

## Postal Inspectors' Badges

Some postal inspectors have worn badges since at least 1900, although their use was rare, given the inspectors' desire for anonymity. Traditionally, postal inspectors' authority and proof of identity has resided in their pocket-size commission or "credential," usually kept in their coat or hip pocket and shown only as needed. Until 1970, some postal inspectors obtained their badges locally, and designs varied.

By 1922, badges were issued to all postal inspectors. On August 30, 1922, the Chief Inspector sent a letter to all inspectors explaining their proper use:

*As a precautionary measure [badges] are issued to all inspectors, but it is believed their use will be justified only in rare instances and that most inspectors, except those employed in cities where there is a large number of foreigners, will probably never find it necessary to show them.*

*Inspectors are prohibited from displaying their badges publicly and are not to exhibit them in private unless other means of identification fail.<sup>1</sup>*

The 1934 *Manual of Instructions for Post Office Inspectors* made no mention of badges. It did, however, contain a section on secrecy, stating that an inspector should "keep his own counsel" and "go quietly about his business, avoiding . . . self-advertisement."<sup>2</sup>

By the 1940s, badges were no longer issued to all inspectors. The 1945 *Manual of Instructions for Post Office Inspectors* contained the following paragraph:

*Inspectors who must deal with people who do not understand the meaning of the commission may request issuance of badges. Very few inspectors need badges. Requests must satisfy the inspector in charge that the need for the badges is real. Inspectors will be expected to give badges the same care as they give their commissions. When no longer needed, badges should be returned to the inspector in charge by registered mail.<sup>3</sup>*

One postal inspector who started work in 1949 did not receive a badge until the early 1960s, about 15 years later.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1970, badges have been routinely issued to postal inspectors. In the early 1970s, postal inspectors were instructed to wear their badge while making arrests and to wear it on their left lapel "when necessary" to identify themselves in Post Office work areas. Inspectors were specifically instructed not to use unofficial or locally prepared badges.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, all postal inspectors are issued badges and are required to carry them along with their credential.<sup>6</sup>

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### Earliest badges?

The star badge, above at left, was pictured on the Chief Inspector's stationery in August 1921; its years of use are unknown. No documentation has been found for the two other badges pictured above. Star badges were worn in 1900 and possibly as late as 1922. By 1924 a shield-shaped badge was in use.<sup>7</sup>



### In use by 1944

Date of introduction and first use unknown. First seen pictured in a collection of postal badges dated October 9, 1944.<sup>8</sup>



### Introduced and in use in 1973

The badge with the eagle seal of the United States Postal Service was introduced in 1973.<sup>9</sup>



### Introduced in 1999; in use by 2000

The badge with the Postal Service's "sonic eagle" design was announced in the November 18, 1999, issue of the *Postal Bulletin*. It was in use by 2000.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Confidential Instructions to Post Office Inspectors*, July 1, 1925, page 75, Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>2</sup> *Manual of Instructions for Post Office Inspectors*, July 1, 1934, 14-15, Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>3</sup> *Manual of Instructions for Post Office Inspectors*, July 1, 1941 (with changes through 1945), chapter 1, section 2, paragraph 1.

<sup>4</sup> Email from Postal Inspector Ronald J. Pry to Jennifer Lynch, May 23, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> *Confidential Instructions to Post Office Inspectors*, December 1970, section 2.4, Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>6</sup> Postal Inspector Tripp Brinkley in a phone conversation with Jennifer Lynch, July 18, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> A postal inspector's "star" badge was mentioned in the July 25, 1900, issue of *The Washington Post*, and a man wearing a five-pointed star on his overcoat was pictured in a group of Chicago postal employees in a circa-1922 photograph album (#1308) in the collection of the USPS Historian. The November 23, 1924, issue of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* referred to an inspector's "shield shaped badge."

<sup>8</sup> Photograph #213 in the collection of the USPS Historian.

<sup>9</sup> *Postal Inspection Service Bulletin*, Summer 1973, front cover.

<sup>10</sup> The new "sonic eagle" badge was worn by inspectors pictured on the cover of the January 2000 *U.S. Postal Inspection Service Directory*.