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## History of the U.S. Postal Service

1775-1993

### Preface

When the Continental Congress named Benjamin Franklin the first Postmaster General in 1775, the United States was a weak confederation of colonies scattered along the eastern seaboard. The postal system that the Congress created helped bind the new nation together, support the growth of commerce, and ensure a free flow of ideas and information.

In the more than two centuries since, the United States and the Postal Service have grown and changed together. Today, the Postal Service fuels the nation's economy and delivers hundreds of millions of messages and billions of dollars in financial transactions each day to eight million businesses and 250 million Americans. The Postal Service is making history, too, as it helps lead the way in making the federal government more businesslike and responsive to customer needs.

This is the story of the evolution of the Postal Service and the role it has played in the development of the United States.



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## Significant Dates in Postal History

- **1639**- Richard Fairbanks' tavern in Boston named repository for overseas mail
- **1775**- Benjamin Franklin, first Postmaster General under Continental Congress
- **1789**- Samuel Osgood, first Postmaster General under Constitution
- **1823**- Navigable waters designated post roads by Congress
- **1825**- Dead letter office
- **1829**- Postmaster General joins Cabinet
- **1830**- Office of Instructions and Mail Depredations established, later Office of the Chief Postal Inspector
- **1838**- Railroads designated post routes by Congress
- **1845**- Star routes

- **1847**- Postage stamps
- **1852**- Stamped envelopes
- **1855**- Registered Mail
- **1855**- Compulsory prepayment of postage
- **1858**- Street letter boxes
- **1860**- Pony Express
- **1862**- Railway mail service, experimental
- **1863**- Free city delivery
- **1863**- Uniform postage rates, regardless of distance
- **1863**- Domestic mail divided into three classes
- **1864**- Post offices categorized by classes
- **1864**- Railroad post offices
- **1864**- Domestic money orders
- **1869**- Foreign or international money orders
- **1872**- Congress enacts Mail Fraud Statute
- **1873**- Penny postal card
- **1874**- General Postal Union (later Universal Postal Union)
- **1879**- Domestic mail divided into four classes
- **1880**- Congress establishes title of Chief Post Office Inspector
- **1885**- Special Delivery
- **1887**- International parcel post
- **1893**- First commemorative stamps
- **1896**- Rural free delivery, experimental
- **1898**- Private postcards authorized
- **1902**- Rural free delivery, permanent

- **1911**- Postal savings system
- **1911**- Carriage of mail by airplane sanctioned between Garden City and Mineola, NY; Earle H. Ovington, first U. S. mail pilot
- **1912**- Village delivery
- **1913**- Parcel post
- **1913**- Insurance
- **1913**- Collect-on-delivery
- **1914**- Government-owned and -operated vehicle service
- **1916**- Postal Inspectors solve last known stagecoach robbery
- **1918**- Airmail
- **1920**- Metered postage
- **1920**- First transcontinental airmail
- **1924**- Regular transcontinental airmail service
- **1925**- Special handling
- **1927**- International airmail
- **1935**- Trans-Pacific airmail
- **1939**- Trans-Atlantic airmail
- **1939**- Autogiro service, experimental
- **1941**- Highway post offices
- **1942**- V-mail
- **1943**- Postal zoning system in 124 major post offices
- **1948**- Parcel post international air service
- **1948**- Parcel post domestic air service
- **1950**- Residential deliveries cut from two to one a day
- **1953**- Piggy-back mail service by trailers or railroad flatcars

- **1953-** Airlift
- **1955-** Certified mail
- **1957-** Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee
- **1959-** Missile mail dispatched from submarine to mainland Florida
- **1960-** Facsimile mail
- **1963-** ZIP Code and sectional center plan
- **1964-** Self-service post offices
- **1964-** Simplified postmark
- **1965-** Optical scanner (ZIP Code reader tested)
- **1966-** Postal savings system terminated
- **1967-** Mandatory presorting by ZIP Code for second- and third-class mailers
- **1968-** Priority Mail, a subclass of First-Class Mail
- **1969-** Patronage no longer a factor in postmaster and rural carrier appointments
- **1969-** First die proof of a postage stamp canceled on moon by Apollo 11 mission
- **1970-** MAILGRAM
- **1970-** Postal Reorganization Act
- **1970-** Express Mail, experimental
- **1971-** United States Postal Service began operation; Postmaster General no longer in Cabinet
- **1971-** Labor contract achieved through collective bargaining for the first time in history of federal government
- **1971-** Star routes changed to highway contract routes
- **1971-** National service standards established: overnight delivery of 95% of airmail within 600 miles and 95% of First-Class Mail within local areas
- **1972-** Stamps by mail

- **1972**- Passport applications accepted in post offices
- **1973**- National service standards expanded to include second-day delivery of parcel post traveling up to 150 miles, with one-day delivery time added for each additional 400 miles
- **1974**- Highway post offices terminated
- **1974**- First satellite transmission of MAILGRAMs
- **1976**- Post office class categories eliminated
- **1976**- Discount for presorted First-Class Mail
- **1977**- Airmail abolished as a separate rate category
- **1977**- Express Mail, permanent new class of service
- **1977**- Final run of railroad post office on June 30
- **1978**- Discount for presorted second-class mail
- **1978**- Postage stamps and other philatelic items copyrighted
- **1979**- Discount for presorted bulk third-class mail
- **1979**- Postal Career Executive Service (PCES)
- **1980**- New standards require envelopes and postcards to be at least 3 1/2" high and 5" long to be mailable
- **1980**- INTELPOST (high-speed international electronic message service)
- **1981**- Controlled circulation classification discontinued
- **1981**- Discount for First-Class Mail presorted to carrier routes
- **1982**- Automation begins with installation of optical character readers
- **1982**- E-COM (Electronic Computer-Originated Mail, electronic message service with hard copy delivery)
- **1983**- ZIP + 4
- **1983**- Ended public service subsidy from federal government
- **1984**- Integrated retail terminals automate postal windows
- **1985**- Jackie Strange, first female Deputy Postmaster General

- **1985**- E-COM terminated
- **1986**- International Priority Airmail
- **1986**- Postal Service realigned; field divisions created
- **1987**- Small parcel and bundle sorters
- **1987**- Stamps by phone
- **1987**- Multiline optical character readers ordered
- **1988**- Inspector General's Act extends duties of Chief Postal Inspector
- **1989**- Universal Postal Union Congress in Washington, DC
- **1990**- Wide area barcode readers
- **1990**- Easy Stamp, allowing purchase of stamps through computers
- **1990**- International business reply service
- **1991**- Independent measurement of First-Class Mail service
- **1992**- Remote barcoding system
- **1992**- Reorganization: regions, divisions and management sectional centers replaced by area and district offices for customer service and mail processing
- **1992**- Stamps sold through automatic teller machines

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