

## HISTORY OF THE SEATTLE GENERAL POSTOFFICE

Arthur A. Denny who was appointed Postmaster of Seattle on August 27th, 1853, received the first United States Mail ever delivered in Seattle and opened the office in a log cabin where Hotel Stevens now stands. This log cabin Postoffice was built in the winter of 1852-1853.\*

In 1879, the Postoffice was in a little three cornered room, situated on Mill Street (now Yesler Way) a few doors above what is now Post Street. It had but recently been made a Presidential office of the third class. O. J. Carr was Postmaster and had but one clerk to assist him, who was paid the munificent salary of three hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$325.) a year. The Postoffice was a way station on the new Tacoma-Port Townsend route, over which the mail was carried six times a week. The Seattle-Sehome mail steamer made one trip over the whole route, leaving Seattle on Monday, arriving at Sehome on Tuesday evening, and reaching Seattle Thursday evening on the return trip, and an additional trip to La Conner used up the remainder of the week. Mails for the Snohomish Valley were exchanged at Mukilteo and for the Stilaguamish and Skagit Valleys at Tulalip. Mails were dispatched daily, except Sundays, to Renton and Newcastle via the Seattle and Walla Walla railroad, to Port Blakely by the Steamer *Success*, and twice a week up the White River Valley on horseback. Mails from the Eastern States came via San Francisco to Portland by steamer, from Portland to New Tacoma by rail, and from New Tacoma to Seattle by the New Tacoma and Port Townsend steamboat. At that time mails from the East were in transit between New York and Seattle as long as they now are between Shanghai, China, and Seattle, and the arrivals from China will average as frequent.

In August, 1880, the Postoffice was moved to the corner of Mill Street and the alley now Post Street.

\* For the period from 1853 to 1879, which has been omitted in this article, consult Welford Beaton's *The City That Made Itself*, pages 170-172, and Thomas W. Prosch's unpublished *Chronological History of Seattle*, Volume 1. From these sources it is learned that the following postmasters filled the gap from Denny to Carr:

W. J. Wright.....	Appointed October 11, 1853
Charles Plummer.....	Appointed May 4, 1854
Timothy D. Hinckley.....	Appointed November 14, 1861
Samuel F. Coombs.....	March 25, 1862
Gardner Kellogg.....	Appointed 1863
W. H. Pumphrey.....	Appointed 1870
Thomas W. Prosch.....	Appointed July 18, 1875
Ossian J. Carr.....	Appointed June 25, 1877

—C.W.S.

Mr. Carr was reappointed Postmaster and served until 1887. During this period the receipts of the office had grown to sixteen thousand dollars a year. The office had been raised to the second class and three additional clerks had been allowed. The improvement in handling mails consisted in the establishing of the through registered pouch exchanged between Seattle, Portland, and Port Townsend.

J. M. Lyon was appointed Postmaster in 1887. The receipts of the office continued to increase so that in the fall of 1887 free delivery was established with four letter carriers. Soon after this the office was moved to the corner of Second Avenue and Columbia Street in the new Boston Block, in the location now occupied by the Seattle National Bank. This large brick building was at that time considered to be entirely outside of the business district of the city and the newspapers of the day protested in long editorials. The officials at Washington, however, had entered into a lease with the owners of the Boston Block, and the office was moved, and, as there was no opposition office started, the people came up to Second Avenue to do business. While Mr. Lyon was postmaster, the revenue of the office increased to forty-six thousand dollars (\$46,000.) a year, and the office was raised to the first class, with twelve clerks at an annual salary of seventy-seven hundred dollars, or six hundred and forty-one dollars and sixty-seven cents each, and ten carriers, who received sixty-five hundred dollars a year or six hundred and fifty dollars each.

In 1889, Mr. A. M. Brookes was appointed Postmaster. He came into the position as an old Postoffice employee, having served as Clerk in the San Francisco Postoffice for twelve years. During his two years of service, Mr. Brookes devoted himself to the betterment of the service of the rapidly growing city. The great fire of 1889 burned the entire business district, excepting the Boston and Colonial Blocks, though both of these buildings were damaged by the fire, the front windows of the Postoffice being broken by the heat. The contents of the office were loaded into wagons, but it did not become necessary to drive away from the entrance on the Columbia street side. The Boston Block has since been replaced by the Seattle National Bank building. Immediately after the fire a building was erected just across Columbia Street for the exclusive use of the Postoffice, and the office moved still farther from the business center. It was during Mr. Brookes' incumbency that mail service was established between Seattle and

Victoria, B. C., direct, and Seattle first became a Canadian exchange office. Up to this time registered mail for Victoria originating in Seattle and vicinity was sent to Port Townsend for dispatch, and registered mail originating farther south was sent to Portland for dispatch in a through registered pouch made up in that office. After proper representation had been made to the Postoffice Department, it was ordered that the pouch should be made up at Seattle.

The exchange of money order business between the United States and British Columbia was, at this time, also carried on through the Postoffice at Portland, Oregon. It was a matter of considerable correspondence with the Postoffice Department to convince the officials that this business should be done through Seattle, but they finally were convinced and Seattle was raised to the dignity of a Canadian Money Order Exchange Office, doing both registry and money order business.

When the office was turned over to Griffith Davies as Postmaster in 1891, the gross receipts had increased to ninety-eight thousand dollars (\$98,000.) a year, with a corresponding increase in the carrier and clerical force.

During Mr. Davies' term of office hard times came on and there was little to be done in the way of advancement. Though the gross receipts of the office ran over the one hundred thousand dollar (\$100,000.) limit, still, at the end of his term in 1895, they had fallen to eighty-four thousand, with only an increase of two in the carrier force, making twenty-two carriers in all.

General Gilbert S. Meem was next in charge and the hard times continued. For a year longer the gross receipts declined, but finally confidence was restored, the "Seattle Spirit stalked forth, and the city took a forward movement. More help was allowed and the office became too small to accommodate the ever growing business. Accordingly General Meem found it necessary to ask the Postoffice Department to allow some substations. Three such stations were allowed on the first of July, 1898, and three additional ones on November fifteenth of the same year. General Meem established the first delivery of mail by electric car service in Seattle. This service was put on the Green Lake line, the University lines, the South Park line and the Rainier Avenue line as far as Dunlap.

It was also during this administration that direct mail service was established between Seattle and the Orient, on the Nippon Yusen Kaisha line of steamers, the first regular line to ply be-

tween this port and Japan and China. This was another step forward for the Postoffice, and later, when the mail service had been perfected, and it was found that mails reached Japan quicker when sent by way of Seattle, the Postoffice Department was asked to make Seattle the exchange office for the transacting of money order business between the two countries. This was asking for business claimed by the San Francisco office, and of course it was necessary to show that better service could be given through this office. A representative from the Seattle office and the Superintendent of the Money Order System accomplished this, and in due time Seattle was made a Japanese International money order exchange office, certifying the Japanese orders issued in the Northern States from Minnesota west to the coast, these states at that time furnished nearly half of the Japanese money order business of the United States. In General Meem's term, too, Seattle was made a depository for the surplus money and postal funds of offices in Alaska and Washington.

In the meantime the business of the office had increased to such an extent that it was found necessary to have more commodious quarters, and after the usual advertisement the office was moved to a store room and basement at the South West corner of University Street and First Avenue, in spite of the remonstrance of our leading papers, who accused the Department of moving the Postoffice out to Ballard, but the growth of the city has since demonstrated that the business has followed, and all of the daily papers have been located beyond the office.

When General Meem turned the office over to his successor, George M. Stewart, on the first of January, 1900, the gross receipts had risen to one hundred and thirty-eight thousand dollars (\$138,000.) a year, and the help to thirty-two carriers and twenty-six clerks in the main office and six clerks in sub-stations. Mr. Stewart, immediately on taking charge of the office, busied himself successfully in obtaining better pay for the employees of the office and in bettering the mail facilities. He had the Postoffices of Ross, Fremont, and Latona consolidated with the Seattle Postoffice, and an Electric Railway Postoffice established connecting the Seattle office with Ballard on the north and South Park on the south, and supplying eight intermediary stations and Postoffices. The business of the office doubled during the first three years of Mr. Stewart's term, making it necessary to enlarge the present quarters. More Stations were established, South Seattle and Columbia City Postoffices were consolidated with and

made stations of the Seattle Postoffice, so that at that time Mr. Stewart in addition to being Postmaster of Seattle was also Postmaster of thirty-five stations in and adjoining the city. The gross receipts had risen to four hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$450,000.) a year, and the help had grown to one hundred carriers, twenty substitute carriers, ninety-two clerks in the main office, thirty-five clerks in stations, and ten special delivery messengers. There were also on the payrolls of the office fifty-three railway postal clerks and one hundred and ninety rural carriers who performed service in the State of Washington.

During Mr. Stewart's term work was begun on the new Government building at Third Avenue and Union Street which was occupied on November 11th, 1908.

George Russell was appointed Postmaster by President Roosevelt on December 9, 1908. Mr. Russell was born in Seattle in 1873, and was educated in the public schools of that city.

Mr. John W. Colkett was Assistant Postmaster under Postmasters, Carr, Lyon, Brookes, Davies, Meem, Stewart and Russell. Mr. Colkett witnessed the introduction of more innovations in the matter of handling mail in the Seattle Postoffice than any other man in public life in the city.

Mr. Battle, a prominent lawyer was appointed Postmaster by President Wilson on October 1st, 1913.

Air-Mail service between Seattle and Victoria was established on February 15th, 1920, for the purpose of facilitating the dispatch of Oriental mails.

In 1921, gross receipts totaled two million, two hundred and thirty-one thousand one hundred and thirteen dollars and forty-nine cents (\$2,231,113.49). There were three hundred and fifty-four clerks, and two hundred and eighty carriers and twelve laborers employed.

Mr. Perkins, the Assistant Postmaster during Mr. Battle's administration, was appointed Postmaster by President Harding on April 1st, 1923.

Mr. Wise was appointed Assistant Postmaster by President Coolidge in August, 1923.

In November, 1924, the City Division was moved from the Main Postoffice at Third Avenue and Union Street to the Terminal Station leased by the Government from the Great Northern Railroad. The Terminal Station is near the railroad depots and was remodelled and enlarged by the Great Northern Railroad Company for the purpose of accommodating approximately six

hundred clerks and carriers who had been removed from the Main Office. Mr. Regan is the Superintendent of the Terminal Station. It is in the interests of economy and efficiency that mails should be handled as near the rail depots as possible, since transportation is a large item in Postoffice expense.

On February 28, 1925, Congress passed an Act providing for an increase in the salaries of Postoffice employees.

The receipts of the office for the year 1925 were three million, one hundred and forty-two thousand, seven hundred and eighty-six dollars and seventy-five cents (\$3,142,786.75).

Postmaster Perkins was largely instrumental in the inauguration of the new air-mail service between Seattle and New York in February, 1926. Under this schedule, air-mail is dispatched from Seattle by rail to Pasco, Washington. From this point it is forwarded by airplane to Elko, Nevada, where air-mail is received from California and other western points. From Elko the mail is carried by plane direct to New York, via Cheyenne, Omaha, and Chicago. Transmission time from New York to Seattle under this system is two and one-half days.

The Seattle Postoffice has grown in the past twenty-five years from a way station on a mail route between two small towns to the proud position of the largest and most important office in the State of Washington. It is the terminus of seventeen railway postoffices which employ over one hundred Railway Postal clerks, with mails arriving and departing at all hours of the day and night. It is the terminus of more steamship routes than any other city in the United States, dispatching mails direct to ports on both shores of the Pacific, from Victoria, British Columbia, northward along the Alaskan coast to Nome, and southward from Nome on the Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Philippine coasts to Australia and New Zealand.

#### *Acknowledgement*

In writing this History it has been my great privilege to have had the cooperation of two veteran employees of the Seattle Postoffice. I have drawn heavily upon the writings of the late Mr. Colkett, whose term of service in the Office extended from 1884 to 1926. I was generously assisted, also, by Mr. Hiram H. Van Brocklin, who read the entire manuscript, and who has been connected with the Seattle Postoffice since 1896.

To the employees in Postmaster Charles E. Perkins' office I am deeply indebted for aid in giving me access to the office files.

I also wish to acknowledge here my sincere appreciation of the help given me by Professor Edmond S. Meany, of the University of Washington, whose constructive criticism and advice facilitated greatly the compilation of this history of a public institution in the largest city of the Pacific Northwest.

NICHOLAS C. CULLINAN.

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