



## TOPIC: Mail

### The History of Mail

How do you communicate with family and friends who live in a different city, state, or country? Today, we can pick up our cell phone and place a call, text message, or even video call someone! When Europeans first came to the New World, the only means of communication with family and friends who lived in Europe was by writing a letter. There was no organized method of sending a letter. Letters were passed from one person to another person in another place until it reached the final destination. In the United States, an official mail system was put into place by the Second Continental Congress and authorized in the United States Constitution in 1775. Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers, was appointed as the first Postmaster General.

When the mail system was created, there were no stamps. Delivery was paid for by the person receiving the mail. The first United States stamp was made in 1847, and mandatory prepayment of postage went into effect in 1855. Before 1863, postage only paid for mail to be delivered from Post Office to Post Office. The people had to make a trip to the Post Office to pick up their mail. If you lived in a city in 1863, free delivery of your mail began and for the first time, street addresses had to be put on the letters. Rural mail still had to be picked up at the Post Office.

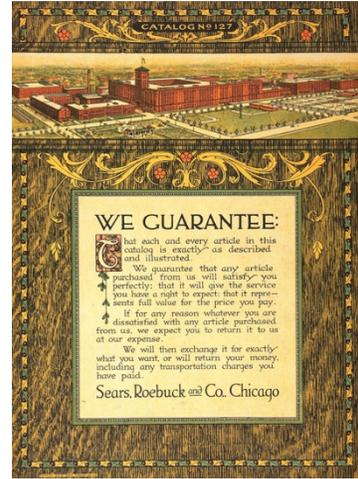


Mail boxes inside Waxpool General Store

In the 1890s, 2 out of 3 people (nearly 41 million people) lived in rural areas. Many farmers associations such as the National Grange, the National Farmers' Congress, and the State Farmers' Alliance lobbied for rural free delivery (RFD). They argued that the postage for rural and city delivery was the same and it was unjust. It wasn't until 1896 that Rural Free Delivery began nationwide.



Rural Free Delivery only applied to letters and packages up to four pounds. By law, heavier packages still had to be delivered by private express companies. It wasn't until 1913 that U.S. Parcel Post began. This greatly increased the volume of mail shipped nationwide. In the first six months of parcel post, 300 million parcels were delivered. Many rural customers took advantage of inexpensive Parcel Post rates to order goods and products from businesses located hundreds of miles away in distant cities for delivery by mail giving rise to the growth of mail order companies such as Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck and Company. If you have never heard of these companies, they are very much like the online store Amazon.com. You could purchase anything from Sears, even a house. This particular catalog on the right has 1,249 pages.



Fall 1913 Sears Catalog Cover

You can take a look at the inside of the catalog here: <https://bit.ly/359yB64>



Mail Wagon inside Museum

Unlike today, not all mail wagons were uniform and had the same look. Rural postal carriers were required to purchase, operate, and maintain their own transportation. This meant that postal carriers had to not only purchase their wagon but also the horse to pull the wagon and the feed for the horse. Rural postal carriers were not required to wear a uniform but some of them did.

This particular wagon is green but other mail wagons could be painted different colors such as white, black, and red. The signs on the mail wagons were also not uniform and could say different things. To see a video of

how Rural Free Delivery changed life in rural America, click here: <https://bit.ly/2S3Hx7o>

Today, the United States Post Office continues to evolve to meet our needs with using the internet to print out labels and postage for mailing packages as well as tracking parcels.



### **Mail Fun Facts**

- Your mailman used to be able to deliver green eggs and ham! During 1914 to 1920, there was a Farm to Table program that allowed farmers to sell to people living in the city and then mail them their choice of ham, bacon, fresh meats, poultry, eggs, butter, cheese, nuts, maple syrup, honey, jellies, preserves, fruits, and vegetables. The most popular products were butter and lard.
- Both Abraham Lincoln and Harry Truman were postmasters before they became President of the United States.
- Other famous people who were postal workers:
  - John Brown, abolitionist – Postmaster, Randolph, PA
  - Bing Crosby, singer and actor – Postal Clerk, Spokane, WA
  - Walt Disney – Substitute Carrier, Chicago, IL
  - William Faulkner, novelist – Postmaster, University, MS
  - Conrad Hilton, Hotel Magnate – Postmaster, San Antonio, NM
  - Rock Hudson, actor – Letter Carrier, Winnetka, IL
  - Charles Lindbergh, pilot – Contract Airmail Pilot
  - Knute Rockne, football coach – Clerk, Chicago, IL
  - Adlai Stevenson, Vice President – First Assistant Postmaster General
  - Noah Webster, lexicographer – Special Agent
- When Parcel Post first started, several children were mailed. An 8-month old baby boy, James Beagle was “mailed” to his grandmother who lived a few miles away near Batavia, Ohio. He was just under the initial 11 pound limit for parcels. The Rural Mail Carrier, Vernon Lytle, picked up the baby from his parents’ house and carried him in his mail wagon. It cost 15 cents and the “parcel” was insured for \$50.
- The current Postmaster General, Meggan Brennan, is the second highest paid Federal worker. She makes \$276,840 a year. The President of the United States makes \$400,000 and the Vice President of the United States makes \$235,100.

### **Songs**

Enjoy this You Tube playlist of songs and videos about the mail and postmen.

<https://bit.ly/2S798ox>



### Letter Writing Activities

When was the last time you got mail? Isn't it a great feeling to know someone was thinking of you? Today we are going to write letters of gratitude to someone in the community to thank them. You can even write a letter to the postal carrier and leave it in the mailbox for them.

SHOW SOMEONE YOU CARE  
STUDENT HANDOUT

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

# LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is another word for being thankful. Sending cards and letters are one popular way to show gratitude toward people who have helped us. Use this page to plan your letter of gratitude to a helper in your community!

1. Which community member would you like to thank with a letter? (circle one)

**firefighter**    **nurse**    **custodian**    **other:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. Including specific details and memories in a letter helps show how much you care. Use the chart to brainstorm details about how the community member helped you and others.

WHAT HE OR SHE DID	HOW IT HELPED

3. Use the Letter Writing Template or a separate sheet of paper to write a draft of your letter. Make sure to include:

- A greeting
- A statement saying thank you
- Specific details about how the person helped you
- A closing and signature

4. In order to send your letter, you will need to research the address of the organization where your community helper works. You can find addresses online or in a community directory.

Once you have found the address, write it in the space below:

**DELIVERY ADDRESS:**

Person's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

**Don't forget a stamp to mail your letter!**

