

Post Office

Perhaps it would be a good idea to give a few salient facts about the United States post office department before commenting on our own local post office. The post office department is the largest enterprise in America, closely followed by the American Telephone & Telegraph Co and General Motors. Last year over 80 billion pieces of mail was handled by the post office department and its 700,000 pay rolls. The huge annual deficit continues to grow and will continue to do so as long as this department is politically dominated. James Farley, who was postmaster general under Franklin Roosevelt claimed to have balanced the post office budget (methinks he must have done a lot of "juggling"). Benjamin Franklin was our first postmaster general, he having been appointed by the first Continental Congress. Lawrence O'Brien is our present p.m. general. With these facts safely stored away, we can now confine our remarks about the local post office. The first post office was established in 1850, while the village was known as Assabet. Amory Maynard was our first postmaster. His tiny office was located opposite the B & M railroad station. Other postmasters followed in this order. Asa Balcolm, Lorenzo Maynard, John Harriman, Abel Barnes, Ben Jognson, Geo Flood, Wm Hall, Arthur Walker, Arthur Coughlan, Wm Stockwell, Frank Sheridan, and John Nowick, the last two coming under the Civil Service law which insures continuity in office provided no malfeasance exists during their term in office. Post offices are divided into four classes. First, second, third and fourth. Fourth class offices were and are usually found in small country stores. There is a movement on foot to eliminate these smaller offices but I predict it will never happen, The boys in Congress will see to that. Postmasters in the 4th class are paid from their stamp cancellations. Just before I entered the postal service the post office crew consisted of Mr. Hall, postmaster, John Sunderland, ass't, Arthur Champagne, clerk, and Arthur Hart part time clerk. Arthur will always be best known for his perilous ride down the Assabet River in a fragile canoe when the crest of the flood was at its highest.

My mind is a trifle nebulous concerning the post office personnel when I entered the service in 1905, shortly after graduating from Maynard High . The post office was located in the Masonic Block. Mr. Hall was postmaster and Ida, his wife was assistant. Arthur Champagne and I were clerks, he left about a year later and thru his efforts Arthur Sullivan replaced him. When the office went second class, I can remember Sully and I taken the oath given by Attorney Thomas Hillis. This automatically placed us under Civil Service. Speaking about Sully, I must tell you about one incident that nearly cost me my job. A negress employed as a maid by Keyes Hall of Stow came to the stamp window one day and asked for " farve two cent stamps" At that moment Sully crept on his hands and knees from out of nowhere, directly under my feet saying " farve two cent stamps" I became hysterical and dropped helplessly to the floor. Sully finally composed himself and gave the greatly embarresd customer her " farve too cent stamps" But this was only the beginning. Keyes Hall who was president of a large insurance concern in Boston bought all his stamps from the Maynard office and he more than any other person was responsible for advancing Maynard to a second class office. He called next day in a flaming rage and asked the postmaster who was the clerk who was discourteous to his maid. Mr. Hall ,of course was ignorant of the incident, asked Keyes to describe the clerk. The guy with the curly hair he replied. Don't ever let this happen again Jim, Mr. Hall excaimed. I took the entire blame as I did not want to involve Sully. Business was increasing rapidly and soon Tim Moynihan, a great fellow was added to the clerical force.

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During Mr. Hall's regime, which by the way lasted seventeen years, the office jumped from third class to second. New fixtures were installed and a cancelling machine that cancelled 1000 letters a minute. Before this innovation, we had to cancel all mail by hand, we even had to stamp all incoming mail. I should make some reference to the Rural Free Delivery which was established in 1902. The original route included part of Stow Lower Village, No. Sudbury, Nine Acre Corner, the Powder Mill and Fletcher Corner district. The route was twenty two miles in length. (Remind me to tell you two or three stories connected with

the R.F. D. following this monograph) A few years later, the route was almost doubled. Two horses were used and I have seen Mr. Rice, the carrier, ^{arrive} at the post office with a lighted lantern which he was forced to use in trying to decipher the addresses on the later part of the route. Along day, you say, but don't forget that we clerks used to have to work from 6 a.m. until 8.30 p.m. The business men were much displeased when we started closing at 6 p.m. In those days it was difficult to hire any male ^{help} (no pun intended) accordingly, almost all substitutes came from the distaff side. Claire Beford, May Ledgard, Millie Walker, ^{Margaret Wilson} Emma Greenhalge and Mrs. Bradford Parker are among some of the names I remember. Whether Robert Sheridan was a regular or a sub, I do not recall. Before leaving the old post office in Masonic Block, I must tell you how on a very hot day, I slid out to Bariteaus Barber shop which was nearby and had my hair scalped. Returning to the post office, I discarded my office coat, and presented myself at the general delivery window.

I never thought it would work, however, I changed my voice and asked if there was any mail for W^m Sampson. ^{Tim} He started to look through the letters in the general delivery section and in the meantime I put on my coat. When he turned around and saw me, he just went to pieces. He must have liked what he saw for he immediately went to Baiteaus and had the same operation performed, Sully not to be outdone also got clipped. There were so many humorous incidents in that old post office, yet, I can not close its doors without relating about Mr. Hall's pet object. It was a burglar alarm that he had installed in the safe and the big bell on top of Masonic Hall that gave the alarm. He would test it every morning religiously. Fortunately, it was never used, although there had been one ^{previous} break, that prompted Mr. Hall to install the alarm. It went off one day by mistake and much to the postmasters chagrin, a goodly crowd had gathered to assist in catching the burglar.-----

Mr. Hall died on Apr. 14, 1911 and was succeeded by Arthur Walker on June 16 of the same year. His salary was a lucrative \$2000. Politics being what they are Mr. Walker only lasted the usual four years. During his term, parcel post service was inaugurated. Eleven pounds was the weight limit. The incoming as well as the outgoing mail was carried in a two wheel ^{man driven to post} man powered vehicle. Jack Kelly, Wm MacAuslin, and Connie Moynihan were in charge of this duty at various periods. It was not unusual to see them accompanied by an immigrant, usually of Finnish or Polish extraction. On their coat would be tied a tag with the post office box number of the relatives. Often after the mail was distributed, we would take the foreigner to his or her proper destination. It was quite a sight to see their turned up boots. The B & M had a nice thing going for them, the government allotted the railroad either \$60,000 or eighty thousand dollars for carrying the mail annually between St. John and Marlboro. Pure gravy. Well, we must finally leave the old post office and wend our way to our new postoffice located in Naylor's Block, or should we say adjunct to the block. The new postoffice was open for inspection Jan. 1/1916 and the people were

pleased to note that the entrance was on the ground level. New fixtures were installed and we now had more call and combination boxes exceeding in number those of the old post office. On July 4, 1916, ex-rep. FJ. Sullivan headed a petition requiring 500 names for the purpose of obtaining city delivery. We were entitled to carrier service two years before this petition was circulated but no one seemed to want to take the initiative. The petition met with great success and carrier service became a certainty. Arthur Coughlan was postmaster and deliveries were started on ^{May. 1} Jan. 23/ 1920. There were only two carriers to start with, Harold Sheridan and James Eaton, later because of continued growth the names of Edward White and William Sweeney were added. Chester Sawyer was the rural carrier making a total of five carriers. Once again the political pendulum was swinging and William Stockwell, a Republican ^{three} succeeded Mr. Coughlan., a Democrat. During Mr. Stockwells 3rd terms, the office experienced a healthy growth. He was followed by Frank Sheridan in 1935. During the last year of his first term he was placed under Civil Service as a result of a new ruling, which guaranteed tenure in office until retirement age. Postal receipts continued to grow and it became necessary to seek new quarters., accordingly the post office was removed to Nason St, near the junction Summer and Nason St. It was apparent that this old shack was not a fit place for a United States post office. Several suggestions for a new site were offered by well meaning people but they all had certain drawbacks. Finally, the site of the old town house was selected and Maynard has now a modern, up-to-date post office which should meet all postal requirements for years to come. John Nowick is the present postmaster, and being a comparatively young man with Civil Service protection should continue in office until retirement age. I shall always feel that I had at least some small part in the selection of a site for new postoffice. During one of the weekly meetings of the selectmen, two representatives of Maynard Industries appeared before the board. They wanted to

obtain this location for a parking area. I was opposed to this suggestion as I felt this place was too valuable a spot for a private parking lot. I thought it would be an ideal site for the post office and the other members agreed. But I am getting ^{ahead} ahead of my story. Lets return to the period when Bill Stockwell displaced Arthur Coughlan. There was a steady increase in business and in the meantime Frank Finocchi had been added to the clerical force. I think that it was in 1927 that the townspeople were shocked by the news of Tim Moynihans untimely passing on Thanksgiving eve. John Trench advanced from substitute clerk- carrier to regular clerk in 1928. Others connected with the local post office while in the first and second class and who have since passed away are Arthur Sullivan, Ed. White ,Chet Sawyer, Al Sullivan, Chris Wilson, Harold Sheridan, and possibly others. They were comparatively young men who never had a chance to enjoy a well earned retirement. .

I don't think the the post office clerks of to-day are finding any fault with their working conditions and salary, however, if some do carp and criticize. perhaps the following facts will cool them off a bit. We worked from 6.a.m to 8 p.m. there was no such a thing as one clerk, one window; we had to be prepared to take charge of any window, registry, money orders, stamp window, gen. dely, later came the issue of war bonds, we even had to take turns when the p.o. was in Masonic Block. in sweeping up the office. Five mails were dispatched daily and all incoming mail had to be backstamped with a dated receive stamps. Add to the above, we had to take an annual case axamination. This consisted of putting 900 cards, representing letters on the proper forty five railroad runs. All incoming mail had to be sorted for the many boxes and later given to the box owner s. We were among the first ten offices in the country relative to postal savings deposits. On a Friday and Saturday the corridor in unending streams would be packed with foreigners sending money to the old country, When the incoming mail arrived, we would put down all four windows and leave down until all the mail had bbeen placed in the boxes. Then up would go the windows and the shout, " get your mail and get out"

Thus , we have seen our local post office grow from a lowly littlr office, which was usually housed in some merchants store to a modern building doing a business of well over a one hundred thousand dollar ~~business~~ under the

postmasterships of Frank Sheridan and John Nowick.

Humorous side lights.

R.F.D. Ted Williams.

China.

Fat Stone.

Dead Squirrel *from*

Turkey raffle. F.

I will have to credit myself with being a bit prophetic. You will recall that at the beginning of this monograph, I stated that the p.o. dept is politically dominated. Yesterday PostMaster, Gen. O'Brien suggested that the p.o. dept be abolished, discontinue the cabinet office of postmaster general, and appoint a Board of Directors to be run along the lines of a private business. Personally, I think it is an excellent idea, the department would be self sustaining, and the huge deficit that increases each year would be a thing of the past.

READ AT THE ? ? ? MEETING OF THE MAY. HIST. Soc. - JAMES R. FARRELL
MARCH 1967.