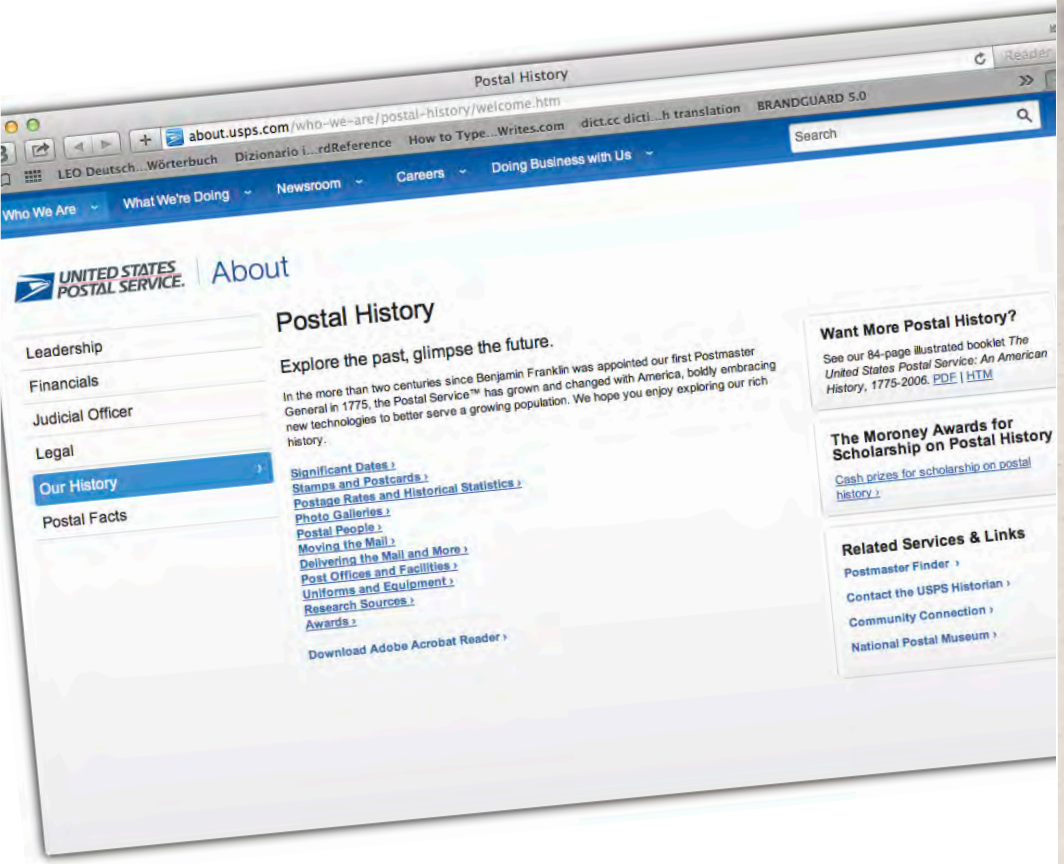
For more information,
visit "Who We Are: Our History," at
about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/welcome.htm.



UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®

THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

More Than Two Centuries of Service

The history

of the United States Postal Service® is an ongoing story of enormous depth and breadth, rooted in a single, great principle: every person in the United States — no matter who, no matter where — has an equal right to secure, reliable, and affordable mail service.

For more than two centuries, the Postal Service™ has delivered on this promise, uniting a diverse nation while continually embracing change.

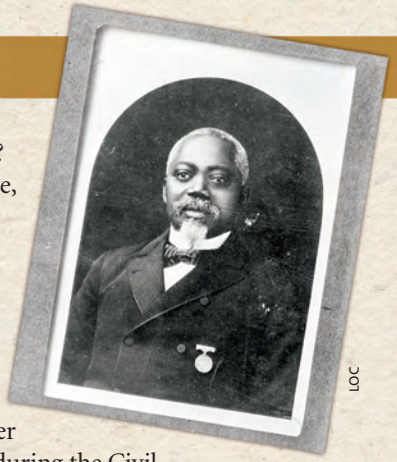
Chronology of Events

1775 Benjamin Franklin appointed first Postmaster General by the Continental Congress
1847 U.S. postage stamps issued
1855 Prepayment of postage required
1858 Street letter boxes introduced
1860 Pony Express began its 18-month run
1863 Free city delivery began
1864 First Railway Post Office™ established and domestic money orders introduced
1873 U.S. postal cards issued
1874 General Postal Union (now Universal Postal Union) established
1893 First commemorative stamps issued
1896 Rural free delivery began
1913 Parcel Post® began
1918 Scheduled airmail service began
1927 Scheduled international airmail service began
1943 Postal zoning system began in largest cities
1950 Residential deliveries reduced to one a day
1963 ZIP Code™ inaugurated
1965 OCR scanner (ZIP Code reader) deployed
1970 Express Mail® began experimentally
1971 United States Postal Service® began operations
1982 Last year Postal Service™ accepted public service subsidy (taxpayer dollars)
1983 ZIP+4® Code began
1992 Self-adhesive stamps introduced nationwide
1998 U.S. semipostal stamp issued
2002 Click-N-Ship™ launched
2007 Forever™ stamp issued
2009 Free usps.com iPhone app offered
2011 Every Door Direct Mail® introduced

Cover and inside front cover images courtesy of Library of Congress (LOC).

Year	Number of Post Offices	Income	Expenses	Pieces of Mail	Pieces of Mail per Capita	Number of Delivery Points *(addresses)*	Number of Career Employees
1900	76,688	$102,353,579	$107,740,268	7,129,990,000	93.4	----	----
1910	59,580	224,128,658	229,977,225	14,850,103,000	161.5	----	----
1920	52,641	437,150,212	454,322,609	----	----	----	----
1930	49,063	705,484,098	803,667,219	27,887,823,000	227.1	----	254,563
1940	44,024	766,948,627	807,629,180	27,749,467,000	210.8	----	266,076
1950	41,464	1,677,486,967	2,222,949,000	45,063,737,000	297.8	----	363,774
1960	35,238	3,276,588,433	3,873,952,908	63,674,604,000	355.1	----	408,987
1970	32,002	6,472,737,791	7,982,551,936	84,881,833,000	417.5	----	548,572
1980	30,326	18,752,915,000	19,412,587,000	106,311,062,000	469.3	----	536,373
1990	28,959	39,654,830,000	40,489,884,000	166,300,770,000	668.6	117,000,000	760,668
2000	27,876	64,540,000,000	62,992,000,000	207,882,200,000	738.7	134,500,000	787,538
2010	27,077	67,052,000,000	75,426,000,000	170,859,000,000	553.4	150,900,000	583,908

Did You Know…?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…THAT women have always served as Postmasters? Mary Katherine Goddard was Postmaster of Baltimore, Maryland, when Benjamin Franklin was named the first American Postmaster General in July 1775, making her the first woman Postmaster in the United Colonies, predecessor of the United States.

…THAT William Carney, the first African American to earn the Congressional Medal of Honor, was also one of the first African Americans appointed a city letter carrier? Carney was awarded the medal for his service during the Civil War at the Battle of Fort Wagner. In 1869, Carney was appointed one of the first letter carriers in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He served in the position until 1901.

…THAT the Pony Express was not operated by the Post Office Department, but by a private company? It ran for 18 months, from April 1860 to October 1861, and operated under contract as a U.S. Mail route during only its final four months. The express was discontinued when the transcontinental telegraph line was completed.

…THAT William Cooper Nell, the earliest known African-American civilian employee of the federal government, was a postal employee? He served as a clerk at the Boston Post Office from 1863 until his death in 1874.

…THAT Roswell Beardsley was the longest-serving Postmaster? He was Postmaster of the North Lansing, New York, Post Office for over 74 years, from 1828 to 1903, serving under 20 Presidents and 34 Postmasters General.

…THAT although it was against postal regulations, several children were "mailed" in the early years of Parcel Post? In 1913, Jesse and Mathilda Beagle sent their 8-month-old son to his grandmother, who lived a few miles away, via U.S. Mail. Baby Beagle was just under the 11-pound limit for parcels. His parents paid the rural carrier 15 cents' postage and insured their "parcel" for $50.

…THAT in 1916, the Postal Service transported nearly 40 tons of bricks through the mail? To save money, W. H. Coltharp had 15,000 bricks mailed from Salt Lake City to Vernal, Utah, in 50-pound packages, to help build the Bank of Vernal. Soon afterwards, postal officials revised regulations to prohibit such large mailings.

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…THAT the last dogsled route in Alaska, from Gambell to Savoonga, was converted to an airplane route in 1963?

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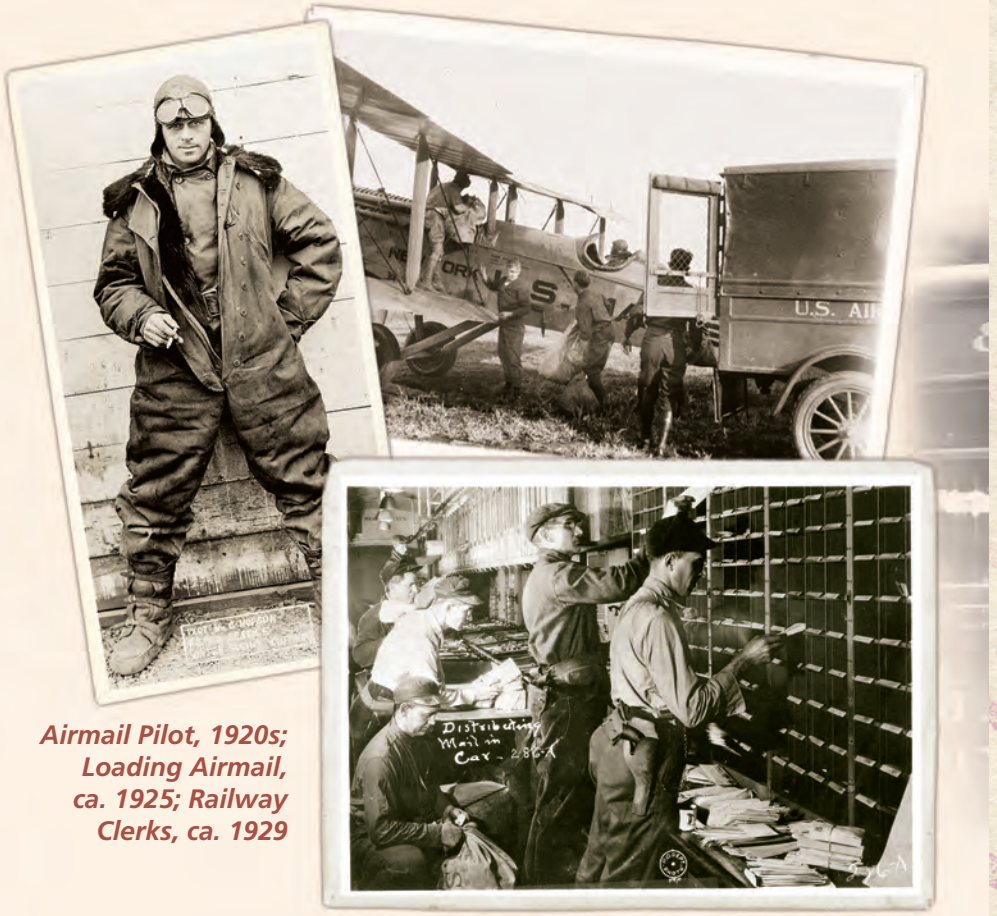
Moving the Mail

To foster travel and commerce, from 1785 to 1845 the Post Office Department favored stagecoaches when awarding mail transportation contracts, as directed by Congress. Stagecoaches carried passengers and freight in addition to U.S. Mail.

When railroads were established in the 1830s, the Department quickly embraced them. Due to railroads' greater speed and reliability, the transit time from New York to New Orleans was reduced from about 18 days in 1835 to just over two days in 1885. From the 1870s to the 1950s, railroads were the primary mode of mail transportation, with trains zipping mail from station to station.

Mail aboard trains not only traveled faster — it traveled smarter. An army of postal workers called "railway mail clerks" rode the rails in specially equipped cars called Railway Post Offices. From 1864 to 1977, railway mail clerks expedited delivery by sorting mail en route as it rumbled to its destination. To save even more time, clerks exchanged mail at smaller Post Offices "on the fly" without the train stopping. Clerks would toss out one pouch of mail and, seconds later, scoop up another pouch — filled



Airmail Pilot, 1920s; Loading Airmail, ca. 1925; Railway Clerks, ca. 1929

Price of a Postage Stamp for First-Class Mail Since 1863

Before 1863, postage rates for letters were based both on the number of sheets or weight of a letter and the distance it traveled.

Until 1971, rates were set by Congress and bore no relation to costs. Congress appropriated funds to make up for annual shortages in postal revenue.

In 1970, Congress transformed the Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service and gave it a self-funding mandate, directing that postal operations be financed from postal revenue.

Since about 1980, postage rates for First-Class Mail® have remained more or less constant in real terms. For example, the rate in 1981, 18 cents, equaled the rate in 2013, 46 cents, after adjusting for inflation.

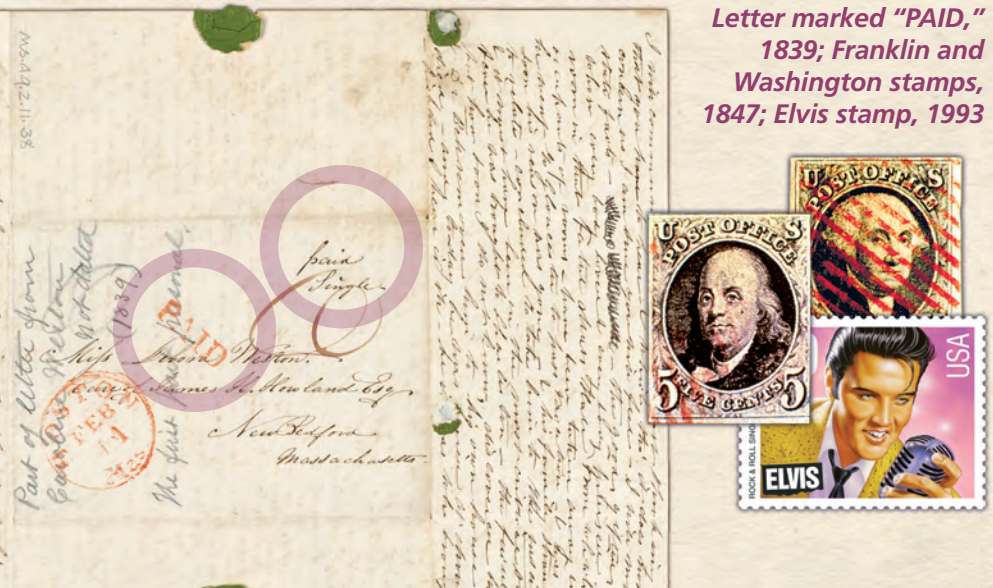
In 2007, the Postal Service issued its first Forever stamp. Since 2011, all First-Class Mail commemorative stamps have been Forever stamps. They will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail one-ounce price.

Effective Date	Rate *in cents*
July 1, 1863	3
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
May 29, 1978	15
March 22, 1981	18
November 1, 1981	20
February 17, 1985	22
April 3, 1988	25
February 3, 1991	29
January 1, 1995	32
January 10, 1999	33
January 7, 2001	34
June 30, 2002	37
January 8, 2006	39
May 14, 2007	41
May 12, 2008	42
May 11, 2009	44
January 22, 2012	45
January 27, 2013	46
January 26, 2014	49

Letter "From Caroline Weston to Deborah Weston; Friday, February 1, 1839," courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library/Rare Books under a CC BY 2.0 license, *www:flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/2653241094*.

Stamped for Success

- Before postage stamps were introduced, Postmasters marked "PAID" on letters if postage was paid in advance, as on the 1839 letter below. Usually, Postmasters marked the amount due on letters, because until prepayment was required in 1855, postage was generally paid by the recipient.
- People rarely used envelopes before July 1845, when two sheets of paper cost twice as much to mail as one. An envelope would have counted as an extra sheet.
- In 1847, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington became the first people to appear on U.S. stamps, followed by Thomas Jefferson in 1856, and Andrew Jackson seven years later. Washington has appeared on more U.S. stamps than any other person.
- The first woman, Hispanic, Native American, and African-American individuals honored on U.S. postage stamps were Martha Washington, David G. Farragut, Pocahontas, and Booker T. Washington.
- The Elvis stamp, issued in 1993, has been the best-selling commemorative stamp to date. Since then, the Postal Service has issued triangular, round, and holographic stamps.
- Stamp collecting in the U.S. has been traced back to around 1856, when David Latimer, a New Jersey schoolboy, pasted 35 three-cent George Washington stamps in his German language textbook.
- In 2013, the William H. Gross Gallery — the largest stamp gallery in the world — opened at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. Images of every U.S. postage stamp are online in the National Postal Museum's Arago™ database, at *arago.si.edu*.
- The American Philatelic Research Library, at *stamplibrary.org*, is the largest philatelic library in the United States.



Letter marked "PAID," 1839; Franklin and Washington stamps, 1847; Elvis stamp, 1993

Stagecoach Ticket, 1843

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with the town's outgoing mail — that was hanging track-side from a special crane. Clerks used a steel rod called a "catcher arm," attached to the side of rail cars, to "catch" specially-designed mailbags.

In 1918, the Post Office Department took to the sky. But whereas with railroads the Department had always contracted with private companies, when airmail started, there was no aviation industry. So the Department created one — building airfields, using its own pilots, planes, and mechanics and fine-tuning flight instruments and navigational aids on the ground. By the end of 1920, airmail routes had been established from New York to San Francisco. Although at first mail was flown only during daylight, the transit time was still nearly a day faster than the cross-country all-rail time. Beginning in 1924, airmail was flown day and night, taking New York mail to San Francisco in about a day and a half. In 1926, the Department began contracting out airmail service, and by the end of the next year all airmail was carried under contract. Many U.S. air carriers — including Delta, American, and United — owe their existence partly to airmail contracts they were awarded in the 1920s and 30s.

Mail Catcher, 1913

Delivering the Mail

Before 1863, postage paid only for the delivery of mail from Post Office to Post Office. That year, Congress authorized the establishment of free city delivery. Within a year, free delivery had been established in 65 cities nationwide. By 1880, 104 cities were served, and by 1900, the service had spread to 796 cities.

Initially, mail carriers hand-delivered mail to customers. By 1912, new customers were required to provide slots or mailboxes, and in 1923, all customers were required to do so.

Free home delivery in the countryside — called "rural free delivery" or RFD — began experimentally in 1896 at a few offices in West Virginia; within a year, routes were operating in 29 states. The popular service was made permanent in 1902. The number of rural carriers climbed from fewer than 500 in 1899 to more than 32,000 just six years later.

Rural delivery eased social isolation by bringing mail directly to farms; before, getting mail required a lengthy trip into town. In 1909, one customer claimed that in his community, rural delivery had "cut down the cases of suicide and insanity among farmers' wives fully 50 percent." Rural delivery also spurred road improvement, since passable roads were required for service.

On New Year's Day 1913, carriers began delivering packages weighing up to 11 pounds via a new service called Parcel Post. The weight limit increased to 20 pounds that same year and soon rose even higher. Previously, four pounds had been the limit. Rural delivery, Parcel Post, and the Sears and Montgomery Wards catalogs were the original "shopportunity." The effect on the national economy was electric. Three hundred million packages were mailed in the first six months of Parcel Post service. The first year, Sears filled five times as many orders as it did the year before.

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City Mailbox, 1920s; Motorcycle Mail, ca. 1911; City Carriers, 1917