THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

AN AMERICAN HISTORY

From the Postmaster General

At the beginning of our nation, and in the midst of the war for independence, there was a critical need to bind the people together through a reliable and secure system for the exchange of information and the delivery of correspondence. This led to the creation of America's postal system in 1775, which preceded the birth of our country. The United States Postal Service has played a vital, sustaining, and unifying role in the life of the nation and in the lives of the American public ever since.

The history of the Postal Service is a large story set on a broad canvas. It is intertwined with the history of America, and it provides a lens from which to observe the evolution of the United States.

The postal system strengthened the foundations of our democracy by fostering the flow of ideas and access to America's free press. It enabled the vast expansion of American industry and commerce, spanning and influencing the rise of the railroads in the 19th century, air travel in the 20th century, and the advanced digital technology of recent decades. As America's economy and society have evolved, so too has the Postal Service progressed, both meeting and reflecting the nation's changing needs.

The *United States Postal Service: An American History* tells the story of an ever-changing and improving institution. It introduces us to the people and events that have shaped our story, and most importantly, how and why the Postal Service continues to play an indispensable role in every American community. From connecting people to each other, to businesses, and to their government, one doorstep and one mailbox at a time, the Postal Service continues to bind the nation together.

I hope you will enjoy reading this history of the United States Postal Service, and its impressive contributions to the story of our nation.

Sincerely,

Megan J. Brennan
Postmaster General

THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

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United States Postal Service
Washington, D.C.

The United States Postal Service: An American History

Messenger of Sympathy and Love
Servant of Parted Friends
Consoler of the Lonely
Bond of the Scattered Family
Enlarger of the Common Life

Carrier of News and Knowledge
Instrument of Trade and Industry
Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance
Of Peace and of Goodwill
Among Men and Nations

———————————

Inscription on the former Washington,
D.C., Post Office, now home of the
Smithsonian's National Postal Museum

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INTRODUCTION

On July 26, 1775, members of the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, agreed

That a postmaster General be appointed for the United Colonies, who shall hold his office at Philad[a], and shall be allowed a salary of 1000 dollars per an: for himself, and 340 dollars per an: for a secretary and Comptroller, with power to appoint such, and so many deputies as to him may seem proper and necessary.

That a line of posts be appointed under the direction of the Postmaster general, from Falmouth in New England to Savannah in Georgia, with as many cross posts as he shall think fit.[1]

This simple statement signaled the birth of the Post Office Department, the predecessor of the United States Postal Service.

As the first American communications network, our postal system not only facilitated commerce and strengthened the bonds of family and friendship — it united a nation. The Founding Fathers believed that to succeed, a democratic form of government depended upon the free exchange of news, ideas, and opinions. Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1804

No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying … that man may be governed by reason and truth. Our first object should therefore be, to leave open to him all the avenues to truth. The most effectual hitherto found, is the freedom of the press.[2]

The first major postal law, passed by Congress in 1792, encouraged the exchange of newspapers by allowing them to travel through the U.S. Mail at extremely low rates of postage — in some cases for free — to ensure the success of the democracy.

Nearly two and a half centuries later, the United States Postal Service is still delivering for America, reaching further as the nation expands and moving faster as technology develops.

Many things have changed since 1775. In scale, the postal system has grown from 75 Post Offices scattered along the East Coast to more than 30,000 locations tucked into every corner of the nation. Travel has sped up — from steamboats that traveled at 6 miles per hour to airplanes that soar nearly 100 times faster. New channels of communication have opened — from the telegraph wires of the 19th century to wireless Internet in the 21st century.

Time and again, advances in technology have challenged the Postal Service to adapt to new ways of doing business. They have also offered new opportunities, from airplanes that enabled coast-to-coast overnight delivery, to supercomputers that allow for tracking of letters in near real-time.

The Postal Service is a vital element of our nation's economy and communications infrastructure. It has served our country for more than 240 years by adapting to the changing needs of a changing nation in fulfillment of its historic mission, which is stated in Title 39 of the U.S. Code:

The Postal Service shall have as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. It shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and shall render postal services to all communities.

COLONIAL TIMES

In early colonial times, correspondents depended on friends, merchants, and Native Americans to carry messages among the colonies. However, most correspondence ran between the colonists and England, the Netherlands, or Sweden — their mother countries. It was largely to handle this mail that, in 1639, the first official notice of mail service in the colonies appeared. The General Court of Massachusetts designated Richard Fairbanks' tavern in Boston as the official repository for mail brought from or sent overseas, in line with the European practice of using coffee houses and taverns as mail stations.

Local authorities operated post routes within the colonies. Then, in 1673, Governor Francis Lovelace of New York set up a monthly post between New York and Boston. The service was short-lived, but the post rider's trail became known as the Old Boston Post Road, part of today's U.S. Route 1.

Governor William Penn established Pennsylvania's first Post Office in 1683. In the South, private messengers, usually slaves, connected the huge plantations; a barrel of tobacco was the penalty for failing to relay mail to the next plantation. As plantations expanded inland from port regions, so did the communications network.

Central postal organization came to the colonies only after 1692, when Thomas Neale received a 21-year grant from the British Crown, whose settlements dominated the Atlantic seaboard, for a North American postal system.[3] Neale never visited America. Instead, he appointed Governor Andrew Hamilton of New Jersey as his Deputy Postmaster General. Neale's franchise cost him only six shillings and eight pence a year but was no bargain. He died heavily in debt in 1699 after assigning his interests in America to Andrew Hamilton and another Englishman, Robert West.

In 1707, the British government bought the rights to the North American postal system from West and Andrew Hamilton's widow. The government then appointed Hamilton's son John as Deputy Postmaster General of America. He served until 1721, when he was succeeded by John Lloyd of Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1730, Alexander Spotswood, a former lieutenant governor of Virginia, became Deputy Postmaster General of America. The appointment of Benjamin Franklin as Postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737 may have been Spotswood's most notable achievement. Franklin, only 31

Post Route Map, 1729
A version of this map appeared in Herman Moll's Atlas Minor, *published in London in 1729. The map's legend, "An account of yᵉ Post of yᵉ Continent of Nᵗʰ America," describes weekly mail service to and from the 13 Post Offices, including "the 3 Great Offices … Boston, New York & Philadelphia."*

years old at the time, was a successful printer, publisher, and civic leader. He would later become one of the most popular men of his age.

Two other Virginians succeeded Spotswood: Head Lynch in 1739 and Elliot Benger in 1743. When Benger died in 1753, Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter, Postmaster of Williamsburg, Virginia, were appointed by the Crown as joint Postmasters General for the colonies. Hunter died in 1761, and John Foxcroft of New York succeeded him, serving until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.

During his time as joint Postmaster General for the Crown, Franklin made important and lasting improvements to the colonial posts. He began to reorganize the service, setting out on a long tour to inspect Post Offices in the North and as far south as Virginia. New surveys were made, milestones were placed on principal roads, and new and shorter routes were laid out. For the first time, post riders carried mail at night to speed service between Philadelphia and New York.

Thanks in large part to Franklin's efforts, the colonial posts in North America made their first profit in 1760. When Franklin left office, post roads (roads on which mail travels) operated from Florida to Maine and into Canada. Mail between the colonies and the mother country operated on a regular schedule, with posted times.

The Crown dismissed Franklin in 1774 for actions sympathetic to the cause of the colonies. Shortly after, William Goddard, a printer, newspaper publisher, and former Postmaster, set up the Constitutional Post for intercolonial mail service. Colonies funded it by subscription, and net revenues were to be used to improve mail service rather than to be paid back to the subscribers. By 1775, when the Continental Congress met at Philadelphia, Goddard's post was flourishing, and 30 Post Offices operated between Williamsburg and Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

The Constitutional Post required each Postmaster to hire only reputable post riders. Each post rider had to swear to secure his mail under lock and key. As for the Crown's competing service, Goddard warned:

Letters are liable to be stopped & opened by ministerial mandates, & their Contents construed into treasonable Conspiracies; and News Papers, those necessary and important vehicles, especially in Times of public Danger, may be rendered of little avail for want of Circulation ...[4]

The Constitutional Post afforded security to colonial messages and provided a communication line that played a vital role in bringing about American independence. ∎

Table of Postage Rates, 1765 (detail view)
This table lists the postage rates for letters traveling between various towns from Quebec to Virginia. It was printed in 1765, when Benjamin Franklin and John Foxcroft were joint Postmasters General for the Crown. Rates are listed in pennyweights and grains of silver.

THE POSTAL SERVICE BEGINS

I n May 1775, three weeks after the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to plan for the defense of the colonies against British aggression and "to take into consideration the state of America."[5] The conveyance of letters and intelligence was essential to the cause of liberty. A committee, chaired by Benjamin Franklin and including Samuel Adams, Richard Henry Lee, Philip Livingston, Thomas Lynch, and Thomas Willing, was named to consider the creation of a postal system.

The committee reported back to Congress on July 25, 1775. The Continental Congress agreed to the committee's recommendations on the following day, creating the position of Postmaster General, and naming Franklin to it. Richard Bache, Franklin's son-in-law, was named comptroller, and William Goddard was appointed surveyor.

Under Franklin and his immediate successors, the postal system mainly carried communications between Congress and the armies. Postmasters and post riders were exempt from military duties, so service would not be interrupted.

Benjamin Franklin served as Postmaster General until November 7, 1776. He was in office when the Declaration of Independence created the United States in July 1776, which made Franklin the first Postmaster General of the United States (see "Benjamin Franklin, First Postmaster General" on page 6). America's present Postal Service descends from the system Franklin placed in operation.

Early Postal Legislation

In 1781, Congress ratified the Articles of Confederation. Article IX addressed postal issues:

> The United States in Congress assembled shall also have the sole and exclusive right and power of … establishing or regulating post offices from one State to another, throughout all the United States, and exacting such postage on the papers passing through the same as may be requisite to defray the expenses of the said office …

Postmaster General Ebenezer Hazard, serving from 1782 to 1789, created new east-west post routes as the population expanded westward, including a route to serve the frontier town of Pittsburgh. Although he devoted most of his energies to developing inland service, Hazard also reestablished monthly mail service to Europe, which the war had disrupted.

Instructed by Congress in 1785 to contract with stagecoach companies to carry mail on heavily traveled routes, Hazard established a regular mail route via stagecoach between Boston and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. President George Washington criticized Hazard when he substituted riders on horseback on some routes to improve service and reduce costs. Washington supported the use of postal allocations to subsidize stagecoaches. He looked at coaches as providing "a facility to the means of traveling for strangers … a circumstance highly beneficial to any country."[6]

During Hazard's tenure the entire postal headquarters staff consisted of himself, a secretary/comptroller, an inspector of dead letters, three surveyors, and 26 post riders. He wrote a friend about his job's demands:

> … I have not had time for proper relaxation, and, in three years past, have not been to the distance of ten miles from this city. I once hired a clerk, but found my salary was not equal to that expence in addition to the support of my family, and was obliged to dismiss him.[7]

At Hazard's suggestion, Congress passed the Ordinance of October 18, 1782, revising and codifying postal laws and regulations. The ordinance continued the Post Office's monopoly on mail, restricted censorship to times of war or when specifically ordered by the Postmaster General or Congress, and allowed post riders to carry newspapers at moderate rates.

The Constitution and the Post Office

In June 1788, the ninth state ratified the Constitution, which gave Congress the power "To establish Post Offices and post Roads" in Article I, section 8. A year later, the Act of September 22, 1789, continued the Post Office and made the Postmaster General subject to the direction of the President.[8] Four days later, President Washington appointed Samuel Osgood as the first Postmaster General under the Constitution. A population of almost four million was served by 75 Post Offices and about 2,400 miles of post roads.

The Post Office received two 1-year extensions by the Acts of August 4, 1790, and March 3, 1791.[9] The Act of February 20, 1792, continued the Post Office for another two years and formally admitted newspapers to the mails, established specific post roads, and prohibited postal

officials from opening letters.[10] Later legislation enlarged the duties of the Post Office, strengthened and unified its organization, and provided rules for its development. The Act of May 8, 1794, continued the Post Office indefinitely.[11]

The Post Office moved from Philadelphia in 1800 when Washington, D.C., became the seat of government. Two horse-drawn wagons carried all postal records, furniture, and supplies. ■

Stagecoaches
Beginning in 1785, Congress encouraged the use of stagecoaches to transport mail between Post Offices to subsidize the growth of stagecoach lines.

Ebenezer Hazard, Postmaster of New York

Prior to his service as Postmaster General, Ebenezer Hazard was Postmaster of New York City from October 5, 1775, until about January 1777, when he was appointed surveyor of the national Post Office. On November 14, 1776, Postmaster Hazard petitioned the Continental Congress for a salary increase, noting his previous year's salary was "by no means a compensation for his services" due to the extraordinary costs associated with the war.[12] Hazard hoped that his friend, the Reverend John Witherspoon, a member of the Continental Congress, would intercede on his behalf, and wrote to Witherspoon of the financial and physical challenges he faced. In his letter (at right) the "General" that Hazard refers to is George Washington.

I shall only observe, that the word 'incidents' used in our quarterly accounts … certainly can mean nothing more than those incidents which are usual in time of peace; such as office rent, firewood, sealing-wax, etc., and cannot justly be construed to include the extraordinary expenses occasioned by the present war.

… The necessity of keeping the office near Head-Quarters arose from the importance of the General's despatches, and his being near the centre of the Army, who are almost the only persons for whom letters now come per post. The General has doubtless informed Congress of his different removals. In each of these I have followed him; and I am sorry I have reason to say … that I have been obliged to follow him on foot. I do not mean even to hint a reflection upon the General, whom I esteem and respect. Furnishing me with a horse did not belong to his department; but those whose business it was have not treated me genteelly. However, lest it should be said that I was unfaithful in my office, and to convince his Excellency of my readiness to oblige him, and serve the publick, I submitted to this indignity, and the fatigue consequent upon it, although it was not my business, as a Postmaster, to follow the Army like a sutler.[13]

(*Note:* A sutler was a peddler who followed an army and sold to it.)

Benjamin Franklin, First Postmaster General

Born in Boston in 1706, Benjamin Franklin left school at age 10 to work in his father's candle shop.[14] In 1718, Franklin apprenticed to his brother James, a printer and founder of Boston's *New England Courant*. Franklin read voraciously, contributed anonymous articles to his brother's newspaper, and managed the paper while his brother was imprisoned for a political offense. At 17, Franklin ran away and ended up in Philadelphia, where he found work as a printer. Franklin started his own print shop by 1728 and purchased *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. His wildly successful *Poor Richard's Almanack* secured his fortune.

Postal Career Begins

Franklin was appointed Postmaster of Philadelphia by the British Crown Post in 1737. Newspaper publishers often served as Postmasters, which helped them to gather and distribute news. Postmasters were the first to receive news; they could also exclude rival newspapers from the mail.

Postmaster General Elliott Benger added to Franklin's duties by making him comptroller, with financial oversight for nearby Post Offices. When Benger's health failed, Franklin successfully lobbied for the job, and, with Virginia's William Hunter, was named joint Postmaster General for the Crown on August 10, 1753.

Franklin surveyed post roads and Post Offices, introduced a simple accounting method for Postmasters, and had riders carry mail both night and day. He encouraged Postmasters to establish the penny post where letters not called for at the Post Office were delivered for a penny. Franklin also instructed Postmasters to admit all newspapers to the mail for a small fee. His efforts contributed to the Crown Post's first North American profit in 1760.

In 1757, while serving as joint Postmaster General, Franklin went to London to represent Pennsylvania's government. In 1763, back in the colonies, he traveled 1,600 miles surveying post roads and Post Offices from Virginia to New England.

In 1764, Franklin returned to London, where he represented the interests of several colonial governments. In 1774, judged too sympathetic to the colonies, he was dismissed as joint Postmaster General.

First Postmaster General under the Continental Congress

Back on American soil in 1775, Franklin served as a member of the Second Continental Congress, which appointed him Postmaster General on July 26 of that year. With an annual salary of $1,000 and $340 for a secretary and comptroller, Franklin was responsible for all Post Offices from Massachusetts to Georgia and had authority to hire Postmasters as necessary. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, Richard Bache, in November 1776.

Founding Father of a New Nation

In 1776, Franklin worked with the committee that wrote the Declaration of Independence, then left for Paris to secure French support for the war with England. The treaty of alliance he helped negotiate in 1778 was vital to the success of the American Revolution. Later, Franklin helped negotiate the peace treaty with Great Britain.

After returning to Philadelphia in 1785, Franklin attended the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and lived to see the Constitution adopted. He died April 17, 1790.

Benjamin Franklin, Postmaster **Stamp**
Issued April 7, 2006

Abraham Lincoln, Postmaster

Two Postmasters became U.S. Presidents later in their careers — Abraham Lincoln and Harry Truman. Truman held the title and signed papers but immediately turned the position and its pay over to an assistant. Lincoln was the only President who had served as a Postmaster.

On May 7, 1833, 24-year-old Lincoln was appointed Postmaster of New Salem, Illinois. Lincoln served until the office was closed May 30, 1836. Postal records show that Lincoln earned $55.70 as Postmaster in fiscal year 1835 and $19.48 for one quarter's work in fiscal year 1837. Besides his pay, Lincoln, as Postmaster, could send and receive personal letters free and get one daily newspaper delivered free.

Abraham Lincoln Stamp
Issued June 29, 1995

Mail arrived once a week. If an addressee did not collect the mail, as was the custom, Lincoln delivered it personally — usually carrying the mail in his hat. Even then, Lincoln was "Honest Abe."

Reportedly, when the New Salem Post Office was discontinued, Lincoln had a balance of $16 or $18, which he took with him to Springfield, Illinois. Months later, while his close friend Dr. A. G. Henry was visiting, a Post Office agent called on Lincoln to collect the funds. Henry knew that Lincoln had been in financial straits and feared that he might not have the money. Henry recalled that just as he was about to offer Lincoln a loan, the future President:

. . . went over to his trunk at his boarding house, and returned with an old blue sock with a quantity of silver and copper coin tied up in it. Untying the sock, he poured the contents on the table and proceeded to count the coin, which consisted of such silver and copper pieces as the country-people were then in the habit of using in paying postage. On counting it up there was found the exact amount, to a cent, of the draft, and in the identical coin which had been received. He never used, under any circumstances, trust funds.[15]

Other Famous Postal Workers

John Brown
Abolitionist, Postmaster, Randolph, PA

Charles Bukowski
Poet and novelist, clerk, Los Angeles, CA

Bing Crosby
Singer and actor, clerk, Spokane, WA

Walt Disney
Producer, substitute carrier, Chicago, IL

Charles R. Drew
Scientist and surgeon, part-time special delivery messenger, Washington, D.C.

William Faulkner
Novelist, Postmaster, University, MS

Sherman Hemsley
Actor, clerk, Philadelphia, PA, and New York, NY

Conrad Hilton
Hotel magnate, Postmaster, San Antonio, NM

Rock Hudson
Actor, letter carrier, Winnetka, IL

Sidney Lanier
Poet, clerk, Macon, GA

Charles Lindbergh
Aviator, contract airmail pilot

John Prine
Singer and songwriter, letter carrier, Maywood, IL

Knute Rockne
Football coach, clerk, Chicago, IL

Adlai E. Stevenson
Vice President, First Assistant Postmaster General

Noah Webster
Lexicographer, special agent

Richard Wright
Author, substitute clerk, Chicago, IL

THE GROWTH OF THE POSTAL SERVICE

As the United States grew, the Post Office Department developed new services that lasted into the 21st century and subsidized the development of every major form of transportation.

Between 1789, when the federal government began operations, and 1861, when civil war broke out, the United States grew dramatically. Its territory extended into the Midwest in 1787 through the Northwest Ordinance, reached down the Mississippi River and west to the Rocky Mountains after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, and stretched to the Pacific coast by the 1840s. The country's population grew from 3.9 million people in 1790 to 31.4 million in 1860.

The Post Office Department grew too. The number of Post Offices increased from 75 in 1790 to 28,498 in 1860. Post roads increased from 59,473 miles at the beginning of 1819 to 84,860 by the end of 1823. By the end of 1819, the Department served citizens in 22 states, including the newest states of Illinois and Alabama.

These new territories and states, as well as established communities, pressed the Post Office Department for more routes and faster delivery. The Department met these needs by expanding its service and developing faster ways to move mail. By 1822, it took only 11 days to move mail between Washington, D.C., and Nashville, Tennessee.

Post Offices Multiply

As new Post Offices were established, their names were handwritten in this 1831 copy of the Table of Post Offices in the United States. *From 1790 to 1860, the U.S. population grew almost eightfold, while the number of Post Offices increased by a factor of nearly 380 — from 75 to 28,498.*
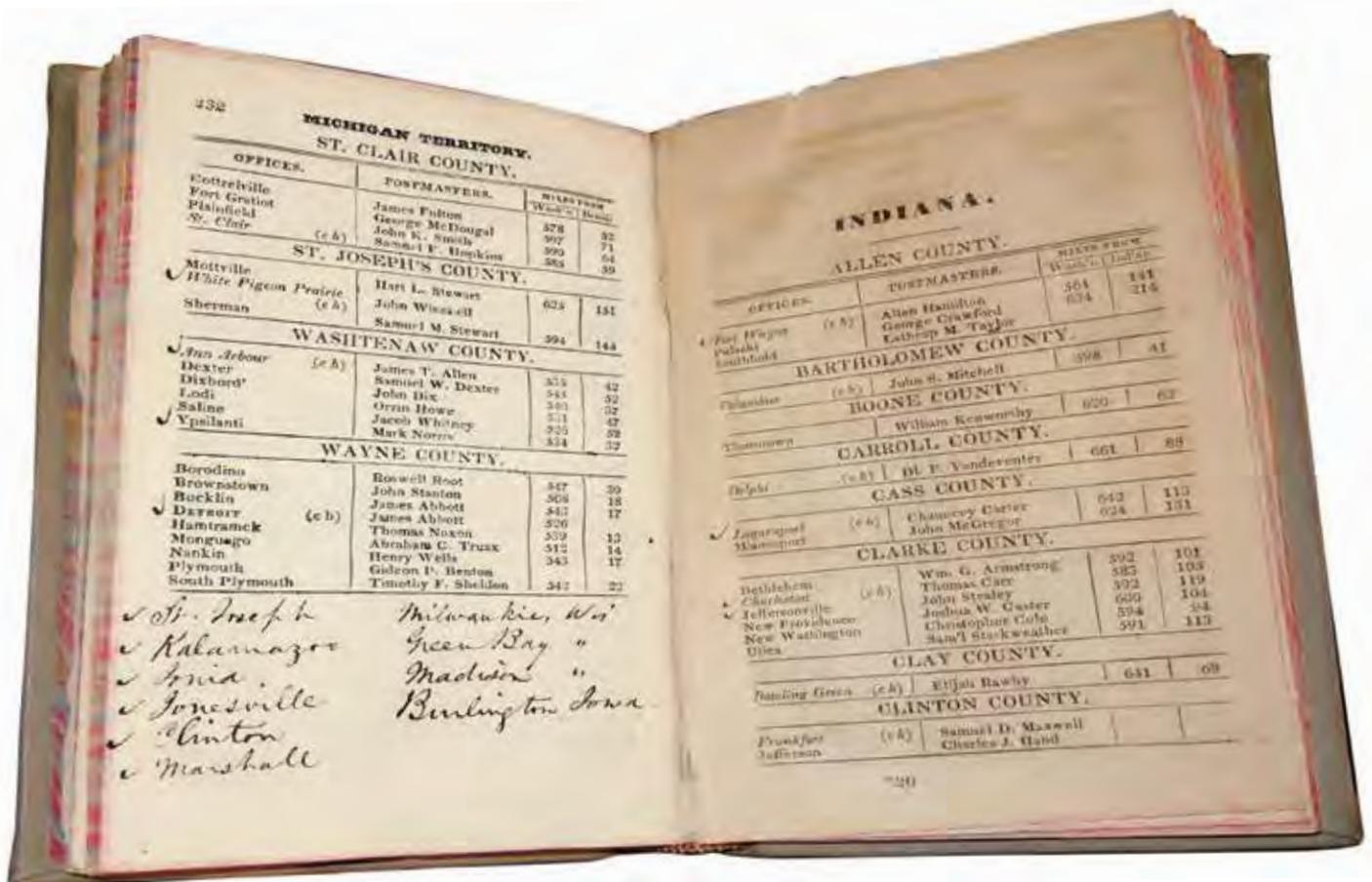
In 1828, there were 7,530 Post Offices and 29,956 postal employees, mail contractors, and carriers, which made the Department the largest employer in the executive branch. Because the Department awarded a large number of jobs and contracts, the Postmaster General's power grew as well. President Andrew Jackson recognized the potential for patronage and, in 1829, invited William T. Barry of Kentucky to become the first Postmaster General to sit as a member of the President's Cabinet. Barry's predecessor, John McLean of Ohio, had been the first Postmaster General to refer to the Post Office, or General Post Office as it sometimes was called, as the Post Office Department, but the organization was not specifically established as an executive department by Congress until June 8, 1872.[16]

By 1831, postal employees accounted for 76 percent of the civilian federal workforce. Postmasters outnumbered soldiers 8,764 to 6,332 and were the most widespread representatives of the federal government.

As the country grew, people in new states and territories petitioned Congress for even more post routes, regardless of their cost or profitability. The Post Office Department, and thus the federal government, had to decide whether to subsidize routes that promoted settlement but did not generate enough revenue to pay for themselves or to operate in the black. The Department struggled with this issue. With congressional support and keeping fiscal responsibility firmly in mind, the Department ultimately made decisions in the 19th century that reflected public service

as its highest aim. It funded post routes that supported national development and instituted services to benefit all residents of the country.

The Post Office Department also simplified and lowered postage rates in the middle of the 19th century. Before that time, postage was based on the number of sheets in a letter and the distance a letter traveled. Families, friends, or businesses further distant paid more to keep in touch. For instance, from 1799 to 1815, it cost:

- 8 cents/sheet, sent 40 miles or fewer.
- 10 cents/sheet, sent over 40 and up to 90 miles.
- 12.5 cents/sheet, sent over 90 and up to 150 miles.
- 17 cents/sheet, sent over 150 and up to 300 miles.
- 20 cents/sheet, sent over 300 and up to 500 miles.
- 25 cents/sheet, sent more than 500 miles.

In 1845, the Department began charging rates based on weight and whether a letter was going more than or fewer than 300 miles. In 1851, the distance limit for the lowest rate increased to 3,000 miles, which included most of the United States, while an even lower rate was charged if postage was prepaid.

In 1855, the prepayment of letter postage became mandatory. Previously, postage could be paid by the sender or the recipient, or partially by each. Beginning January 1, 1856, mailers were required to prepay postage using U.S. postage stamps, which had been introduced in 1847 to simplify
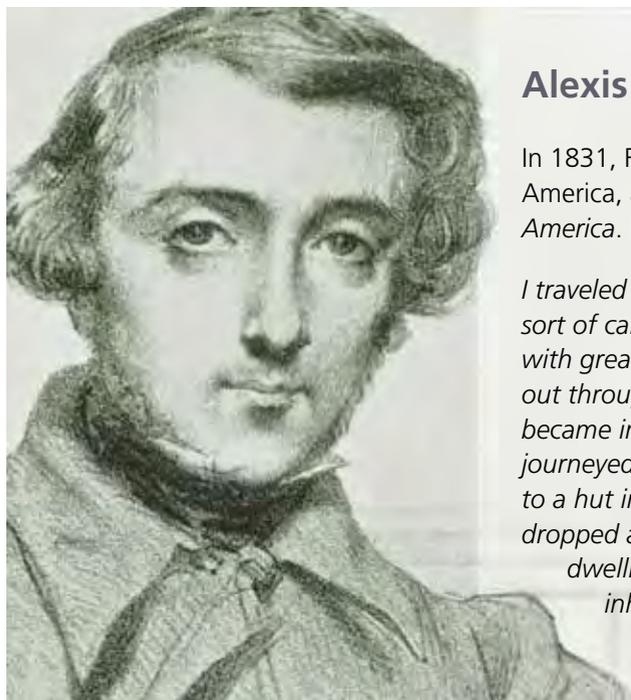
Alexis de Tocqueville

In 1831, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville began his travels in America, a journey that led to his classic book, *Democracy in America*. He wrote of the mail:

I traveled along a portion of the frontier of the United States in a sort of cart, which was termed the mail. Day and night we passed with great rapidity along the roads, which were scarcely marked out through immense forests. When the gloom of the woods became impenetrable, the driver lighted branches of pine, and we journeyed along by the light they cast. From time to time we came to a hut in the midst of the forest; this was a post-office. The mail dropped an enormous bundle of letters at the door of this isolated dwelling, and we pursued our way at full gallop, leaving the inhabitants of the neighboring log houses to send for their share of the treasure.[17]

Saving on Postage and Paper

Until July 1845, two sheets of paper cost twice as much to mail as one sheet. People rarely used envelopes, which would have counted as another sheet — they simply folded their letter so that the outside was blank and sealed it with wax or an adhesive wafer. To fit even more lines on one page, some people cross-wrote their letters. When they reached the end of the page they turned the paper 90 degrees and continued writing.
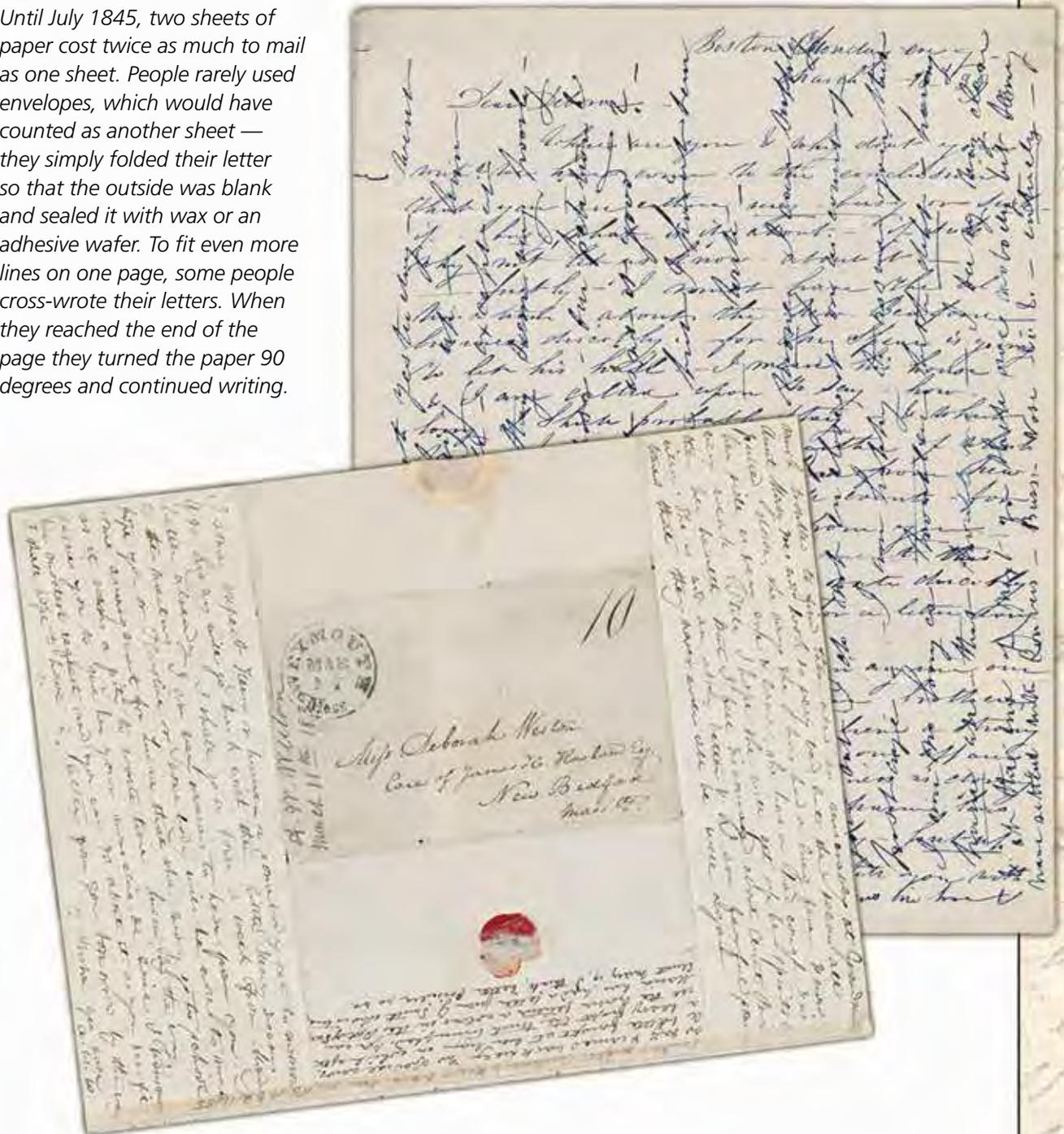
Letters Sent to Abolitionist Deborah Weston of New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1839

payment and help account for postage revenues (see "U.S. Postage Stamps" on page 100.)

The Act of March 3, 1863, based postage for a letter on its weight and eliminated all differences based on distance.[18] (See "Rates for Domestic Letters" on page 124.) The act also created three classes of mail: letters, called First-Class Mail; newspapers and other periodicals, called second-class mail; and all other mailable matter, called third-class mail.

The Private Express Statutes

To enable the Post Office Department to finance its operations largely from its revenue, Congress gave it a monopoly over the delivery of letters. Without such protection, Congress believed that private companies would siphon off profitable delivery routes, leaving the Department overly reliant on the U.S. Treasury.

Initially the costs and challenges of transporting mail discouraged competition, but the development of reliable steamboat and railroad lines in the early 19th century encouraged entrepreneurs to jump into the delivery business. The first two private posts sprang up in 1839; dozens soon followed. About 150 local posts are known to have operated, mostly in the 1840s and 1850s — nearly a third of them in New York City. Some private companies transported mail between large cities; others provided home delivery of mail within cities. By limiting their services to only the most profitable delivery areas, they could provide more frequent service at cheaper rates. In 1841, Postmaster Jonathan J. Coddington of New York estimated that private competition had reduced mail volume on the New York–Boston route by one third.
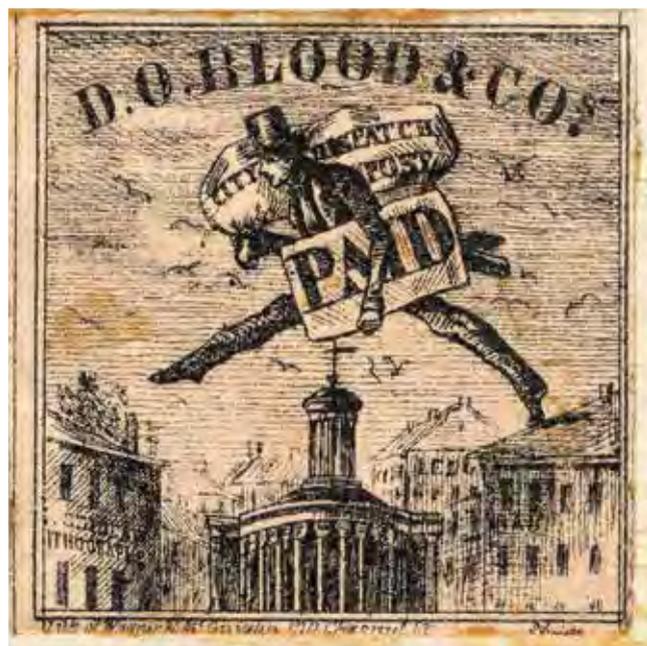
To help stem the Department's loss of revenue, Congress passed laws, now known as the Private Express Statutes, which gradually closed loopholes that allowed private companies to deliver letters. The first major postal law, passed in 1792, prohibited the private carriage of letters on post roads "whereby the revenue of the general post-office may be injured."[19] In 1799, Congress outlawed the private carriage of letters on roads adjacent or parallel to post roads. Congress later specified that waterways (1823) and railroads (1838) could be post roads. The proliferation of private posts in the early 1840s prompted Congress to pass a law in 1845 forbidding the establishment of "any private express or expresses for the conveyance . . . by regular trips or at stated periods . . . of any letters" to or from anywhere that U.S. Mail was regularly carried.[20]

The 1845 act largely ended inter-city competition, but private companies continued to deliver mail within cities because city streets were considered exempt from the act. So in 1851 Congress specified that the Postmaster General could designate city streets as "post routes." In 1860, Postmaster General Joseph Holt declared the streets of New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia to be post routes, and federal prosecutors took the owner of Blood's Despatch — the largest private carrier in Philadelphia — to court to shut him down. In November of the same year, the judge in the case ruled partially in Blood's favor by finding that "post roads" and "post routes" were not synonymous. Congress responded a few months later by specifically including "post routes" in the postal monopoly; Blood's Despatch went out of business within a year.

The last of the private posts — Boyd's Dispatch and Hussey's (both in New York) — continued to deliver letters in violation of the law until the 1880s.

In 1979, the Postal Service suspended the prohibition against the private delivery of extremely urgent letters; the delivery of packages has never been included in the postal monopoly. ∎

Striding Messenger Stamp, circa 1845
The Striding Messenger stamp features a giant messenger stepping over the Philadelphia Post Office. It was originally issued by the Philadelphia Despatch Post in 1843 to indicate payment for local letter delivery. This privately printed stamp was the world's first pictorial issue — the first stamp to depict something other than a monarch or statesman. D. O. Blood & Company bought the Philadelphia Despatch Post around 1845 and used a variation of the stamp overprinted with the company's name.

MOVING THE MAIL

In 1800, the speed of travel was limited by natural forces like wind, currents, or a horse's pace. By century's end, mail trains were crisscrossing the country with postal clerks onboard, who sorted mail in transit.

Steamboats

At the turn of the 19th century, when the nation's waterways were its main transportation arteries, travel often depended on river currents, wind, and muscle. Traveling upstream on some rivers was so difficult that boat owners sometimes sold their vessels upon reaching their destination and returned home overland.

Robert Fulton launched America's first successful steamboat line, connecting New York City and Albany via the Hudson River, in September 1807. Although Fulton's steamboats traveled at only six miles per hour, their dependability revolutionized travel. As long as their fires were fed, the boats' boilers created steam, turning the paddlewheels.

On October 2, 1807, the *New-York Evening Post* asked:

Would it not be well if she [the boat] could contract with the Post Master General to carry the mail from this [city] to Albany?

Fulton's steamboat carried mail as early as November 1808. Initially, letters were carried either unofficially by crew and passengers — bypassing local Post Offices — or under the existing provisions for ship letters, whereby Postmasters at ports of call gave ship captains two cents for each letter and then charged letter recipients six cents postage. In 1810, Postmaster General Gideon Granger offered Fulton a contract to carry mail, but Fulton apparently declined.

The *New Orleans*, the first commercial steamboat to ply the lower Mississippi River, began carrying mail from New Orleans to Natchez, Mississippi, in 1812 — also without a mail contract. In December of 1812, John Hankinson, Postmaster of Natchez, alerted Granger to the drop in his office's revenue as more and more letters bypassed the Post Office. In 1813, Congress authorized the Postmaster General to contract for the carriage of mail by steamboat, provided it was no more expensive than if transported by land.[21] Granger informed Hankinson that he could enter into a mail transportation contract with the captain of the *New Orleans*, but apparently no contract was made.

On February 27, 1815, Congress authorized the Postmaster General to contract for the carriage of mail by steamboat "on such terms and conditions as shall be considered expedient" and required the operators of steamboats and other craft to promptly deliver any letters they carried to Postmasters at ports of call, under penalty of a fine.[22] The next month, the steamboat captains on the Hudson River line entered into a contract with the Postmaster General. Steamboats on the Mississippi River, meanwhile, continued to transport letters either outside the U.S. Mail or as ship letters.

To help limit revenue losses, in 1823 Congress declared waterways upon which steamboats regularly traveled to be post roads, making it illegal for private express companies to carry mail on them.[23]

By the late 1820s, the Post Office Department had contracted for mail to be carried by steamboats along the East Coast, between New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and from Washington, D.C., to Richmond. Mail contractors

The *Mayflower*, 1855
In December 1855 — less than a year after entering service between St. Louis and New Orleans — the Mayflower *was destroyed by fire. The average lifespan of an antebellum steamboat on the Mississippi River was 5 to 6 years. Daily hazards included explosions, fires, collisions, and the submerged, hull-piercing deadwood called "snags."*
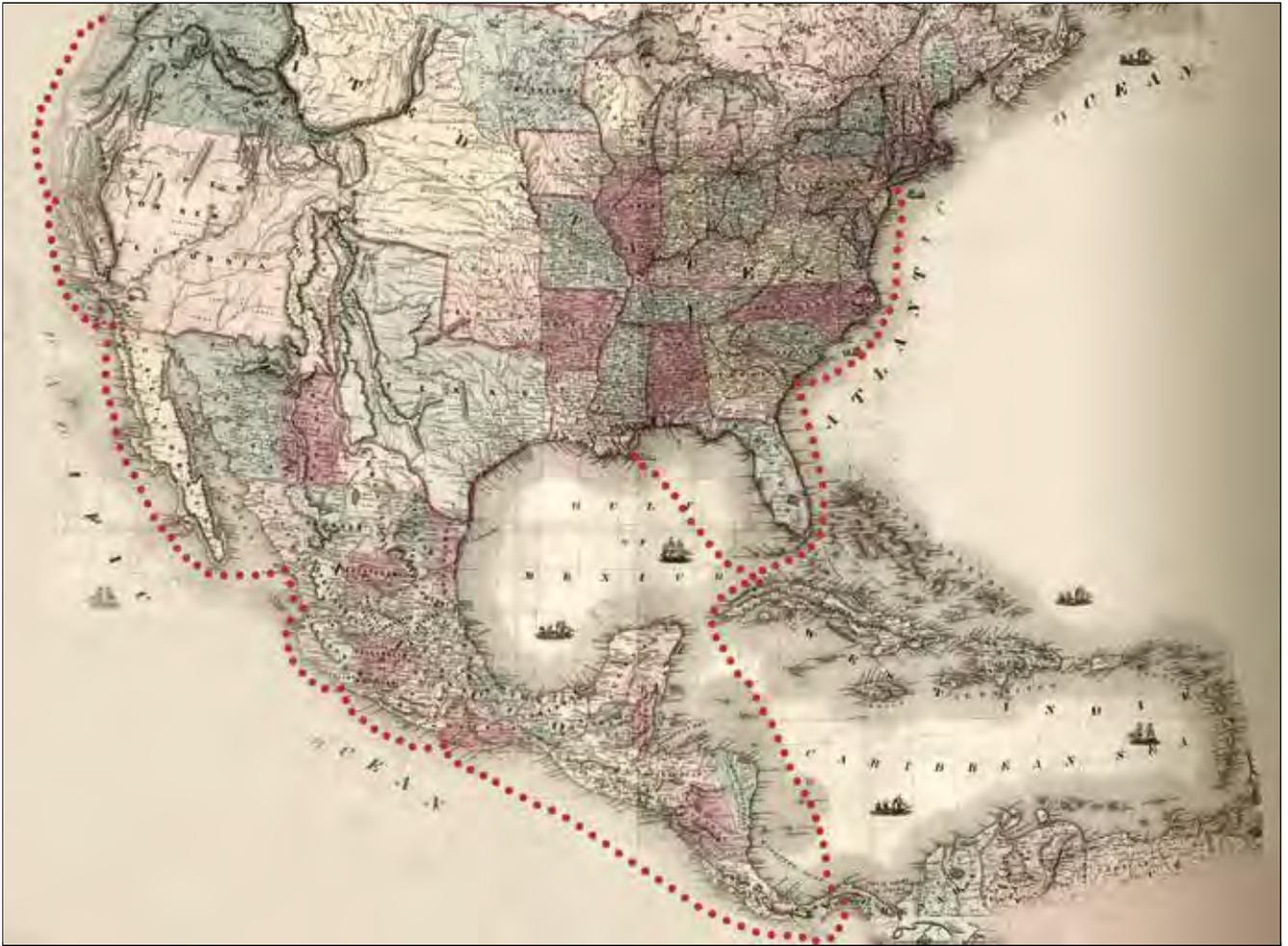
New York to California by Steamship

The first U.S. Mail traveled to California by steamship, via the Isthmus of Panama, in December 1848. The ocean routes via Panama remained a vital link in the nation's mail system until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. (Illustration based on J.H. Colton's 1850 *Map of the United States of America*, in the collection of the Library of Congress.)

continued to use stagecoaches on parts of the routes and used stagecoaches exclusively when waterways were clogged with ice in winter. By 1827, steamboats were also carrying mail under contract between Mobile, Alabama, and New Orleans.

By the early 1830s, contracted service began on the Ohio River, from present-day Huntington, West Virginia, via Cincinnati, to Louisville, Kentucky, but no further west. Postmaster General Amos Kendall stated in his 1835 report to the President that an "immense correspondence" was carried in steamboats, postage-free, west of Louisville. He noted that where there was no contracted service it was "difficult, if not impractical, to enforce the Post Office laws, and bring the letters so transmitted into the post offices."[24]

Contracted steamboat service west of Louisville to New Orleans began in November 1837. Nevertheless, many merchants continued to send their correspondence outside the U.S. Mail, postage-free.

In the mid-1800s, the Post Office Department greatly expanded its use of steamboats to carry mail. Between 1845 and 1855, the distance mail was transported by steamboat nearly doubled, from 7,625 to 14,619 miles.

In November of 1848, Postmaster General Cave Johnson dispatched a special agent to establish Post Offices in the newly acquired territory of California. By Christmas, steamships under contract with the Navy Department were carrying U.S. Mail from New York to California via

Overland Mail Employee Handbook, 1859

This handbook for employees of Butterfield's Overland Mail Company included a fold-out route map, a schedule, a rate chart, special instructions and room for daily log entries. Company employees were instructed to "never lose sight of the mails for a moment" and to "be particular to see that the mails are protected from the wet and kept safe from injury of every kind." (From the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum.)

the Isthmus of Panama.[25] This was before the construction of the canal. When the ships reached Panama, the mail was taken off and transported in canoes or on pack animals — and later by railroad — about 50 miles to the Pacific coast. Another steamship collected the mail on the Pacific side and headed north. The aim was to get a letter from the East Coast to California in three to four weeks but this goal was often missed. For example, in 1850, citizens of Los Angeles learned California was admitted to the Union six weeks after the fact. New routes to the West were needed.

Overland Mail to California

Following the discovery of gold in California in 1848, immigration exploded. As the population grew, so did the need to connect California with the rest of the country through the U.S. Mail.

The first overland mail route to California was established in the spring of 1851, bringing mail to Sacramento via Salt Lake City. However, service on the route was erratic, partly because deep snow and blizzards in the Sierra Nevada Mountains prevented travel through much of the winter. To bypass the snowy Sierras, George Chorpenning, the mail contractor, rerouted the mail southward: from San Francisco, he sent the mail south by steamship to San Pedro, near Los Angeles, and then overland to Salt Lake City. Still, the service remained far from regular.

In 1857, a second overland mail route was established to California, to San Diego via San Antonio, Texas. Mail carriers along this route were challenged by Indian attacks and a scarcity of water and mules. Passengers who rode in the mail wagon sometimes had to get off and walk to relieve overworked mules. Occasionally, they even had to help push the mail wagon.

The third overland mail route to California, the Butterfield Overland Mail, was the longest and most legendary. In 1857, Congress authorized the Postmaster General to contract for the carriage of letters from some-

Butterfield Overland Mail, 1858 to 1861
It took stagecoaches 21 ½ days to traverse the nearly 2,800-mile-long mail route from St. Louis and Memphis to San Francisco. The route was discontinued in early 1861 because of the impending Civil War.

where on the Mississippi River — it would be the contractor's choice — to San Francisco for six years. The mail was to be carried using "good four-horse coaches or spring wagons, suitable for the conveyance of passengers."[26]

Congress wanted the contractor to choose the location of the route because Congress itself could not. Southern congressmen wanted it in the South; Northern congressmen wanted it in the North. More was at stake than the mail — everyone believed this route would determine the path of the future transcontinental railroad.

The day after the bill passed, Aaron Brown of Tennessee was appointed Postmaster General. Brown, a southerner, favored a southern route. Although Congress had specified that the contractor choose the location of the route, when none of the proposed routes were southern enough, Brown himself decided the route: from St. Louis and Memphis, converging at Little Rock (soon changed to Fort Smith), then on to San Francisco via El Paso and Yuma. Brown assigned the contract to John Butterfield and company, whom he considered best able to provide the service.

Having two starting points for the route — St. Louis and Memphis — was an attempt to appease both northern and southern interests, but the bulk of the route hugged the southern U.S. At a couple of places, the route skirted the Mexican border; west of Yuma, for about 70 miles, it was actually in Mexico.

The *New York Times* howled:

What possible object there can be in selecting this extreme Southern route we are utterly unable to conceive, unless it is that of forcing the future railroad to take an unnatural course, such as neither buffalo, emigrants nor capital would ever select.[27]

Scheduled semiweekly service on the Butterfield Overland route began on September 15, 1858. The specified running time was 24 days, but within a year the average trip time had been shaved to about 21 ½ days. Even the loudest critics of the route's location had no complaints about the service.

Still, faster transportation to the Pacific coast was needed.

The Pony Express

American transportation pioneer William H. Russell advertised for hostlers and riders to work on his central overland express route via Salt Lake City in March 1860.

Russell had failed repeatedly to get the backing of the Senate Committee on Post Office and Post Roads for an express route to carry mail between St. Joseph, Missouri — the westernmost point reached by the railroad and telegraph — and California. St. Joseph was the starting point for the nearly 2,000-mile central route to the West. Except for a few forts and settlements, the route beyond St. Joseph was a vast, unknown land, inhabited primarily by Native Americans.

Many thought that year-round transportation across this area was impossible because of extreme weather conditions. Russell organized his own express to prove otherwise.

With partners Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell, Russell formed the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, later known as the Pony Express. They built new relay stations and readied existing ones. The country was combed for good horses — hardy enough to challenge deserts and mountains and to withstand thirst in summer and ice in winter. Riders were recruited hastily but, before being hired, had to swear on a Bible not to cuss, fight, or abuse their animals and to conduct themselves honestly.

On April 3, 1860, the Pony Express began its run through parts of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and California. On average, a rider covered 75 to 100 miles daily. He changed horses at relay stations set 10 to 15 miles apart, swiftly transferring himself and his mochila (a saddle cover with four pockets or cantinas for mail) to the new mount.

Overland by Stagecoach

Stagecoach in Wyoming, circa 1900
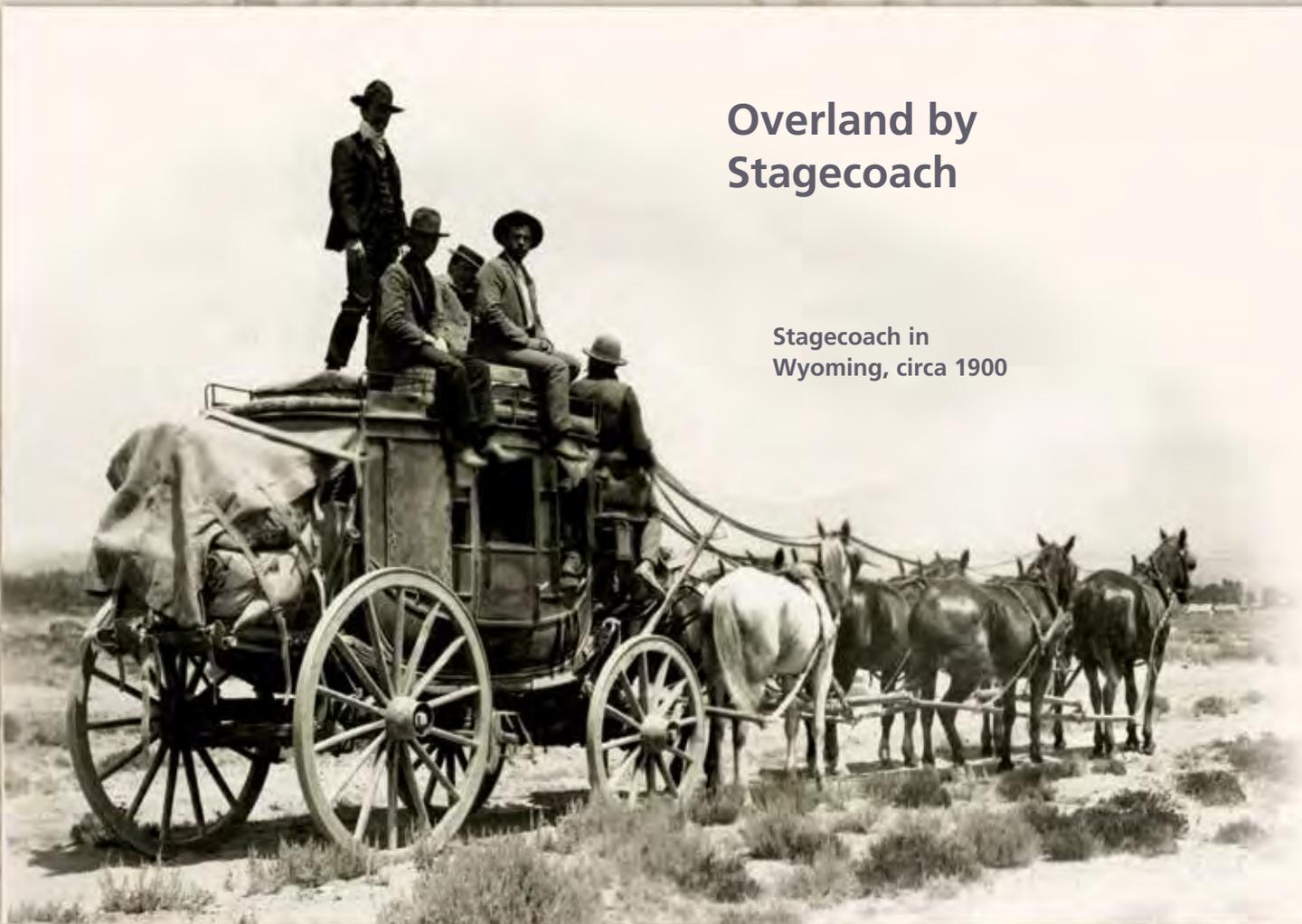
The first mail by Pony Express from St. Joseph to Sacramento took ten days, cutting the overland stage time via the southern route by more than half. The fastest delivery was in March 1861, when President Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address was carried from St. Joseph to Sacramento in 7 days and 17 hours.

On July 1, 1861, the Pony Express began operating under contract as a mail route. By that time, the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company was deeply in debt. Though it had charged as much as $5 a half ounce for a letter at a time when ordinary U.S. postage was no more than ten cents, the company did not make its operating expenses.

On October 26, 1861 — two days after the transcontinental telegraph line was completed — the Pony Express officially ended. It became one of the most enduring legends of the West.
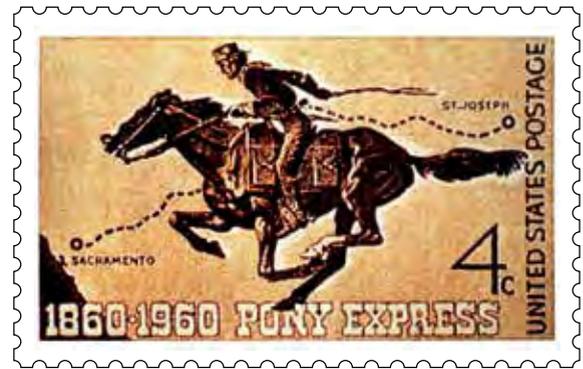
Pony Express Stamp
Issued July 19, 1960. The Pony Express ran for only 18 months, from April 1860 to October 1861. It operated under contract as a U.S. Mail route during only the final four months.

Crossing the country by stagecoach was an adventure, even by 19th-century standards. William Tallack, who traveled east by stagecoach in 1860, noted that "not one in a hundred travellers go eastward by the Overland on account of its risks and discomforts."[28] Tallack observed that traveling by ship via Panama, though more than twice the distance, was just as fast, and generally more comfortable.

Stagecoach passengers risked death or injury if coaches were attacked by robbers or Indians. Bad roads, though less fearsome, were a more persistent danger. At their worst, they overturned coaches, and at their best, bruised passengers.

Edmund Hope Verney, a lieutenant in the British Royal Navy who had seen battle in the Crimean War and India, traveled overland from California to Kansas in 1865. In an article in the June 1866 issue of London's *Good Words and Sunday Magazine*, Verney recalled: "I can remember no night of horror equal to the first night's travel on the Overland Route." He described jolts to the carriage that would "strike the cranium violently against the roof." The carriage was so crowded, he wrote, that

not only was there a difficulty about stowing away one's feet, but we had even to fit in our knees one with another, and then occasionally give and take pretty smart blows caused by the jostling of the carriage.

Nine people could squeeze inside a stagecoach; additional passengers sometimes traveled on the roof. Inside, three lucky passengers had the back seat. Three passengers sat in the middle seat, which had only a leather strap for a backrest, and three sat in the front seat, facing backwards. Middle and front seat passengers faced each other and had to interlock their legs. Through-passengers remained sandwiched together for about 22 days, with only brief stops for meals and changes of stock or equipment.

Mail Service and the Civil War

The Civil War was America's bloodiest conflict. An estimated 750,000 Americans lost their lives during the war, including an estimated 50,000 civilians — more Americans than have died in all the wars since that time. Soldiers suffered in battle, while traveling, and from the everyday, sometimes fatal hardships of camp life. Friends and family at home also suffered, not knowing if a son, brother, or husband survived.

Mail was a treasured link between camps and battlefields and "back home." Recognizing its importance to morale, the armies assigned personnel to collect, distribute, and deliver soldiers' mail; wagons and tents served as traveling Post Offices. Some soldiers wrote home weekly; some seemed to spend all their free time writing. A letter from home could be tucked into a pocket close to a soldier's heart, to be read and re-read in moments of loneliness. Many soldiers carried letters in their pockets, to be forwarded to loved ones if they were killed in action.

Three Union Officers at Fort Brady, Virginia, 1864
Mail was a treasured link between camps and battlefields and "back home."

During the war, the U.S. Post Office Department introduced several improvements that made it easier to send and receive mail. Since soldiers sometimes had trouble getting postage stamps and keeping them dry, beginning in July 1861, they were allowed to mail letters without stamps by writing "Soldier's Letter" on the envelope; postage was then collected from the recipient. In July 1863, postage rates were simplified and in some cases lowered when distance-based letter rate categories were eliminated. That same month, free home delivery of mail was introduced in the nation's largest cities. And in November 1864, the money order system began, making it safer for soldiers and citizens alike to send money through the mail.

The South established its own Post Office Department in February 1861, two months before the start of the war, with former U.S. Congressman John Henninger Reagan appointed Postmaster General in March. Federal mail service to southern states was officially suspended on May 31, 1861, following Reagan's proclamation that he would assume control of the Confederate Post Office Department on June 1.

The United States banned the exchange of mail between citizens of the North and South in August 1861, although smugglers often carried mail illegally across the lines. Prisoner-of-war mail was exchanged at designated points under a flag of truce. Citizens could also send letters via the flag-of-truce system, although like prisoners' mail, their letters were censored.

To prevent Postmasters in the seceded states from using U.S. postage stamps, the U.S. Post Office Department redesigned its postage stamps soon after it suspended mail service to the South. The newly designed stamps were distributed to Postmasters and customers beginning in August 1861, in exchange for the old ones. Initially Postmasters were instructed to give customers six days following notification to exchange old stamps for new ones, after which time the old ones were demonetized (rendered valueless). But the time limit was stretched in some cases to accommodate customers. In New York City, citizens were given about six weeks to exchange their postage stamps.

As the war progressed, coins, which were more highly valued than paper money, gradually disappeared from the marketplace. By the summer of 1862 the lack of coinage

posed a serious hardship to trade. Merchants began issuing their own promissory notes, called "shinplasters," and many people began using postage stamps as small change. Unfortunately shinplasters were often redeemable only where received, and stamps were liable to crumple and clump together.

A law of July 17, 1862, authorized the use of postage stamps as currency, and beginning in August 1862, the Treasury Department issued special "postage currency" — reproductions of postage stamps on larger, thicker, ungummed pieces of paper, in denominations of five, ten, twenty-five, and fifty cents. Due to coin shortages, the Treasury Department continued issuing paper notes representing fractions of a dollar through 1876, although beginning in October 1863, they were called "fractional currency" and did not feature reproductions of stamps.

U.S. Mail Wagon, Army of the Potomac, circa 1864
Army personnel were assigned to collect, distribute, and deliver mail.

The Confederate Post Office Department

The Post Office Department of the Confederate States of America was established February 21, 1861, by an act of the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States. On March 6, 1861, the day after Montgomery Blair's appointment by President Abraham Lincoln as Postmaster General of the United States, former U.S. Congressman John Henninger Reagan was appointed Postmaster General of the Confederate States of America by Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States.

South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas already had seceded from the Union. In the following months, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and most of Tennessee followed suit. Reagan instructed southern Postmasters to continue to render their accounts to the United States as before until the Confederate postal system was organized. Meanwhile, he sent job offers to southern men in the Post Office Department in Washington. Many accepted and brought along their expertise, as well as copies of postal reports, forms in use, postal maps, and other supplies.

In May 1861, Reagan issued a proclamation stating that he officially would

John Henninger Reagan, Confederate Postmaster General

assume control of the Post Office Department of the Confederate States on June 1, 1861. Postmaster General Blair responded by ordering the cessation of United States mail service throughout the South on May 31, 1861.

Although an able administrator headed the Confederate Post Office Department, its mail service was continuously interrupted. Through a combination of pay and personnel cuts, postage rate increases, and streamlining of mail routes, Reagan eliminated the postal deficit that existed in the South. But blockades and the invading Northern army, as well as a growing scarcity of postage stamps, severely hampered postal operations.

Federal mail service in the South gradually resumed as the war came to an end. By November 15, 1865, 241 mail routes had been restored, and by November 1, 1866, 3,234 Post Offices out of 8,902 in the South were returned to federal control.

Postmaster General Reagan was arrested at the end of the war, but was later pardoned and eventually made it back to Congress, where he became chairman of the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads.

Mail by Rail

Some three decades before the Pony Express galloped into postal history, the "iron horse" made its formal appearance. In August 1829, an English-built locomotive, the *Stourbridge Lion*, completed the first locomotive run in the United States on the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company Road in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. The next month, the South Carolina Railroad Company adopted the locomotive as its tractive power.

In 1830, the Baltimore & Ohio's *Tom Thumb*, America's first steam locomotive, successfully carried more than 40 people at over ten miles per hour. This beginning was considered less than auspicious when, in late August 1830, a stage driver's horse outran the *Tom Thumb* on a parallel track in a race at Ellicott's Mills, Maryland. Later, however, a steam locomotive reached the unheard-of speed of 30 miles per hour in an 1831 competition in Baltimore.

The Post Office Department recognized the value of rail to move mail as early as November 30, 1832, when stagecoach contractors on a route from Philadelphia to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, were granted an allowance of $400 per year "for carrying the mail on the railroad as far as West Chester from December 5, 1832."[29] Although the Department apparently awarded several contracts for rail transportation as a part of stagecoach routes in succeeding years, the Postmaster General listed only one railroad company as a contractor during the first six months of 1836, for Route 1036 from Philadelphia to Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania.

The Department appointed the first route agent, John Kendall, nephew of Postmaster General Amos Kendall, to accompany the mails between Albany and Utica, New York, in 1837. An Act of July 7, 1838, designated all United States railroads as post routes, and railroad mail service increased rapidly.

Owney, Mascot of the Railway Mail Service

On an autumn day in 1888, a shaggy pup took his first steps toward becoming a postal legend when he crept into the Albany, New York, Post Office. Postal employees allowed him to stay and named him Owney.

At first, Owney stayed close to the Post Office, but he soon began riding mail wagons to the train depot and then rode the railway mail car down to New York City and back to Albany. As Owney traveled farther, his friends at the Albany Post Office feared he might wander too far away to find his way home again, so they purchased a leather collar with a tag reading "Owney, Post Office, Albany, N.Y." Railway mail clerks recorded Owney's travels by attaching metal baggage tags to his collar to identify the rail lines he traveled on.

He was soon weighed down by his collection of tags. Postmaster General John Wanamaker presented Owney with a little jacket to distribute their weight more evenly.

Owney took to traveling farther and staying away longer, eventually visiting Mexico, Canada, Japan, China, Singapore, Suez, Algiers, and the Azores.

While being shown off to an Ohio newspaper reporter, Owney bit the clerk who was handling him. The Postmaster had Owney put down on June 11, 1897. Railway mail clerks chipped in money to have a taxidermist preserve Owney's body, which then was sent to postal headquarters in Washington, D.C., for exhibit.

In 1911, the Post Office Department entrusted Owney to the Smithsonian Institution. Since 1993, Owney has been part of the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. In 2011, Owney was honored on a commemorative U.S. postage stamp.

Owney the Postal Dog **Stamp**
Issued July 27, 2011

Owney with Railway Mail Clerks, 1890s

The expanded use of railroads greatly reduced transportation time. For example, in 1835, mail going from New York City to Raleigh, North Carolina, took about 94 hours. Two years later, the time had been cut nearly in half to 55 hours. By 1885, it was more than halved again to just over 19 hours. The time-savings was due not only to increased use of the rails but also to better use — the introduction of Railway Post Offices (RPOs) in the 1860s.

In June 1840, two mail agents were appointed to the Boston-Springfield route, "to make exchanges of mail, attend to delivery, and receive and forward all unpaid way letters and packages received."[30] The route agents opened the pouches from local offices, separated mail for other local points on the line for inclusion in the pouches for those offices, and sent the balance to distributing Post Offices for further sorting. Gradually, the clerks began to make up mail for connecting lines and local offices, and the idea of sorting mail on the cars evolved.

In 1862, William A. Davis, head clerk of the St. Joseph, Missouri, Post Office, began the first experiment in distributing mail in railroad cars on the Hannibal-St. Joseph run. Although this practice expedited the connection with the overland stage at St. Joseph, it was discontinued in January 1863. On August 28, 1864, the first U.S. Railway Post Office (RPO) route was officially established when George B. Armstrong, Chicago's assistant Postmaster, placed a car equipped for general distribution in service between Chicago and Clinton, Iowa, on the Chicago and North Western Railroad. Similar routes were established between
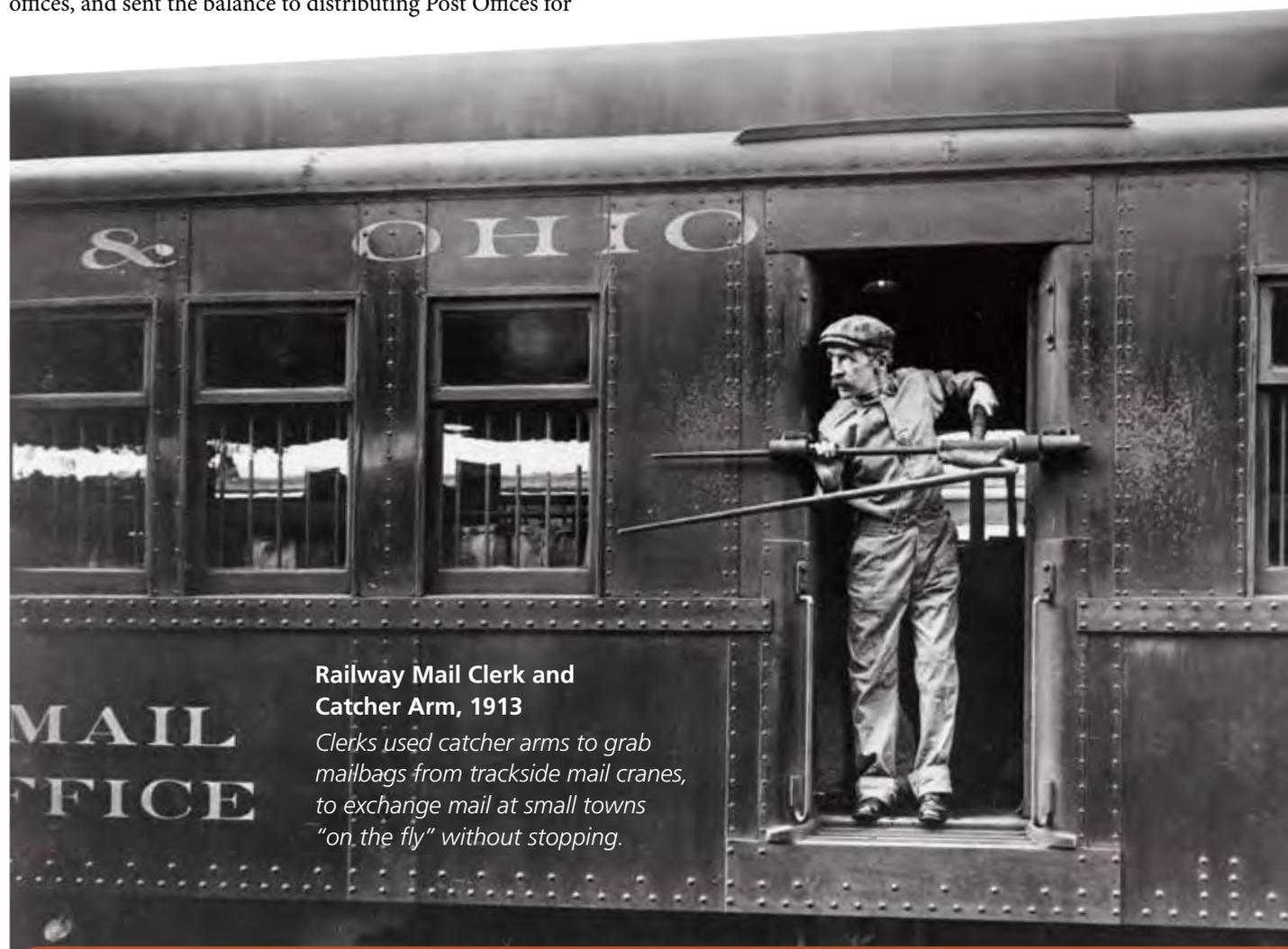
Railway Mail Clerk and Catcher Arm, 1913

Clerks used catcher arms to grab mailbags from trackside mail cranes, to exchange mail at small towns "on the fly" without stopping.

Mail by Rail Video

Watch Mail by Rail*, a 4-minute video exploring life in the railway mail service as told by four former clerks. Courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum via its YouTube channel, SmithsonianNPM.*

New York and Washington, D.C.; Chicago and Rock Island, Illinois; Chicago and Quincy, Illinois; and New York and Erie, Pennsylvania.

When railway mail service began, the cars were equipped primarily to sort and distribute letter mail. By about 1869, other mail was being sorted. Parcel Post service, added in 1913, soon outgrew the limited space aboard trains. Terminals, established adjacent to major railroad stations, allowed parcels to be sorted then loaded into mail cars and RPOs for transport to cities and towns.

In 1930, more than 10,000 trains moved mail. Following passage of the *Transportation Act of 1958*, which allowed the discontinuance of money-losing passenger trains, mail-carrying passenger trains began to decline rapidly. By 1965, only 190 trains still carried mail, and by 1970 virtually no First-Class Mail traveled by rail.

On April 30, 1971, the Post Office Department terminated seven of the eight remaining RPO routes. The last Railway Post Office, which operated between New York and Washington, D.C., on Penn Central/Conrail, made its final run on June 30, 1977.

Highway and air congestion and an increase in the weight of catalogs and advertising mail during the 1980s led to renewed rail use. Amtrak carried mail on many trains, and freight trains pulled flatcars holding trailers full of mail. In 1993, Amtrak and the Postal Service reintroduced the RoadRailer®, special intermodal equipment that could travel on highways and on rails without having to be hoisted onto a railroad flatcar.

Although Amtrak stopped carrying mail in October 2004, several of the nation's freight railroads continue to carry mail as an intermodal service. ∎

A Perilous Profession

Railway mail clerks had one of the toughest jobs in the Post Office Department. Working elbow-to-elbow in fast-moving railcars, they needed brains and brawn to memorize complicated mail sorting schemes and accurately sort mail in transit. At many stations trains did not even stop — clerks readied the mail pouches and threw them out of the open car door while simultaneously snagging pouches of outgoing mail that hung trackside.

Annual reports of the Postmaster General gave harrowing accounts of clerks injured and killed in the line of duty. Trains were derailed because of livestock on the tracks, open switches, oncoming trains, broken rails, and washed-out bridges, to name but a few hazards. Until the 1920s, most mail cars were

Wreck of the *Red Arrow*, 1947
Six railway mail clerks were among the dozens of people killed and more than 100 injured when the Pennsylvania Railroad's Red Arrow *passenger train derailed and plunged over a 150-foot embankment near Gallitzin, Pennsylvania, on February 18, 1947.*

made of wood, lit by oil lamps, and heated by wood-stoves. Mail cars were normally coupled directly behind the locomotive, with sparks belching from its stack. With the lighter wooden mail car sandwiched between the heavier locomotive and passenger coaches, mail clerks risked severe injury in the event of a wreck. Even the sudden lurch of a train could injure a clerk if he lost his balance.

The work was so dangerous that an entire section of the *Annual Report of the Postmaster General* relating to the railway mail service was titled "Casualties." In 1904, 21 men lost their lives in the line of duty, including one who was shot and killed by a train robber. By the 1920s, so many bandits were targeting mail trains that the Postmaster General armed railway mail clerks with government-issued pistols with orders to "shoot to kill."

Railway Mail Clerks, 1929
A rash of train robberies following World War I prompted the Postmaster General to arm railway mail clerks beginning in 1921.

Railway Mail Clerk James Julian

James Julian served as a railway mail clerk from about 1905 to the 1930s. In 1993, his oldest son, Percy, became the 16th honoree in the Black Heritage stamp series.

James, whose parents had been slaves, was born in Alabama in 1871. When Percy was born in 1899, James was working as a letter carrier at the Post Office in Montgomery, Alabama. By 1905, James had landed a higher-paying job as a clerk in the railway mail service, where he worked for more than 25 years.

James Julian worked on the Montgomery, Alabama, and Artesia, Mississippi, Railway Post Office until about 1922. The preceding decade had been particularly challenging for African American railway mail clerks. Starting in 1913, there was a movement to racially segregate federal workers, including in the railway mail service; some supervisors fired African American clerks on trumped-up charges and routinely passed over others for promotion. But James Julian persevered.

James and his wife, a former schoolteacher, steered all of their children to higher education. One by one they sent them to college — Percy was the first. In 1919, the whole family — everyone except James — moved to Indiana, where the children attended DePauw University. James remained in Alabama for three more years until he was able to transfer to a railway mail service job in Indiana and join them.

All of James Julian's children achieved success, but it was Percy who left the most lasting legacy. In the mid-1900s, Percy pioneered the synthesis of medicinal drugs — one of his discoveries has been ranked in the top 25 achievements in the history of American chemistry. In 1993, Percy Julian was honored on a commemorative postage stamp — a fitting tribute for the son of a lifelong postal worker.

Percy Lavon Julian Stamp
Issued January 29, 1993

Star Routes

Post riders on horseback were the first contractors to carry mail between Post Offices. In 1773, post road surveyor Hugh Finlay noted that a stagecoach driver held a contract to carry semiweekly mail between Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Boston, Massachusetts. In 1785, the Continental Congress instructed the Postmaster General to award mail transportation contracts to stagecoach operators, subsidizing public travel and commerce with postal funds. Despite their higher costs and sometimes lower efficiency, stagecoach proposals were preferred over horseback.

An Act of March 3, 1845, took steps to reduce mail transportation costs. Congress abandoned its preference for stagecoaches, with contracts to be awarded to the lowest bidder for what "may be necessary to provide for the due celerity, certainty and security of such transportation."[31] These were known as "celerity, certainty and security" bids. Postal clerks shortened the phrase to three asterisks or stars (***). The bids became known as star bids, and the routes became known as star routes.

Until 1882, most of the Post Office Department's budget went towards mail transportation. In 1845, more than two-thirds of postal costs were for transportation. By 1849, the Department cut transportation costs on all routes — horseback, stage, steamboat, and railroad — by 17 percent, from $2,938,551 in 1844 to $2,428,515. Route distances rose 20 percent for the same years, from

35.4 million miles to 42.5 million miles in 1849. Star routes were largely responsible for the savings as contractors switched to horseback, which cut per-mile costs 38 percent, from 7.2 cents to 4.5 cents.

Still, throughout the 1850s, the Department continued to favor stagecoaches over horses on certain routes. In 1852, Postmaster General Samuel D. Hubbard instructed contract bidders to state the type of conveyance "if a higher mode than horseback be intended," noting that stagecoaches were preferred on certain routes.[32]

Postmaster General Joseph Holt's 1859 annual report criticized the "enormous sums" paid to stagecoach companies to transport mails, "some of which [were] so light as scarcely to yield a revenue sufficient to defray the expense of carrying them on horseback." He declared, "In advertising for the new lettings, 'Star Bids'… will alone be invited … without any designation of modes of conveyance."[33] The 1860 annual report is the last to discriminate between "coach" and "inferior" modes of service.[34]

Contractors had to be at least 16 years old until 1902, when the age limit was raised to 21. Subcontractors or carriers could be 16. Contractors were bonded and took an oath of office; subcontractors and carriers also took the oath.

From 1802 to 1865, postal laws required carriers to be free white persons. Violators were fined. The typical 4-year contract did not provide payment for missed trips, regardless of weather conditions. Unexcused service failures could result in fines up to three times the trip's price.

Regular schedules made carriers easy targets for thieves. Criminal punishment was harsh. Anyone found guilty of robbing carriers could receive five to ten years of hard labor for the first offense and death for the second. Meanwhile, some carriers faced the hazards of snow, avalanches, ice packs, cliff-hugging roads, seas of mud, and dangerous waters.

Contractors provided their own equipment. A 1930s-era Post Office Department memo quotes Harry Elfers, who transported mail ten miles from Sandusky, Ohio, to Kelleys Island in Lake Erie. In bad weather, he would sail from the island to Marblehead, the closest mainland point, only four miles away. That could take 20 minutes or 8 hours, depending on the weather.

Ticket for Mail Stage, 1843
In addition to carrying U.S. Mail under contract, stage owners carried passengers and freight. Until 1845, stagecoaches were given preference in the award of mail transportation contracts, to subsidize the growth of stagecoach lines.

Either way, his pay was the same. Elfers recalled the specialized equipment he used:

> When I was a youngster I was out in a boat about all the time. Now I don't care for ordinary sailing but battling with the ice has a fascination for me. As soon as the ice begins to form, I feel eager to get out one of the 'ironclads' and fight my way across. An 'ironclad' is a flat-bottomed skiff. There's a sail in the bow to carry us through the water or over the ice when conditions are right. There are two iron-shod runners on the bottom so the boat may be used as a sled. The sides are sheathed with galvanized iron. This is very important, because thin ice will cut a boat like a knife.[35]

Most star route carriers traveled by horse or horse-drawn vehicle until the early 20th century. Boats, sleds, snowshoes, and skis also were used. Today's contractors use trucks, tractor trailers, and automobiles, or whatever it takes — mule trains into the Grand Canyon, flat-bottomed pole boats in the Louisiana bayous, and airplanes and hovercraft in Alaska. Dogsleds were used in Alaska until 1963. Today, mail is dropped by parachute on some Alaskan routes. During the winter, snowmobiles carry mail in the highlands of Utah, Colorado, and Montana.

In the 1800s, some star route carriers also delivered mail to customers along their routes. Such unofficial arrangements were formalized beginning July 1, 1900, when some contracts required service to and from rural mailboxes along the routes. By 1918, some contracts also required the sale of stamps, money orders, and Registered Mail along routes.

In 1948, Congress allowed the Postmaster General to renew 4-year contracts with satisfactory service providers rather than award a new contract to the lowest acceptable bidder, to prevent the many contract failures resulting from speculators who underbid tried-and-true contractors by just a few dollars.

Star routes declined in the 1950s as unnecessary and duplicate service was eliminated. However, the 1960s saw growth as the *Highway Act of 1958* improved highways while rail service declined. Between 1960 and 1970, star-route miles more than doubled. In the 1970s, star routes officially became known as highway contract routes (HCRs), although popular usage of the older term continues.

Mail by Dogsled, Tanana, Alaska, circa 1910
Star route contractors have a history of transporting the mail by any means necessary. The last dogsled route in Alaska, from Gambell to Savoonga, was converted to an airplane route in 1963.

REACHING OUT TO EVERYONE

I n the late 19th century, free home delivery of mail was introduced — first in cities, then in rural areas — and letter carriers became familiar, trusted visitors to homes and businesses across the country.

Free City Delivery

Before 1863, postage paid only for the delivery of mail from Post Office to Post Office. Citizens picked up their mail, although in some cities they could pay an extra one- or two-cent fee for letter delivery or use private delivery firms. Among the postal reforms suggested by Postmaster General Montgomery Blair in his 1862 report to the President was

free delivery of mail by salaried letter carriers, which he felt would "greatly accelerate deliveries, and promote the public convenience."[36] He reasoned that if the system of mailing and receiving letters was more convenient, people would use it more often, and pointed to increasing postal revenues in England, which already had adopted free city delivery.

Congress agreed. An Act of Congress of March 3, 1863, effective July 1, 1863, provided that free city delivery be established at Post Offices where income from local postage was more than sufficient to pay all expenses of the service.[37] For the first time, Americans had to put street addresses on their letters.

Mail Truck in Washington, D.C., 1916
To speed delivery, postal officials urged city residents to provide mail slots or receptacles, so carriers would not have to spend an estimated 30 to 60 minutes each day waiting at residents' doors. Mail slots or receptacles were required for city delivery service beginning in March 1923.

Delivery Frequency

Daily

From the start, city letter carriers were expected to deliver mail "as frequently as the public convenience" required.[38] Postmasters determined the number of daily trips in their cities. Business districts, with heavier mail volume and more time-sensitive mail, typically received more frequent deliveries than strictly residential sections of cities. In 1905, carriers in downtown New York City made nine daily deliveries, whereas in Cleveland, Ohio, two to five was the norm.

The 1922 *Annual Report of the Postmaster General* stated that "in the smaller cities, three daily deliveries in business sections is the general rule, in larger cities three or four, and in the largest cities three to seven deliveries."[39]

To save money, in 1923 the number of daily trips on many routes was reduced by one. In 1930, further reductions were made, and for a few months in 1934 some residential areas received mail only once a day. Some residential customers also temporarily received once-a-day delivery during World War II, due to labor shortages. In 1947, some Postmasters temporarily reduced the number of daily deliveries in their cities to stay within their operating budget, and in 1949, one delivery trip per day was eliminated in many cities to save money.

On April 17, 1950, "in the interest of economy," Postmaster General Jesse M. Donaldson ordered all Postmasters to limit the number of deliveries in residential sections to one each day, and to eliminate one Saturday delivery in business districts.[40]

Because of changing transportation patterns and distribution procedures, few second or third daily deliveries to businesses were needed by 1969. Multiple daily deliveries to many business districts ended in the 1970s, and were largely phased out by the end of the 1990s.

As a rule, rural carriers have always made one trip per delivery day.

Weekly

From the outset, both city and rural carriers delivered mail Monday through Saturday.[41]

In May and June 1947, Saturday deliveries were temporarily eliminated in some cities due to budget shortfalls.

In 1957, a budget crisis prompted Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield to end Saturday deliveries nationwide. On one Saturday — April 13, 1957 — there was no mail delivery. Public outcries convinced President Dwight D. Eisenhower to sign a bill three days later, increasing funding for the Post Office Department, and service resumed.

In May 1964, the Department ended Saturday delivery of packages in 6,091 cities where carriers delivered on foot — again, to save money. Delivery resumed in January 1966 after President Lyndon B. Johnson promised to seek increased funding from Congress.

In 1975, an unprecedented $989 million deficit prompted Postmaster General Benjamin F. Bailar to consider ending Saturday delivery. In 1976, Congress ordered its continuation and created the Commission on Postal Service to study the challenges facing the Postal Service. In 1977, the Commission concluded that "mail delivery to all addresses should be reduced from six days to five days a week" to cut soaring postal costs, but the idea was unpopular and Bailar abandoned it.[42] In 1979, rising mail volumes and postage rate increases gave the Postal Service its first budget surplus since 1945.

In 1980, facing another budget crisis, Postmaster General William F. Bolger briefly considered ending Saturday delivery. Two postage rate increases the next year and rising mail volumes — again — got the Postal Service through the crisis. Meanwhile, in December 1980, Congress directed the Postal Service not to reduce "the number of days each week for regular mail delivery," and has included similar instructions in annual appropriations legislation since then.[43]

In 2009, financial challenges prompted postal officials to again propose ending Saturday delivery. Due to sustained growth in package shipping, the proposal was revised in February 2013 to keep Saturday package delivery. Later that year, the Postal Service began Sunday delivery of Amazon packages to residential addresses in select cities. Sunday package delivery was later expanded to additional locations and other types of packages, as the volume warranted.

City Delivery Pioneer

Joseph William Briggs, a Cleveland, Ohio, postal clerk, is often credited with conceiving the idea of free city delivery during the winter of 1862, while contemplating long lines of customers trying to keep warm as they inched toward his window. Many were women hoping for news of loved ones in the Civil War. Briggs enlisted local businesses to serve as staging areas for sorting customers' mail, and he began delivering mail to his patrons free of cost.
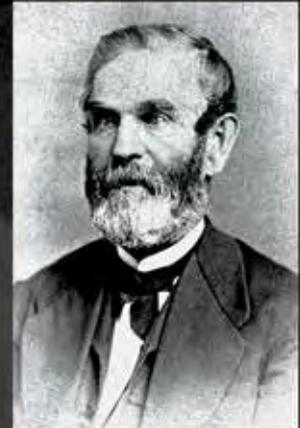
In 1864, Briggs wrote Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, suggesting improvements to the free delivery system that had launched in 1863. Blair liked Briggs' ideas, brought him to Washington, and appointed him special agent in charge of superintending the operation of the letter carrier system, a role he performed until his death on February 23, 1872.

In 1921, a postal committee was charged with determining who should be credited with the establishment of free city delivery. After examining the available evidence, the committee reported "no one individual can be considered the author or originator of this service." The committee said, "Mr. Briggs cannot be properly credited as the author of the City Free Delivery Service, but the evidence seems sufficient to warrant the statement that he was the first letter carrier in the city of Cleveland, Ohio."[44]

A plaque in the Cleveland Post Office commemorates Briggs' service as that city's first free letter carrier and his contributions to establishing the service nationwide.

By June 30, 1864, free city delivery had been established in 65 cities nationwide, with 685 carriers delivering mail in cities such as Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. By 1880, 104 cities were served by 2,628 letter carriers, and by 1900, 15,322 carriers provided service to 796 cities.

Postmasters, groups of citizens, or city authorities could petition the Post Office Department for free delivery service if their city met population or postal revenue requirements. The city had to provide sidewalks and crosswalks, ensure that streets were named and lit, and assign numbers to houses.

Initially, carriers hand-delivered mail to customers. If a customer did not answer the carrier's knock, ring, or whistle, the mail remained in the carrier's satchel until the customer was home. By 1912, new customers were required to provide mail slots or receptacles, and Postmasters were urged to encourage existing customers to provide them as well. As late as 1914, First Assistant Postmaster General Daniel C. Roper estimated that a letter carrier spent 30 minutes to an hour each day waiting at doors where there was person-to-person delivery. As of March 1, 1923, mail slots or receptacles were required for delivery service.

By the 1930s, as a convenience to customers living on the margins of a city, letter carriers began delivering to customers with "suitable boxes at the curb line."[45] In the ensuing decades American suburbanization, which exploded in the 1950s, brought an increase in curbside mailboxes. The Department introduced curbside cluster boxes in 1967. Their use has been increasingly encouraged in recent decades to promote efficiency and economy of service.

Originally, letter carriers worked 52 weeks a year, typically 9 to 11 hours a day from Monday through Saturday, and if necessary, part of Sunday. An Act of June 27, 1884, granted them 15 days of leave per year. In 1888, Congress declared that 8 hours was a full day's work and that carriers would be paid for additional hours worked per day. The 40-hour workweek began in 1935.

Some carriers walked as many as 22 miles a day, carrying up to 50 pounds of mail at a time. They were instructed to deliver letters frequently and promptly — generally twice a day to homes and up to four times a day to businesses. On April 17, 1950, the number of residential deliveries was limited to one each day. Multiple deliveries to businesses were phased out over the next few decades as changing transportation patterns made most mail available for first-trip delivery. The weight limit of a carrier's load was reduced to 35 pounds by the mid-1950s and remains the same today.

Post-Mounted Mailbox, 1920s
Post-mounted collection boxes predominated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They began to be phased out in favor of larger, free-standing models in the 1950s.

Village Carrier, circa 1920

Genevieve Baskfield was appointed a village carrier in Zumbrota, Minnesota, in 1919, at the age of 18. Village delivery was a service similar to city delivery, offered in small towns from 1912 to about 1960. More than 100 women are known to have served as village carriers, mostly from 1918 through 1920, when about 5 percent of the nation's 943 village carriers were women.

Rural Free Delivery (RFD)

In 1890, nearly 41 million people — 65 percent of the American population — lived in rural areas. Although many city dwellers had enjoyed free home delivery since 1863, rural citizens had to pick up their mail at the Post Office, leading one farmer to ask: "Why should the cities have fancy mail service and the old colonial system still prevail in the country districts?"[46]

Postmaster General John Wanamaker, who served from 1889 to 1893, was a merchant who became one of the most innovative and energetic people ever to lead the Post Office Department. He thought it made more sense to have one person deliver mail than to have 50 people ride into town to collect their mail. He cited business logic and social philosophy as reasons to give rural dwellers free delivery. Businesses could expand their markets. Rural customers paid the same postage rates as city people. Rural people needed the important information provided by newspapers yet did not always have time to walk or ride to the Post Office. Young people might stay on the farm if correspondence and magazines eased their isolation.

"I think the growth of the Farmers' Alliance movement and the other farmers' movements in the past few years has been due to this hunger for something social as much as to anything else," Wanamaker wrote in 1891.[47] He proposed that rural customers receive free delivery.

In January 1892, Congressman James O'Donnell introduced "A Bill to Extend the Free Delivery System of Mails to Rural Communities," but the House Committee on Post Office and Post Roads balked at the proposed $6 million price tag. An amendment bringing the figure down to $100,000 also was rejected.

A year and two months later, on March 3, 1893, a bill introduced by Georgia Congressman Tom Watson passed. It appropriated $10,000 for experimental rural free delivery. On March 6, 1893, Wilson S. Bissell was sworn in as Postmaster General. He did not pursue the experiment, citing the pressure of more important concerns and the need for at least $20 million to inaugurate rural free delivery, a figure later identified as a guess. Instead, he recommended establishing additional Post Offices where needed.

Bissell was succeeded by William L. Wilson on March 1, 1895. Wilson agreed with his predecessor that rural free delivery was not practical, but was willing to attempt the experiment if Congress made more money available. That year, Congress appropriated $20,000 for the experiment and another $10,000 in 1896, bringing the total to $40,000 — enough for the Post Office Department to begin its rural free delivery experiment.

On October 1, 1896, rural free delivery service began in Charles Town, Halltown, and Uvilla in West Virginia, Postmaster General Wilson's home state. Within a year, 44 routes were underway in 29 states.

Just five days before Christmas in 1899, the Post Office Department decided to experiment with extending RFD across an entire county. Postmaster General Charles Emory Smith ordered that 63 small Post Offices and 35 star routes and mail messengers be replaced by rural free delivery in Carroll County, Maryland. County-wide delivery proved viable.

Judged a success, rural free delivery became a permanent service effective July 1, 1902. The word "free" was dropped in 1906, since it was understood.

During the six years rural delivery was an experiment, customers sent more than 10,000 petitions asking that routes be established. The Department had time to evaluate the extent to which RFD could replace small, fourth-class Post Offices and star routes, whether it could be used to offer services such as money orders, and what national RFD service would cost. The Department also had an opportunity to see what else was needed to make the service successful: good roads, standardized mailboxes, and a "great army of rural carriers" — about 8,500 in 1902. The Post Office Department claimed that "as a class there are no more faithful employees in the Government service."[48]

Before Rural Free Delivery…

On October 1, 1890, Congress authorized funding of $10,000 to test the feasibility of delivering mail to small towns and villages, defined as those having populations of from 300 to 5,000 people. Experimental free delivery was established in 12 small communities on February 1, 1891, and in 34 additional communities by July 1891. Just two years later, postal officials recommended discontinuing the experiment, noting that after the novelty of free delivery had worn off, customers preferred to pick up their mail at the Post Office. The experiment was discontinued in all 46 communities by July 1896.

Rural Carrier, Rural Route No. 2, Rochester, Indiana

Although a uniform has never been required for rural carriers, some, such as this carrier, chose to wear one. When it was established in October 1900, this carrier's route was 35 miles long and served 1,000 customers.

The backing of the National Grange, National Farmers' Congress, and State Farmers' Alliance was important to rural delivery's establishment and success, as was the enthusiastic response of rural customers. Although one Kansas farmer expressed concern that rural people would become lazy if they did not have to pick up their mail, more typical were reactions such as those of the Colorado woman who was glad to "have our mail fresh instead of stale" and the Arizona citizen who wrote:

I am more than ever proud of being an American citizen. … I live three and a half miles from the Tempe post-office, and have been sick for a week past, yet my mail is brought to my door every morning, except Sunday. … It looks as if "Uncle Sam" had at last turned his eye in our direction.[49]

Farmers helped by putting out boxes for the rural carriers — everything from lard pails and syrup cans to old apple, soap, and cigar boxes. Postal officials decided a standardized box would better protect mail and, in 1901, asked manufacturers to design boxes to the following specifications:

- The box must be made of metal, 6 by 8 by 18 inches, and weather-proof.
- Boxes should be constructed so they can be fastened to a post at a height convenient to the carrier without alighting.
- Keys for customers' boxes should be easy to use by a carrier with "one gloved hand in the severest weather."[50]

Manufacturers stenciled the words "Approved by the Postmaster General" on satisfactory boxes. While customers were not required to remove existing mailboxes, only approved mailboxes were permitted on new routes or when replacing old boxes. Boxes could be square, oblong, circular, or semicircular, as long as they protected mail from rain, snow, and dust.

Delivering Mail in Maine, 1930

Rural carriers sold stamps and money orders, registered letters, and, in short, served as traveling Post Offices. They were the vanguard for delivery in suburban areas, a "middle territory, neither distinctly city nor rural in character" first mentioned by the Post Office Department in its *Annual Report* of 1902, with Bridgeport, Connecticut, cited as an example.[51] Rural carriers served suburban areas until these areas were annexed by an adjacent city postal district. Carriers supplied their own transportation — usually horses and wagons until, in 1929, the Post Office Department noted that improved roads had led to "almost a complete change in rural delivery from horse-drawn vehicles to motor cars."[52]

Although rural carriers could deliver packages weighing up to four pounds, by law the Post Office Department could not deliver heavier parcels, which had to be shipped via private express companies. Beginning in 1904 the Department asked Congress for authorization to experiment with the delivery of larger packages. In 1911, Postmaster General Frank H. Hitchcock recommended that Congress allow such service in rural and urban areas and requested a total of $150,000 for such an experiment, with the thought of paving the way for a general Parcel Post.

The increase in the number of rural delivery routes led to a decrease in the number of small Post Offices. In 1901, the Post Office Department operated the largest number of Post Offices in American history, 76,945. The next year, there were 1,000 fewer Post Offices. Despite a growing population and more mail, the number of Post Offices continued to drop each subsequent year, with the exception of 1947 and 2001.

In 2019, more than 46 million homes and businesses were served by the Postal Service's rural letter carriers. Rural delivery continues to provide a vital link between urban and rural America. ∎

Picking Up Mail in Missouri, 1940

***RFD: To The Country* Video**
Watch RFD: To The Country, *a 3-minute video on the history of RFD, courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum via its YouTube channel, SmithsonianNPM.*

Postmasters in the Mid-19th Century

In 1860, Postmasters took the following oath: "I, _____, do swear/affirm that I will faithfully perform all the duties required of me, and abstain from everything forbidden by the laws in relation to the establishment of the Post Office and post roads within the United States. I do solemnly swear/affirm that I will support the Constitution of the United States."

Postmasters had to post a bond and reside in the community where the Post Office was located. The Postmaster was exempt from militia duty but could be called upon to work on the roads.

The job of Postmaster was an important one — candidates were proposed by the outgoing Postmaster, the local community, or local congressmen. Beginning in 1836, Postmasters at the largest Post Offices were appointed by the President and usually received the job as a political plum. The Postmaster General continued to appoint Postmasters at smaller Post Offices. The Post Office often was kept as a sideline to the Postmaster's primary occupation, such as storekeeper.

The Postmaster had to keep the Post Office open during normal business hours and, if mail was delivered on a Sunday, for one hour after the arrival of mail. If a church service was going on, the Postmaster had to wait until it concluded, and then open the office for an hour. This decision dated back to the 19th-century controversies over the drivers of mail wagons blowing on a horn or a trumpet as the wagon came into town. Some ministers complained that the men would rise up, leave the church, and head for the Post Office, where they would visit with each other and even play cards.

The decision to keep the Post Office closed during services was a compromise. However, the Postmaster General refused to stop mail wagons from running on Sundays, since this would delay the mail too much.

Postmaster Mary H. Sumner Long

Mary H. Sumner Long was appointed Postmaster of Charlottesville, Virginia, by President Ulysess S. Grant on March 2, 1877 — one of his last days in office.

Long's friends urged President Grant to appoint her on account of her father, the late Union General Edwin V. Sumner. Her husband was Confederate General Armistead L. Long, who had resigned as her father's aide at the start of the Civil War and became one of General Robert E. Lee's closest aides.

Grant reportedly stated:

I have great respect for General Sumner. He was a gallant soldier. But General Long was also a gallant soldier, and I will help Mrs. Long on her husband's account. (The Washington Post, *June 26, 1898.*)

By that time, Armistead Long had gone completely blind, due perhaps to his war service, and relied upon his wife for support.

Longest-Serving Postmaster

In 1828, at the age of 18, Roswell Beardsley was appointed Postmaster of North Lansing, New York. He served until his death in 1902 at the age of 93 — a total of 74 years. The Post Office in his small country store was well-loved by his patrons, including some families whom Beardsley served for five generations.

Postmasters' Convention
Postmasters met in Waco, Texas, on July 12, 1899, for the first convention of the Texas Postmasters Association.

Postmaster Finder

The Postmaster Finder database lists Postmasters by Post Office since 1986, and in some cases back to an office's establishment. You can search for Postmasters by name or by Post Office at about.usps.com/who-we-are/postmasterfinder.

Post Office Names

Historically, local communities proposed the name for their Post Offices, subject to the approval of the Post Office Department. The sources of some Post Office names are lost to history; there are no postal records on name origins. Often Post Offices were named after the town they served; sometimes they were named after the first Postmaster. Many Post Office names changed over time. For example, the name of the Joliet, Illinois, Post Office was originally Juliet, then Romeo, then Juliet again before being changed to Joliet.

At first, unique names for Post Offices were not mandatory. The 1825 *Official Register of the United States* lists many instances of two Post Offices with the same name in the same state. Some states had three Post Offices with the same name — for example, three Bloomfields in Ohio and three Washingtons in Pennsylvania.

By the 1840s, the utility of unique names was officially recognized. Instructions on the application to establish a Post Office read:

The name of the candidate for postmaster should not be applied as the name of a post office. It is preferable to have some LOCAL or PERMANENT name, which must not be the name of any other office in the State; and you should aim to select a name not appropriated to any office in the United States.[53]

Despite these instructions, many new Post Offices were named after the first Postmaster. In one 15-year period in Chickasaw County, Mississippi, 9 out of 20 new Post Offices were given the Postmaster's first or last name or some variant.

Meanwhile, Post Office names too similar to each other continued to create confusion. In Vermont in 1852, mail for Saint Johnsbury East and Saint Johnsbury Centre often went to Saint Johnsbury, causing delays. Instructions in the 1880s addressed this problem, specifying that offices have short names that would "not resemble the name of any other post office in the United States."[54] In the 1890s, the instructions were relaxed, calling for names dissimilar to "any other post office in the State."[55]

Between 1850 and 1890 the number of Post Offices increased from 18,417 to 62,401. Inconsistent geographic names were deemed "a serious and growing evil in the publications of the Government."[56] On September 4, 1890, President Benjamin Harrison created the United States Board on Geographic Names to settle questions regarding place names and to induce uniformity. In its first annual report, issued in 1892, the Board singled out the Post Office Department as one of many sources of confusion, citing the "thousands of cases where the name of the

Self-Service Postal Unit, Wheaton, Maryland, 1964

post-office does not conform to the local name of the place."[57] The Board outlined 13 guiding principles in assigning names, including a preference for locally accepted names; avoiding the possessive form and the words "city" and "town"; using "burg" over "burgh," "boro" over "borough," and "center" over "centre"; and choosing one-word names where possible.

On February 13, 1891, Postmaster General John Wanamaker ordered postal employees to follow the Board's decisions whenever possible, and two more orders in the 1890s reiterated this. As a result, thousands of Post Office names were shortened in the 1890s. Perhaps to calm fears of sweeping name changes, in his 1896 annual report, the Postmaster General stated that "in the selection of new names the Department rule of short, single names is strictly adhered to, but changes of names are not [normally] authorized… at offices of long standing."[58] Some communities successfully lobbied to have the earlier form of their name reinstated. For example, the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Post Office lost its "h" in 1894, but regained it in 1911.

The *Postal Operations Manual* requires a Post Office to normally bear the official name of the town or community it serves.

Boring, Maryland, Post Office, 1970

Facility Names

In 1998, the Paterson, New Jersey, Post Office was designated the "Larry Doby Post Office," honoring the Hall of Fame outfielder who was the first African American to play baseball in the American League. In 2003, a Chicago postal facility was designated the "Cesar Chavez Post Office," honoring civil rights leader Cesar E. Chavez. Since 1967, some postal facilities have been named in honor of individuals — usually by Congress and sometimes by the Postal Service. Nearly one in seven public laws passed by the 113th Congress (2013–2014) concerned the naming of a postal facility in honor of an individual, from civic leaders to servicemen and women killed in the line of duty. The name applies to the building that houses the Post Office, not to the Post Office itself.

The *Postal Operations Manual* specifies that the Postal Service may name a postal facility after an individual "only with the approval of the Postmaster General and only if the individual has been deceased for at least 10 years, with the exception of former Postmasters General, former members of the [Postal Service's] Board of Governors, or deceased U.S. Presidents."[59] These restrictions do not apply to individuals honored by acts of Congress. For a list of congressional honorees, see *about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/dedicated-facilities.pdf.*

THE 20th CENTURY

At the start of the 20th century, Americans were served by the Post Office Department. At the century's close, they were served by the United States Postal Service. At the beginning of the 20th century, most Americans lived in rural areas. By its end, the country was an industrial and service economy of international preeminence, and the character, volume, and means of transporting mail had changed. The Post Office Department, transformed into the United States Postal Service, continued its tradition of innovation, adaptation, and change to better serve postal customers.

Parcel Post

By law, the Post Office Department could not carry parcels weighing more than four pounds at the beginning of the 20th century. Private express companies, which had begun to flourish in the mid-1800s, delivered large packages.

The establishment of rural free delivery had provided a heady taste of life for rural Americans. Soon the demand increased for the delivery of packages containing food, dry goods, drugs, and other commodities not easily available to farmers. When Congress considered enacting a law to allow Parcel Post service, express companies and country merchants fought long and hard against it. Rural residents, who represented 54 percent of the country's population in 1910, were equally emphatic in wanting Parcel Post. While Congress was hotly debating the question, one express company declared a large dividend to stockholders. Public indignation at their so-called exorbitant profits helped Congress decide the issue.

The Act of August 24, 1912, authorized Parcel Post, a service that would:

> *embrace all other matter, including farm and factory products not now embraced by law in either the first, second or third class, not exceeding eleven pounds in weight, nor greater in size than seventy-two inches in length and girth combined …* [60]

Parcel Post began on January 1, 1913. It was an instant success, with 300 million parcels mailed in the first six months the service was offered. The effect on the national economy was electric. Marketing and merchandising through Parcel Post spurred the growth of the great mail-order houses. Montgomery Ward, the first mail-order company, started with a catalog of more than 100

products in 1872. Sears, Roebuck and Company followed Montgomery Ward in 1893. The year Parcel Post began, Sears handled five times as many orders as it did the year before. Five years later, Sears doubled its revenues.

Parcel Post grew too, literally and in volume. Its weight and size limits were expanded over time, reaching 70 pounds and 100 inches on August 1, 1931.[61] After World War II, Parcel Post's comparatively low rates stimulated its growth while the business of express companies began to decrease. Eventually, Congress intervened to rescue the Railway Express Agency from a precarious financial position. On January 1, 1952, the maximum weight of parcels sent via the mails to large (first class) Post Offices was reduced to 40 pounds, if the parcels were traveling up to 150 miles, and to 20 pounds for any greater distance. None of these parcels could exceed 72 inches in length and girth combined. Parcels bound for other Post Offices still could weigh up to 70 pounds and be up to 100 inches in size. Parcel Post volume fell.

To offset this, weight and size limits for parcels moving between larger Post Offices gradually were increased starting on July 1, 1967, so that by July 1, 1969, the weight limit for all such parcels had been increased to 40 pounds, and by July 1, 1971, the size limit had been increased to 84 inches.

Mailing Children

Just a few weeks after Parcel Post began, Jesse and Mathilda Beagle "mailed" their 8-month-old son James to his grandmother, who lived a few miles away near Batavia, Ohio. Baby Beagle was just under the initial 11-pound limit for parcels. Rural Carrier Vernon Lytle picked up the baby from his parents' house and carried him in his mail wagon to his grandmother's house. The postage was fifteen cents, and the "parcel" was insured for $50.

Although it was against postal regulations, several children traveled via U.S. Mail in the early years of Parcel Post. Initially the only animals that were allowed in the mail were bees and bugs. In 1918, day-old chicks were allowed in the mail. In 1919, some additional "harmless live animals" were permitted, but children did not fall into this category.[62]

On February 27, 1983, a uniform weight and size limit was set at 70 pounds, 108 inches, for parcels mailed from any Post Office to any destination within the United States. On January 10, 1999, the size limit for Parcel Post increased to 130 inches. Parcel Post was renamed Standard Post on January 27, 2013, and USPS Retail Ground on January 22, 2016.

Postal Savings System

An Act of Congress of June 25, 1910, established the Postal Savings System in designated Post Offices, effective January 1, 1911. The legislation aimed to get money out of hiding, attract the savings of immigrants accustomed to saving at Post Offices in their native countries, provide safe depositories for people who had lost confidence in banks, and furnish more convenient depositories for working people.

The system paid two percent interest per year. Initially, the minimum deposit was $1, and the balance in an account could not exceed $500, excluding interest.

Deposits were slow at first, but by 1929, $153 million was on deposit. Savings spurted to $1.2 billion during the 1930s and jumped again during World War II, peaking in 1947 at almost $3.4 billion.

After the war, banks raised their interest rates and began offering the same governmental guarantee as the Postal Savings System. In addition, United States savings bonds gave higher interest rates. Deposits in the Postal Savings System declined, dropping to $416 million by 1964.

On April 27, 1966, the Post Office Department stopped accepting deposits to existing accounts, refused to open new accounts, and cut off interest payments as the annual anniversary date of existing accounts came up. When the system ended officially July 1, 1967, about $50 million in the unclaimed deposits of more than 600,000 depositors was turned over to the U.S. Treasury Department to be held in trust indefinitely.

An Act of August 13, 1971, authorized the Treasury to turn over the money on deposit to various states and jurisdictions, each sharing proportionately based on its own deposits. Some money was kept for future claims, but under the *Postal Savings System Statute of Limitations Act* of July 13, 1984, no claims could be brought more than one year after enactment. Thus, no claims made after July 13, 1985, have been honored.

The above Statute of Limitations applies only to certificates. Postal savings stamps and postal savings bonds can be redeemed by sending them to the Bureau of the Public Debt, Post Office Box 426, Parkersburg, WV 26106-0426.

Roller Skates Speed Service, 1913
In 1913, some clerks at the Chicago Post Office wore roller skates to sort mail faster. Chicago was the birthplace of the nation's mail order industry and had the second busiest Post Office, after New York City.

Postal Savings System Certificate
If you inherit an old Postal Savings System certificate of deposit, do not expect to get rich. The system ended in 1967, and the U.S. Treasury Department stopped accepting claims in 1985.

Airmail

The Post Office Department's most extraordinary role in transportation was played in the sky. The Department was intrigued with the possibility of carrying mail through the skies and authorized its first experimental mail flight at an aviation meet on Long Island, New York, in 1911. Earle Ovington was sworn in as a mail carrier and made daily flights between Garden City Estates and Mineola, New York, dropping his mail bags from the plane to the ground where they were picked up by Mineola Postmaster William McCarthy.

In the next few years, the Department authorized dozens more experimental flights at fairs, carnivals, and air meets in more than 20 states. These flights convinced the Department that an airplane could carry a payload of mail. Beginning in 1912, officials repeatedly urged Congress to appropriate money to launch airmail service. In 1916, Congress finally authorized the use of $50,000 from steamboat and powerboat service appropriations for airmail experiments. The Department advertised for bids for contract service in Massachusetts and Alaska, but received no acceptable responses.

In 1917, Congress appropriated $100,000 to establish experimental airmail service the next fiscal year. The Army wanted to operate the service to give its pilots more cross-country flying experience. The Postmaster General and Secretary of War agreed: the Army Signal Corps would lend its planes and pilots to the Department to start the service.

The Post Office Department began scheduled airmail service between New York and Washington, D.C., May 15, 1918 — an important date in commercial aviation. Simultaneous takeoffs were made from Washington's Polo Grounds and from Belmont Park, Long Island — both trips by way of Philadelphia.

Airmail's Bumpy Beginning

Airmail got off to a bumpy start. On the first flight out of Washington, D.C., in May 1918, the pilot flew in the wrong direction. He was supposed to follow the railroad tracks and head north towards New York, but instead ended up near Waldorf, Maryland, about 20 miles south. Suspecting he was lost, the pilot stopped to ask a farmer for directions, but crash-landed in a freshly plowed field. The airmail had to be picked up by a truck and driven back to Washington, where it caught a flight north the next day.

Katherine Stinson, the "Flying Schoolgirl"

In 1912, at the age of 21, Katherine Stinson became the fourth woman in the United States to earn her pilot's license. The next year, she became the first woman to fly the U.S. Mail when she dropped mailbags from her plane at the Montana State Fair. Dubbed the "Flying Schoolgirl," she captivated audiences worldwide with her youthful looks, long brown curls, and fearless feats of aerial derring-do. In 1917, she set a non-stop long-distance endurance record, flying from San Diego to San Francisco in 9 hours and 10 minutes. In 1918, she became the first woman to fly an experimental mail route from Chicago to New York, as well as the first woman to fly the regular route from New York to Washington, D.C.

Eddie Hubbard (left) and William Boeing stand in front of a Boeing C-700 seaplane near Seattle, Washington, after returning from a survey flight to Vancouver, British Columbia, on March 3, 1919. They brought with them a pouch with 60 letters, making this the first U.S. international mail flight. In 1920, Hubbard began flying the first international contract mail route, from Seattle to Victoria, British Columbia.

During the first three months of operation, the Post Office Department used Army pilots and six Army Curtiss JN-4H "Jenny" training planes. On August 12, 1918, the Department took over all phases of airmail service, using newly hired civilian pilots and mechanics, and six specially built mail planes from the Standard Aircraft Corporation.

These early mail planes had no reliable instruments, radios, or other navigational aids. Pilots navigated using landmarks and dead reckoning. Forced landings occurred frequently due to bad weather, but fatalities in the early months were rare, largely because of the planes' small size, maneuverability, and slow landing speed.

Congress authorized airmail postage of 24 cents, including special delivery. (See "Rates for Domestic Airmail, 1918–1977," on page 127.) The public was reluctant to use this more expensive service. During the first year, airmail bags often contained as much regular mail as airmail. To better its delivery time on long hauls and to entice the public to use airmail, the Department's long-range plans called for a transcontinental air route from New York to San Francisco. The first legs of this transcontinental route — from New York to Cleveland with a stop at Bellefonte, Pennsylvania,

Airmail Pilot Wesley L. Smith, 1922
Wesley Smith flew the mail from 1919 to 1927. Like most early airmail pilots, he had many close calls, including the time he put out a fire in the left side of his engine by swerving to the right and then into a vertical dive. After regaining control of the plane and landing in a cornfield, he found that the only damage to the plane was to the tires, which had burned in the fire.

New York to San Francisco	Ship or steamboat via the Isthmus of Panama _1 month or longer_	Railroad to Tipton, MO, then overland mail route _30–35 days (6–10 railroad + 24–25 stagecoach)_	Railroad to St. Joseph, MO, then via Pony Express _13–14 days (3–4 railroad, 10 horseback)_	Transcontinental railroad _7 days, 2 hours_
	1849	**1858**	**1860**	**1869**

then from Cleveland to Chicago, with a stop at Bryan, Ohio — opened in 1919. A third leg opened in 1920 from Chicago to Omaha, via Iowa City, and feeder lines were established from St. Louis and Minneapolis to Chicago. The last transcontinental segment — from Omaha to San Francisco, via North Platte, Nebraska; Cheyenne, Rawlins, and Rock Springs in Wyoming; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Elko and Reno in Nevada — opened on September 8, 1920.

At this time, mail was carried on trains at night and flown by day. Still, the new service was 22 hours faster than the cross-country all-rail time.

In August 1920, the Department began installing radio stations at each airfield to provide pilots with current weather information. By November, ten stations were operating, including two Navy stations. When airmail traffic permitted,

other government departments used the radios instead of the telegraph for special messages, and the Department of Agriculture used the radios to transmit weather forecasts and stock market reports.

February 22, 1921, marked the first time mail was flown both day and night over the entire distance from San Francisco to New York. Congress was impressed. It appropriated $1,250,000 for the expansion of airmail service. The Post Office Department installed additional landing fields, as well as towers, beacons, searchlights, and boundary markers, across the country. The Department also equipped the planes with luminescent instruments, navigational lights, and parachute flares.

In 1922 and 1923, the Department was awarded the Collier Trophy for important contributions to the devel-

opment of aeronautics, especially in safety and for demonstrating the feasibility of night flights. Regular cross-country through service, with night flying, began on July 1, 1924.

On February 2, 1925, Congress authorized the Postmaster General to contract for airmail service. The Post Office Department immediately invited bids from commercial aviation companies. By the end of 1926, 11 out of 12 contracted airmail routes were operating.

The first commercial airmail flight in the United States occurred February 15, 1926. As commercial airlines took over, the Department transferred its lights, airways, and radio service to the Department of Commerce, including 17 fully equipped stations, 89 emergency landing fields, and 405 beacons. Terminal airports, except government properties in Chicago, Omaha, and San Francisco, were transferred to the municipalities in which they were located. Some planes were sold to airmail contractors, while others were transferred to interested government departments. By September 1, 1927, all airmail was carried under contract.

Airplanes were used to transport mail internationally with the establishment of routes from Seattle to Victoria, British Columbia, on October 15, 1920, and from Key West, Florida, to Havana, Cuba, beginning November 1, 1920. The Havana route was discontinued in 1923, but resumed on October 19, 1927, marking the beginning of regularly scheduled international airmail service.

Congress authorized the Postmaster General to enter into long-term contracts for flying the mail internationally on March 8, 1928. On October 1, 1928, Foreign Air Mail (FAM) Route 1 began regular service between New York

Loading Airmail, 1930

A crew loads bags of mail into a Ford Tri-Motor Mail Passenger Plane via a compartment in the wing that lowered for loading. When Ford's Tri-Motor "Tin Goose" debuted in 1926, most planes were still built of wood and fabric. Ford hoped the safer, all-metal plane would attract passengers — the "Tin Goose" could carry up to 15 people as well as the mail. Until passenger traffic picked up in the late 1930s, airlines depended upon mail transportation contracts for survival.

Airmail Pilot Bill Hopson

William C. Hopson was less than impressed with photographs of himself. Submitting a photo to the Post Office Department's Airmail Service in the early 1920s, he wrote:

*Enclosed please find photo of bum pilot …
When finished with picture just post in cellar, it's
guaranteed to keep away all rats, mice and other
vermin.*[63]

Hopson had 741 hours of flight time when he became an airmail pilot on April 14, 1920. He trained at Hempstead, Long Island, and won a pilot's incentive contest sponsored by Otto Praeger, the Second Assistant Postmaster General. Hopson flew 413,034 miles, more than all but two of the service's 44 pilots, logging 4,043 hours in the air.

Like many airmail pilots, Hopson flew the British-designed De Havilland (DH-4B) biplane. Its front cockpit, transformed into a cargo hold, could carry about 500 pounds of mail, and the plane cruised at 95–100 mph. Although considered reliable, DH-4Bs tended to stall, and their high landing speeds made them difficult to land in short fields. But, wrote Hopson, they "are the only suitable ships for mountains in all weather."[64]

For most of his career, Hopson flew the Omaha-Chicago leg of the transcontinental route. In 1925, he flew into a severe storm near Anita, Iowa. An air pocket dropped the plane almost to the ground before Hopson regained control. By then, his landing gear and lower wings had harvested about 75 bushels of corn. The plane turned over, pinning Hopson underneath. Surrounded by cornstalks and deluged by rain, he fired his revolver into the air to attract attention. The official report said:

*The Pilot was only slightly injured, the mail wet in
spots, and the plane practically a washout.*[65]

Between weather and primitive instrumentation, each airmail trip was an adventure. As Hopson wrote:

*The best system of flying bad weather is not so
much to go rip roaring through nasty weather, but
to use your head for something else besides a hat-
rack, and fly where bad weather ain't.*[66]

In 1925, base pay for beginning airmail pilots was $2,000 to $2,800, depending on how much night flying they did. Pilots also earned five to seven cents per mile flown, double for night flight. Pilots agreed, in writing, to fly in all kinds of weather.

Hopson's last flight for the Department was on August 27, 1927. On September 1, contract carriers began transporting all airmail. Hopson left the Airmail Service two days later and was hired to fly National Air Transport's Contract Air Mail Route 17 between New York and Chicago. This was the Allegheny route, one of the most difficult because of limited safe places for emergency landings.

Hopson died October 18, 1928, when his plane crashed into the top of a tree on a hill near Polk, Pennsylvania, during a bad storm. One man, grateful that Hopson had saved his life during an earlier flight, wrote a tribute that appeared in *The St. Louis Times* on October 20, 1928:

*It was a dark, rainy, cloudy day on the New York
end of the air mail. No planes through in two days.
I wanted to get home to my family in California. I
insisted on going. It wasn't bravery — it was dumb
ignorance, and an unlimited confidence in all air
mail pilots.*

*"We will try to get through if you insist," Pilot
W.P. Hopson said. And we got through, clear to
Cleveland.*

*Thursday he didn't get through. I kinder feel like
his skill saved my life. So "Hoppie," Old Boy, here's
hoping you are piloting the best cloud the Boss
has got in his hangar up there, and you don't have
to worry about low ceiling, engine missing, head
winds, or even whether the old rip cord will pull in
case —.*

*Yours,
Will Rogers*

and Montreal. In 1929, routes were established from Miami to Nassau, Bahamas, on January 2; to San Juan, Puerto Rico, on January 9; to San Cristobal, Canal Zone, on February 4; and from Brownsville, Texas, to Mexico City on March 10. By the end of 1930, the United States was linked by air with nearly all the countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Transpacific airmail routes began operating on November 22, 1935, with FAM Route 14, from San Francisco via Hawaii, Midway, Wake, and Guam to the Philippines. Airmail service was extended to Hong Kong on April 21, 1937; to New Zealand on July 12, 1940; to Singapore on May 3, 1941; to Australia on January 28, 1947; and to China on July 15, 1947.

Transatlantic airmail routes connected the United States with Europe beginning May 20, 1939, with the 29-hour flight of Pan American Airways' *Yankee Clipper* from New York to Marseilles, France, via Bermuda, the Azores, and Portugal. That same year, on June 24, a route was inaugurated between New York and Great Britain by way of Newfoundland, Greenland, and Iceland. On December 6, 1941, direct airmail service to Africa was made possible by the inauguration of a route from Miami via Rio de Janeiro to the Belgian Congo. Though interrupted during WWII, improvements in aviation fostered the rapid expansion of international airmail routes in the postwar years.

On October 4, 1958, a jet airliner was used to transport mail between London and New York for the first time, cutting the transatlantic trip from 14 hours to 8.

Airmail as a separate class of domestic mail officially ended on May 1, 1977, although in practice it ended in October 1975, when the Postal Service announced that First-Class postage — which was three cents cheaper — would buy the same or better level of service. By then, transportation patterns had changed, and most First-Class letters were already zipping cross-country via airplane. Airmail as a separate class of international mail ended on May 14, 2007, when rates for the international transportation of mail by surface methods were eliminated.

Charles I. Stanton, an early airmail pilot and airmail division superintendent who later headed the Civil Aeronautics Administration, said about the early days of airmail service:

We planted four seeds … They were airways, communications, navigation aids, and multi-engined aircraft. Not all of these came full blown into the transportation scene; in fact, the last one withered and died and had to be planted over again nearly a decade later. But they are the cornerstones on which our present world-wide transport structure is built, and they came, one by one, out of our experience in daily, uninterrupted flying of the mail.[67]

NEW DEAL ART:
EAGER AND ALIVE

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal sponsored several art programs to help get people back to work and restore confidence in a nation facing 25 percent unemployment in 1933.

From 1934 to 1943, the New Deal murals and sculpture seen in Post Offices were produced under the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, later called the Section of Fine Arts. Unlike the Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project, with which it often is confused, this program was not directed toward providing economic relief. Instead, the art placed in Post Offices was intended to help boost the morale of people suffering the effects of the Great Depression with art that, in the words of President Roosevelt, was:

native, human, eager and alive — all of it painted by their own kind in their own country, and painted about things they know and look at often and have touched and loved.[68]

Artists competed anonymously in national and regional contests. After receiving a commission, an artist was encouraged to consult with the Postmaster and other townspeople to ensure that the subject would be meaningful. In 2019, more than 1,000 Post Offices nationwide continued to house this uniquely American art.

Postman In Storm, **Independence, Iowa (at right)**
The oil on canvas mural Postman In Storm *by Robert Taylor might evoke shivers from visitors to the Independence, Iowa, Post Office at 200 2nd Avenue, Northeast. The mural was installed in January 1938 and restored in 2000.*

Air Mail, **Piggott, Arkansas (below)**
Air Mail *by painter Daniel Rhodes is a nearly 12-foot-long work in oil on canvas. The public still can see this work of art, installed in 1941, when they visit the Piggott, Arkansas, Post Office, located at 116 North 3rd Avenue.*

The Leisurely Native Tempo, Charlotte Amalie, U.S. Virgin Islands
Stevan Dohanos painted two murals for the Charlotte Amalie Post Office in the U.S. Virgin Islands in 1940, including The Leisurely Native Tempo, *which can still be seen in the Post Office lobby at 9846 Estate Thomas.*

Winter Landscape, Canton, Missouri
Artist Jessie Hull Mayer painted Winter Landscape *in oil and tempera for the Canton, Missouri, Post Office, located at 500 Lewis Street, where it can still be seen. The mural was installed in 1940, with restoration work done in 1971 and 2005.*

Legend of James Edward Hamilton — Barefoot Mailman (Panel 5 of 6), West Palm Beach, Florida
Stevan Dohanos painted six murals for the West Palm Beach, Florida, Post Office. Originally installed in 1940, they were moved to the office's new location at 3200 Summit Boulevard in 1988.

***Washington Bridge*, Ridgefield Park, New Jersey**
Installed in 1937, this oil on canvas work by artist Thomas Donnelly depicts the George Washington Bridge with the New Jersey shore in the foreground and Manhattan in the background. The mural is located in the lobby of the Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, Post Office, at 155 Main Street.

***Apple Harvest*, Arlington, Virginia**
Apple Harvest *was one of a series of seven murals painted by artist Auriel Bessemer for the Arlington, Virginia, Post Office, at 3118 Washington Boulevard. The mural was installed in 1940 and restored in 2005.*

Indian Bear Dance, Truth Or Consequences, New Mexico
Installed in 1938, Indian Bear Dance *by Boris Deutsch is a 12-foot-long oil on canvas mural located in the Geronimo Retail Unit, 300 Main Street, Truth Or Consequences, New Mexico, Post Office. The retail unit is open 24 hours a day for postal customers and visitors interested in New Deal art.*

Buffalo Range, Portales, New Mexico
Artist Theodore Van Soelen painted this nearly 12-foot-long mural in 1938. It can be seen in the Portales, New Mexico, Post Office, located at 116 West 1st Street.

The Postwar Boom

The period following World War II was marked by a booming economy, a growing population, and a general sense of optimism. After decades of deprivation and war, this era of stability and prosperity put new cars, suburban homes, and college educations within the reach of more Americans than ever.

As millions of GIs returned home and started families, new housing was built in suburban subdivisions. The family car played a central role in suburban life; the number of cars on the road increased from 25.8 million in 1945 to 61.7 million by 1960.

America's growing dependence on automobiles and the growth of the suburbs pushed the Post Office Department to change how it transported and delivered mail. Passenger trains — which had transported most mail since the 19th century — declined, as more and more people chose the open road over the railroad. Between 1940 and 1960, the operating miles of passenger trains fell by 45 percent, from 170,429 miles to 93,816, continuing a downward trend that began in the 1920s. As trains were pulled from service, the Post Office Department quickly converted inter-city mail transportation to highway routes. The Department even established Highway Post Offices, similar to Railway Post

Snorkel Mailbox, circa 1954
Curbside "snorkel" mailboxes were first tested in Cleveland, Ohio, and Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1939.
In the 1950s, the design was standardized and the boxes spread to cities nationwide.

Offices, with clerks aboard inter-city buses sorting mail en route (see page 112).

Suburban growth challenged the Post Office Department to deliver mail to more households that were spread out geographically. The Department began motorizing city delivery routes in the 1950s, putting more and more letter carriers in motor vehicles. The percentage of "mounted" city carriers serving residential routes more than doubled in the 1950s, climbing from 11 percent in 1954 to 24 percent in 1960. Meanwhile, handcarts were given to some carriers who walked their routes, to double the amount of mail that they could deliver in one trip.

The booming postwar economy led to ever-increasing amounts of mail. Between 1940 and 1960, mail volume more than doubled, from 27.7 billion to 63.7 billion pieces mailed annually. To deliver mail faster and more economically, the Department enlisted the help of customers to presort their outgoing mail into "cooperative mailing racks" in some office building lobbies, with sacks labeled for "local," "air mail," or "out-of-town" mail. Similarly, dual collection boxes were

Experimental Mailster, 1952
The Post Office Department began motorizing city delivery routes in the 1950s. Three-wheeled vehicles like this Mailster were tested in half a dozen cities beginning in June 1950. By the end of the decade, more than 5,700 Mailsters were in service; the number peaked in 1966, at about 17,700 nationwide.

Stamp Vending Machine, 1956
The Model "F" Stampmaster debuted in 1956. The machine not only made change but also "spoke" to customers with pre-recorded messages at the end of transactions, such as "Thank you. I am another example of streamlining your postal service," and "Thank you. Introduce me to your friends. I like friends."

Cooperative Mailing Rack, 1956
In the mid-1950s, cooperative mailing racks were placed in the lobbies of large office buildings in more than 130 cities, so customers could presort their outgoing mail.

placed on some busy street corners — one for "local" and one for "out-of-town" mail. The Department also encouraged bulk mailers to presort and label their outgoing mail for either local or out-of-town dispatch.

To serve customers more efficiently, self-service machines like the "Mailomat" and the "Stampmaster" vending machine were added to some Post Office lobbies, so customers could quickly purchase postage without waiting in line for counter service. Catering to the car culture, the Department installed snorkel mailboxes on city streets and even experimented with drive-up service at Post Offices.

From Zone Codes to ZIP Codes

During World War II, thousands of experienced postal employees left to serve with the military. To help offset the loss, in May 1943, the Post Office Department began a zoning address system in 124 large cities. Under this system, delivery units or zones were identified by one or two numbers between the city and state — for example, Birmingham 7, Alabama — so that mail could be separated by employees who did not have detailed scheme knowledge. The zone numbering system was continued after the war to help employees sort ever-increasing mail volumes in rapidly expanding urban and suburban areas. Zone codes were used in 131 cities in total. Most of the cities used the system until 1963, when the Department implemented an even further reaching plan, the Zoning Improvement Plan (ZIP) Code.[69]

Between 1943 and 1963, mail volume more than doubled. The nature of the mail also changed. The development of the computer brought centralization of accounts and sent a growing mass of utility bills and payments, bank deposits and receipts, advertising, magazines, credit card transactions, mortgage bills and payments, and Social Security checks through the mail. By 1963, 80 percent of all mail in the United States was business mail.

To cope with rising mail volumes, the Department needed to sort and distribute mail more efficiently. Adding more and more employees to sort ever-increasing volumes of mail was not an option. Costs aside, there was nowhere to put them, as many large postal facilities were already cramped.

In June 1962, after a study of mechanization, the presidentially appointed Advisory Board of the Post Office Department made several recommendations. One was the development of a nationwide address coding system,

Promoting Zone Codes, New York City, 1958

Acting Postmaster Robert Christenberry encouraged the public to mail early and use zone codes to speed their Christmas mail.

an idea the Department had considered for a decade or more. A number of coding programs were examined and discarded before the Department selected a system advanced by Department officials. Postmaster General J. Edward Day announced that the ZIP Code would launch July 1, 1963.

Preparing for the new system involved a realignment of the mail system. The Post Office Department had previously recognized that new avenues of transportation would open and had begun to establish focal points for air, highway, and rail transportation. Called the Metro System, these transportation centers were set up around 85 of the country's larger cities to deflect mail from congested city streets and compensate for the reduced number of mail-carrying passenger trains which had previously brought mail to city centers. The Metro concept was expanded and eventually became the core of 552 sectional centers, each serving between 40 and 150 surrounding Post Offices.

Once these sectional centers were delineated, the next step in establishing the ZIP Code was to assign codes to the centers and the postal addresses they served. The existence of postal zones in the larger cities, set in motion in 1943, helped to some extent, but in cases where the old zones failed to fit within the delivery areas, new numbers had to be assigned.

Postmaster General and City Carriers with Mr. ZIP, 1963
Postmaster General J. Edward Day and two city letter carriers pose in front of Mr. ZIP, a cartoon character who promoted the use of the ZIP Code.

"Swingin' Six" ZIP Code Video
Watch an entertaining 14-minute ZIP Code promotion featuring the folk group the "Swingin' Six," produced by the Post Office Department in 1966. Courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum via its YouTube channel, SmithsonianNPM.

By July 1963, a five-digit code had been assigned to every address throughout the country. The first digit designated a broad geographical area of the United States, ranging from zero for the Northeast to nine for the far West. This number was followed by two digits that more closely pinpointed population concentrations and those sectional centers accessible to common transportation networks. The final two digits designated small Post Offices or postal zones in larger zoned cities.

The ZIP Code began as scheduled. At first, use of the new code was not mandatory for anyone, but in 1967, the Department required mailers of second- and third-class bulk mail to presort by ZIP Code. The public and business mailers alike adapted well to its use.

The ZIP Code helped postal employees manually sort mail by consolidating regional, city, and state information into five easy-to-read numbers. Previously, clerks had to memorize the names and locations of thousands of Post Offices in order to sort mail to the right hub. The code also enabled computerized presorting of mail by business mailers, who could then bundle and deposit mail presorted by sectional center, which speeded delivery by eliminating multiple handlings. The new code also paved the way for further development of automated mail processing.

Mechanization and Early Automation

Despite rising mail volumes, throughout much of the 20th century the Post Office Department relied on antiquated sorting equipment and mailhandling methods, such as the pigeonhole method of sorting mail from colonial times. Although a few letter sorting machines had previously been tested on a limited basis, like the Gehring Mail Distributing Machine beginning in the 1910s and the Sestack Letter Sorter in the 1940s, it was not until the 1950s that the Post Office Department began its "crash program of modernization and mechanization."[70]

In 1956, the Department began intense research on sorting codes used in 13 other countries to manually encode addresses for letter sorting by machine, and began to

City Letter Carriers, Mobile, Alabama, 1956
City carriers sorted mail into delivery sequence by hand until the late 20th century.
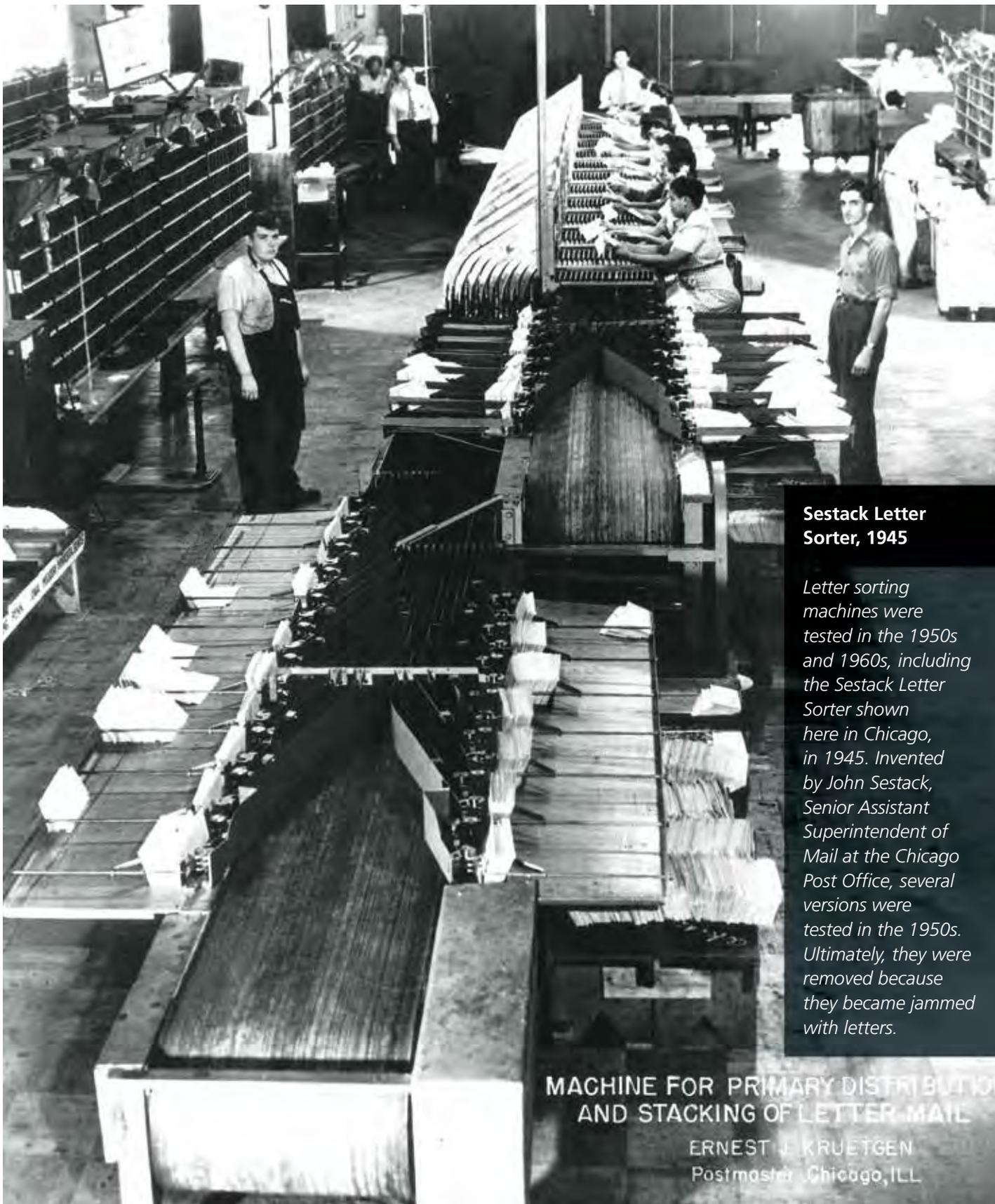
Sestack Letter Sorter, 1945

Letter sorting machines were tested in the 1950s and 1960s, including the Sestack Letter Sorter shown here in Chicago, in 1945. Invented by John Sestack, Senior Assistant Superintendent of Mail at the Chicago Post Office, several versions were tested in the 1950s. Ultimately, they were removed because they became jammed with letters.

MACHINE FOR PRIMARY DISTRIBUTION AND STACKING OF LETTER MAIL

ERNEST J. KRUETGEN
Postmaster Chicago, ILL

work with the U.S. Bureau of Standards and the Rabinow Engineering Company, among others, to develop a system best suited to U.S. postal needs. They examined codes for extracting information and the memory core needed by automated letter sorting machines.

The Post Office Department also initiated projects and awarded contracts to develop a number of machines and technologies, including letter sorters, facer-cancelers, automatic address readers, parcel sorters, advanced tray conveyors, flat sorters, and letter mail coding and stamp-tagging techniques.

The first semiautomatic parcel sorting machine was introduced in Baltimore in 1956. A year later, a foreign-built, semiautomatic, multiposition letter sorting machine (MPLSM), the Transorma, was installed and tested for the first time in a U.S. Post Office. With five operators keying in memorized sorting codes, the Transorma could sort letters, cards, and circulars to 300 separations at the rate of 15,000 pieces per hour, about double the amount that the same number of clerks could sort by hand.

The first American-built MPLSM, based on a 1,000-pocket machine adapted from a foreign design, was developed during the late 1950s. The first production contract was awarded to the Burroughs Corporation in 1958 for ten machines. The machine was successfully tested in Detroit in 1959 and eventually became the backbone of letter sorting operations during the 1960s and 70s.

In 1959, the Post Office Department also awarded its first volume order for mechanization to Pitney-Bowes, Inc., for the production of 75 Mark II facer-cancelers.

The Department's accelerated mechanization program began in the late 1960s and consisted of semiautomatic equipment such as the MPLSM, the single-position letter sorting machine, and the facer-canceler. In November 1965, the Department put a high-speed optical character reader (OCR) into service in the Detroit Post Office; nine Post Offices were using these OCRs by 1970. This first-generation machine was connected to an MPLSM and read the city/state/ZIP Code line of typed addresses to sort letters to one of 277 pockets. Although this first-generation OCR could read up to 43,000 addresses an hour, letters fed into it had to be pre-culled, since it could read only the 80 most common of about 600 typefaces in use.

Mechanization and early automation efforts increased productivity, but the Post Office Department was in a "race with catastrophe" trying to cope with dramatic increases in mail volume. In Chicago in 1966, postal operations ground to a halt. It soon became clear that a piecemeal approach would no longer work; a fundamental reorganization of the entire Post Office Department was needed. ∎

Farrington Automatic Address Reader, 1959

A prototype of Farrington's automatic address reader was showcased at the Parade of Postal Progress in Detroit, Michigan, in 1959. The exhibit was ahead of its time — a functioning version of this optical character reader (OCR) was first tested in 1962. In the next few years, more models were tested in other cities, and by July 1970, fifteen OCRs were operating in nine cities. These first-generation machines could read the last line of typed addresses only. In the late 1990s, OCRs began deciphering handwritten addresses.

POSTAL REORGANIZATION

In the mid-1960s, the Post Office Department struggled with outdated equipment, crowded facilities, underpaid workers, and an ineffective management structure.

Postal officials knew they needed new facilities — many of the nation's largest Post Offices had been built in the 1930s and were designed to receive mail by rail. The facilities did not have enough docking space for large trucks, which began replacing trains as the primary mail movers in the 1950s. Also, mail volume had skyrocketed up 230 percent between 1940 and 1960.

But Congress held the purse-strings. All important decisions — from buildings and equipment used, to how many employees could be hired and what they were paid — were made by Congress. This led to artificially low rates of postage, which were popular with constituents but led to a stagnant postal infrastructure.

During the 1963 Christmas season, mail volume at the Chicago Post Office was so high that trucks could not make it into the terminal to unload. Tons of mail, mostly Parcel Post, were delivered late; they were still playing catch-up with Christmas when Valentine's Day rolled around.

In October 1966, it happened again. The Chicago Post Office became gridlocked by mountains of mailbags. Mail trucks backed up outside the Post Office, unable to unload. At one point, it was estimated that 300 tractor trailers waited in a line that wound around the Chicago Post Office, which was then the largest Post Office in the world. One bulk mailer recalled that on October 1, one of his drivers had to wait all day to unload; a week later one of his drivers was stuck at the Post Office for three days waiting to unload one truck.

It took about a month to clear the logjam, with mail re-routed to other offices around the country. It made national headlines and, finally, ignited a movement for postal reform. The Chicago Post Office became a symbol to the nation of how not to manage mail.

During February 1967 hearings before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Treasury-Post Office, Postmaster General Lawrence F. O'Brien said that the

The Chicago Post Office
For a week in October 1966, the Chicago Post Office, at that time the largest Post Office in the world with 60 acres of floor space, ground to a virtual halt under a logjam of 10 million pieces of mail. This crisis triggered a bipartisan look at postal reform.

Department was in a "race with catastrophe." O'Brien described the crisis:

> At the peak of the crisis in Chicago, ten million pieces of mail were logjammed. The sorting room floors were bursting with more than 5 million letters, parcels, circulars, and magazines that could not be processed. Outbound mail sacks formed small grey mountain ranges while they waited to be shipped out.
>
> Our new and beleaguered Chicago postmaster summed it up pretty well when he said: "We had mail coming out of our ears."
>
> What happened in Chicago to cause the crisis? The answer is not that something specific happened in 1966, but that enough did not happen in the previous 33 years. … we are trying to move our mail through facilities largely unchanged since the days of Jim Farley when our mail volume was 30 percent of what it is today.[71]

After O'Brien spoke, Oklahoma Congressman Tom Steed, chairman of the subcommittee, offered the following summary:

> … would this be a fair summary: that at the present time, as the manager of the Post Office Department, you have no control over your workload, you have no control over the rates of revenue, you have no control over the pay rates of the employees that you employ, you have very little control over the conditions of the service of these employees; you have virtually no control, by the nature of it, of your physical facilities and you have only a limited control, at best, over the transportation facilities that you are compelled to use — all of which adds up to a staggering amount of "no control" in terms of the duties you have to perform.[72]

The answer was yes. Congress, the President, and the Post Office Department moved to improve this situation.

In April 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson created the President's Commission on Postal Organization. Its ten members included the dean of Harvard's Business School, the president of the AFL-CIO, and heads of major corporations. It was chaired by Frederick R. Kappel, a former chairman of AT&T, and became known as the Kappel Commission. The President asked the commission to "determine whether the postal system as presently organized is

International Harvester Tractor Trailer, circa 1960
In the 1960s, many of the nation's largest Post Offices lacked adequate docking space for the large numbers of trucks and tractor trailers that began to proliferate in the 1950s.

National Guardsmen Sort Mail in New York, 1970

On March 18, 1970, letter carriers in New York City walked off the job to protest pay and working conditions. Although it was illegal for postal workers to strike, 152,000 other employees in 671 locations soon joined the walkout, halting much of the nation's mail — including welfare and pension checks, tax refunds, census forms, and draft notices. To minimize mail congestion, Postmaster General Winton M. Blount ordered an embargo on all mail originating in or destined for the New York City metropolitan area. On March 23, 1970, President Richard Nixon declared a state of national emergency and sent federal troops to New York City to sort and distribute the backlog of mail. The strike ended two days later with the start of negotiations for a general wage increase.

capable of meeting the demands of our growing economy and our expanding population."[73]

In June 1968, the Kappel Commission concluded that it was not. The commission traced this incapacity to "an absence of responsible management having normal operating authority."[74] It felt that the Post Office Department operated one of the nation's largest businesses, yet it was not run as a business, primarily because its "nominal managers" did not have the authority to run it — rather, "important management decisions of the Post Office are beyond their control."[75]

The Commission recommended:

■ That a self-supporting postal corporation owned by the federal government be created.

■ That all hiring and promotions in the postal system be made on a merit-based, nonpolitical basis.

■ That postal employees be transferred from the federal Civil Service to a new postal career service and that conditions of employment for non-managerial employees be determined through collective bargaining between labor and management.

■ That postage rates be set by a board of directors, after hearings by rate commissioners, subject to veto by Congress.

The commission released its recommendations in June 1968. In 1969, President Richard M. Nixon supported the commission's recommendations; others, including postal union leaders, opposed it.

On March 12, 1970, after extensive hearings, the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee reported a compromise measure containing provisions similar to the commission proposals endorsed by President Nixon. The bill included a 5.4 percent retroactive pay raise and a system that would allow employees to reach the top of their pay grade in 8 rather than 21 years. Postal employees called it too little, too late.

On March 18, a work stoppage began. It ultimately involved 152,000 postal employees in 671 locations. The President ordered the military to deliver the mail, and the unions asked Labor Secretary George Shultz to intervene. Postmaster General Winton M. Blount agreed to negotiate when the employees returned to work. They did, and negotiations began March 25. Eight days later, the negotiating parties recommended a general wage increase of six percent,

Chicago Post Office Clerks, circa 1970
In the late 1960s, stagnant wages for federal workers led to the hiring of more women, especially in urban areas, where men could often find better paying jobs in the private sector. The Postal Reorganization Act *of August 12, 1970, increased employees' pay by 14 percent and shortened the amount of time needed for employees to reach the top of their pay grade.*

retroactive to December 27, 1969, for all federal employees. Postal workers would get an additional eight percent increase if there was agreement on, and enactment of, legislation reorganizing the Post Office Department.

On April 16, 1970, after continuing negotiations, the Department and union leaders announced agreement on a reorganization plan, which was embodied in a legislative proposal and sent to Congress by President Nixon. The plan included the following key provisions: adequate financing authority, removal of the system from politics to assure continuity of management, collective bargaining, and setting of rates by the Postal Service after an opportunity for hearings before an impartial rate panel. In addition to the eight percent pay increase, the bill provided for negotiation of a new wage schedule permitting employees to reach the top of their pay grade in eight years.

On August 3, 1970, by a vote of 57 to 7, the Senate approved the conference report on House Resolution 17070, a modified version of the legislation proposed by the President. Three days later, the House of Representatives approved it. On August 12, 1970, President Nixon signed into law the most comprehensive postal legislation since the founding of the republic, the *Postal Reorganization Act*.[76]

The act transformed the Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service, an independent establishment of the executive branch of the Government of the United States. The mission of the Postal Service remained the same, as stated in Title 39 of the U.S. Code:

The Postal Service shall have as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. It shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and shall render postal services to all communities.

Six Former Postmasters General at Signing Ceremony, August 1970
Six former Postmasters General and incumbent Postmaster General Winton M. Blount were present when President Richard Nixon signed the Postal Reorganization Act *into law on August 12, 1970. From left: John A. Gronouski, J. Edward Day, James A. Farley, President Nixon, Postmaster General Blount, Arthur E. Summerfield, Lawrence F. O'Brien, and W. Marvin Watson.*

The new Postal Service officially began operations on July 1, 1971, when the Postmaster General ceased to be a member of the President's Cabinet. The Postal Service received:

- Operational authority vested in a Board of Governors and Postal Service executive management, rather than in Congress.

- Authority to issue public bonds to finance postal buildings and mechanization.

- Direct collective bargaining between representatives of management and the unions.

- A new rate-setting procedure built around an independent Postal Rate Commission.

The *Postal Reorganization Act* changed the United States postal system in many ways.

Finances and Rates
The act established an independent Postal Rate Commission of five members, appointed by the U.S. President with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate, to recommend postal rates and mail classifications for adoption by the Postal Service Governors. It authorized the Postal Service to borrow money from the general public and phased out the general public service subsidy, which the Postal Service ended earlier than required, last accepting an operational subsidy in 1982. It also authorized appropriations to reimburse the Postal Service for carrying congressionally established categories of free and reduced-rate mail and required that rates for each class of mail cover direct and indirect costs attributable to that class, plus a portion of institutional costs.

Personnel
The act established a postal career service, which is a framework that permits terms and conditions of employment to be set through collective bargaining. It also prohibited political recommendations for appointments within the Postal Service. The Civil Service retirement program was retained.

Labor-Management Relations
The act authorized collective bargaining on wages and working conditions under laws applying to private industry and provided for binding arbitration if an impasse persists 180 days after the start of bargaining. The ban on strikes, applicable to all federal employees, remained. The act au-

thorized the National Labor Relations Board to determine proper bargaining units, supervise representative elections, and enforce the unfair labor practices provisions. It also protected the rights of all employees to form, join, or assist a labor organization or to refrain from such activity.

Transportation
The act generally extended existing laws governing transportation of mail, while providing some additional flexibility. The distinctions between various categories of motor carriers, previously contracted by the Post Office Department, were eliminated. The Civil Aeronautics Board retained authority to regulate rates for airmail transportation, but the Postal Service also was granted limited authority to contract directly with the airlines for air transportation services.

Pay
The act specified that the Postal Service would maintain compensation and benefits for its officers and employees comparable to that offered by the private sector for similar work. However, the act mandated that no officer or employee be paid compensation at a rate higher than a Cabinet officer. ■

The Postal Service Board of Governors

The Board of Governors was established by the *Postal Reorganization Act* of August 12, 1970. It is much like the board of directors of a private corporation, and normally includes nine Governors who are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

The nine Governors select a Postmaster General, who becomes a member of the Board, and those ten select a Deputy Postmaster General, who also serves on the Board. The Postmaster General serves at the pleasure of the Governors for an indefinite term. The Deputy Postmaster General serves at the pleasure of the Governors and the Postmaster General.

Originally, Governors of the Postal Service were appointed for terms of nine years.[77] The *Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006* (PAEA) changed the Governors' terms from nine to seven years. Each Governor's term expires on December 8 of a given year. Governors can be removed only for cause.

The 2006 act also added some professional qualifications for Governors. Governors are chosen to represent the public interest and cannot be representatives of special interests. Not more than five of the nine may belong to the same political party. They must be chosen solely based on their experience in public service, law, or accounting, or on their demonstrated ability to manage organizations or corporations in either the public or private sector. At least four of the Governors must have demonstrated ability in managing organizations or corporations with at least 50,000 employees.

The Board directs the exercise of the powers of the Postal Service, directs and controls its expenditures, reviews its practices, conducts long-range planning, approves officer compensation, and sets policies on all postal matters. The Board also takes up matters such as service standards and capital investments.

The Board employs a full-time secretary. As the primary staff assistant to the Board, the secretary is generally responsible for coordinating the resources of the Postal Service so that the Board fulfills its statutory duties in the most efficient and informed manner possible.

The Board of Governors meets on a regular basis, generally in Washington, D.C., but meetings may be scheduled in some other city where the members can see firsthand a Postal Service or large mailer's operation.

All meetings are open to the public unless the Board specifically votes to close all or part of a meeting in line with exemptions permitted by the *Government in the Sunshine Act* of September 13, 1976.

As the terms of the sitting Governors began to expire in 2010, the Senate failed to confirm replacement nominees. The Board adopted a resolution in November 2014 establishing a Temporary Emergency Committee (TEC) composed of the remaining members of the Board, to exercise those powers reserved to the Board necessary for continuity of operations. The Governors also adopted a resolution regarding the exercise of those powers conferred by law solely to the Governors (as distinguished from the full Board) — those powers include the appointment and removal of the Postmaster General and the establishment of prices and classifications for postal services. The Governors determined that their ability to exercise those powers reserved to the Governors was not impacted by the loss of a Board quorum.

The Board lost the six members needed for a quorum in December 2014. It operated without any appointed Governors, under authority delegated to the TEC, from December 2016 to August 2018, when the Senate confirmed two new appointees.

Governors of the Postal Service (listed with date of appointment)

Theodore W. Braun	*January 11, 1971*	**Norma Pace**	*May 21, 1987*
Charles H. Codding	*January 11, 1971*	**Ira D. Hall**	*November 23, 1987*
Patrick E. Haggerty	*January 11, 1971*	**Tirso del Junco, M.D.**	*July 15, 1988*
Andrew D. Holt	*January 11, 1971*	**Susan E. Alvarado**	*July 15, 1988*
George E. Johnson	*January 11, 1971*	**Bert H. Mackie**	*December 9, 1988*
Frederick R. Kappel	*January 11, 1971*	**LeGree S. Daniels**	*August 6, 1990*
Elmer T. Klassen	*January 11, 1971*	**J. Sam Winters**	*November 25, 1991*
Crocker Nevin	*January 11, 1971*	**Einar V. Dyhrkopp**	*November 24, 1993*
Myron A. Wright	*January 11, 1971*	**S. David Fineman**	*May 26, 1995*
John Y. Ing	*June 22, 1972*	**Robert F. Rider**	*May 26, 1995*
Robert E. Holding	*October 26, 1972*	**Ned R. McWherter**	*October 2, 1995*
Hayes Robertson	*May 14, 1974*	**Ernesta Ballard**	*November 13, 1997*
William A. Irvine	*March 3, 1975*	**John F. Walsh**	*November 16, 1999*
Hung Wai Ching	*August 5, 1976*	**Alan C. Kessler**	*November 3, 2000*
Robert L. Hardesty	*August 5, 1976*	**Albert V. Casey**	*August 6, 2002*
William J. Sullivan	*January 12, 1979*	**James C. Miller III**	*April 22, 2003*
Richard R. Allen	*October 5, 1979*	**Carolyn Lewis Gallagher**	*November 3, 2004*
George W. Camp	*October 5, 1979*	**Louis J. Giuliano**	*November 3, 2004*
Paula D. Hughes	*August 19, 1980*	**John S. Gardner**	*January 6, 2006*
David E. Babcock	*August 20, 1980*	**Mickey D. Barnett**	*August 17, 2006*
Timothy L. Jenkins	*August 20, 1980*	**James H. Bilbray**	*August 17, 2006*
Wallace N. Hyde	*December 31, 1980*	**Katherine C. Tobin**	*August 17, 2006*
John R. McKean	*March 9, 1982*	**Ellen C. Williams**	*August 17, 2006*
Peter E. Voss	*July 28, 1982*	**Thurgood Marshall Jr.**	*December 15, 2006*
John L. Ryan	*May 10, 1983*	**Dennis J. Toner**	*September 17, 2010*
Ruth O. Peters	*December 2, 1983*	**Robert M. Duncan**	*August 30, 2018*
Frieda Waldman	*January 6, 1984*	**David C. Williams**	*August 30, 2018*
John N. Griesemer	*December 12, 1984*	**John M. Barger**	*August 5, 2019*
J. H. Tyler McConnell	*December 19, 1985*	**Ron A. Bloom**	*August 5, 2019*
Robert Setrakian	*December 19, 1985*	**Roman Martinez IV**	*August 5, 2019*
Crocker Nevin	*August 15, 1986*		

Post Office Department Headquarters, 1899–1934 (previous page, far left)
This granite building on Pennsylvania Avenue, not far from the White House, was the last to simultaneously house both postal headquarters and the Washington, D.C., Post Office. Horse-drawn wagons brought mail to the building in its early years. By the time postal Headquarters moved to a larger building, almost all mail was carried by motor vehicles.

Postal Service Headquarters, 1973–Present (at right)
Vlastimil Koubek designed the present Postal Service Headquarters building, which is located in Southwest Washington, D.C., just a few blocks south of the National Mall.

THE AUTOMATION AGE

In the decade following passage of the *Postal Reorganization Act*, mail volume rose by more than 25 percent. It was clear that more efficient work methods and equipment were needed to stem the rising costs of growing mail volume and an expanding delivery network.

In September 1982, the first computer-driven single-line optical character reader (OCR) was installed in Los Angeles. This equipment could read address information and print on envelopes barcodes representing the five-digit ZIP Code, which enabled mail to be automatically sorted to the correct delivery office. The sorting barcode, called a POSTNET barcode, consisted of groups of five long and short bars, with each group representing one digit of the ZIP Code.

The POSTNET barcode grew longer in 1983, when the Postal Service introduced the ZIP+4 code, which added a hyphen and four digits to the existing five-digit ZIP Code. The first five numbers continued to identify an area of the country and delivery office to which mail was directed. The sixth and seventh digits denoted a delivery sector: several blocks, a group of streets, a group of Post Office boxes, several office buildings, a single high-rise office building, a large apartment building, or a small geographic area. The last two digits denoted a delivery segment: one floor of an office building, one side of a block, specific departments in a firm, or specific Post Office boxes. The expanded code enabled automated equipment to sort letters to the correct carrier at the delivery office. On October 1, 1983, price incentives for First-Class Mail bearing the ZIP+4 code were approved.

By the end of 1984, 252 OCRs were installed in 118 major mail processing centers across the country and processed an average of 6,200 pieces of mail per workhour — a substantial increase from the 1,750 pieces processed using MPLSMs.

Sorting Letters Better

In 1988, the Postal Service approved its Corporate Automation Plan, which it considered the "cornerstone to achieving quality mail service at reduced costs."[78] Since letters accounted for the greatest amount of mail volume, the Postal Service first focused its efforts there.

By 1989, multiline optical character readers (MLOCRs) had replaced single-line optical character readers. MLOCRs enabled equipment to read and barcode letters without a

Multi-Position Letter Sorting Machine, circa 1974
Clerks keyed in sorting codes, separating mail into one of 277 destination bins, in Merrifield, Virginia, circa 1974. By September 1970, 268 letter sorting machines had been deployed at 116 Post Offices nationwide; 15 had optical character readers, enabling them to read and sort mail automatically. Automated equipment helped employees sort more mail, more quickly.

Multi-Position Letter Sorting Machine
Watch a 1-minute film showing the operation of a Multi-Position Letter Sorting Machine (MPLSM), courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum via its YouTube channel, SmithsonianNPM.

ZIP+4 code. More prebarcoded letters began entering the mailstream in 1991, when the Postal Service began offering discounted postage rates for prebarcoded mail. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of mail with customer-applied barcodes jumped from just 7 percent to 59 percent.

Throughout the 1990s, the Postal Service deployed advanced facer-canceler systems (AFCSs), which could orient and postmark 30,000 pieces of mail per hour — nearly twice as many as the older Mark II facer-cancelers they replaced.

To enable automated equipment to sort letters into delivery order, in 1990 the Postal Service lengthened the nine-digit ZIP+4 code with a two-digit "delivery point" (represented by a longer barcode). Existing equipment was retrofitted to sort mail into delivery order. In late 1991, the first delivery barcode sorters (DBCSs) were deployed, and by 1998, they had virtually replaced the old MPLSMs.

In 2000, the Postal Service began to deploy state-of-the-art DIOSS (delivery barcode input/output subsystem) sorters, an upgraded delivery barcode sorter. With up to 302 bins to receive mail — five times more than the equipment it replaced — DIOSS provided a finer, more localized sort, reducing the number of handlings and speeding delivery times.

The remote barcoding system, first tested in Tampa, Florida, in 1992, provided the Postal Service with a means to apply barcodes to mail that could not be read by automated equip-ment. Images of illegible addresses were sent automatically to a remote encoding center (REC), without the mail physically leaving the processing plant. If a computer at the REC could not decipher the address, an operator at the center read the address and keyed in enough information so the piece could be barcoded for proper sorting. The number of RECs, which were always intended to be temporary, peaked by 1997, at 55 centers nationwide, but began declining just two years later, as more prebarcoded letters entered the mailstream and hand-writing analysis software improved. Between 1997 and 2003, the percentage of machine-readable handwritten addresses jumped from less than 2 percent to about 80 percent. In 2013, about 98 percent of handwritten addresses were ma-chine-readable. By the end of 2014, only one REC remained in operation.

To increase efficiency in handling undeliverable-as-addressed letters, from 2004 to 2007, the Postal Service deployed the postal automated redirection system (PARS) to processing plants. PARS identified and redirected forwardable mail during processing, which reduced the number of times it needed to be handled. PARS also automated the processing of change-of-address forms, and generated revenue via electronic notification to mailers who subscribed to the address change service as well as hard copy notification to mailers who added an endorsement to their mail.

Carrier Sequence Bar Code Sorter, 2004
The Carrier Sequence Bar Code Sorter, used from 1995 to 2013, was similar to a Delivery Barcode Sorter (DBCS) but had a smaller footprint. An operator swept mail from the sorter's output bins, at his left, to the feeder belt, at his right, for another pass through the machine. The output of the next pass was sorted to more specific neighborhood locations.

Carrier Sequence Bar Code Sorter
Watch a 2-minute video of the Carrier Sequence Bar Code Sorter in action, courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum via its YouTube channel, SmithsonianNPM.

Processing Flats

"Flat" mail — which includes large envelopes, catalogs, magazines, and newspapers — is one of the most labor-intensive categories of mail to process and deliver due to variations in size, thickness, and address placement.

In 1982, the Postal Service deployed its first flat sorting machine, the FSM 775. With four operators keying in part of the ZIP Code, the FSM 775 could sort about 6,200 flats per hour into 100 bins. The FSM 881, introduced in 1992, could sort about 10,000 flats per hour with four operators. In 1996, FSM 1000s were introduced to sort the 25 percent of flats that could not go through the FSM 881s, including newspapers, poly-wrapped material, and flats weighing more than 20 ounces.

The first fully automated flat sorting machine (AFSM 100) was installed in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1999. Each AFSM could process 300,000 flats a day, almost three times as many as the equipment it replaced. Deployment of the AFSM 100s was completed in 2002, with 534 systems installed at 240 mail processing facilities nationwide. By 2005, flats productivity had nearly doubled in processing facilities, with about 80 percent of flats processed on the AFSM 100.

Meanwhile, flat sorting in delivery offices remained the same; letter carriers spent an average of three hours a day sorting their mail into delivery order. In the late 1990s, the Postal Service began to explore ways to sort flats into delivery order, and in 2006, a prototype flats sequencing system (FSS) was installed in Indianapolis for field testing. In 2007 and 2008, FSS machines were installed for field testing in Dulles, Virginia, and in 2009, three additional cities began testing systems — Columbus, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; and Phoenix, Arizona. In 2011, the Postal Service completed the deployment of 100 FSS machines to 47 mail processing facilities nationwide. Each machine was capable of sorting 16,500 flats per hour into delivery order.

Processing Parcels

The Postal Service introduced small parcel and bundle sorters in 1988. The sorters used a conveyor system with four to six induction stations where operators faced and keyed mail based on ZIP Code. Then, conveyors transported the mail to specific bins for delivery or further processing.

In 1992, the Postal Service began to deploy package barcode sorting systems to process prebarcoded parcels and to apply barcodes to parcels without them. In 2001,

Operators Feed AFSM 100, 2005

Operators put stacks of vertically aligned flats (oversize mail) into feeders. The flats travel one at a time through feeders, OCRs, and buffers to the injectors, which insert the flats, one by one, into cartridges. Inside the AFSM 100, cartridges transport flats up an inclined conveyor (shown at far left) to output bins, where flats are sorted to specific geographic locations based on their barcode.

singulate, scan, and induction units were introduced. These units sent parcels, one by one, through a device that measured and weighed them, and then through a scanning tunnel that read the barcode. Parcels were then fed automatically onto the sorter at a rate of more than 5,000 per hour.

From 2004 through 2007, the Postal Service deployed 74 automated package processing systems, which could process up to 9,500 parcels per hour.

In 2010 and 2011, the Postal Service upgraded its aging small parcel and bundle sorters with new control systems and barcode and OCR technology. Induction stations were modified so that little or no keying was required by the operators who faced and placed mail on the conveyor belt for reading by the barcode reader/OCR. The upgraded units — called automated parcel and bundle sorters — processed an average of 4,500 pieces an hour versus 2,770 pieces before the upgrade.

In 2015 and 2016, the Postal Service installed 33 Small Parcel Sortation Systems, capable of sorting 4,500 packages an hour. In July 2016, it began testing a High Throughput Parcel Sorter in Denver, Colorado, which could sort 14,350 packages an hour.

Automating Mail Handling and Acceptance

The Postal Service also installed automated equipment to move containers of mail in processing plants, and to verify large customer-prepared mailings eligible for discounts.

In 1997, the Postal Service started to deploy 100 robotic tray-handling systems to sort and load trays of letters to containers or pallets for transportation. In 2000 and 2001, the Postal Service deployed 100 gantry robots — automated arms running along overhead tracks distributing tubs and trays of mail.

In 1998, the Postal Service began using automation barcode evaluator systems to help ensure that large mailings had clear, readable barcodes so they could be processed efficiently. In 2001, the Postal Service introduced the mailing evaluation readability lookup instrument (MERLIN) to further automate the labor-intensive process of verifying the eligibility of bulk mailings for discounts. In addition to

Robotic Arm, 1999
The Postal Service began integrating robotics into its mail handling in 1997.

analyzing barcodes, MERLIN analyzed mail size and weight, and could produce the necessary reports for mail acceptance. Until 2009, MERLIN sampled all mailings of more than 10,000 pieces and some smaller bulk mailings. In 2009, the Postal Service completed deployment of Performance Based Verification, an automated process that uses mailers' past performance to determine the frequency, sample size, and type of verification to perform on large mailings.

In 2009, employees also began using handheld Intelligent Mail Devices to sample the Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb) on individual mailpieces, trays, and containers of full-service mailings (see pages 74–75 for more information on Intelligent Mail). Meanwhile, the Electronic Verification System, introduced in 2006, allowed bulk parcel shippers to submit manifests and pay for postage electronically, eliminating the need for postal clerks to visit mailers' plants and distribution centers to verify shipments. The manifests were randomly sampled for accuracy after the parcels entered the mail system. eInduction, launched in 2013, let large mailers deliver shipments of mail to processing facilities without having to fill out paper forms.

In 2014, the Postal Service began testing Seamless Acceptance, an automated process that validated postage payment of business mailings. Seamless Acceptance used the IMb, electronic mailing information, and active and passive barcode scans to confirm that business mailers paid the correct postage on large mailings.

Giving Customers Greater Access

Automated technology helped the Postal Service deliver more mail to more people by speeding up mail sorting and transactions in Post Offices, and letting customers serve themselves — whether at automated kiosks or personal computers.

In the 1990s, the focus was on speeding up retail transactions in Post Offices. Integrated retail terminals (IRTs), introduced in 1984, were computers with an integrated electronic scale that replaced calculators, manual scales, rate charts, and ZIP Code directories. They provided information to customers during a transaction and simplified postal accounting by consolidating data. Postage validation imprinters attached to the IRTs produced self-sticking postage labels with a barcode for automated processing.

Bulk Mailing Made Easier
When it was introduced in 2001, MERLIN (mailing evaluation readability lookup instrument) computerized and greatly simplified the laborious process of verifying bulk mailings.

Collaborating With Customers and Competitors

The Postal Service has a long tradition of working with customers to improve mail service.

Mail Users Councils, renamed Postal Customer Councils (PCCs) in 1971, were first established in 1961 in 300 large cities. The councils' initial focus was to improve mail service by encouraging postal customers to deposit mail earlier in the day or in staggered increments, to avoid delays in mail processing. Later, the councils served as open channels of communication for local business and postal executives to exchange ideas and information — from best mailing practices, to solving local challenges.

In 1965, the Mailers' Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC) was created. MTAC consisted of representatives from mailing associations and other segments of the mailing industry, including publishers, advertising mailers, and envelope and greeting card manufacturers. Initially formed to help implement the ZIP Code, MTAC has since provided technical advice and feedback vital to the formation and implementation of many postal innovations. Special MTAC task forces and work groups have been formed as needed to study particular areas for improvement. Among other initiatives, MTAC suggested improvements to the ZIP+4 program, handling changes of address, the presorting and barcoding of mail, optical character recognition, and electronic payment for business mailings.

Consumer Advisory Councils, called Customer Advisory Councils prior to 2000, were established by 1989. The councils were comprised of citizens who volunteered to work with local postal management on issues of interest to their communities.

The Postal Service has also collaborated with some of its competitors to improve delivery operations. In 2001, the Postal Service formed a business alliance with FedEx, using FedEx's air network for the air transportation of domestic U.S. Mail and allowing the company to place self-service collection boxes on postal premises. In 2004, the Postal Service contracted with United Parcel Service (UPS) for air transportation of U.S. Mail.

The collaboration worked both ways — FedEx and UPS provided transportation services, while the Postal Service provided both with delivery services. In 1999, the Postal Service introduced Parcel Select service, which completed the "last mile" of delivery for parcel consolidators and private carriers. Parcel Select's low rates made it economical for consolidators and private carriers to collect and sort parcels from high-volume shippers — such as mail order houses and online retailers — and deliver them to a postal facility close to the recipient's home. From there, a postal carrier completed the "last mile" of delivery. The first private carrier to ally with the Postal Service in this hybrid service was Airborne Express, in 1999. UPS followed in 2003, and FedEx came on board in 2004; they increasingly relied on the Postal Service to deliver packages the "last mile," especially in rural areas.

Parcel Return Service was developed to handle packages traveling in the opposite direction. It offered a convenient way for customers to return packages, even if they were delivered by another company. Using a prepaid postage label, customers could take the parcel to a Post Office or request pickup during normal mail delivery. Launched experimentally in 2003, it became a permanent service in 2006. In 2009, both UPS and FedEx gave their customers the option of returning packages with their mail carrier or at the Post Office.

Package Pickup, 2017
Starting in 2004, customers could request free pickup of their prepaid packages by going to usps.com.

In 1998, the Postal Service began replacing IRTs with POS (point of service) ONE retail terminals. By 2005, more than 60,000 POS ONE terminals were installed in more than 15,000 facilities nationwide. The deployment of POS ONE systems was completed in 2012. By providing state-of-the-art computer technology and connecting retail units through phone lines or satellite connections, POS ONE provided real-time information and faster, more efficient service.

The Postal Service also increased customers' access to postal products and services via personal computers. In March 1998, the Postal Service authorized tests of PC Postage. Developed and distributed by USPS-approved vendors, PC Postage produced digitally encoded, two-dimensional barcodes that postal customers could print directly onto envelopes or address labels. Users had access to postage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from their computer.

In 2002, the Postal Service launched Click-N-Ship on its website, *usps.com*. Click-N-Ship let customers use their home or office computer to create, pay for, and print shipping labels for packages. In its first six months of operation, customers used the service to produce more than one

million shipping labels. In 2004, an option to insure packages was added, and in 2006, a mailing list feature was added, which allowed users to create group mailing lists and store up to 3,000 addresses. The capacity of the address book increased to 5,000 addresses in 2012. From the outset, Priority Mail packages sent via Click-N-Ship received free Delivery Confirmation service. From May 2008 to January 2016, Click-N-Ship items received discounted postage rates.

The 2004 rollout of Package Pickup (originally called Carrier Pickup) brought the Post Office to the customer's doorstep. By going to *usps.com*, customers could request free pickup of their prepaid packages. Two other innovative services also debuted in 2004: *PostalOne!* and Automated Postal Centers (APCs). *PostalOne!* gave business mailers a streamlined, web-based process for mail entry, payment, tracking, and reporting. APCs were kiosks that offered customers an alternative to counter service in busy Post Offices, providing self-service mailing with an integrated scale and a touch-screen menu. The Postal Service deployed 2,500 APCs nationwide in 2004.

The growing popularity of mobile technology led the Postal Service to launch a smartphone app for iPhone users in 2009, and for Android and BlackBerry users in 2011. The USPS mobile apps let customers check the delivery status of shipments, look up ZIP Codes, and find USPS locations. Since their initial launch, the apps have been upgraded with new features, including "Calculate shipping prices," "Schedule a next-day pick-up," "Scan shipping labels and QR codes," and "Order supplies."

Taking the concept of self-service even further, in 2012 the Postal Service began testing "gopost" self-service parcel lockers in about a dozen locations in the Washington, D.C., area, with sites added in New York City the following year. gopost let customers receive and ship packages via automated, self-service parcel lockers located in convenient locations, such as shopping malls.

In 2014, the Postal Service launched MyUSPS.com, a dashboard that gave customers the ability to easily check the status of incoming packages at any time from a computer or web-enabled device, or to receive status text alerts on their phone. If a package was on its way, it automatically showed up in the MyUSPS.com dashboard.

Intelligent Mail

In the late 20th century, improvements in computing power revolutionized communications. Increased data storage capacity and transfer speeds drove down the cost and improved the ways in which technology could be used. While expanded use of the Internet and email diverted some

physical mail from the mailstream, this same technology also created new opportunities for enhancing the value of the mail by capturing and providing information about its processing and delivery, both internally and to customers.

In 1999, the Postal Service launched Delivery Confirmation service to provide the date, time, and ZIP Code of delivery for Priority Mail and parcels to customers either online or via a toll-free number. More than 300,000 handheld scanners were deployed to letter carriers to support Delivery Confirmation service. In 2001, the Postal Service added Signature Confirmation, offering customers a copy of the recipient's signature. In 2006, the Postal Service began deploying new handheld scanners that took a digital image of the signature, which allowed customers to see it the same day.

In 2002, the Postal Service officially launched Confirm service, which provided tracking information to participating letter and flat mailers. Mailers printed an identifying barcode, known as a PLANET Code, on their mail. Automated equipment read the barcode and made information available to the mailer via the Internet on the time, place, and operation that handled the mail.

In January 2003, the Postal Service created the Intelligent Mail and Address Quality group to further develop information-rich mail. Among the group's first tasks was to adopt for each type of mail one code that could uniquely identify each mailpiece and provide information on distribution and special services like Delivery Confirmation. The solution, finalized in 2005, was a barcode that used four vertical bar types rather than two.

Initially called the 4-State Customer Barcode, but soon renamed the Intelligent Mail barcode, it encoded almost three times more information than previous codes. It consolidated information from both the POSTNET (routing) and PLANET (tracking) barcodes, with room for other services in the future. The new barcode was tested in 2005. Beginning September 1, 2006, Confirm service subscribers and address change service users were given the option of using the new barcode.

In May 2009, the Postal Service began offering large mailers two options for using the Intelligent Mail barcode on their mailings: basic and full-service. Under the basic option, mailers did not need to use unique barcodes on each mailpiece. Under the full-service option, mailers were required to use unique barcodes on mailpieces and containers of mail, and electronically submit postage statements and mailing documentation.

In 2010, about 30 percent of business mail contained Intelligent Mail barcodes. The next year, about 36 percent of business First-Class and Standard Mail qualified as full-service Intelligent Mail.

In January 2012, Confirm service was replaced with IMb Tracing; new subscribers were required to use the Intelligent Mail barcode. Existing Confirm service subscribers were required to switch to the new code by January 2013.

To hasten the adoption of the Intelligent Mail barcode, mailers were required to use it — under either the basic or full-service option — for automation price eligibility beginning in January 2013. ∎

POSTNET Barcode

With barcodes, mail can be sorted automatically. The first postal barcode, the POSTNET barcode, was introduced in 1982 and converted 5-digit ZIP Codes to a machine-readable format. In 1983, the ZIP+4 code expanded the barcode to nine digits. In 1990, the barcode expanded again when the Postal Service added two more digits with exact address information.

Intelligent Mail Barcode

The Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb) was launched in 2006. The IMb could hold nearly triple the data of the POSTNET barcode — not just the delivery address, but also the sender's address, mailpiece information, and information on extra services. In 2013, large mailers were required to use the IMb to qualify for postage discounts.

21st CENTURY CHALLENGES AND CHANGE

Since the *Postal Reorganization Act of 1970*, techno-logical advances both improved postal operations and services and increased competition and cus-tomer expectations. A decade of prosperity in the 1980s was followed by slower economic growth in the 1990s. The terrorist attacks of 2001 caused a tragic loss of human life and rippled out to affect many areas, including the economy. Mail volume fell from 2001 through 2003 — the first back-to-back declines since the Great Depression. Although mail volume picked up from 2004 through 2006, since December 2007, it has dropped precipitously.

The drop in First-Class Mail — the most profitable class — has been even more pronounced, as more mail has shifted to electronic media. From 2000 to 2010, while overall mail volume dropped by about 18 percent, the volume of First-Class Mail fell by nearly 25 percent. Meanwhile, the Postal Service's costs continued to rise, as growth in the number of U.S. households and businesses led to an increase in the number of delivery addresses each year.

Service at Risk
In a March 2001 letter to the President, the Postal Service Governors stated that significant statutory reform was need-ed to continue to provide consistent, satisfactory, universal service to the American people. The economic assumption underpinning the 1970 *Postal Reorganization Act* — that continuing growth in mail volume and revenue would support the continued growth of the postal infrastructure — was no longer valid.

In April 2001, United States Comptroller General David Walker placed the Postal Service on the General Accounting Office's (GAO) "high-risk" list because of the Postal Service's significant financial, human capital, and structural challenges. Walker stated that:

The Service's ability to provide universal postal service … will be increasingly threatened unless changes are made, both within current law and to the legal and regulatory framework that governs the Service.[79]

The General Accounting Office, now the Government Accountability Office, asked the Postal Service for a compre-hensive plan that addressed these concerns. In April 2002, the Postal Service submitted its *Transformation Plan* to Congress, outlining strategies to improve service, customer satisfaction, the workplace, and its financial health.

On December 11, 2002, President George W. Bush issued an executive order establishing the President's Commission on the Postal Service. The nine-member bipartisan commission was tasked with identifying the operational, structural, and financial challenges facing the Postal Service, and charting a course to build a healthy financial foundation.

The commission issued its report, *Embracing the Future*, in 2003. The report called for the Postal Service to remain a public institution subject to broader oversight. It directed the Postal Service to focus on universal mail service as its core value, to be guided by the best business practices, to overhaul the postal network, to clarify the postal monopoly, and to maintain a culture of excellence.

Postal Civil Service Retirement System Funding Reform Act of 2003
In November 2002, the Office of Personnel Management projected that the Postal Service would overpay its retirement obligations for postal employees and retirees enrolled in the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) by $71 billion.

Within months, Congress passed the *Postal Civil Service Retirement System Funding Reform Act of 2003*, which modified the way the Postal Service funded its obligations to the CSRS to prevent overfunding. The act also dictated how the Postal Service would spend its estimated sav-ings: to pay down debt in 2003 and 2004, and to maintain postage rates in 2005. In 2006, the act required that the Postal Service's estimated annual savings — about $3.1 billion — be considered an operating expense of the Postal Service, to be held in escrow for future use as determined by Congress.

But the projected savings did not represent cash actual-ly on hand. Although funds were available through 2005, by 2006, inflation and reduced revenue had whittled away the financial benefit of lower CSRS payments. To fund the escrow account, in 2005 the Postal Service requested an across-the-board increase of 5.4 percent in rates and fees, while warning that a biannual increase of 1 to 1.5 percent to fund this account might be needed in the future. The Postal Rate Commission and the postal Governors approved the request. On January 8, 2006, most postal rates and fees increased by about 5.4 percent — including the price of a First-Class stamp, from 37 to 39 cents — solely to fund the escrow account.

Dealing With the Unimaginable

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States, killing thousands. The Postal Service helped keep the lines of communication open despite severe restrictions on commercial air operations during this tense time.

As the Postal Service dealt with these challenges, a photo editor in Boca Raton, Florida, died from inhalation anthrax on October 5, 2001, the first known case in the United States since 1976. A week later, a media employee in New York City was diagnosed with cutaneous anthrax after opening a letter addressed to an NBC news anchor. On October 15, 2001, a letter postmarked in Trenton, New Jersey, was delivered to the Capitol Hill office of a U.S. senator. The letter claimed to contain anthrax, which proved to be true. The Postal Service then went to work with other agencies to confront bioterrorism.

The Postal Service announced the formation of a mail security task force, headed by the Chief Postal Inspector; authorized its employees to wear protective gear; and considered ways to sanitize mail, including irradiating it with electron beams. The Postal Service also notified people at every mailing address about how to identify and handle suspicious letters and packages.

On October 21, 2001, Joseph P. Curseen, Jr., an employee at the Brentwood postal facility in Washington, D.C., which handled mail for Capitol Hill, was diagnosed with inhalation anthrax. That night, another employee, Thomas L. Morris, Jr., died from inhalation anthrax. The next morning, Curseen also died.

Postmaster General John E. Potter announced the sad news, then stated:

800,000 Postal Service employees are using everything they've learned, doing everything humanly possible, to keep the mail safe and keep it moving. And we're determined not to let terrorists stop us.[80]

By October 27, anthrax spores had been detected in other locations. All told, at least five deaths and several cases of anthrax poisoning are known. In November 2001, the Postal Service began irradiating mail destined for Congress, the White House, and federal agencies in Washington, D.C. This practice was ongoing at the end of 2019.

In 2004, after multiple tests, the Postal Service began installing biohazard detection system (BDS) equipment at mail processing facilities nationwide. This equipment regularly collects and tests air samples near mail processing machines to help protect postal employees and customers. Deployment of 1,373 detection systems was completed in December 2005.
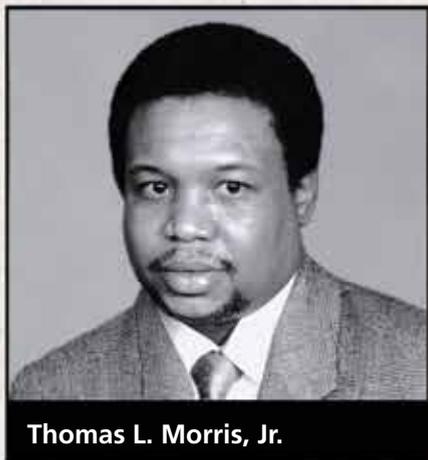
Thomas L. Morris, Jr.

Fallen Colleagues, Remembered
In 2003, the Brentwood Processing and Distribution Center in Washington, D.C., was renamed in honor of Thomas L. Morris, Jr., and Joseph P. Curseen, Jr., who lost their lives in October 2001 after being exposed to anthrax while working at the facility.
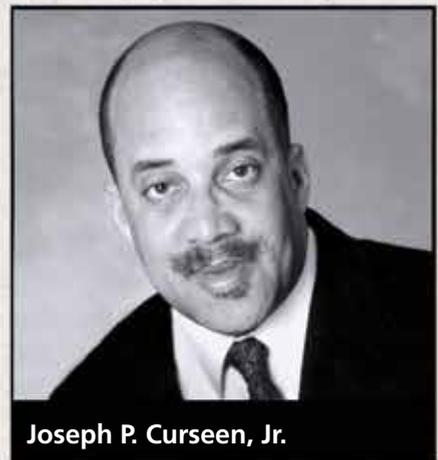
Joseph P. Curseen, Jr.

The 2003 act also created another challenge for the Postal Service: it transferred the responsibility for funding military pensions of current and former postal employees to the Postal Service from the Department of the Treasury. This amounted to $27 billion in costs transferred from taxpayers to postal ratepayers.

Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006

On December 9, 2006, after several years of discussion and study, Congress passed the *Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act* (PAEA).[81] The act made more than 150 changes to federal law concerning the Postal Service — the most sweeping changes since the *Postal Reorganization Act of 1970*. President Bush signed the act into law on December 20, 2006.

The act's most significant changes included the following:

- **Market-dominant vs. competitive products; rate-setting:** The act divided postal products into market-dominant and competitive categories. It restricted rate increases for market-dominant products, such as First-Class Mail, to a cap tied to the Consumer Price Index for 10 years, at which point the cap would be reviewed by the PRC. It specified that rate increases for competitive products, such as Express Mail, would not be capped, and that they would cover attributable costs and contribute to institutional costs.

- **More powerful PRC:** The act created the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) out of the Postal Rate Commission and increased the PRC's regulatory powers. It gave the PRC subpoena power over the Postal Service, and the ability to levy fines if the Postal Service does not take remedial action when the PRC finds a complaint filed regarding rates, regulations, or service standards has merit.

- **Military pension costs:** The act returned the obligation to pay military pension costs amounting to $27 billion to the Department of Treasury.

- **Retiree Health Benefits Fund:** In lieu of the escrow requirement of the 2003 law, the 2006 act established the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund and required the Postal Service to aggressively pay into the fund approximately $5.6 billion annually for ten years to pre-pay for future retirees' health benefits.

In January 2007, citing the new law as well as other encouraging developments, the GAO removed the Postal Service from its "high-risk" list. Less than a year later, the U.S. housing market collapsed. A global banking crisis followed, which put nearly every U.S. industry at risk and led to the worst economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Digital Dilemma
Electronic transactions have contributed to a massive decline in First-Class Mail volume.

Between 2000 and 2010…
…Internet usage nearly doubled, from about 41 percent of U.S. households in 2000…

…to 80 percent in 2010. By 2011 the number of bills paid by First-Class Mail declined to less than…

…**50** percent.
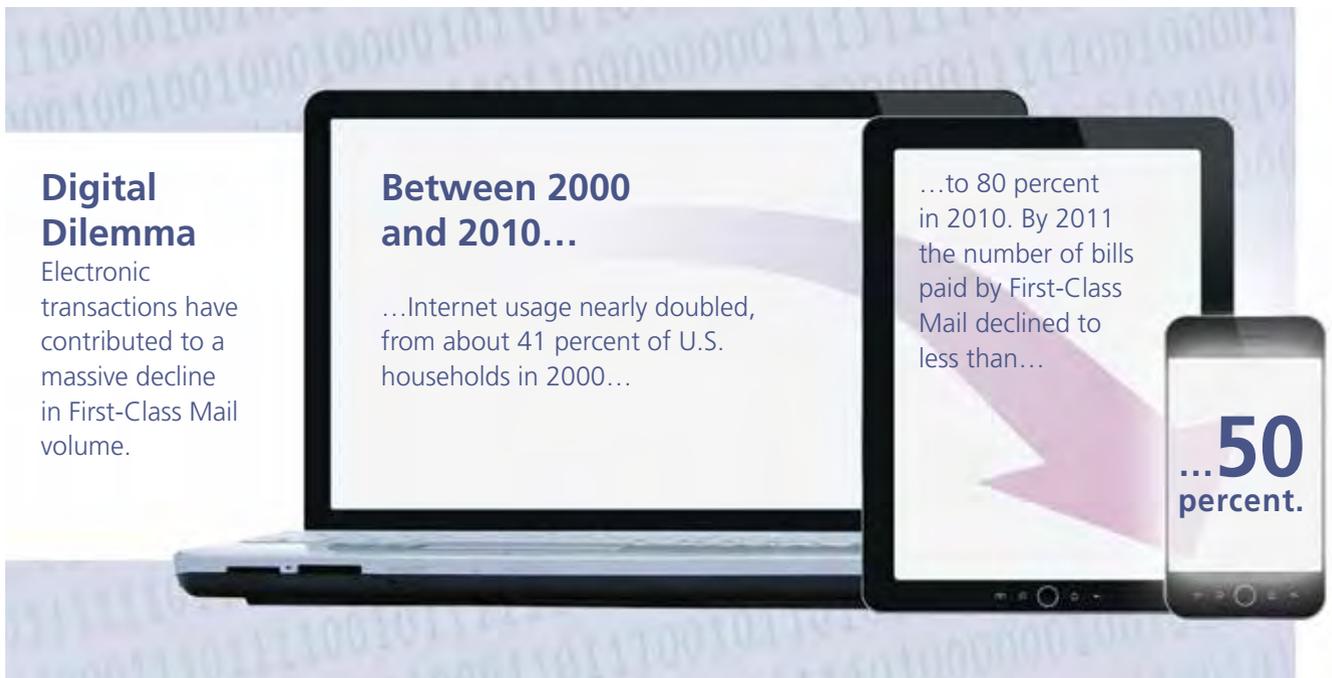
Crisis and Crossroads

Month-after-month drops in economic activity signaled the start of the Great Recession in December 2007. Although the economy began to recover in 2009, high unemployment, low wages, lower or negative home equity, and the lasting effects of large stock market losses continued to undermine consumer confidence. Consumer spending shrank through 2010, and barely kept pace with inflation in 2011. The crippling of the economy resulted in falling mail volume, since more than 95 percent of mail was business-related.

Mail volume plummeted from a peak of over 213 billion pieces in 2006 to just over 154 billion in 2015, a loss of nearly 28 percent. First-Class Mail — the most profitable class — fared even worse, plunging by more than 36 percent. Much of the drop in First-Class Mail volume was due to the diversion of mail to electronic media. Emails, text messages, online bill paying, and websites offered alternatives to traditional mail. The drop in First-Class Mail volume began even before the recession, in 2002, and continued even after the economy recovered.

Even as mail volume and revenue shrank, the Postal Service's costs continued to increase. About 80 percent of these costs were personnel-related and not easily reduced. About 38 percent of postal personnel costs were tied to federal benefits programs outside the Postal Service's control. In addition, labor agreements protected most workers from lay-offs and decreases in wages or benefits. Further, in 2006 Congress directed the Postal Service to put more than $5 billion annually through 2016 into a savings fund administered by the U.S. Treasury, to pre-pay for future postal retirees' health benefits. The Postal Service lost $5.1 billion in 2007 and $2.8 billion in 2008.

In July 2009, the GAO placed the Postal Service on its "high-risk" list once again, and advised Congress that the Postal Service "must align its costs with revenues."[82]

In March 2010, after consulting with members of Congress, the Administration, numerous stakeholders, and three paid consultants — Accenture, the Boston Consulting Group, and McKinsey & Company — Postmaster General John Potter outlined a plan to save the Postal Service. Among other things, the plan called for:

- Restructuring USPS retiree health benefits payments.

- Eliminating Saturday delivery.

- Establishing a more flexible workforce.

- Basing postage rates for market-dominant types of mail on both the demand for such products, and their costs, rather than capping prices at the rate of inflation.

Potter asked Congress for the legislative changes needed to enact these reforms. Congress held hearings to discuss postal reform, but passed no legislation. Potter retired in 2010 and was succeeded by his deputy, Patrick Donahoe, a 35-year postal veteran.

Pieces of Mail Handled, 2007–2019 (in billions)

2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
212.2	176.7	168.3	158.2	154.3	149.6	142.6

Donahoe took office during one of the most challenging times in the history of the organization. In June 2011, the GAO reported that the Postal Service's financial condition and outlook were "reaching a crisis," and that the agency "urgently" needed to restructure its networks and operations.[83] The Postal Service worked aggressively to reduce its costs. In July 2011, it announced that it would study nearly 3,700 small Post Offices for possible closure. In September, it announced that it would study more than 200 mail processing facilities for possible closure and also consider revising service standards for First-Class Mail.

In response to concerns voiced by members of Congress, and to facilitate enactment of pending postal reform legislation, the Postal Service agreed to a temporary delay in closings and consolidations, with a specific deadline of May 15, 2012.

In February 2012, Donahoe released a 5-year business plan that identified various strategies by which the Postal Service could save an estimated $20 billion through 2017. The plan included a postal-sponsored healthcare program independent of other federal programs, ending the prefunding of retiree health benefits, transitioning to five-day delivery, and realigning mail processing, retail, and delivery operations to increase efficiency. The plan also included revising service standards (the number of days for mail to be delivered from one ZIP Code to another) and allowing more pricing flexibility for all market-dominant products. Major components of the plan required congressional action, since federal law prohibited their implementation. Testifying before Congress the next month, Donahoe bluntly stated:

> The Postal Service is at a crossroads. Our business model is broken. … If the Postal Service were a private company, we would be engaged in Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings.[84]

In 2013, the Postal Service updated its 5-year plan with new strategies to save and make money, including a postal-sponsored retirement plan for future employees, and expanding into non-postal products and services.

Congress held hearings in 2013 to discuss the Postal Service's financial crisis, but postal reform bills stalled in committee.

Cutting Controllable Costs

As mail volume continued to fall, revenue from postage declined. The Postal Service relied mostly on the sale of postage to fund its operations — it received no tax dollars for this purpose. Raising the price of postage to make up

21st Century Innovation

The Postal Service tested and introduced dozens of new services beginning in 2011, including:

Alternate Postage payment
Enabled consumers to send greeting cards and other correspondence without affixing postage (postage is paid by the business providing the stationery).

Priority Mail Regional Rates Boxes
For businesses that ship regionally, offered the speed and convenience of Priority Mail shipping at more economical, zoned prices.

Every Door Direct Mail
Enabled customers without a mailing permit to mail up to 5,000 mailpieces addressed to "Postal Customer" to specific delivery routes within a ZIP Code or city.

Adult Signature service
Provided security by requiring the signature of an adult (21 years or older) at the delivery address with the option of restricting delivery to the addressee.

for budget shortfalls was not an option — not only was it prohibited by law, but it might have resulted in even more volume loss.

Instead, the Postal Service worked to reduce the costs within its control through a process called "network rationalization," aligning mail processing capacity with declining mail volumes. The network that was needed to deliver 213 billion pieces of mail in 2006 was not needed to deliver 156 billion pieces in 2014. The Postal Service simply could not afford to maintain excess capacity.

Through attrition, the Postal Service reduced its total workforce by 8 percent between 2010 and 2014, continuing a trend that began in 2000. Staff reductions in the early 2000s were largely due to efficiencies gained from the automation of mail processing. Later, fewer workers were needed because Americans were sending less mail.

In May 2012, the Postal Service outlined a new strategy — the Post Office Structure Plan (POStPlan) — that would preserve the nation's smallest Post Offices, but with reduced retail window hours to match customer use. The POStPlan called for evaluating about half of the nation's Post Offices over a two-year period. From November 2012 to February 2015, operating hours were reduced at nearly 12,600 Post Offices, about 47 percent

of the nation's total. The Postal Service estimated that these changes saved more than $236 million annually.

In July 2012, new overnight service standards for First-Class Mail went into effect, which enabled the consolidation of mail processing facilities. The first 48 facilities were consolidated in July and August 2012. In fiscal year 2013, 143 more processing facilities were consolidated, shrinking the network from 461 facilities in 2011 to 270 at the end of 2013. The Postal Service saved not only on the cost of facilities, but also on personnel, equipment, and transportation. The Postal Service estimated that these cost-saving measures reduced its operational budget by about $865 million in fiscal year 2014 alone.

Innovating to Increase Revenue

In addition to cutting costs, the Postal Service continued to innovate to increase revenue, testing and introducing dozens of new services, including Every Door Direct Mail and flat-rate packaging for its speediest shipping service, Priority Mail Express (see "21st Century Innovation," below).

The Postal Service also introduced new pricing incentives to encourage use of the mail. Beginning in 2009, the Postal Service offered "summer sales" to high-volume mailers to encourage mailing in the traditional

Village Post Offices
Provided customers in small communities with retail locations for purchasing stamps and Priority Mail flat-rate products.

Priority Mail Express Flat Rate Packaging
Offered the convenience of flat-rate shipping of Priority Mail Express items.

gopost
Provided access to self-service parcel lockers in convenient locations like shopping malls; market-tested beginning in 2012 in the Washington, D.C., area, and in New York City the following year.

Metro Post
Enabled participating retailers to offer their customers same-day delivery service for online purchases in metro-

politan areas; market-tested in San Francisco beginning in 2012 and in the New York City area beginning in 2014.

Sunday package delivery
Enabled delivery of a company's packages in select cities on Sundays, following the signing of a negotiated service agreement.

Customized Delivery
Provided early-morning grocery deliveries in select locations; market-tested in San Francisco beginning in 2014.

Informed Delivery, tested in select locations beginning in 2014, offered customers a daily email with images of the outside of letter-sized pieces in their mail, before delivery. In 2017, Informed Delivery rolled out nationwide and package tracking information was added to the daily emails.

off-season. And in 2011, the Postal Service began offering promotions to large mailers who integrated innovative technologies onto their mail — such as a QR code linking to a mailer's website and codes linking to augmented reality experiences. Making mail more interactive made it a more powerful messaging medium, and — it was hoped — more attractive to mailers.

Although total mail volume declined, package shipping increased due to the steady growth of eCommerce. Package volume grew by 21 percent from 2010 and 2013. To attract even more shippers, the Postal Service upgraded its Priority Mail lineup in July 2013. It redesigned its free packaging and offered improved features like free insurance, improved USPS Tracking, and day-specific delivery. From 2014 through 2019, package volume grew by more than 55 percent. But packages comprised less than 5 percent of total deliveries, and even their impressive growth was not enough to offset declines in other mail.

Need for Postal Reform Legislation

Despite aggressive cost-cutting and efforts to increase revenue, the Postal Service's financial crisis deepened. In 2012, the Postal Service reached its $15 billion borrowing limit with the U.S. Treasury, and began operating with a sometimes razor-thin margin of cash on hand. Due to lack of funds, from 2012 through 2016 the Postal Service defaulted on $33.9 of the $54.8 billion required by the PAEA for prefunding future retiree health benefits.

In 2015, Megan Brennan was appointed Postmaster General — the first woman to lead the organization in its 240-year history. A 29-year postal veteran, Brennan rose through the ranks from working as a letter carrier in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to becoming chief operating officer in 2010. Upon taking office as Postmaster General, Brennan reaffirmed both the Postal Service's commitment to public service and its need to adapt to a changing America.

The Next Generation of Mailboxes

Between 2010 and 2014, package shipping increased by 31 percent. In 2015, the Postal Service introduced a large curbside mailbox that was taller and more than twice as wide as the traditional curbside mailbox. This "next generation" mailbox was designed to accommodate more than 70 percent of the packages sent through the mail. In 2015, the Postal Service also began testing "Delivery Box" lockers in Boston, Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C. Available in three styles to suit different neighborhoods, Delivery Box lockers provided secure access to mail and packages in urban areas.

Delivery Box Locker (at right)
Large Curbside Mailbox (at left)

Innovation and customer service were key priorities. The Postal Service continued developing Informed Delivery, a feature that offered users a daily email with images of the outside of letter-sized pieces in their mail, before delivery. And it launched Informed Visibility, which enabled large volume mailers to "see" their mail all the way to their customer's door. The two initiatives harnessed available data to enrich the experience of both senders and receivers of mail.

Other key reforms required changes to federal law. The Postal Service continued working with Congress towards passage of postal reform legislation. Brennan collaborated with key stakeholders, including employee labor unions and large volume mailers, to identify reforms on which there was broad consensus. These included requiring Medicare integration for postal retiree health plans, calculating all retirement benefit liabilities using postal-specific assumptions, and providing additional product flexibility.

Testifying before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee in May 2016, Brennan described the Postal Service's financial challenges as "serious but solvable."[85] In July 2016, a bipartisan postal reform bill advanced out of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee but failed to make it to the floor before the end of the year.

In February 2017, Brennan spoke again to the Committee. She told its members:

> *The Postal Service is a self-funding entity. We pay for our operations entirely through the sale of postal products and services and do not receive tax revenue to support our business. …*
>
> *During the last decade, we have responded aggressively to the challenges that confronted us. … These efforts have resulted in cost savings of approximately $14 billion annually. …*
>
> *Despite these achievements, our efforts have not been enough — and cannot be enough — to restore the Postal Service to financial health, absent legislative and regulatory reform. …*
>
> *Some of our most significant costs are fixed by law and are outside management's control. Further, our ability to earn revenue to pay for those costs is constrained by law. This fundamental imbalance is the root of our financial instability.*[86]

Mandated costs included six-day delivery to the entire nation, which grew by 1 million or more addresses each year, and the health benefits prefunding requirement imposed by the PAEA. Revenue growth, meanwhile, was constrained by a price cap tied to changes in the Consumer Price Index.

Picking Up Packages, 2014
Between 2010 and 2019, the number of packages in the U.S. Mail more than doubled, but still comprised less than 5 percent of total deliveries.

In March 2017, the Committee passed another postal reform bill with bipartisan support, but it failed to advance. That December, the PRC announced the results of its 10-year review of the PAEA's pricing system, finding that the system prevented the Postal Service from achieving financial stability. In 2018, postal reform bills were introduced in the House and Senate, but stalled. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump created a Task Force to study the Postal Service's operations and finances, to help chart a course to financial stability. The Presidential Task Force ultimately concluded that comprehensive postal reforms were urgently needed. Brennan pledged to work with key stakeholders to find the best way forward.

Recovering From Hurricane Katrina, September 2005
*Two and a half weeks after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Letter Carrier Deborah Johnson
resumed deliveries in West Biloxi, Mississippi.*

Delivering Despite Disaster

"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night" stops mail carriers, the saying goes. Sometimes, the challenges are greater.

The nation faced one of its greatest challenges in August 2005. Hurricane Katrina — one of the most destructive storms in United States history — devastated entire sections of coastal Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and put 80 percent of New Orleans underwater. The storm claimed more than 1,800 lives, left many more unaccounted for, and displaced more than one million people.

Within days of the storm, the Postal Service joined with other agencies to coordinate the distribution of Social Security, pension, and benefit checks, which were due to be delivered at the beginning of September. The Postal Service set up temporary distribution centers and delivered more than 30,000 checks before the centers closed in mid-September.

The Postal Service urged displaced residents to file change-of-address forms so that their mail could be sent to them directly, bypassing stricken regions. By year's end, the Postal

Service had processed change-of-address forms from more than 520,000 households that had been displaced by Katrina as well as Hurricane Rita, which struck three weeks later. Due to intense national interest, the Postal Service provided an overview of change-of-address data to national news media, since this was the only reliable way to track the movement of evacuees.

Two other major storms, Dennis and Wilma, hit the southern United States during the 2005 hurricane season — the most destructive on record. All told, in 2005 hurricanes destroyed 17 postal facilities and damaged more than 500.

Despite the devastation, postal employees delivered — handing out mail from trailers, recreational vehicles, and even tents, where street delivery was not possible. As letter carriers gradually returned to city streets, they were greeted with smiles, laughter, hugs, and tears.

Every year, storms, floods, fires, and other natural disasters strike. Postal employees are on the front lines of relief efforts. They are among the first to restore service and support as fires are extinguished and waters recede. ∎

Everyday Heroism

In 1901, John J. Comisky, a New Jersey letter carrier walking his route, saw a 12-year-old boy struggling for his life in the Passaic River. Comisky jumped into the river, brought the boy to shore, then continued delivering mail in his dripping-wet uniform.

In 1922, Henry Druckman, a Brooklyn letter carrier, saved the life of a toddler who fell from a second-story window by running across a street and catching the boy in his mailbag.

In 1927, Charles M. Taylor, a railway mail clerk in St. Louis, pulled six women and children from a wrecked, submerged Pullman car.

In 1928, Paul F. Collins, an airmail pilot, tightly circled his plane around a burning house late in the evening of February 10, until the plane's buzzing sounds woke up the family of eight inside, who escaped the fire.

In 1938, James R. Fox, a Kansas letter carrier, saved an 83-year-old woman from her burning house after an oil stove set it on fire.

In 1982, the National Association of Letter Carriers and the Postal Service formalized a long tradition of postal employees watching out for their customers by establishing the Carrier Alert Program. Customers could register for the program, and letter carriers would report any suspicious incidents or accumulations of mail that might indicate the customer was unable to collect his or her mail because of illness or injury

Every year, hundreds of postal employees are recognized as heroes, sometimes risking their own lives to save others in their community.

The Greatest Gift
In 2012, Audrey Pollard, a postal clerk in New York, met the British man whose life she saved eight years earlier through the bone marrow donation program. Since 1997, the Postal Service has recruited more than 58,000 employees and family members to register as potential donors. More than 80 have become donors, helping to save the lives of critically ill patients worldwide.

DIVERSITY PAST AND PRESENT

Benjamin Franklin may be our most storied postal predecessor, but many Americans — men and women of all geographic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds — have made the Postal Service what it is today. Women served as Postmasters in the United States more than a century before they won the right to vote. African Americans worked as Postmasters, clerks, and carriers beginning in the 1860s — one hundred years before the Civil Rights Era opened up widespread opportunity in the American workplace.

In the 20th century, postal employment helped launch many African Americans into the middle class. The benefits of postal employment rippled out to the community at large, as black postal employees not only often served as leaders in their communities, but also frequently helped lead the struggle for civil rights.[87]

In the early 21st century, the Postal Service continued to stand out as a leader in building a diverse workforce.

Here are sketches of five little-known postal pioneers, from an early woman Postmaster to the first known African American civilian employee of the federal government.

Mary Katherine Goddard, Postmaster, 1775–1789

Mary Katherine Goddard of Baltimore was the only known female Postmaster when Benjamin Franklin was named the first American Postmaster General in July 1775, making her the first known woman Postmaster in the United Colonies, the predecessor of the United States.

For Goddard, postal work was a family affair. Her father was a Postmaster in Connecticut, and her brother William had served as Postmaster of Providence, Rhode Island. Both men were also newspaper publishers. Mary Katherine learned the printing trade in the 1760s while helping William run his shop in Providence.

In the early 1770s, William Goddard moved to Baltimore, where he started the city's first newspaper, *The Maryland journal, and the Baltimore advertiser*. Soon he began to travel extensively, going from colony to colony to promote his Constitutional Post, a postal system that would be independent of the British one. In 1774, Mary Katherine moved to Baltimore to run the print shop during her brother's frequent absences.

William Goddard's proposed network of independent Post Offices ultimately formed the basis of the new American postal system. In 1775, Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin appointed William as surveyor general of the new system. Mary Katherine, meanwhile, was appointed Postmaster of Baltimore.

Postmasters at that time were not salaried, but earned a commission on the postage they collected; rampant inflation and devalued currencies combined to make running the Post Office a losing venture. Mary Katherine paid the post rider and high office rents out of her own pocket, when necessary, to keep the office going and information flowing. In addition to printing the newspaper, she was the first to print the Declaration of Independence with the names of all

A Diverse Workforce

Men and women of all geographic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds have made the Postal Service what it is today.

the signers; she also printed broadsides, books, and almanacs, which she sold in her shop along with stationery and dry goods.

In 1789, newly appointed Postmaster General Samuel Osgood replaced Mary Katherine with a new Postmaster. It was customary for new political administrations to summarily replace previous appointees. More than 200 citizens of Baltimore petitioned Osgood to reinstate her, but he refused, claiming the right to exercise his own judgment. Goddard wrote to both President George Washington and the United States Senate to petition for reinstatement, but neither intervened on her behalf. She continued to run a bookshop in Baltimore until she retired around 1810, in her early 70s.

Refugio Benavides, Postmaster, 1859–1861

Refugio Benavides of Laredo, Texas, great-great-grandson of the town's founder, was Postmaster of Laredo before serving with distinction as a Confederate Army captain during the Civil War.

Benavides was born in Laredo in 1821. In the 1850s, while in his mid-30s, he served as alderman, and then mayor. In July 1859, Refugio Benavides was appointed Postmaster of Laredo. Although his primary occupation was cattle rancher, as Postmaster, he or his sworn assistant oversaw the arrival and delivery of U.S. Mail to the entire community. Benavides served as the U.S. Postmaster until the outbreak of the Civil War.

Following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, the majority of the political elite in Texas voted to join other southern states in seceding from the United States. During the Civil War, Refugio and his younger brothers, Santos and Cristobal, served fearlessly and with distinction.

In May 1861, Santos, a Confederate Army captain, and his men were surrounded by Mexican bandits rumored to have Union support. Refugio raced 65 miles on horseback overnight on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, avoiding enemy lines and lookouts, to bring word to his brother that reinforcements were on their way. When reinforcements arrived, Santos led a charge against the enemy, and overwhelmed them in mere minutes. Colonel John Ford, the local Confederate Army commander, officially thanked the Benavides brothers for their "gallantry in expelling a foe from our territory," and singled out Refugio for special praise.[88]

By the end of the war, Refugio and Cristobal were promoted to the rank of captain; their brother Santos was ultimately promoted to colonel and became the highest-ranking Mexican American in the entire Confederate Army.

The Benavides brothers were legends in their own time, admired by fellow Army officers and the Governor of Texas himself. In 1863, the Texas state legislature officially thanked Refugio and Santos "for their vigilance, energy, and gallantry."[89] Even more telling was the continued loyalty of the men they led into battle, at a time when the desertion rate of Confederate troops in some companies neared 100 percent.

After the war, Refugio Benavides continued to raise cattle in Laredo. In the 1870s he served as mayor once more, and for a time led a company of Texas Rangers, who protected the citizens of Laredo from cattle thieves and Indian raiders. He died in 1899 at the home of his son in Laredo.

Refugio Benavides with Fellow Confederate Officers, circa 1863

From left to right: Refugio Benavides, Atancio Vidaurri, Cristobal Benavides, and John Leyendecker. By the end of the Civil War, Refugio and Cristobal Benavides had been promoted to the rank of captain. Their brother, Santos, was promoted to colonel, making him the highest-ranking Mexican American in the Confederate Army.

Vinnie Ream, late 1860s

In 1866, at age 18, Vinnie Ream became the youngest artist and first woman to receive a government commission for a work of art. Ream created the life-size statue of President Abraham Lincoln that stands in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.

Vinnie Ream, Clerk, Dead Letter Office, 1862–1865

Vinnie Ream, the first woman to receive a federal commission for a statue, was "discovered" while she was working as a clerk at Post Office Department Headquarters as a teenager during the Civil War. She was one of the first women known to have worked at postal headquarters — one of ten women hired to help process undeliverable letters in the Dead Letter Office in 1862.

Born in Madison, Wisconsin, Ream traveled with her family to Washington, D.C., at the beginning of the Civil War. To help support her family, she took a job as a clerk in the Dead Letter Office in 1862 at the age of 15. Shortly thereafter, she met the sculptor-in-residence at the U.S. Capitol and, inspired, picked up a piece of clay and created a medallion of an Indian chief's head. The sculpture so impressed those who saw it that she soon began sculpting part-time, and had a stream of congressmen and generals sitting for their likenesses.

Together, some of these men commissioned a bust of President Lincoln and convinced the president to sit for her. The president reportedly agreed when he learned she was a poor mid-westerner of humble origins, much as he had been. Ream's completed bust of Lincoln was so realistic that in 1866 it led to a congressional commission for a life-size statue of President Lincoln, to be placed in the U.S. Capitol.

Almost overnight, Ream went from being a $600-a-year unknown postal clerk to the recipient of a $10,000 federal commission. At age 18, Ream was the youngest artist and the first woman ever to receive such an honor. The awarding of the commission sparked heated debate in Congress, not only because of Ream's age and gender, but because she had never before completed a full-size statue.

To transfer her clay model to marble, Ream went with her parents to Europe, where she was welcomed by the leading artists of the day, entertained by Franz Liszt, and had an audience with the Pope. Her completed Lincoln statue was unveiled to great acclaim at the U.S. Capitol in 1871 in what Ream later called "the supreme moment" of her life.[90]

Over the next decade Vinnie Ream completed many other notable works, including a statue of Admiral Farragut located in Farragut Square in Washington, D.C. But marriage at the age of 30 largely ended Ream's career, as she deferred to her husband's wish that she quit work.

William Cooper Nell, Post Office Clerk, 1863–1874

William Cooper Nell, a civil rights pioneer and the first published African American historian, holds another distinction — he is the earliest known African American civilian employee of the federal government, having been appointed a clerk at the Boston Post Office in 1863.

Nell was born in 1816 into a middle-class family in Boston. He excelled in school and at the age of 14 went to work for William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent abolitionist and printer of the newspaper *The Liberator*. In Garrison's print shop, Nell advanced from errand boy to apprentice printer. Eventually he wrote articles for the newspaper, chronicling the challenges and achievements of Boston's black community and, like his mentor, devoting himself to the emancipation of slaves and civil rights for African Americans.

An active member of the New England Freedom Association, Nell helped coordinate money, clothing, and housing for newly arrived fugitive slaves. He also helped found several Boston organizations that encouraged self-improvement of citizens through reading, discussion, and lectures.

In the 1840s Nell went to Rochester, New York, where for nearly two years he collaborated with Frederick Douglass, a rising star in the abolitionist movement. Although the two men later fell out over tactics, Nell was the first printer and publisher of Douglass' newspaper *The North Star*.

In 1844, Nell and other leading black Bostonians petitioned the Boston School Committee to desegregate the city's public schools. Having suffered from discrimination during his own school career, Nell campaigned tirelessly for school integration for more than a decade. Finally, in 1855, after 11 years of petitions, appeals, and meetings, the Massachusetts state governor signed into law a bill prohibiting racial discrimination in public school admissions. Later that year, Boston's African American community recognized Nell's service in a moving ceremony, calling him the "champion of Equal School Rights" and presenting him with a gold watch and speeches of heartfelt gratitude in what Nell called the proudest moment of his life.[91]

The year 1855 was momentous for Nell for another reason. That year, his landmark 396-page book *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* was published in Boston, the first published history book researched and written by an African American.

In early 1863, Boston's Postmaster, John Palfrey, appointed Nell as a clerk at the Boston Post Office — the first known appointment of an African American to a federal office. Like Nell, Palfrey had been an abolitionist and newspaperman as well as a published historian. Nell was the first of several African Americans appointed by Palfrey.

Nell worked as a clerk at the Boston Post Office until his death in 1874.

William Cooper Nell, undated
William Cooper Nell — abolitionist, journalist, historian, and equal rights champion — was the first known African American civilian employee of the federal government. He was appointed a clerk at the Boston, Massachusetts, Post Office in 1863.

William H. Carney, Letter Carrier, 1869–1901

William H. Carney, the first African American to earn the Medal of Honor, was also one of the first African Americans appointed as a city letter carrier.

Carney was born a slave in Virginia in 1840; in the 1850s, he escaped and joined his father in New Bedford, Massachusetts, a favorite destination of the Underground Railroad.

In February 1863, soon after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Carney enlisted in the first regiment of African American troops raised in the North — the 54th Massachusetts Regiment.

Five months later, the 54th participated in one of the most legendary battles of the Civil War — the Battle of Fort Wagner — from which Carney emerged a hero. On the evening of July 18, 1863, the 54th Regiment spearheaded an assault on Fort Wagner, which guarded the entrance to the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. As the troops advanced, they were mowed down by a barrage of shells and bullets from the fort. When a bullet struck the 54th's flag-bearer, Carney threw down his gun and seized the flag before it fell to the ground, then moved to the head of the column. Holding the flag aloft, Carney made it to the ramparts as his fellow soldiers fell around him. On the ramparts, he stood almost alone among the dead and dying as the Confederate forces repulsed the 54th's charge and closed

Storming Fort Wagner, **circa 1890 (left)**
William H. Carney, circa 1900
To Colored Men! **Recruitment Poster, 1863**
William H. Carney, one of the first African American letter carriers, was the first African American to earn the Medal of Honor, for bravery displayed in battle during the Civil War.

in around them. Rather than dropping the flag and fleeing for his life, Carney wound the flag around its staff, avoided capture, and despite being shot multiple times, made it back to Union lines to deliver the flag safely to a member of his regiment. Before collapsing from his wounds, he reportedly told his comrades "Boys, the old flag never touched the ground."[92]

Although the Union Army lost the battle, the heroism of the 54th Regiment inspired thousands of other African Americans to join the Union Army. Abraham Lincoln considered the support of these troops crucial to the Union's ultimate victory.

William Carney recovered from his wounds and was promoted to sergeant; he was discharged from the Army in 1864.

On November 16, 1869, Carney was appointed as one of the first letter carriers in New Bedford. He delivered mail for nearly 32 years and was a founding member of the New Bedford Branch of the National Association of Letter Carriers. He resigned from his letter carrier position in 1901 and died seven years later, in 1908.

His valor at Fort Wagner was honored on May 23, 1900, when he was awarded the Medal of Honor. The bravery displayed by Carney and the rest of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in the assault on Fort Wagner inspired the acclaimed 1989 movie *Glory*. ■

Social Change in the Sixties

In the 1960s, changing attitudes led to more equality in the workplace and opened up new opportunities in the federal workforce for women, African Americans, and other minorities.

The racial segregation of employee lockers, toilets and break rooms — which was still practiced in some cities — was abolished after campaigns by employee unions and civil rights organizations.

Also, opportunities increased. Although women had served as Postmasters since the 1700s, and African Americans had served in a variety of positions since the 1860s, they had generally not been promoted to supervisory positions, and women were traditionally not considered for city letter carrier positions.

In March 1961, newly elected President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925, establishing the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity and declaring that it was the responsibility of the federal government to "promote and ensure equal opportunity for all qualified persons, without regard to race."[93]

In December 1961, Kennedy created the President's Commission on the Status of Women, and in July 1962 he directed that federal appointments and promotions be made "without regard to sex."[94]

Kennedy's orders and their implementation by the Post Office Department over the course of the 1960s opened the doors of opportunity and advancement for many postal employees.

Between 1962 and 1964, the percentage of supervisory jobs held by African American postal employees doubled, from 5 percent to 10 percent. In 1966, African American Postmasters headed the nation's three largest Post Offices — New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles — which together handled about 14 percent of the nation's mail. Meanwhile, the number of women who served as city letter carriers rose from 104 in 1960, to 370 in 1965, to 3,500 in 1968. By 1972, nearly 8,000 women delivered mail in U.S. cities.

John R. Strachan, 1963
John R. Strachan, a career postal employee and U.S. Army veteran, was promoted to Assistant Director of the Post Office Department's New York Region in May 1963. He was later promoted and served for more than 10 years as Postmaster of New York City.

PROTECTING THE MAIL

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service, which protects postal customers and employees from criminal attack and the mail from criminal misuse, traces its roots to Benjamin Franklin. While Postmaster of Philadelphia under the British postal administration, Franklin's duties included "regulating several offices, and bringing the officers to account."[95]

Extending Mail Service

The position of "surveyor" was created in December 1772, with Hugh Finlay named "Surveyor of Post roads on the Continent of North America" by the British Postmasters General.[96] Finlay toured Post Offices from Maine to Georgia to evaluate service and suggest improvements. In 1775, under the Second Continental Congress, William Goddard became the first surveyor of the American postal system. We date the beginning of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service to August 7, 1775 — the earliest recorded date that Goddard served as surveyor. Goddard established new Post Offices, arranged mail transportation contracts, and settled Postmasters' accounts.

In 1782, the position of surveyor was abolished to save money; Postmasters General and their assistants acted in the capacity of inspectors through the 1790s.

By 1801, the title "special agent" was used. In March 1801, a special agent was appointed to investigate delays in moving mail between Washington, D.C., and Kentucky. Six years later, another was hired to secretly investigate mail robberies in Tennessee.

In the 1820s, an Office of Instruction and of Mail Depredations was created, headed by a General Agent. His duties were to:

investigate, in person, cases of mail robberies and of missing letters; to correspond with district attorneys … to examine mail routes, and the manner in which mail contracts are executed; to examine post offices; the characters and conduct of postmasters …

and to communicate:

the decisions of the Postmaster General on questions … concerning the construction of post office laws and regulations.[97]

By 1837, the Post Office Department's four special agents were paying surprise visits to Post Offices, auditing accounts, and reporting on the general state of affairs. Twelve special agents were employed by 1843, and the Postmaster General attributed a decrease in mail thefts to their "vigilance … in ferreting out and bringing to justice depredators."[98] In the 1840s, special agents also were sent to Texas, Oregon, and California to superintend the establishment of new service.

In October 1850, the Postmaster General outlined agents' duties:

- Arresting and helping convict mail thieves.

- Overseeing mail service.

- Occasionally asking local business communities to provide suggestions for improvement.

- Keeping a daily journal of activities, to be transcribed twice a month and sent to the Department.[99]

By 1855, the Post Office Department employed 18 special agents — 3 at-large and 15 domiciled across the United States. Twenty-one agents served by 1861, including one assigned solely to the New York City Post Office, which handled more than three times the mail of the next largest Post Office.

The Civil War brought new challenges. Special agents helped deliver mail to Union troops in the South and reestablished service as southern states returned to federal control. Finding individuals willing and able to serve as Postmasters in the South was difficult because, until July 1868, all prospective Postmasters had to swear that they had not voluntarily aided the Confederacy or Confederate soldiers. The 1865 *Official Register of the United States* listed 33 special agents, including five in charge of specific southern Post Offices.[100]

The number of agents grew with the Post Office Department and with congressional mandates to protect the mail and to protect the American public from obscenity, fraud, and lotteries conducted through the mail.

Cleaning the Mailstream

In February 1865, Jacob Collamer, a U.S. senator from Vermont and former Postmaster General, told his fellow senators that the traffic in obscene books and pictures was "getting to be a very great evil."[101] An Act of Congress of

March 3, 1865, provided that "no obscene book, pamphlet, picture, print, or other publication of a vulgar and indecent character, shall be admitted into the mails."[102] The law was broadened in 1872 to ban obscene envelopes and postal cards, and expanded further in 1873 when Congress passed the *Comstock Act*, named after Special Agent Anthony Comstock, a zealous anti-vice crusader. In addition to banning the mailing of obscene materials, the *Comstock Act* banned mailing any items or information relating to contraception or abortion, or receiving them with intent to distribute.

In 1872, Congress also passed the first mail fraud statute to empower special agents to pursue swindlers, who previously had used the mails "with almost absolute impunity."[103] "Swindling circulars" enticed victims to buy counterfeit money, tickets for nonexistent lotteries, and miraculous "medicines" and devices. For a mere $5 (or three for $10), citizens could buy "THE MAGIC BELT! FOR RENDERING ONE'S SELF 'INVISIBLE'" ("Go where you will, no living being can see you, nor in any way be aware of your presence").[104] In 1876, Chief Special Agent P. H. Woodward noted that swindlers not only fleeced innocent victims by enticing them to send money through the mail, but tempted postal employees with an "easy conscience" to redirect money-filled envelopes addressed to known swindlers into their own pockets.[105] In 1875, out of 307 people arrested for violating postal laws, 115 were postal employees.

In 1880, the title "post-office inspector" replaced "special agent." In recommending the change, Postmaster General David M. Key said:

> the duties of these officers are by no means confined to the detection and arrest of offenders … most of their time is occupied in the inspection of the postal service, the examination of postmasters' accounts, the investigation of the solvency of their bonds, the collection of debts … and the general supervision of all officers and employees.[106]

The *Anti-Lottery Act of 1890* was the first federal law prohibiting all lottery-related mail. The act targeted the Louisiana Lottery Company, the only legal U.S. lottery at the time, which earned profits of more than $10,000,000 a year, mostly via the U.S. Mail. Armed with the new law, inspectors quickly shut down the lottery, whose business had been so vast that, within three months, revenue at the New Orleans Post Office dropped by one third and nine clerks had to be let go.

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, several experienced inspectors oversaw temporary military Post Office stations serving the troops and investigated thefts

Warning Consumers
Hoping to save the "credulous from being swindled," in 1880 Anthony Comstock wrote Frauds Exposed; Or, How the People Are Deceived and Youth Corrupted.

The De Autremont Train Holdup, 1923

On October 11, 1923, brothers Ray, Roy, and Hugh De Autremont held up a Southern Pacific train near Siskiyou, Oregon, because they mistakenly believed it carried $500,000 in gold. The brothers murdered the train engineer, brakeman, and fireman, and used too much dynamite to blow open the mail car, killing the railway mail clerk and destroying the mail. They fled the scene empty-handed, but left behind several incriminating clues. An extensive manhunt followed, with postal inspectors following clues as far as Central America, Mexico, Canada, and Alaska. All three brothers were caught in 1927, after being recognized from reward posters. "We literally plastered the United States with circulars," one inspector recalled. "I knew it would be through those we would get the men."[107] All three brothers were convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

HUGH DE AUTREMONT.
(Picture taken in 1923.)

Specimen of Handwriting

ROY A. A. DE AUTREMONT.
(Picture taken early in 1923.)

Specimen of Handwriting

RAY CHARLES DE AUTREMONT.
(Picture taken in 1920. He now resembles closely his twin brother Roy.)

Specimen of Handwriting

Reward Circular, 1926
More than two million reward circulars were distributed — in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, German and Portugese — leading to the men's capture in 1927.

Registered Mail Receipt, 1923 (at right)
Post Office records helped identify the criminals. Deep in the pocket of a pair of overalls found near the scene was the receipt for a letter that Roy De Autremont had mailed weeks earlier to his brother, Hugh, by Registered Mail.

RECEIPT FOR REGISTERED ARTICLE
Registered at the Post Office Indicated in Postmark

$15,900.00 REWARD
IN GOLD

Train Hold-up and Murder
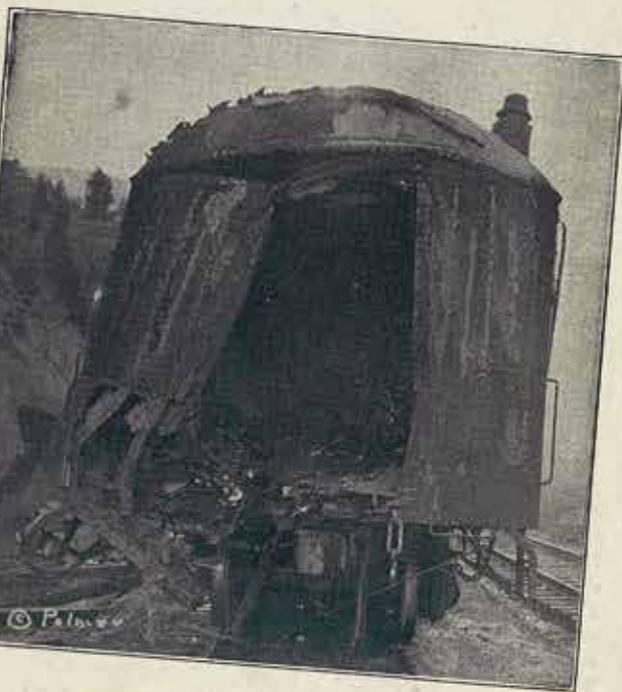
MAIL CAR AFTER HOLDUP.
Where the postal clerk was cremated.

Case No. 57883-D

$15,900.00 Reward in Gold!

of soldiers' mail. In 1898, inspectors also went to Alaska to reorganize the mail service there; the discovery of gold had led to avalanches of mail.

In 1900, inspectors investigated postal fraud in Cuba, which was under U.S. military jurisdiction, and traveled to Puerto Rico and Hawaii to supervise the start of mail service in these new U.S. territories. In 1903, 40 inspectors participated in a sweeping internal investigation of irregularities in the awarding of contracts, which led to the removal or resignation of 17 Post Office Department officers and employees, including First Assistant Postmaster General Perry S. Heath and Superintendent of Free Delivery August W. Machen. In 1905, the Department had 216 inspectors; by 1911, the number had increased to 390.

Pursuing Rogues and Robbers

During World War I, the need for military postal facilities was decided by inspectors, who also investigated the loyalty of potential employees and possible violators of the Espionage and Sedition Acts. After the war and through the 1930s, inspectors contended with an increase in mail robberies by armed gangs. Thefts became so numerous that, in 1921, about 50,000 surplus military firearms were distributed to railway mail clerks. In 1921 and again in 1926, thousands of U.S. Marines guarded valuable mail at vulnerable points throughout the country, as identified by inspectors. Two of the most notorious train robberies were the botched robbery near Siskiyou, Oregon, in 1923, and a well-planned heist at Rondout, Illinois, in 1924. Inspectors doggedly investigated each case and eventually saw the thieves convicted.

Meanwhile, inspectors continued protecting the public from evolving consumer fraud. In 1920, they investigated and helped convict Charles Ponzi, the father of illegal pyramid schemes, who filched millions of dollars from the public for supposed investments.[108]

During World War II, inspectors served as liaisons between civilian and military postal facilities, regularly inspecting both types of facilities to ensure prompt, secure handling of mail, investigating complaints of theft, and helping military authorities identify the guilty parties.

In 1954, the title "postal inspector" was first officially used.

The 1950s saw a rise in illegal drug use — a significant factor in postal crime. By 1954, about half of all non-postal mail thieves in the New York City area were addicts who stole checks from mailboxes to finance their habits. Illegal drug use affected the Post Office Department on another front as well: in 1967, Postmaster General Lawrence F. O'Brien noted an increase in the use of mail to transmit illegal drugs.[109] The *Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention*

and *Control Act of 1970* made it unlawful to use the mail "to transmit or facilitate the manufacture, distribution, disbursing, or possession" of illegal drugs; postal inspectors immediately seized the initiative in pursuing offenders.[110]

The Security Force, the uniformed branch of the Postal Inspection Service, was formed in 1970. Primarily responsible for protecting people and property and keeping the peace on postal property, Postal Police Officers, like other members of the Postal Inspection Service, also respond to natural and man-made disasters.

Protecting the Innocent

Since the passage of the *Child Protection Act of 1984*, postal inspectors have arrested about 6,000 suspects for using the mail in violation of federal child exploitation laws. In 1999, inspectors helped shut down Landslide Productions, Inc. of Fort Worth, Texas, the largest-known child pornography enterprise in history, which grossed $1.4 million each month

from website subscriptions. Its founder was sentenced to 1,335 years in prison. The company's customer records sparked a two-year undercover sting operation called "Operation Avalanche," with investigators contacting former website subscribers and arresting them if they accepted delivery of child pornography. Inspectors also investigated the exploitation of children through the mail by sexual predators they met online.

The Inspection Service narcotics program stresses the safety of all postal employees and strives to protect them and customers from handling packages of illegal narcotics and trafficking proceeds. From 2010 through 2017, inspectors reported 14,838 arrests related to investigations of drug-trafficking via the mail and seized a total of about $157.1 million in illegal drug proceeds.

Mail fraud — "free" prize schemes, foreign lotteries, pyramid schemes, investment fraud, and work-at-home scams — has been around for generations, but two new

Responding to Hurricane Irma, 2017
Postal inspectors play a key role in safeguarding postal employees, postal facilities, and the mail — including by leading emergency response teams following natural and man-made disasters. After Hurricane Irma struck Florida in September 2017, postal inspectors quickly secured the mail and other valuables at damaged postal facilities.

types of fraud emerged in the late 20th century: credit card fraud and identify theft. Hundreds of thousands of credit cards travel through the mail each day. Since 1992, the Inspection Service has partnered with major credit card issuers and other industry stakeholders to protect cards and cardholders against theft and help stem losses.

The Inspection Service works to prevent fraud through community awareness and by publicizing prevention guidelines. In 2012, the Inspection Service launched a new fraud awareness effort, the Consumer Alert News Network. These consumer alerts, which are short videos aired during local television news broadcasts, feature inspectors discussing ongoing scams to help consumers avoid becoming victims. The Inspection Service funds the effort with fines collected from convicted fraudsters. The Inspection Service also partners with other federal, state, and local agencies in support of National Consumer Protection Week, which was launched by the Federal Trade Commission in 1998. This annual program raises awareness of fraud schemes and provides other information that helps customers become smarter consumers.

The Inspection Service's Mail Fraud Team helped arrest and successfully prosecute R. Allen Stanford, the former chairman of the Houston-based Stanford Financial Group and the mastermind of a $7 billion Ponzi scheme. Stanford convinced investors to purchase certificates of deposit and then misused most of the money. His victims mailed payments and believed the monthly statements he sent them accurately reflected their investments. In 2012, Stanford was sentenced to 110 years in prison and ordered to forfeit $5.9 billion. The jury also directed that $330 million in recovered funds be returned to victims.

Inspectors respond rapidly to reports of suspicious items, such as unidentified substances in the mail and bombs in the mail or on postal property. In May 2012, a federal jury in Chicago convicted John Tomkins — the so-called "Bishop Bomber" — on 12 counts of mailing threatening communications and destructive devices. The Inspection Service's hunt for Tomkins intensified in 2007, when his series of threatening letters escalated and he mailed two pipe bombs to investment firms. Fortunately, the bombs were not triggered to explode, and no one was hurt.

Postal inspectors are also among the first on the scene following disasters, both natural and man-made. They secure buildings and enter damaged facilities to gather mail, money, and stamp stock. They also confirm the safety of employees.

Postal inspectors continue to protect the Postal Service, its employees, and its customers from criminal attack, and the nation's mail from criminal misuse. ∎
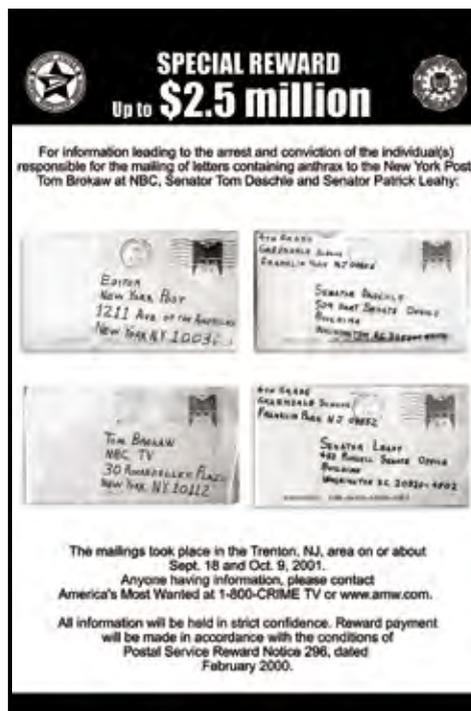
Reward Poster
Rewards for the arrest and conviction of postal offenders were offered as early as 1805. The largest reward ever offered was $2.5 million for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individual(s) who mailed anthrax in 2001. In 2008, a suspect was identified but committed suicide before being charged.

The Office of Inspector General

The *Inspector General Act of 1978* created Inspector General offices in 12 federal agencies following a series of public spending scandals. Their mission was to investigate and audit the programs and operations of agencies that, in many cases, had failed to supervise their own spending, to ferret out fraud and misconduct, and to help prevent and end the misuse of funds. The act granted the Inspectors General broad authority to:

- Conduct audits and investigations.

- Access all agency records directly, using subpoenas if necessary.

- Request assistance from other government agencies.

- Administer oaths when taking testimony.

- Hire staff and manage their own resources.

- Receive and respond to complaints from agency employees, while protecting their confidentiality.

Inspectors General were not authorized to take corrective action themselves under the rationale that it would be difficult — if not impossible — for Inspectors General to review programs and operations objectively if they were directly involved in carrying them out.

The *Inspector General Act Amendments of 1988* created IGs in 39 additional government agencies and entities, including the Postal Service. Initially the Chief Postal Inspector served a dual role as the Inspector General, reporting to the Postmaster General. Congress further amended the *Inspector General Act* in 1996, creating an independent Inspector General for the Postal Service, who reported to the Board of Governors.

Recognizing the importance of a USPS OIG independent from management, Congress created the Postal Service's independent Office of Inspector General to be its eyes and ears to detect and prevent waste, fraud, theft, and misconduct. Although funded by the Postal Service, the Inspector General is appointed by the nine presidentially appointed Governors of the Postal Service and reports twice a year to the Governors and to Congress. The USPS OIG's independence allows it to more effectively perform its mission, "to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of USPS programs and operations, while eliminating and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse."[111]

The Postal Service's independent Office of Inspector General began with a single employee, Inspector General Karla W. Corcoran, who was sworn in on January 6, 1997. In one year's time, the office hired 109 employees and set up field offices across the country to audit and investigate Postal Service programs and operations. It also established a hotline number — 1-888-USPS-OIG — to receive allegations of waste, fraud, and abuse; the hotline received more than 14,000 calls in its second year.

David C. Williams was sworn in as Inspector General on August 20, 2003, and served until his retirement in 2016. The scope of his office increased in 2005 when allegations of postal employee misconduct including embezzlement, record falsification, workers' compensation fraud, contract fraud, and on-duty narcotics violations were transferred from the Postal Inspection Service to the USPS OIG. On May 1, 2006, the USPS OIG took over the responsibility for investigating all new allegations of these types. On September 1, 2006, the USPS OIG also began investigating all new allegations of mail theft by postal employees. To handle its increased responsibilities, the USPS OIG hired more than 260 new investigators in 2006.

By the end of 2006, its staff numbered 1,071 and included special agents (federal law enforcement officers authorized to carry firearms, make arrests, and investigate federal criminal violations), auditors (professionals trained in government audit and accounting standards), and others crucial to its mission.

The *Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006* increased the OIG's responsibilities by directing it to report within six months on the Postal Service's workplace safety and within one year on the fairness of the process by which nonprofit rate deficiencies were assessed and appealed. The act also required the OIG to regularly audit the data collection systems

and procedures the Postal Service uses to analyze and report on its costs, revenues, rates, and service performance to the Postal Regulatory Commission.

In addition to detecting and preventing waste, fraud, theft, and misconduct, the OIG, in a series of white papers beginning in 2011, investigated areas for improvement, which included exploring potential revenue opportunities for the Postal Service in the digital age. The OIG also weighed in on subjects including Postal Service pension obligations and possible overfunding, budget treatment of the Postal Service by the Federal government, and other issues.

In 2019, OIG auditors issued 139 audit reports and management advisories accounting for more than $3.4 billion in monetary impact. OIG investigators, meanwhile, completed 2,561 investigations, which lead to 832 arrests and more than $1.5 billion in fines, restitution, and recoveries that went to the Postal Service.

Investigation In Progress
Special agents from the Office of Inspector General conduct surveillance in 2003.

Investigating Fraud

One mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate fraud, including workers' compensation fraud. Most employees who receive workers' compensation benefits do so because of legitimate job-related injuries. Nevertheless, a small percentage of postal employees abuse the system. The OIG investigates whenever fraud is suspected.

For example, in 2006 OIG investigators received an anonymous tip that a letter carrier regularly exceeded the physical limitations under which he received worker's compensation payments. On eleven separate occasions, OIG agents videotaped him playing golf at a local club. One day he was observed playing 36 holes of golf. Unaware that he had been videotaped, in an interview he told investigators that he could no longer play golf due to his back injury and merely walked around the golf course for exercise. Indicted on 30 counts of mail fraud and one count of making false statements, he entered a guilty plea and was sentenced to 30 months in prison and ordered to pay $71,514 in restitution.

In 2009, a former supervisor pled guilty to charges stemming from an investigation in which OIG agents observed her catching and reeling in numerous fish, carrying luggage, and driving a motor vehicle — all in violation of her medical restrictions. Previously, she had told the claims examiner that she could not lift or do anything with her arm, even on a good day. She was sentenced to 18 months' probation and ordered to repay $10,000.

In 2012, a rural carrier was found guilty in federal court of making false statements and healthcare fraud. The carrier had filed a claim for an on-the-job injury to her back and had been placed on limited duty by her physician. OIG agents found that she had participated in at least 80 marathons and triathlons since claiming her injury. As a result of the investigation, her employment was terminated, saving the Postal Service more than $140,000.

U.S. POSTAGE STAMPS

The Post Office Department issued its first postage stamps on July 1, 1847. Previously, letters were taken to a Post Office, where the Postmaster, clerk, or assistant would note the postage in the upper right corner. Postage could be paid in advance by the mailer, collected from the recipient on delivery, or paid partially in advance and partially on delivery. On April 1, 1855, prepayment of postage became mandatory; as of January 1, 1856, payment via postage stamps was required.

The First Postage Stamps

In 1837, Great Britain's Sir Rowland Hill proposed a uniform rate of postage for mail going anywhere in the British Isles and prepayment by using envelopes with preprinted postage or adhesive labels. On May 6, 1840, the stamp that became known as the Penny Black, covering the one-penny charge for half-ounce letters sent anywhere in the British Isles, went on sale in British postal facilities.

United States Postage Stamps

Alexander M. Greig's City Despatch Post, a private New York City carrier, issued the first adhesive stamps in the United States on February 1, 1842. The Post Office Department bought Greig's business later that same year and continued use of the stamps for carrier service in New York City.

After U.S. postage rates were simplified in 1845, New York City Postmaster Robert H. Morris, among others, provided special stamps or markings to indicate prepayment of postage. These now are known as Postmasters' Provisionals.

On March 3, 1847, Congress authorized United States postage stamps. The first general issue postage stamps went on sale in New York City, July 1, 1847. One, priced at five cents, depicted Benjamin Franklin. The other, a ten-cent stamp, pictured George Washington.

Until 1857, when stamp manufacturers began perforating sheets of stamps, clerks had to use scissors to cut the stamps from pregummed, nonperforated sheets.

Issued July 1, 1847

Issued July 1, 1847

Issued December 1902

Issued April 26, 1907

Issued June 5, 1903

Stamp Firsts

In 1847, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington became the first people to appear on U.S. stamps, followed by Thomas Jefferson (1856) and Andrew Jackson (1863).

Martha Washington was the first American woman to appear on a U.S. postage stamp (1902). Admiral David Farragut was the first Hispanic American so honored (1903); Pocahontas the first Native American (1907); and Booker T. Washington the first African American (1940).

Images not shown at scale.

Issued July 1863

Issued March 1856

Issued April 7, 1940

Only Franklin and Washington appeared on stamps until 1856, when a five-cent stamp honoring Thomas Jefferson was issued. A two-cent Andrew Jackson stamp was added in 1863. George Washington has appeared on more U.S. postage stamps than any other person.

Commemorative Stamps

Commemorative stamps honor important people, events, or aspects of American culture, and tend to be larger in size than regular issues of stamps, which are called definitives.

In 1893, the first U.S. commemorative stamps, honoring that year's World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, were issued. The subject — Columbus's voyages to the New World — and size of the stamps were innovative. The stamps were 7/8 inches high by 1-11/32 inches wide, nearly double the size of previous stamps.

Over the years, commemorative stamps have been produced in many sizes and shapes, with the first triangular stamps issued in 1997 and the first round stamp in 2000. In 2017, the Postal Service issued its first stamps with special tactile features — the Have a Ball! stamps, printed with surface textures mimicking eight sports balls, and the Total Eclipse of the Sun stamp, printed with a heat-sensitive ink that,

when touched, revealed an image of the moon. In 2018, the Postal Service issued Frozen Treats stamps, the first to feature scratch-and-sniff scents. Another first in 2018: select Art of Magic stamps appeared to show a rabbit popping out of a hat, thanks to lenticular printing.

The first stamp honoring an American woman was the eight-cent Martha Washington stamp of 1902. The first to honor a Hispanic American was the one-dollar Admiral David Farragut stamp in 1903. Native Americans were portrayed in a general way on earlier stamps, but the first to honor an individual was 1907's five-cent Pocahontas stamp. In 1940, a ten-cent stamp commemorating Booker T. Washington became the first to honor an African American.

In 1959, the United States participated in its first joint stamp issue with another country when it released a five-cent stamp commemorating the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway on the same day that Canada issued a stamp with the same design in its own denomination.

Other firsts include the 1993 29-cent stamp featuring Elvis Presley. The public was invited to vote for the "young" or the "older" Elvis for the stamp's design. Youth triumphed, and the Elvis Presley stamp has been the best-selling U.S. commemorative stamp to date.

Issued January 1893

Issued June 20, 2017

Issued March 13, 1997

*Sixteen stamps issued in 1893 in honor of Columbus's voyages to the New World were the first commemoratives. The first triangular stamps (1997) and the first round stamp (2000) were issued in conjunction with international stamp exhibitions. The Total Eclipse of the Sun stamp, issued in 2017, was the first U.S. stamp printed with heat-sensitive ink— when touched, it revealed an image of the moon.*

Issued July 7, 2000

Forever Stamps

Since 2011, all new commemorative stamps for the First-Class Mail one-ounce rate have been Forever stamps. They are not marked with a postage value because they will always be equal in value to the price of mailing a one-ounce letter by First-Class Mail.
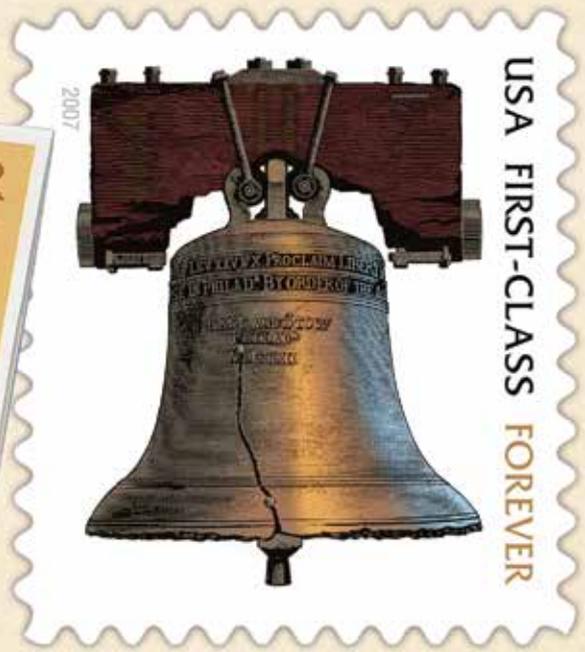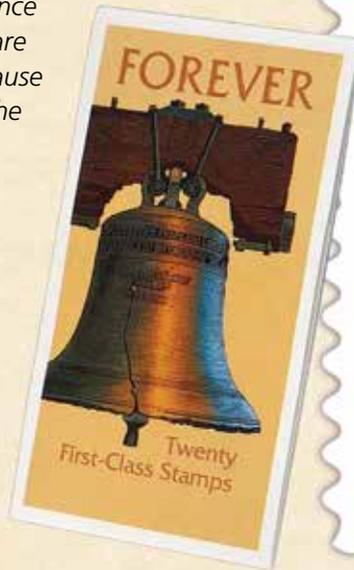
Booklets

Stamp booklets were first issued April 16, 1900. They contained 12, 24, or 48 two-cent stamps. Parafinned paper was placed between sheets of stamps to keep them from sticking together. The books, which carried a one-cent premium until 1963, had light cardboard covers printed with information about postage rates.

Coils and Vending Machines

The first coil (roll) stamps were issued on February 18, 1908, in response to business requests. Coils were also used in stamp vending equipment.

The Post Office Department began experimenting with stamp vending machines in 1905, but in 1911 concluded that none of the models tested were entirely satisfactory. Meanwhile, in the next few decades, privately owned machines proliferated. Drugstore models sold stamps at a profit by charging, for example, a nickel for two 2-cent stamps.

The Department began experimenting with stamp vending machines again after World War II, and rolled out its first model in 1948. Both coil stamps and imperforate sheets were produced for vending machines. Imperforate sheets received a variety of distinctive perforations and separations.

By 1961, the Department had about 4,500 stamp vending machines in service; at the same time, about 400,000 privately owned machines were in use.

Nondenominated Stamps

The first nondenominated stamps (stamps without a printed value) in the United States were two Christmas stamps issued October 14, 1975. The Postal Service had requested a rate change from 10 to 13 cents and was unsure when the Postal Rate Commission would issue a recommended decision in the case. When the rate change was delayed, the stamps were sold for 10 cents.

A similar situation led the Postal Service to issue nondenominated stamps on May 22, 1978. They bore the letter "A" rather than a denomination. The stamps were prepared in case of a shortage of stamps in the uncertain new denomination. They were sold for 15 cents for domestic use only. Nondenominated stamps with letter designations through "H" were issued in conjunction with postage rate changes through 1998.

The Postal Service's Quick Service Guide 604a at *pe.usps.com* lists nondenominated stamps and postal stationery issued since 1975, along with their postage values.

Self-adhesives

The Postal Service originally developed self-adhesive stamps to make precanceled stamps more secure. Precanceled stamps are canceled across the face before being sold. In the late 1960s, as many as 20 percent of such stamps were soaked off envelopes and reused. Precanceled stamps skipped a processing step that often caught reused stamps.

Semipostals: Stamps for a Cause

Semipostals are stamps that sell for more than the cost of postage, with the difference going to a specific cause (less administrative costs). Semipostals have raised more than $1 billion since they were first issued in 1998.

With the 1974 Christmas issue, the Postal Service experimented with a self-adhesive precanceled stamp. It was believed that the tightly bonded self-adhesive would not permit stamps to be soaked off. Slits were also cut in the center of the stamps to foil attempts to peel them off. Unfortunately, the stamps cost three to five times more to produce than regular postage stamps, they could still be soaked off and reused, and stamps in the hands of collectors started to self-destruct.

In 1989, the Postal Service again experimented with self-adhesive stamps, this time with emphasis on customer convenience. The new self-adhesives had a water-soluble adhesive and were produced on coated paper, so the effects of the adhesive would not be destructive. Introduced nationwide in 1992, self-adhesive stamps quickly became popular with customers. By 2002, nearly all new U.S. commemorative stamp issues were self-adhesive.

Forever Stamps

On April 12, 2007, the Postal Service issued its first Forever stamp — a nondenominated, nonexpiring stamp intended for customers mailing a piece of First-Class Mail. Sold at the going rate of a First-Class stamp, a Forever stamp is always valid for the first ounce of First-Class postage.

Forever stamps were initially intended to ease the transition for customers during stamp price changes. From 2007 to October 2010, only one design was issued: the Liberty Bell Forever stamp. Due to their popularity, two additional designs were issued in 2010 — Holiday Evergreens Forever stamps on October 21, and Lady Liberty and U.S. Flag Forever stamp coils on December 1.

Since 2011, all new commemorative stamps for the First-Class Mail one-ounce rate have been Forever stamps. Since 2014, all new stamps for the First-Class Mail one-ounce rate have been Forever stamps.

In 2013, a Global Forever stamp was introduced, offering a single price for any First-Class Mail international one-ounce letter going to any country in the world — or for up to a two-ounce letter going to Canada. Beginning in 2015, Forever stamps were also issued for postcards, and for letters needing additional postage.

Semipostals

Semipostals are stamps for which the price exceeds the cost of postage, with the difference devoted to a particular cause. An act of Congress resulted in the Breast Cancer Research stamp, the first United States semipostal, on July 29, 1998, with proceeds above the cost of postage going to breast cancer research. Congress passed legislation extending the sale of the Breast Cancer Research stamp several times. It has been sold nearly continuously since it was first issued, and has raised approximately $90.7 million through November 2019.

The Postal Service issued the Heroes of 2001 stamp on June 7, 2002, with proceeds going to the families of emergency workers killed or injured in connection with the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.

As directed by Congress, the Heroes of 2001 stamp remained on sale through 2004 and raised more than $10.5 million.

On October 8, 2003, the Postal Service issued the Stop Family Violence semipostal, with proceeds contributing to the nationwide fight against domestic violence. It was sold through 2006 and raised more than $3 million.

The *Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Act of 2010* directed the Postal Service to issue a fourth semipostal, with proceeds going to international wildlife conservation. The Save Vanishing Species stamp was issued on September 20, 2011, and remained on sale through 2018, raising approximately $5.6 million. In December 2019, Congress passed legislation directing its return to sale.

The first four semipostals were mandated by Congress. The *Semipostal Authorization Act of 2000* authorized the Postal Service to issue semipostals in support of causes considered to be in the national public interest. On November 30, 2017, the Postal Service issued its first discretionary fundraising stamp, the Alzheimer's semipostal, which raised $1 million through November 2019. On December 2, 2019, the Postal Service issued its second discretionary semipostal, the Healing PTSD semipostal stamp.

Customized Postage

With Customized Postage, also known as photo stamps, customers could print personalized postage labels by combining their own images with USPS-approved coding technology indicating payment of postage. Following a successful market test in 2004, Customized Postage became available from USPS-authorized vendors in 2005.

Postal Stationery

The first printed stamped envelopes were issued July 1, 1853. They have always been produced by private contractors and sold at the cost of postage plus the cost of manufacture. With the exception of manila newspaper wrappers used from 1919 to 1934, watermarks have been mandatory for stamped-envelope paper since 1853. The watermarks usually changed with every four-year printing contract to help identify the envelope and paper manufacturers.

The first commemorative stamped envelopes were issued in conjunction with the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. The "Centennial Envelope-Making Machine," which made the envelopes that were sold on site, was one of the most popular displays at the exposition. Centennial envelopes could also be special-ordered from Postmasters nationwide from May 1876 until the exhibition ended that November. More than nine million envelopes were sold, including nearly 700,000 at the exposition's temporary Post Office branch.

Postal cards, known today as stamped cards, carry pre-printed postage, unlike privately produced postcards, which do not bear postage.

Austria issued the first postal card in 1869. The United States Post Office Department issued its first postal card in Springfield, Massachusetts, on May 12, 1873, and in other cities the next day. The public responded enthusiastically. *The New York Times* reported that on the first day of issue, postal clerks in New York City sold 200,000 cards in two and a half hours. Nationwide, customers bought more than 31 million postal cards in the first two months. The cards were popular not only with individuals, but also with businesses and organizations. For example, banks mailed them to customers to acknowledge deposits; libraries used them to send overdue notices. The annual number of mailed postal cards peaked in 1950 at more than 3.4 billion. They remained more popular than postcards until the mid-1960s.

On May 27, 1966, the Post Office Department issued its first postal card with illustrations on the back (address) side, the Visit the USA international postal card. On July 29, 1972, the Postal Service issued its first postal cards with pictures on the front, the Tourism Year of the Americas — '72 postal card set.

In 1989, the Postal Service issued its first glossy picture postal cards with the release of two cards celebrating two Washington, D.C., landmarks: the White House (on November 30) and the Jefferson Memorial (on December 2). On October 18, 1994, the first postal card sets with collectible artwork were issued, featuring the Legends of the West stamp images.

On January 10, 1999, the Postal Service changed the term for postal cards to "stamped cards" and added a charge for the cost of their manufacture. In 2007, the term for stamped cards with collectible artwork was changed to "premium stamped cards"; they are sold at a higher price than regular stamped cards.

Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee

The Post Office Department's Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee was established March 21, 1957, to provide a breadth of judgment and depth of experience in various areas that influence the subject matter, character, and beauty of postage stamps.[114] As announced in the *Federal Register* of Tuesday, March 26, 1957:

> *The Stamp Advisory Committee shall advise the Post Office Department on any matters pertaining to the subject matter, design, production and issuance of postage stamps.*

The postcard handwritten message (left card) reads:

Attended the Metropolitan M.E. Church today. The one Genl. Bros. Grant + Geo. Mc Kinley attended. Mc Pres. Fairbanks. Very fine. I saw Pres. Fairbanks worshipped there this a.m. and I had the pleasure of shaking hands with him after service. He looked down at me (I was very tired) and graciously said he "was very pleased to meet me" wonder if he was. I heard some one say this is 500 ft. high.

Expect to go to the top of this monument in a day or two. Will climb the stairs if the elevator is not running.
Mch - 5 - 1905.   *F. M. J.*

— WASHINGTON MONUMENT —

Postcard Mailed in 1905
Congress approved a special one-cent rate for postcards beginning July 1, 1898. Before then, postcards cost as much to mail as letters. Until March 1, 1907, postal regulations prohibited written messages on the address side of postcards.

The initial seven-member committee was appointed by Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield on March 26, 1957. The first meeting of the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Commitee was opened by Postmaster General Summerfield on April 30, 1957. Those serving were Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency Abbott Washburn, along with three well-known philatelists — Franklin R. Bruns, Jr., Sol Glass, and Harry L. Lindquist — and three artists — Arnold Copeland, president of Westport Artists, Inc.; Ervine Metzl, president of the Society of Illustrators; and William H. Buckley, president of the New York Art Directors Club. Bruns served as the first chairman.

The artists were enthusiastic about using the skills of members from their groups to help design United States postage stamps. (The combined memberships of the three groups represented by the artists included an estimated 95 percent of all commercial artists in the country.) All three artists played an important role in improving postage stamp designs by helping the Post Office Department transition to commercial artists instead of relying upon the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Today, the committee consists of members appointed by the Postmaster General, who also appoints the chairman. The members share a respect for philately and are experts on history, science and technology, art, education, sports, or other subjects of public interest.

The committee meets four times a year to review suggestions for new postage stamps. The Postal Service receives as many as 40,000 proposals each year and every proposal is considered. The committee's primary goal is to select

subjects that are both interesting and educational for recommendation to the Postmaster General, who decides which stamps will be issued.

Besides recommending new subjects for commemorative stamps each year, the committee also suggests subjects for the extensive line of regular stamps. The committee considers the interests of stamp collectors as well as all citizens, and looks for subjects that will stand the test of time, be consistent with public opinion, and have broad national appeal. More information on the committee is available at *about.usps.com*.

Stamp Collecting

Stamp collecting began almost as soon as the first postage stamp was issued in England in 1840. The first recorded collector was reportedly an English lady who advertised in *The [London] Times* in 1841 for a quantity of used stamps to use as wallpaper. In 1845, the British humor magazine *Punch* advised readers that "the cheapest way to furnish a room is to paper it with postage stamps . . . you will only require 33,542 to paper a *small room*." [115]

By the late 1850s, stamp collecting had spread to the United States. Although an article in the September 13, 1860, issue of the *Boston Daily Advertiser* noted that the "elegant and curious 'mania'" was "chiefly indulged by young ladies," the earliest known U.S. collection is that of young New Jersey schoolboy David T. Latimer, who pasted 35 three-cent George Washington stamps onto the inside front cover of his German language textbook circa 1856.

Stamp collecting grew more popular in the U.S. in 1861, when stamps were demonetized soon after the start of the Civil War. In June 1862, James Holbrook noted in his monthly *United States Mail and Post Office Assistant* that, as the old postage stamps were withdrawn from circulation and replaced with new stamps the previous summer,

many persons were suddenly seized with a rage for collecting specimens of each denomination to preserve as curiosities.

Holbrook continued:

It is a well-known fact that a taste for the collection of rarities once formed… is not easily appeased.

He went on to describe the chaotic scene of collectors clamoring for new specimens near the entrance of the New York Post Office:

The neighborhood of the entrance to the New York post-office has become a sort of exchange, where the amateurs and speculators in this singular business, (principally boys) daily congregate.

The World's Largest Stamp Gallery

On September 22, 2013, the William H. Gross Stamp Gallery — the largest stamp gallery in the world — opened at the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. The gallery showcases more than 20,000 objects in six thematic areas, including "World of Stamps," "Gems of Philately," and "National Stamp Salon." It is the only stamp gallery to feature stamps and mail in the context of American history. Among the items on display: a letter addressed to John Hancock postmarked July 4, 1776; stamps from the Kingdom of Hawaii before it became a U.S. state; and a cover postmarked on the moon in 1971.

The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, located next to Union Station, is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except December 25. Admission is free.

They muster in strong force on the arrival of a foreign mail, watch the recipients of letters from abroad, and besiege them with clamorous requests for stamps. We saw the other day a sailor belonging to one of the foreign ships of war in the harbor, who had just received a number of letters, beset by a crowd of urchins, whose urgent appeals he in vain endeavored to comprehend, and who was finally obliged to take flight to escape the bewildering importunities of his persecutors.

The term "philately" originated in 1864 with French collector Georges Herpin, who proposed it as a more attractive alternative to the earlier terms "timbromania" ("stamp madness") and "timbrophily."

As the number of stamps increased, the scope of collectors narrowed. Whereas the first collectors could hope to procure one of every postage stamp ever issued, or stamps from every nation, soon collectors began to specialize, limiting their collections by country, time period, or topic. In 2009, the American Topical Association listed more than 500 popular stamp-collecting topics, from "abacus" to "zoos."

Famous stamp collectors have included President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who not only collected but also helped design stamps during his presidency, and John Lennon, whose stamp album is in the collection of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

Errors, Freaks, and Oddities

The printing of stamps is a complex process, during which any number of things can go awry. When misprints occur, stamp collectors call them "errors," "freaks," or "oddities."

Stamps that have some major, consistent, unintentional deviation from the norm are considered "errors." Types of errors include missing or wrong colors, wrong paper, wrong watermarks, inverted centers or frames on multicolor printing, inverted or missing surcharges or overprints, double impressions, and missing perforations.

Inconsistent or randomly appearing mistakes, such as misperforations or color shifts, are classified as "freaks." "Oddities" are one-of-a-kind misprints, like folded stamps or stamps printed without ink, known as "albinos." Since printing mistakes are expected, stamp shipments are carefully inspected to make sure no printing errors reach the public. Occasionally, a few evade the inspectors. When misprinted stamps are discovered, they are highly coveted by collectors.

One of the most famous errors was the 24-cent Curtiss "Jenny" stamp issued in 1918. This two-color stamp depicts a blue airplane surrounded by a red border, which required two separate passes through the printing press. Savvy collectors knew that each pass through the press increased the chance for errors, and were on the lookout for them. They were not disappointed — several sheets of the "Jenny" were accidentally inverted between passes, making it appear that the airplane was flying upside down. Only one sheet of 100 stamps slipped past inspectors. It was sold to stamp collector William Robey on May 14, 1918, soon after the stamps went on sale. Robey purchased the entire sheet for $24, its face value, and quickly re-sold it for $15,000. In 2018, a single one of these stamps sold at auction for $1,593,000.

In 1962, at least four panes (200 stamps) of the 4-cent Dag Hammarskjöld issue were discovered with an inverted yellow background. Postmaster General J. Edward Day ordered 40 million more of the stamps to be deliberately misprinted, thereby reducing the rarity and value of the originals. Day defended his controversial decision stating, "We are not in the stamp lottery business."[116]

In 1994, a design error was discovered on the Legends of the West issue. The stamp that was supposed to depict bull roper Bill Pickett mistakenly had a portrait of Pickett's brother, Ben. The Postal Service recalled the stamps before the official sale date, planning to destroy the errors, but 183 sheets were inadvertently sold to the public. Postmaster General Marvin Runyon ordered 150,000 more of the erroneous sheets to be sold at face value by lottery to deflate their value. ∎

Making Stamps

Stamp Production at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing
At first, postage stamps were printed by private firms. In 1894, an agreement between the Postmaster General and the Secretary of the Treasury made the Bureau of Engraving and Printing the exclusive printer of postage stamps.

At right, top: *Employees of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing gumming sheets of stamps around 1895.*
At right, below: *Employees coiling postage stamps in the 1920s.*

Modern Production

In 2001, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing printed 4.7 billion United We Stand stamps, which were sold in coils. At the same time, an additional 2.25 billion of the stamps, sold in booklets, were made by private firms, which began printing stamps once more in 1979. The Bureau printed its last postage stamps in 2005. Since then, all postage stamps have been printed by private firms.

At right: An employee of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing inspecting uncut sheets of the United We Stand issue as they emerge from the press in 2001. Below: United We Stand stamp coils, 2001.

UNUSUAL DELIVERY METHODS

Motorcycle Mail, 1914
Two special delivery messengers in Portland, Oregon, pose on their "Flying Merkels" — belt-driven, two-cylinder V-twin motorcycles. The use of motorcycles for mail collection and delivery in cities peaked in the 1920s. Four-wheeled automobiles and trucks, with larger capacities and protection from weather, soon became the vehicles of choice.
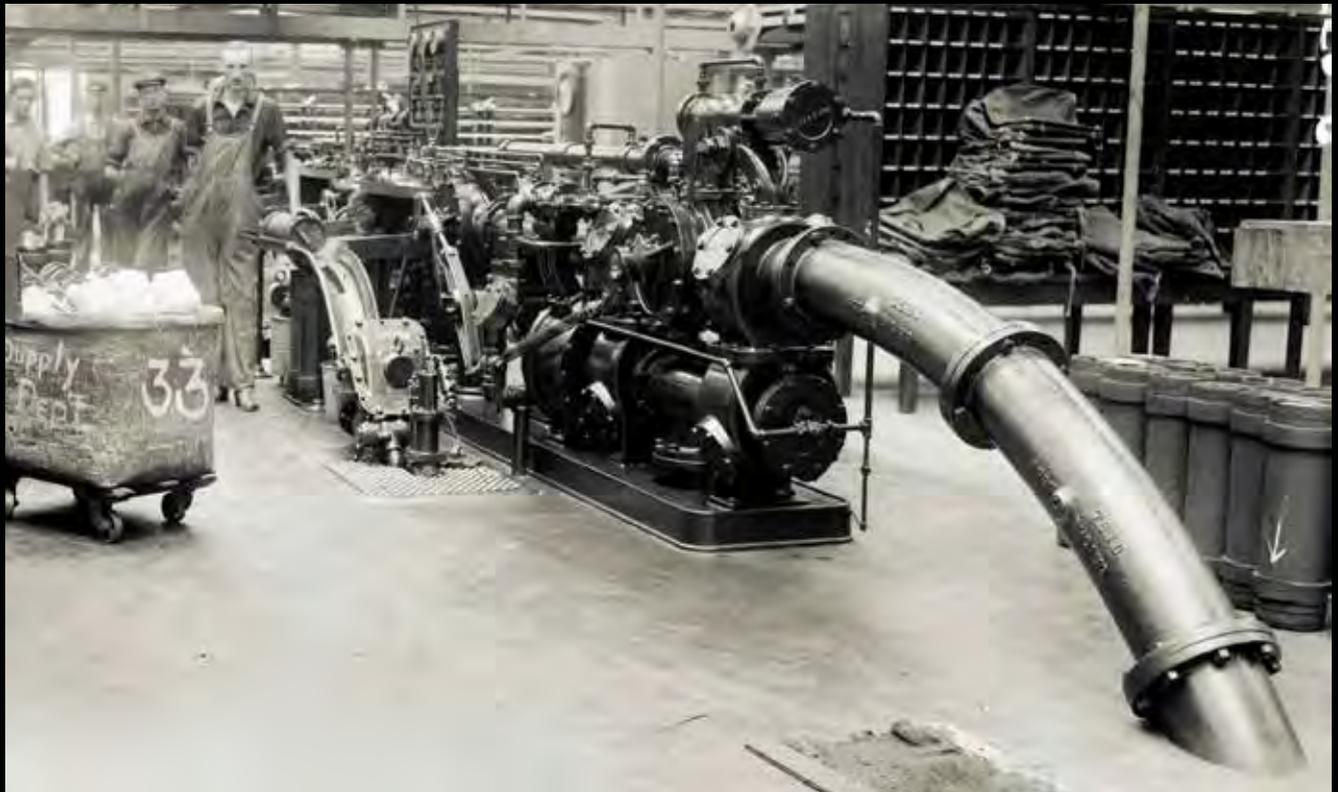
Pneumatic Tube Mail, circa 1915
From the 1890s through the early 1900s, mail zipped between postal facilities beneath the crowded streets of six U.S. cities. Letters were packed into canisters that were propelled by pressurized air through a system of underground pneumatic tubes. The canisters could hold up to 500 letters and hurtled through the tubes at 30 miles per hour. The service fell from favor and was suspended in 1918 as motor vehicles became more efficient. Pneumatic tube service was resurrected in New York City and Boston in the 1920s; it ended in Boston in 1950, and in New York in 1953.

The Autoped, circa 1916

Special delivery messengers in Washington, D.C., circa 1916, model their brand-new Autoped motor scooters, made by the Autoped Company of Long Island City, New York. According to the August 1914 issue of Popular Mechanics *magazine, "There are no pedals or cranks about the machine, which will maintain … an average speed of 20 miles per hour over country roads, with a consumption of gasoline of but one gallon to the 100 miles." The Autoped did not catch on, and production of the vehicle ceased in 1921.*

Ski Mail, 1920

Mail carriers used whatever means necessary to get the mail through. This 1920 Idaho carrier strapped up to 80 pounds of mail on his back and traveled on skis from Rocky Bar to Atlanta, Idaho. His 16-mile route was one of the most dangerous in the country. Between 1892 and 1913, seven carriers lost their lives in snow slides on the route. The body of a carrier who died one January was not found until the following June.

Helicopter Mail, 1946
In October 1946, the Post Office Department conducted a 3-week experiment using helicopters to carry mail in the Chicago area. Chicago received regular helicopter service in 1949. Helicopters also carried mail in Los Angeles and New York. Shuttle service from the roof of the Chicago Post Office ended in 1957 due to the increasing weight of the helicopters.

Mail by Bus, 1952
In 1941, Highway Post Offices (HPOs) made their first appearance when a route was established between Washington, D.C., and Harrisonburg, Virginia, serving more than 20 intermediate Post Offices. Highway Post Offices were similar in function to Railway Post Offices and were created in part due to the decline of mail-carrying trains. Like railway mail clerks aboard trains, clerks onboard HPOs sorted mail en route for transfer to Post Offices and connecting routes. The number of HPOs peaked in 1959, at 172. The increasing number of mechanized mail-sorting facilities in the 1960s and 1970s gradually rendered hand-sorting of mail by traveling clerks obsolete. The last HPO rolled between Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio, on June 30, 1974.

Mule Mail, 1996
The contract mail route to the Havasupai Indian Reservation, Supai, Arizona, far below the southern rim of the Grand Canyon, is the last mule train delivery in the United States. Helicopters and mail drops are impractical here, so a mule train makes the 6- to 8-hour round trip 5 days a week, bringing everything from food to furniture to the reservation.

Missile Mail, 1959

On June 8, 1959, in a move that Postmaster General Arthur A. Summerfield heralded as being "of historic significance to the peoples of the entire world," the Navy submarine USS Barbero *fired a guided missile carrying 3,000 letters towards the naval auxiliary air station in Mayport, Florida.[112] Racing along at up to 600 miles per hour, the guided missile traveled more than 100 miles, from the deck of the submarine off the coast of Florida to the air station, in about 22 minutes. "Before man reaches the moon," Summerfield was quoted as saying, "mail will be delivered within hours from New York to California, to England, to India, or to Australia by guided missiles."[113] History proved otherwise, but this experiment exemplifies the pioneering spirit of the Post Office Department.*

Mail by Hovercraft, 2003

In western Alaska, a hovercraft began carrying mail from the town of Bethel to remote villages along the Kuskokwim River in 1997. The hovercraft usually carries parcels and "bypass mail" — large items such as auto parts and pallets of groceries that bypass Post Offices. When bad weather prohibits flying, the hovercraft also carries First-Class Mail.

DELIVERY IN CITIES: A VISUAL TIMELINE

Letter Carrier Uniforms

City letter carriers were first required to wear a uniform in 1868; the uniform was blue-gray with black trim.
Carriers' uniforms have changed over time to provide greater comfort, especially in hot weather.
For a detailed history of the letter carrier uniform, go to *about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/welcome.htm*.

1888   **Circa 1894**   **1926**   **Circa 1940**

Mail Collection Vehicles

Originally, horse-drawn wagons were used to transport mail in large cities. Automobiles were first tested for mail collection in cities in 1899; they were able to cover the same distance as horse-drawn wagons in less than half the time.

The first contract for mail collection by electric-powered automobile was for service in Minneapolis from January 1901 through June 1903. The first contract for mail collection by gasoline-powered automobile was for service in Baltimore beginning in October 1906. By 1911, "motor wagons" were being used in seven cities; by 1933, only two percent of postal vehicles in cities were horse-drawn.

Screen Wagon, circa 1900

Columbia Automobile, circa 1906

Screen Truck, 1914

The Post Office Department originally painted its motor vehicles red, white, and blue, but changed the color to vermilion red beginning in February 1913, then switched to green, red, and black in October of that year. By 1915 the Department returned to a red, white, and blue color scheme for its vehicles.

Beginning in 1921, when most of the postal fleet consisted of trucks transferred from the War Department, postal vehicles were painted olive drab. The color scheme reverted to red, white, and blue in 1954, and then to white in 1979.

Ford Model A Truck, circa 1930

Chevrolet 3/4 Ton Truck, 1958

2 Ton Truck, 1997

***On The Road* Video**
Watch On the Road, *a 9-minute video chronicling the use of motorized vehicles to move mail in cities. Courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum via its YouTube channel, SmithsonianNPM.*

City Delivery Vehicles

Although some enterprising letter carriers in Los Angeles used their own autos to deliver mail as early as 1912 — cutting their eight-hour workday down to four — the Post Office Department did not motorize city delivery routes until the 1950s, in response to unprecedented suburban growth. The Department had motorized more than half of its residential routes by 1969 with Jeeps, three-wheeled mailsters, and sit-stand trucks. Jeeps were in general use in the 1970s and 1980s. Long-life vehicles — longer lasting, lighter, and roomier than Jeeps — were introduced in 1987. In 2015, the Postal Service began deploying extended-capacity ProMaster delivery vans.

Willys Jeep, 1953

Cushing Mailster, 1958

Sit-stand Truck, 1961

ProMaster Van, 2017
Letter carriers used ProMaster vans, introduced in 2015, for "park and loop," when carriers park a vehicle and make door-to-door deliveries on foot; mail collection; package delivery; and relay drop-offs.

Long-life Vehicle (LLV), 1996

Uniform Badges, 1887–1982

Letter carriers were required to wear a numbered badge on their hat, cap, or helmet beginning in 1887. When wearing a hat became optional in 1972, carriers were directed to wear a badge on their clothing in plain view. Since 1982, letter carriers have not been required to wear a badge.

1887–1922
Several other styles were worn prior to 1922.

1888–1922
Alternate style patented by C.J. Heller in 1888.

1922–1956

1956–1982
The words "Letter Carrier" replaced the city and state in 1956.

Uniform Emblem Patches, 1956–present

An emblem patch featuring the postal seal was added to the letter carrier uniform in 1956. The current patch, featuring the Postal Service's logo — an eagle's head leaning into the wind — was introduced in 1995.

1956–1965

1965–1970

1970–1991

1991–1995

1995–present

POSTMASTERS GENERAL

Megan J. Brennan took office as the nation's 74th Postmaster General on February 1, 2015. She was the first woman appointed to the position.

Shown here is a list of Postmasters General and the names of those who appointed them. Appointments by the President were made with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Dates prior to 1900 are the dates the Postmasters General were appointed or commissioned. Dates after 1900 are the dates they took office.

Benjamin Franklin	July 26, 1775	*Continental Congress*
Richard Bache	November 7, 1776	*Continental Congress*
Ebenezer Hazard	January 28, 1782	*Continental Congress*
Samuel Osgood	September 26, 1789	*George Washington*
Timothy Pickering	August 12, 1791	*George Washington*
Joseph Habersham	February 25, 1795	*George Washington*
Gideon Granger	November 28, 1801	*Thomas Jefferson*
Return J. Meigs, Jr.	March 17, 1814	*James Madison*
John McLean	June 26, 1823	*James Monroe*
William T. Barry	March 9, 1829	*Andrew Jackson*
Amos Kendall	May 1, 1835	*Andrew Jackson*
John M. Niles	May 19, 1840	*Martin Van Buren*
Francis Granger	March 6, 1841	*William Henry Harrison*
Charles A. Wickliffe	September 13, 1841	*John Tyler*
Cave Johnson	March 6, 1845	*James K. Polk*
Jacob Collamer	March 8, 1849	*Zachary Taylor*
Nathan Kelsey Hall	July 23, 1850	*Millard Filmore*
Samuel D. Hubbard	August 31, 1852	*Millard Filmore*
James Campbell	March 7, 1853	*Franklin Pierce*
Aaron V. Brown	March 6, 1857	*James Buchanan*
Joseph Holt	March 14, 1859	*James Buchanan*
Horatio King	February 12, 1861	*James Buchanan*
Montgomery Blair	March 5, 1861	*Abraham Lincoln*
William Dennison	September 24, 1864	*Abraham Lincoln*
Alexander W. Randall	July 25, 1866	*Andrew Johnson*
John A. J. Creswell	March 5, 1869	*Ulysses Grant*
James W. Marshall	July 3, 1874	*Ulysses Grant*
Marshall Jewell	August 24, 1874	*Ulysses Grant*
James N. Tyner	July 12, 1876	*Ulysses Grant*
David M. Key	March 12, 1877	*Rutherford B. Hayes*
Horace Maynard	August 26, 1880	*Rutherford B. Hayes*
Thomas L. James	March 5, 1881	*James A. Garfield*
Timothy O. Howe	December 20, 1881	*Chester A. Arthur*
Walter Q. Gresham	April 3, 1883	*Chester A. Arthur*
Frank Hatton	October 14, 1884	*Chester A. Arthur*
William F. Vilas	March 6, 1885	*Grover Cleveland*
Don M. Dickinson	January 16, 1888	*Grover Cleveland*
John Wanamaker	March 5, 1889	*Benjamin Harrison*
Wilson S. Bissell	March 6, 1893	*Grover Cleveland*

William L. Wilson	March 1, 1895	*Grover Cleveland*
James A. Gary	March 5, 1897	*William McKinley*
Charles Emory Smith	April 21, 1898	*William McKinley*
Henry C. Payne	January 15, 1902	*Theodore Roosevelt*
Robert J. Wynne	October 10, 1904	*Theodore Roosevelt*
George B. Cortelyou	March 7, 1905	*Theodore Roosevelt*
George von L. Meyer	March 5, 1907	*Theodore Roosevelt*
Frank H. Hitchcock	March 6, 1909	*William H. Taft*
Albert S. Burleson	March 5, 1913	*Woodrow Wilson*
Will H. Hays	March 4, 1921	*Warren G. Harding*
Hubert Work	March 4, 1922	*Warren G. Harding*
Harry S. New	March 5, 1923	*Warren G. Harding*
Walter F. Brown	March 6, 1929	*Herbert Hoover*
James A. Farley	March 6, 1933	*Franklin D. Roosevelt*
Frank C. Walker	September 11, 1940	*Franklin D. Roosevelt*
Robert E. Hannegan	June 30, 1945	*Harry S. Truman*
Jesse M. Donaldson	December 16, 1947	*Harry S. Truman*
Arthur E. Summerfield	January 21, 1953	*Dwight D. Eisenhower*
J. Edward Day	January 21, 1961	*John F. Kennedy*
John A. Gronouski	September 30, 1963	*John F. Kennedy*
Lawrence F. O'Brien	November 3, 1965	*Lyndon B. Johnson*
W. Marvin Watson	April 26, 1968	*Lyndon B. Johnson*
Winton M. Blount	January 22, 1969	*Richard M. Nixon*

Appointed by the Governors of the United States Postal Service

Winton M. Blount	July 1, 1971
E. T. Klassen	January 1, 1972
Benjamin F. Bailar	February 16, 1975
William F. Bolger	March 15, 1978
Paul N. Carlin	January 1, 1985
Albert V. Casey	January 7, 1986
Preston R. Tisch	August 16, 1986
Anthony M. Frank	March 1, 1988
Marvin T. Runyon	July 6, 1992
William J. Henderson	May 16, 1998
John E. Potter	June 1, 2001
Patrick R. Donahoe	December 6, 2010
Megan J. Brennan	February 1, 2015

STATISTICS: PIECES AND POST OFFICES

Year	Pieces of Mail Handled	Number of Post Offices	Total Operating Revenue	Total Operating Expenses
1789	…	75	$ 7,510	$ 7,560

Income and expenses listed for 1789 are for three months only.

Year	Pieces of Mail Handled	Number of Post Offices	Total Operating Revenue	Total Operating Expenses
1790	…	75	37,935	32,140
1795	…	453	160,620	117,893
1800	…	903	280,804	213,994
1805	…	1,558	421,373	377,367
1810	…	2,300	551,684	495,969
1815	…	3,000	1,043,065	748,121
1820	…	4,500	1,111,927	1,160,926
1825	…	5,677	1,306,525	1,229,043
1830	…	8,450	1,850,583	1,932,708
1835	…	10,770	2,993,556	2,757,350
1840	…	13,468	4,543,522	4,718,236
1845	…	14,183	4,289,842	4,320,732
1850	…	18,417	5,499,985	5,212,953
1855	…	24,410	6,642,136	9,968,342
1860	…	28,498	8,518,067	14,874,601
1865	…	28,882	14,556,159	13,694,728
1870	…	28,492	18,879,537	23,998,838
1875	…	35,547	26,791,314	33,611,309
1880	…	42,989	33,315,479	36,542,804
1885	…	51,252	42,560,844	50,046,235
1890	4,005,408,000	62,401	60,882,098	66,259,548
1895	5,134,281,000	70,064	76,983,128	87,179,551
1900	7,129,990,000	76,688	102,353,579	107,740,268
1905	10,187,506,000	68,131	152,826,585	167,399,169
1910	14,850,103,000	59,580	224,128,658	229,977,225

Year	Pieces of Mail Handled	Number of Post Offices	Total Operating Revenue	Total Operating Expenses
1915	…	56,380	$ 287,248,165	$ 298,546,026
1920	…	52,641	437,150,212	454,322,609
1925	…	50,957	599,591,478	639,281,648
1930	27,887,823,000	49,063	705,484,098	803,667,219
1935	22,331,752,000	45,686	630,795,302	696,503,235
1940	27,749,467,000	44,024	766,948,627	807,629,180
1945	37,912,067,000	41,792	1,314,240,132	1,145,002,246
1950	45,063,737,000	41,464	1,677,486,967	2,222,949,000
1955	55,233,564,000	38,316	2,349,476,528	2,712,150,214
1960	63,674,604,000	35,238	3,276,588,433	3,873,952,908
1965	71,873,166,000	33,624	4,483,389,833	5,275,839,877
1970	84,881,833,000	32,002	6,472,737,791	7,982,551,936

Effective July 1, 1971, the Post Office Department was transformed into the United States Postal Service, an independent establishment of the executive branch of the Government of the United States.

Year	Pieces of Mail Handled	Number of Post Offices	Total Operating Revenue	Total Operating Expenses
1971	86,983,000,000	31,947	8,751,484,000	8,955,264,000
1975	89,265,979,000	30,754	11,548,104,000	12,574,205,000
1980	106,311,062,000	30,326	18,752,915,000	19,412,587,000
1985	140,097,956,000	29,557	28,705,691,000	29,207,201,000
1990	166,300,770,000	28,959	39,654,830,000	40,489,884,000
1995	180,733,700,000	28,392	54,293,500,000	50,730,200,000
2000	207,882,200,000	27,876	64,539,900,000	62,992,000,000
2005	211,742,700,000	27,385	69,907,400,000	68,283,000,000
2010	170,859,000,000	27,077	67,052,000,000	75,426,000,000
2015	154,157,000,000	26,615	68,928,000,000	73,826,000,000
2019	142,570,000,000	26,362	71,154,000,000	79,879,000,000

History of Postage Rates

Rates for Domestic Letters, 1792–1863

Rates listed were for a "single letter," defined as consisting of one sheet of paper until July 1, 1845, and thereafter as weighing ½ ounce or less, regardless of

Effective Date	Distance	Postage, in Cents
June 1, 1792	not over 30 miles	6
	over 30 and not exceeding 60 miles	8
	over 60 and not exceeding 100 miles	10
	over 100 and not exceeding 150 miles	12.5
	over 150 and not exceeding 200 miles	15
	over 200 and not exceeding 250 miles	17
	over 250 and not exceeding 350 miles	20
	over 350 and not exceeding 450 miles	22
	over 450 miles	25
May 1, 1799	not over 40 miles	8
	over 40 and not exceeding 90 miles	10
	over 90 and not exceeding 150 miles	12.5
	over 150 and not exceeding 300 miles	17
	over 300 and not exceeding 500 miles	20
	over 500 miles	25
February 1, 1815	all distances	50% increase (to pay for the War of 1812)

Rates for Domestic Letters, 1863–2019

Effective Date	Postage, in cents Per ½ Ounce		Effective Date	Postage, in cents Per Ounce*
July 1, 1863	3		July 1, 1885	2
October 1, 1883	2		November 2, 1917	3
			July 1, 1919	2
			July 6, 1932	3
			August 1, 1958	4
			January 7, 1963	5
			January 7, 1968	6
			May 16, 1971	8
			March 2, 1974	10
			December 31, 1975	13

Prior to the transformation of the Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service effective July 1, 1971, low postage rates were subsidized by Congress.

the number of sheets. "Double letters" were charged double. Not included in this chart are rates for ship and steamboat letters and drop letters (for local delivery), which were assigned different rates. The last rates listed were effective until July 1, 1863.

Effective Date	Distance	Postage, in Cents
April 1, 1816	*all distances*	increase repealed
May 1, 1816	*not over 30 miles*	6
	over 30 and not exceeding 80 miles	10
	over 80 and not exceeding 150 miles	12.5
	over 150 and not exceeding 400 miles	18.5*
	over 400 miles	25
July 1, 1845	*not over 300 miles*	5
	over 300 miles	10
July 1, 1851	*not over 3,000 miles*	3 *if prepaid*, 5 *if not prepaid*
	over 3,000 miles	6 *if prepaid*, 10 *if not prepaid*
April 1, 1855	*not over 3,000 miles*	3 *(prepayment required)*
	over 3,000 miles	10 *(prepayment required)*

** increased to 18.75 by the
Act of March 3, 1825*

Effective Date	Postage, in cents *Per Ounce**	Effective Date	Postage, in cents *Per Ounce**
May 29, 1978	15	**May 14, 2007**	41
March 22, 1981	18	**May 12, 2008**	42
November 1, 1981	20	**May 11, 2009**	44
February 17, 1985	22	**January 22, 2012**	45
April 3, 1988	25	**January 27, 2013**	46
February 3, 1991	29	**January 26, 2014**	49
January 1, 1995	32	**April 10, 2016**	47
January 10, 1999	33	**January 22, 2017**	49
January 7, 2001	34	**January 21, 2018**	50
June 30, 2002	37	**January 27, 2019**	55
January 8, 2006	39		

*Since September 14, 1975, additional ounces have been charged at a lower rate. Since July 15, 1979, a surcharge has been added for non-standard envelope sizes.

Rates for Stamped Cards and Postcards, 1873–2019

Postcards (privately manufactured cards) were charged letter postage rates until July 1, 1898. Since then, the rates for postcards have been the same as for stamped cards (produced by the Postal Service) except for the period from April 15, 1925, to July 1, 1928.

Until 1999, stamped cards were called postal cards. On January 10, 1999, the Postal Service changed the term to stamped cards and added a charge for the cost of their manufacture.

In addition to regular stamped cards, in 1994 the Postal Service began selling higher-cost stamped cards with collectible artwork, called premium stamped cards since 2007.

Effective Date	Postage, in Cents
May 12, 1873	1
November 2, 1917	2
July 1, 1919	1
April 15, 1925	1 *for stamped cards*, 2 *for postcards*
July 1, 1928	1
January 1, 1952	2
August 1, 1958	3
January 7, 1963	4
January 7, 1968	5
May 16, 1971	6
March 2, 1974	8
September 14, 1975	7
December 31, 1975	9
May 29, 1978	10
March 22, 1981	12
November 1, 1981	13
February 17, 1985	14
April 3, 1988	15
February 3, 1991	19
January 1, 1995	20
July 1, 2001	21
June 30, 2002	23
January 8, 2006	24
May 14, 2007	26
May 12, 2008	27
May 11, 2009	28
April 17, 2011	29
January 22, 2012	32
January 27, 2013	33
January 26, 2014	34
May 31, 2015	35
April 10, 2016	34
January 21, 2018	35

Rates for the Pony Express

From July 1, 1861, to October 26, 1861, the Pony Express operated under contract with the U.S. Post Office Department, speeding letters between St. Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco, California, in about 10 days. During this time, the postage rate for letters sent via Pony Express was $1 per ½ ounce versus 3 or 10 cents for letters sent via regular mail, which took about 20 to 26 days.

In its first 15 months of operation, the Pony Express operated as a more costly private express — charging $5 per ½ ounce when it began on April 3, 1860. The rate was cut in half on July 31, 1860, and lowered to $2 per ½ ounce in April 1861.

Rates for Domestic Airmail, 1918–1977

Airmail service began on May 15, 1918, between New York and Washington, D.C, via Philadelphia. By the end of 1920, routes had been established from New York to San Francisco. Airmail as a separate class of mail was officially discontinued on May 1, 1977, although it effectively ended in October 1975, when the Postal Service announced that First-Class postage — which was three cents cheaper — would buy the same or better level of service. By then, transportation patterns had changed, and most First-Class letters were already zipping cross-country via airplane.

Effective Date	Postage
May 15, 1918	24 cents per ounce, of which 10 cents was for special delivery
July 15, 1918	16 cents first ounce and 6 cents each additional ounce, of which 10 cents was for special delivery
December 15, 1918	6 cents per ounce, without special delivery

There was no airmail rate from July 18, 1919, to July 1, 1924. During this time a small percentage of letters were flown at the First-Class rate of 2 cents per ounce.

July 1, 1924	8 cents per ounce, per zone (the zones were New York to Chicago, Chicago to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Cheyenne, Wyoming, to San Francisco)
July 1, 1925	10 cents per ounce for overnight service from New York to Chicago, 8 cents per ounce daytime zone rate
February 15, 1926	**Contract air routes**
	Under 1,000 miles: 10 cents per ounce*
	1,000 to 1,500 miles: 15 cents per ounce*
	over 1,500 miles: 20 cents per ounce*
	plus 5 cents per ounce per zone if carried partly over government routes
	Government routes
	Daytime zone rate: 8 cents per ounce
	New York to Chicago (overnight): 10 cents per ounce
February 1, 1927	10 cents per half-ounce, regardless of distance
August 1, 1928	5 cents first ounce, 10 cents each additional ounce
July 6, 1932	8 cents first ounce, 13 cents each additional ounce
July 1, 1934	6 cents per ounce
March 26, 1944	8 cents per ounce
October 1, 1946	5 cents per ounce
January 1, 1949	6 cents per ounce
	4 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards
August 1, 1958	7 cents per ounce
	5 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards
January 7, 1963	8 cents per ounce
	6 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards
January 7, 1968	10 cents per ounce
	8 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards
May 16, 1971	11 cents per ounce
	9 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards
March 2, 1974	13 cents per ounce
	11 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards
December 31, 1975	17 cents first ounce, 15 cents each additional ounce
	14 cents for airmail postal cards and postcards

Amelia Earhart **Stamp**
Issued July 24, 1963

POSTAL INSIGNIA

Seals

1829 – 1837	Mercury, a post rider, and now the eagle have symbolized the U.S. postal system at various times. In 1782, Postmaster General Ebenezer Hazard used the figure of Mercury, messenger of the gods, in his official seal. Mercury's feet, helmet, and staff had wings, and he was encircled by an inscription that read, in Latin, "Seal of the Office of the General Messenger." By 1824, the inscription was changed to read "Seal of the Genl Post-Office Department," Mercury's right hand was raised, and he was standing on top of a globe. By 1829, "America" was written on the globe.
1837 – 1970	Amos Kendall, in his May 1, 1837, Order of the Postmaster General, moved away from classical, divine imagery when he directed that the official seal of the Post Office Department portray "a Post Horse in speed, with Mail-bags and rider, encircled by the words 'Post Office Department, United States of America.'" The energy and effort of a human on a gallant horse served as the seal of the Post Office Department from 1837 through 1970.
1970 – Present	When President Nixon signed the *Postal Reorganization Act* into law on August 12, 1970, the bald eagle became the center of the Postal Service seal. The eagle was poised for flight on a white field, above red and blue bars framing the words "U.S. Mail," which were in black. The ochre border featured the words "United States Postal Service" on three sides and nine five-pointed stars at the base. (The number of stars had no special significance.)
Logo 1993 – Present	On October 12, 1993, Postmaster General Marvin Runyon unveiled a new corporate logo: an eagle's head in white, leaning into the wind, on a blue background. The 1993 corporate logo became a registered trademark on September 12, 1995. However, the logo has not replaced the 1970 postal seal as the official seal of the United States Postal Service.

Inscriptions

Contrary to popular belief, the United States Postal Service has no official motto. However, a number of postal buildings contain inscriptions, the most familiar of which appear in New York City and Washington, D.C.

At the former New York City Post Office, at 8th Avenue and 33rd Street, these words appear:

Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.

These words were adapted from a translation of the works of Herodotus, who chronicled the wars between the Greeks and the Persians around 500 B.C. The Persians operated a system of mounted postal couriers who performed with great fidelity.

Another inscription can be found on the former Washington, D.C., Post Office, at Massachusetts Avenue and North Capitol Street, now the site of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum:

Messenger of Sympathy and Love   *Carrier of News and Knowledge*
Servant of Parted Friends   *Instrument of Trade and Industry*
Consoler of the Lonely   *Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance*
Bond of the Scattered Family   *Of Peace and of Goodwill*
Enlarger of the Common Life   *Among Men and Nations*

The original words were penned by Dr. Charles W. Eliot, former president of Harvard University, and were changed slightly by President Woodrow Wilson before being inscribed on the building.

RESEARCH SOURCES

See also U.S. Postal Service Publication 119, *Sources of Historical Information on Post Offices, Postal Employees, Mail Routes, and Mail Contractors*, listed in the bibliography and available online at *about.usps.com*.

American Philatelic Research Library

100 Match Factory Place
Bellefonte PA 16823-1367
stamps.org/services/library
The American Philatelic Research Library, the library of the American Philatelic Society, is the largest public philatelic library in the United States. The library publishes a quarterly journal, *Philatelic Literature Review*.

Historian

United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington DC 20260-0012
about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history
The historian maintains Postmaster Finder, the Postal Service's national historic record of Postmasters by Post Office, online at *about.usps.com/who-we-are/postmasterfinder*. The historian can also provide guidance in researching specific aspects of postal history. Upon request, the historian's staff can provide the names and appointment dates of Postmasters who have served at particular Post Offices, Post Office establishment and discontinuance dates, and the dates of any Post Office name changes. Response time varies with the number of requests received. The historian also manages the Postal Service's Library, which contains a collection of historical material including the *Annual Report of the Postmaster General* since 1789, *Postal Laws and Regulations* since 1794, the *United States Official Postal Guide* from 1874 to 1954, and the *Postal Bulletin* since 1880. (Exact titles vary.) The collection is open to the public by appointment. Back issues of some of these publications, digitized by the U.S. Postal Bulletin Consortium, are available online at *uspostalbulletins.com*.

Library of Congress

101 Independence Avenue SE
Washington DC 20540-0002
loc.gov
The Library's Geography and Map Division has early post route, railroad, and other historical maps. Some of these maps have been digitized and can be viewed or downloaded from its website. Visit *loc.gov*, and search for "map collections."

National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20408-0001
archives.gov
The National Archives houses postal records prior to 1971. Some of the records most useful in researching local postal history have been reproduced on microfilm, including National Archives Microfilm Publication M1131, *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, October 1789–1832*; Publication M841, *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832–September 30, 1971* (available on *ancestry.com*); and Publication M1126, *Post Office Department Reports of Site Locations, 1837–1950*. For more information on these and other records, write to the National Archives or visit its website.

National Personnel Records Center

National Archives and Records Administration
ATTN: Archival Programs
Post Office Box 38757
St. Louis, MO 63138-0757
archives.gov/st-louis/civilian-personnel
The National Personnel Records Center has personnel records for many postal employees whose service ended after 1910. Researchers should provide as much identifying information as possible about the former employee and his/her place and dates of employment. The Center also houses rural route cards, filed by Post Office, which provide details on rural routes and carriers prior to 1971. *Note:* To request the personnel records of an employee whose service ended after 1951, write to the National Personnel Records Center, Annex; 1411 Boulder Boulevard; Valmeyer, IL 62295-2603. For more information, visit *archives.gov/st-louis/civilian-personnel*.

National Postal Museum

Smithsonian Institution
2 Massachusetts Avenue NE
MRC 570 PO Box 37012
Washington DC 20013-7012
postalmuseum.si.edu

The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum offers exhibits tracing the history of the postal system in the United States. It houses nearly six million postal-related items — mostly stamps, but also postal stationery, greeting cards, covers and letters, mailboxes, postal vehicles, handstamps, metering machines, patent models, uniforms, badges, and other objects related to postal history and philately. The museum's library, with more than 40,000 volumes and manuscripts, is open to the public by appointment. In 2013, the William H. Gross Stamp Gallery — the largest in the world — opened at the museum.

Postal History Foundation Museum and Library

920 North 1st Avenue
Tucson, AZ 85719-4818
postalhistoryfoundation.org

The Postal History Foundation operates a museum with displays of postal artifacts, and also the Slusser Memorial Philatelic Library, which has more than 30,000 publications, photographs, maps, and other items relating to philately and postal history. The library's archival collections focus on the postal history of Arizona and the American Southwest.

Railway Mail Service Library

117 East Main Street
Boyce VA 22620-9639
railwaymailservicelibrary.org

The Railway Mail Service Library has artifacts, mail route schedules, schemes of mail distribution, and publications relating to the railway mail service/postal transportation service. The library is open by appointment but handles most requests by mail.

NOTES

1. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 2:208.

2. Thomas Jefferson to John Tyler, June 28, 1804, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* Volume XI, edited by Albert Ellery Bergh (Washington, DC: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), 33.

3. The year of Neale's grant is given according to the current, Gregorian calendar. Neale's grant was dated February 17, 1691, under the old, Julian calendar.

4. William Goddard's petition to the Continental Congress, September 29, 1774, in the collection of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

5. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 2:57.

6. George Washington to John Jay, July 18, 1788. Letter. From Library of Congress, *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799, Series 2: Letterbooks 1754–1799, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html* (accessed February 25, 2003).

7. Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, September 27, 1789, in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Vol. III, Fifth Series (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1877), 192.

8. *United States Statutes At Large*, Volume 1, page 70 (1 Stat. 70).

9. 1 Stat. 178 and 1 Stat. 218.

10. 1 Stat. 232.

11. 1 Stat. 354.

12. Ebenezer Hazard to the Continental Congress, November 14, 1776, in *American Archives,* Fifth Series, 3:681 (New York, NY: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972) (originally by Peter Force, Washington, DC, 1853).

13. Ebenezer Hazard to Rev. John Witherspoon, November 14, 1776, in ibid., 681–682.

14. Benjamin Franklin was born on January 17, 1706, according to the current, Gregorian calendar. He was born on January 6, 1705, under the old, Julian calendar.

15. Benjamin P. Thomas, "Lincoln the Postmaster," *Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association* (Springfield, IL), No. 31, June 1933, 7–8.

16. 17 Stat. 283.

17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, The Henry Reeve Text as Revised by Francis Bowen, Now Further Corrected and Edited with Introduction, Editorial Notes, and Bibliographies by Phillips Bradley* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 1:317.

18. 12 Stat. 704.

19. 1 Stat. 236.

20. 5 Stat. 735.

21. 2 Stat. 805.

22. 3 Stat. 220.

23. 3 Stat. 767.

24. *Annual Report of the Postmaster General,* 1835, in *Public Documents Printed by Order of the Senate of the United States, First Session of the Twenty-Fourth Congress, Begun and Held at the City of Washington, December 7, 1835, and in the Sixtieth Year of the Independence of the United States*, Volume 1, Number 1 (Washington, DC: Gales & Seaton, 1836), 394.

25. In 1847, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Navy to enter into contracts with private companies for the construction and operation of mail-carrying steamships. The plan was for the steamships to be convertible to warships if the need arose. Congress' intent was to simultaneously upgrade the U.S. naval fleet, provide mail service to California, and subsidize American steamship companies so they could better compete with England's successful Cunard line.

26. 11 Stat. 190.

27. *New York Times*, June 25, 1857, 4.

28. Walter B. Lang, editor, *The First Overland Mail: Butterfield Trail, St. Louis to San Francisco 1858-1861* (unknown binding, 1940), 129.

29. U.S. Post Office Department, *History of the Railway Mail Service; A Chapter in the History of Postal Affairs in the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1885), 28.

30. Ibid., 41.

31. 5 Stat. 738.

32. U.S. Post Office Department, *Proposals for Carrying the Mail in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut* (Washington, DC: C. Alexander, Printer, 1853), 164–166.

33. *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1859, 16.

34. Ibid., 1860, 2.

35. Circa 1930 U.S. Post Office Department memorandum, files, USPS Historian.

36. *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1862, 32.

37. In 1879 eligibility for free city delivery was extended to include any town with at least 20,000 residents within its corporate limits or any Post Office with at least $20,000 in annual revenue, and in 1887 to include any town with at least 10,000 residents or Post Office with at least $10,000 in annual revenue. In 1948 the population requirement was dropped to 2,500 as long as the area served was at least 50 percent improved with houses. In 1972, "750 possible deliveries" was added as an alternative minimum population requirement (*Postal Service Manual* Issue 41, October 16, 1972).

38. 12 Stat. 703.

39. *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1922, 24.

40. Ibid., 1950, 28.

41. A small percentage of rural customers have received triweekly service, getting mail every other day. Also, a few cities have chosen to receive mail on Sunday instead of Saturday. For example, Loma Linda, California, with a large Seventh-Day Adventist population that observed the Sabbath on Saturday, received mail on Sunday instead of Saturday until April 23, 2011.

42. Commission on Postal Service, *Report of the Commission on Postal Service*, Volume 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), 6.

43 94 Stat. 2607.

44 Committee Chairman Edwin A. Neiss to Postmaster General Will H. Hays, Aug. 24, 1921, vertical files, USPS Corporate Library.

45 U.S. Post Office Department, *Supervision of City Delivery Service* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1930), 8.

46 *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1891, 84.

47 Ibid., 86.

48 Ibid., 1902, 129.

49 Ibid., 1897, 112–114.

50 Ibid., 1901, 122. Locks on rural mailboxes have always been optional; initially carriers used master keys to open locked boxes. Since May 28, 1981, rural carriers have delivered mail into locked boxes through slots.

51 Ibid., 1902, 101.

52 Ibid., 1929, 26.

53 National Archives Microfilm Publication M1126, *Post Office Department Reports of Site Locations, 1837–1950*, Roll # 264, application to establish the Keyser's Ridge Post Office in Allegany County, Maryland, dated February 23, 1850, on form printed in 1840s. The same language also appears on the application to establish the Pipe Creek, Bandera County, Texas, Post Office, dated August 26, 1873 (ibid., Roll # 565).

54 Ibid., Roll # 580, application to establish the Burleson, Johnson County, Texas, Post Office, dated November 21, 1881.

55 Ibid., application to establish the Donald, Johnson County, Texas, Post Office, dated July 21, 1892.

56 *First Report of the United States Board on Geographic Names, 1890–1891* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1892), 2.

57 Ibid., 5.

58 *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1896, 43.

59 *Postal Operations Manual, POM Issue 9, July 2002, Updated with Postal Bulletin Revisions Through October 30, 2017*, part 123.413e, *http://blue.usps.gov/cpim/ftp/manuals/pom/pomtc. pdf* (accessed December 28, 2017).

60 37 Stat. 539.

61 The weight limit for parcels going to nearby addresses was increased to 20 pounds on August 15, 1913, and on January 1, 1914, the weight limits were increased to 50 pounds for parcels to nearby addresses and 20 pounds for parcels traveling further. On July 1, 1915, the size limit was increased to 84 inches. Beginning on March 15, 1918, weight limits were increased to 70 pounds for parcels to nearby addresses and 50 pounds for parcels traveling further. The weight and size limits of all parcels, regardless of destination, were raised to 70 pounds and 100 inches on August 1, 1931.

62 U.S. Post Office Department, *The Postal Bulletin*, No. 11925, April 9, 1919.

63 William C. Hopson to Second Assistant Postmaster General, April 11, 1921, Air Mail Service Personnel Files, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

64 Hopson to Duard B. Colyer, Air Mail Service, September 4, 1920, Air Mail Service Personnel Files, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

65 D. B. Colyer, *News Letter. Week Ending September 26, 1925*, Air Mail Service, Omaha, Nebraska, September 26, 1925, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

66 Hopson to Colyer, May 1, 1925, Air Mail Service Personnel Files, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

67 Rita Lloyd Moroney, "Above and Beyond," *The Encyclopedia of Aviation and Space Sciences* (Chicago: New Horizons Publishers, Inc., 1967), 77.

68 Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Freedom of the Human Spirit Shall Go On," Address at the Dedication of National Gallery of Art, March 17, 1941. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, *http://www.presidency.ucsb. edu/ws/index.php?pid=16091* (accessed February 5, 2007).

69 Sometimes referred to as the "Zone Improvement Plan Code."

70 Post Office Department Release Number 264, October 13, 1959, "Statement by Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield."

71 U.S. House. Hearings, Committee on Appropriations. Subcommittee on Departments of Treasury and Post Office and Executive Office of the President. 90th Congress, 1st session, 27 February 1967 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1967), 5.

72 Ibid., 27.

73 *Towards Postal Excellence: The Report of the President's Commission on Postal Organization* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982), iii.

74 Ibid., 34.

75 Ibid., 33.

76 84 Stat. 719.

77 In 1970, when the Board was established, the first nine appointments were for staggered terms of one to nine years. Subsequent appointments were made for a full nine years or, when vacancies occurred, for the remainder of the unexpired terms.

78 United States Postal Service, *Comprehensive Statement on Postal Operations*, 1995, 28.

79 David M. Walker, *U.S. Postal Service: Financial Outlook and Transformation Challenges* (GAO-01-733T, May 15, 2001), 2. Testimony. From United States General Accountability Office, Reports and Testimony, *http://www.gao.gov/new.items/ d01733t.pdf* (accessed September 15, 2006).

80 *USPS News Link*, October 30, 2001, files, USPS Historian.

81 Public Law 109-435; 120 Stat. 3198.

82 United States Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-958T, August 6, 2009, *U.S. Postal Service: Restructuring Urgently Needed to Achieve Financial Viability*, Highlights.

83 United States Government Accountability Office, GAO-11-759T, June 15, 2011, *U.S. Postal Service: Dire Financial Outlook and Changing Mail Use Require Network Restructuring*, Highlights.

84 Statement of Postmaster General/CEO Patrick R. Donahoe before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, U.S. Postal Service & Labor Policy, United States House of Representatives, March 27, 2012, *http://about.usps.com/news/testimony/2012/ pr12_pmg0327.pdf* (accessed January 15, 2013).

85 Statement of Postmaster General Megan J. Brennan before the Committee on House Oversight and Government Reform, United States House of Representatives, May 11, 2016, *http://about.usps.com/news/testimony/2016/pr16_pmg0511.pdf* (accessed September 9, 2016).

86   Statement of Postmaster General Megan J. Brennan before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Hearing "Accomplishing Postal Reform in the 115th Congress — H.R. 756, the Postal Service Reform Act of 2017," February 7, 2017, *http://about.usps.com/news/testimony/2017/pr17_pmg0207.pdf* (accessed December 29, 2017).

87   Information on postal employees who were also civil rights leaders is available in the paper "African-American Postal Workers in the 20th Century" at *http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/african-american-workers-20thc.pdf*, and the book *There's Always Work at the Post Office: African American Postal Workers and the Fight for Jobs, Justice, and Equality*, by Philip F. Rubio (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

88   Cited by Jerry D. Thompson in *Vaqueros in Blue & Gray* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 2000), 22–23.

89   Ibid., 24.

90   Mary Kavanaugh Oldham Eagle, ed., *The Congress of Women Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition. Chicago, U.S.A., 1893*, Volume II (Chicago, IL: W. B. Conkey Company, Publishers, 1894), 608, *http://books.google.com* (accessed October 27, 2014).

91   *Triumph of equal school rights in Boston. Proceedings of the presentation meeting held in Boston, December 17, 1855* (Boston, MA: R. F. Wallcut, 1856), 2, 4, *www.hathitrust.org* (accessed February 20, 2015).

92   Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865* (Boston, MA: The Boston Book Company, 1894), frontispiece, *http://books.google.com* (accessed October 27, 2014).

93   John F. Kennedy, "Executive Order 10925 – Establishing the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity," March 6, 1961. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, *http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58863* (accessed December 3, 2010).

94   John F. Kennedy, "Memorandum on Equal Opportunity for Women in the Federal Service," July 24, 1962. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, *http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58863* (accessed May 30, 2007).

95   *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1965), 160.

96   *The Hugh Finlay Journal, Colonial Postal History, 1773–1774* ([s.l.]: U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., c1975), 1.

97   *House Report No. 103*, 23rd Congress, 2nd Session, "Examination of the Post Office Department," February 13, 1835, 194; letter from Postmaster General William Barry, May 5, 1830, *American State Papers: Post Office Department*, 1:256.

98   *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1843, 4.

99   "History of the Inspection Service," *Post Office Inspection Service Survey*, 1954, August, 10–11, and September, 9-10.

100   The five Post Offices were located at Savannah, Georgia; Old Point Comfort, Virginia; Charleston, South Carolina; Mobile, Alabama; and Natchez, Mississippi.

101   *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, 661 (1865).

102   13 Stat. 507.

103   P. H. Woodward, *Guarding the Mails; Or, The Secret Service of the Post-Office Department* (Hartford, CT: J. P. Fitch, 1882), 442.

104   "Mail-Bag Mysteries: How our Country Cousins are 'Taken in and Done for' — Some Ingenious Swindles," *The New-York Times*, June 11, 1871, 6.

105   Woodward, 421–422.

106   *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1879, 17.

107   "Says Poster Snare Got De Autremonts," *The New-York Times*, July 6, 1927, 16. See also ibid., April 24, 1927, XX4, and *The Washington Post*, September 23, 1928, M6.

108   Ponzi promised a 50 percent return on investments from profits made redeeming international reply coupons bought cheaply in war-torn Europe for their greater value in U.S. currency. He continued seeking investors even after he learned the coupons could not be redeemed for cash. Only his earliest investors profited, because they were paid from funds collected from later investors.

109   *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1967, 65.

110   *United States Postal Inspection Service Annual Report*, 1972, 14.

111   *United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General, Five-Year Strategic Plan, FY 2004-2008*. From Office of Inspector General, *http://www.uspsoig.gov/sp_0408.pdf* (accessed March 3, 2006).

112   U.S. Post Office Department, Release No. 149, [June 8, 1959].

113   U.S. Post Office Department, Release No. 23, January 23, 1959.

114   The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee was established by the Postmaster General's Order # 56304.

115   Reprinted in *The New World; a Weekly Family Journal of Popular Literature, Science, Art and New*s, February 8, 1845, 86, *American Periodicals Series Online*, *www.proquest.com* (accessed April 20, 2011).

116   "The World of Stamps: Postmaster's Decision: The Why of Philately," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1962, 169.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1639 Richard Fairbanks' tavern in Boston named repository for overseas mail

1775 Benjamin Franklin was appointed first Postmaster General under Continental Congress

1777 Continental Congress authorized appointment of an inspector of dead letters

1789 Samuel Osgood was appointed first Postmaster General under Constitution

1823 Navigable waters designated post roads by Congress

1829 Postmaster General joined Cabinet

1838 Railroads designated post routes by Congress

1845 Act of Congress created star routes

1847 U.S. postage stamps issued

1853 Stamped envelopes issued

1855 Registered Mail began

— Prepayment of postage required

1858 Street letter boxes installed

1860 Pony Express started

1862 Railway mail service began experimentally

1863 Free city delivery instituted

— Postage rates became uniform, regardless of distance

— Domestic mail divided into three classes

1864 Post Offices categorized by class

— Railway mail service inaugurated

— Postal money order system created

1869 International money orders offered

1872 Congress enacted Mail Fraud Statute

— Congress made Post Office Department an executive department

1873 U.S. postal cards issued

1874 General Postal Union established (later "Universal Postal Union")

1879 Domestic mail divided into four classes

1885 Special delivery began

1887 International Parcel Post instituted

1893 First commemorative stamps issued

1896 Rural free delivery began experimentally

1898 Private postcards given special rate

1900 First stamp booklet issued

1902 Rural free delivery became permanent service

1908 First coil stamps issued

1911 Postal Savings System started

— First carriage of mail by airplane sanctioned by the Post Office Department

1912 Village delivery offered

1913 Parcel Post began

— Insurance offered

— Collect on delivery (COD) offered

1914 Government-owned and -operated vehicle service instituted

1918 Scheduled airmail service began

— Nonprofit second-class rates became effective

1920 Metered postage authorized

1924 Scheduled transcontinental airmail service began

1941 Highway Post Offices started

1942 V-mail inaugurated

1943 Postal zoning system began in 124 large cities

1948 Domestic and International Air Parcel Post inaugurated

1950 Residential deliveries reduced to once a day

1952 Nonprofit third-class rates became effective

1953 Piggy-back mail service by trailers or railroad flatcars started

1955 Certified mail introduced

1957 Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee created

1959 Missile mail dispatched from submarine to mainland Florida

— First joint stamp issued (with Canada)

1960 Facsimile mail offered

1961 Mail Users Councils established (later "Postal Customer Councils")

1963 ZIP Code and sectional center plan implemented

— First tagged stamps issued

1964 First self-service Post Office opened

1965 First optical scanner (ZIP Code reader) installed

— Mailers' Technical Advisory Committee established

1966 Postal Savings System terminated

1967 Presorting by ZIP Code became mandatory for second- and third-class bulk mailers

1968 Priority Mail established as a subclass of First-Class Mail

1969 Patronage eliminated in Postmaster and rural carrier appointments

1970 Postal Reorganization Act signed

— Express Mail began experimentally

— MAILGRAM instituted

1971 United States Postal Service began operations
— Postmaster General became a non-Cabinet position
— Labor contract negotiated through collective bargaining, a first for the federal government
— National service standards established
— Letter cancelled on moon by Apollo 15 mission

1972 Stamps by mail instituted
— Passport applications accepted in Post Offices

1974 Highway Post Offices terminated
— Self-adhesive stamps tested

1975 Post Office class categories eliminated

1976 Discount offered for presorted First-Class Mail

1977 Airmail abolished as a separate rate category
— Express Mail became permanent class of service
— Final run of Railway Post Office on June 30

1978 Discount offered for presorted second-class mail
— Postage stamps and other philatelic items copyrighted

1979 Discount offered for bulk third-class mail presorted to carrier routes
— Postal Career Executive Service (PCES) established

1980 INTELPOST (high-speed international electronic message service) began

1981 Discount offered for First-Class Mail presorted to carrier routes

1982 Automation began with installation of optical character readers
— E-COM (Electronic Computer-Originated Mail) offered
— Last year Postal Service received public service subsidy

1983 ZIP+4 code instituted

1984 Integrated retail terminals introduced

1985 E-COM terminated

1987 Stamps by Phone available
— Multiline optical character readers ordered

1988 Small parcel and bundle sorters deployed

1990 International business reply mail offered
— Easy Stamp allowed computer purchase of stamps
— Independent measurement of First-Class Mail service implemented

1991 Wide area barcode readers added
— Delivery point sequence processing began
— Flat-rate envelopes introduced for Priority Mail and Express Mail

1992 Remote barcoding system introduced
— Stamps sold through automatic teller machines
— Flats barcoded for automation
— Self-adhesive stamps introduced nationwide
— Postal Service began national environmental program

1993 New corporate logo introduced
— Postal Service began selling First Day Covers
— National Postal Museum opened in Washington, D.C.
— Elvis stamp issued (best-selling commemorative)

1994 Postal Service launched public Internet site

1996 Standard Mail category created
— Second-class mail renamed "Periodicals"
— Inspector General appointed
— Postal Service released automated postage software via Internet
— Self-adhesive coil stamps sold
— Flat sorters introduced

1997 Robotic containerization systems deployed
— Linerless self-adhesive coil stamps offered
— Stamps Online instituted

1998 U.S. semipostal stamp issued
— Confirm service tested
— POS (Point of Service) ONE began

1999 Delivery Confirmation launched
— Parcel Select introduced
— PC Postage introduced
— AFSM 100 installed

2001 Business alliance with FedEx formed
— Mail irradiated due to anthrax threat
— Signature Confirmation launched
— Internet change of address instituted

2002 Confirm service became permanent
— Click-N-Ship launched

2003 Civil Service Retirement System funding reform legislation passed
— Repositionable notes authorized on select letter-size mail
— Customized MarketMail introduced
— First negotiated service agreement
— Parcel Return Services began experimentally (later "Parcel Return Service")
— Business alliance with UPS formed

2004 Biohazard detection equipment deployed
— Pay for Performance implemented
— Customized Postage tested
— Carrier Pickup introduced
— Automated Postal Centers deployed
— Priority Mail flat-rate box introduced

2005 Standard Mail volume outpaced First-Class Mail volume
— Post Office Box Lobby Recycling program launched
— Premium Forwarding Service tested

2006 *Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act* signed
— Intelligent Mail barcode introduced
— Intelligent Mail devices with signature capture deployed
— Prototype flats sequencing system tested
— Electronic Verification System introduced

2007 Forever stamp issued

2008 First military discount offered (on Priority Mail packages)
— Commercial Based pricing introduced
— PO Box rental available via *usps.com*
— Free recycling of inkjet cartridges and small electronics by mail at select Post Offices

2009 Commercial Plus pricing introduced
— Performance Based Verification System deployed nationally
— Forever stamped envelope issued (personalized)
— Summer sale for Standard Mail offered
— Select *usps.com* features available on web-enabled mobile devices
— First green roof installed on postal facility
— Priority Mail flat-rate gift envelopes offered
— Free *usps.com* iPhone app offered

2010 USPS mailing products sold at Office Depot
— Direct Mail product sampling tested

2011 Alternate Postage Payment for Greeting Cards tested
— Priority Mail Regional Rates Boxes debuted
— Critical Mail service began
— Reply Rides Free Program offered (one year)
— Forever stamped envelope issued (general issue)
— Some PO Boxes reclassed as competitive
— Free *usps.com* Android and BlackBerry apps offered
— First commercial contract offering postage rebate signed
— Regional ground rate for commercial shippers introduced
— Every Door Direct Mail introduced
— Prepaid Forever flat-rate Priority Mail packaging introduced
— Adult Signature service offered
— Discount first offered on mailings with integrated innovative technology like QR codes
— First Village Post Office opened

2012 USPS BlueEarth Product Carbon Accounting launched
— Forever stamped card issued
— 2nd Ounce Free offered to commercial mailers
— Express Mail flat-rate box introduced
— *gopost* self-service parcel lockers tested
— Picture Permit Indicia Program launched
— POSt Plan began
— Metropost same-day delivery service tested

2013 Intelligent Mail barcode required for automation rates
— Parcel Post reclassified as competitive product and renamed Standard Post
— Carrier Pickup renamed Package Pickup
— Global Forever First-Class Mail international stamp issued
— Premier Post Office certification program launched
— Express Mail renamed Priority Mail Express
— Product Samples promotion offered from August through September
— Sunday delivery of Amazon packages began in select cities
— USPS BlueEarth Federal Recycling launched
— USPS BlueEarth Secure Destruction tested

2014 Mobile Point of Sale devices tested
— Grocery deliveries tested in San Francisco area
— Postage credit offered to new users of Every Door Direct Mail from September 7 through December
— Informed Delivery tested in select locations
— My USPS.com online tool launched
— Sunday package delivery began in high volume areas during holiday season
— Postal Service rated top-performing federal agency in Gallup Poll

2015 First woman Postmaster General took office
— Forever stamps issued for postcards and letters needing additional postage
— Larger residential mailboxes introduced
— Deployment of Mobile Delivery Devices completed

2016 Standard Post renamed USPS Retail Ground

2017 Standard Mail renamed USPS Marketing Mail
— Informed Delivery available nationwide
— First discretionary U.S. semipostal issued

THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

AN AMERICAN HISTORY

Did you know?

- Women have served as Postmasters since 1775?
- Before stamps were invented, postage was usually paid by the addressee?
- The first African American to earn the Medal of Honor also served as a city letter carrier?

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Front cover: Vermont, 1937
*Back cover: Letter carriers, New York City, circa **1950***
Back flap: North Dakota, 1942

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