

Letter Carriers' Satchels

Leather Satchels, 1868-circa 1974

Photographs of letter carriers from the late nineteenth century show them carrying the mail in leather satchels similar to those issued through 1973.



Carrier with leather satchel, circa 1890.
Collection of Jennifer Lynch;
M. B. Lonergan, photographer.



Carrier with leather satchel, 1973.
Collection of USPS.



Clockwise, from bottom left: bags manufactured by Bona Allen Inc., 1950; Bona Allen Inc., 1970; and Bucheimer, 1966. Collection of USPS Historian.

Canvas Satchels, circa 1974-present

In August 1973, due to the scarcity and high price of leather, the Postal Service announced that when the existing stock of leather satchels was depleted, it would be replaced with canvas satchels. At two pounds each, canvas satchels weighed half as much as the old leather four-pounders but lasted only an average of 18 months, compared to six years or more for the leather versions.

The canvas satchel bore a left-facing eagle logo as early as 1978. The eagle was changed to face right in 1986, but the older style was still in use in 1989, as seen in the photo at left, below. The satchel in the photo at right, below, was in use in 1991. (Collection of USPS.)



The "sonic eagle" logo was added to the satchel in August 1996, and the reflective stripe was added in December 1996. (Both satchels in collection of USPS; Daniel Afzal, photographer.)



Double Canvas Satchel, 1997-present

In October 1997, a double satchel was introduced to more evenly distribute weight. The double satchel was designed to prevent shoulder, back and neck strain, but its use has remained optional. As of 2002, many carriers prefer the traditional single satchel, which offers better protection from charging dogs.



Double satchel, as illustrated in the 1999 edition of USPS Publication 247, *Supply and Equipment Catalog*