

Letter Carriers' Uniform: Buttons

Postmaster General Alexander W. Randall's order of October 31, 1868, describing the first official uniform for letter carriers, specified that the uniform coat have "five brass buttons with the design of the seal of this Department," that the vest have "seven oval brass buttons (vest size) with the letters P.O. on the face," and that the cap have "small size buttons at the sides of the same material and design, as those of the vest . . ." Centered in the middle of the coat button was a likeness of a post rider, a mounted carrier galloping at speed with mailbags on horseback. In 1873, regulations specified that the initials "P.O.D." (for Post Office Department) appear under the rider. Some versions of the button also had the initials "U.S.A." along the top. The vest and cap buttons were smaller and simply had the letters "P.O." raised in the center.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Uniform buttons, 1893-1970. There were minor variations, depending on the manufacturer, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

The 1893 *Postal Laws and Regulations* introduced a new coat button style: in lieu of the post rider, the buttons could feature "a letter carrier in uniform with mail bag on shoulder and letter in uplifted hand." Both images appeared above the initials "P.O.D." The 1893 regulations also changed the vest buttons to read "P.O.D." instead of "P.O." The wording describing the coat button remained unchanged through 1948, the last year the *Postal Laws and Regulations* was published.

Prior to 1942, regulations specified that buttons were to be made of brass. In September 1942, due to a war-time metal shortage, it was ordered that uniform buttons be made out of bluish-gray plastic or another non-metallic material. Brass buttons were re-instated alongside plastic/non-metal buttons beginning in September 1950; by 1955, only brass buttons were allowed.

In 1970, the United States Post Office Department became the United States Postal Service, and a new seal was adopted -- a bald eagle poised for flight above bars framing the words "U.S. Mail," surrounded on three sides by the words "United States Postal Service" and along the bottom by a row of nine stars. Coat, jacket and cap buttons were redesigned to feature the central figure of this new seal -- the eagle and bars framing the words "U.S. Mail." These gold-plated brass buttons were used on coats, jackets, and windbreakers until buttons were phased out in favor of zippers and snaps. As of 2002, they were still available on the policeman-style letter carrier caps.



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Figures 2 & 4: www.eBay.com, online auction site, 2001