

red, with the words “Special Delivery” in blue.

Chapter Nine: The Parcel Post Series of 1913

The Origin of Parcel Post Service

When the United States Postal Department first began providing domestic mail service, it did not include delivery to a home address. Instead, all mail, including letters, was shipped from one post office to another. It was the recipient’s responsibility to arrange for pickup of the mail at the local post office, though in some cities he or she could pay extra to have a letter delivered directly either by US mail or private carrier. In 1863, a law was passed establishing free mail delivery, but it only applied to inhabitants of cities. By the early 1890s, rural residents (primarily farmers) comprised 60 percent of the US population, and they began advocating for a similar service for more remote parts of the country. The result was Rural Free Delivery (RFD), approved by Congress in 1893 and first tested in West Virginia three years later. The service was made permanent in 1902, and by 1905, RFD employed 32,000 postal carriers.

Rural Free Delivery, however, only covered packages weighing four pounds or less. Heavier parcels had to be shipped by railroad or via private express company, if such a service was available. This meant that many of the commodities featured in the popular mail-order catalogues were not accessible to many rural residents. Rural inhabitants lobbied for a parcel post service, while local shopkeepers and private shipping companies fought against such an arrangement. Just as the matter was being debated in Congress, one of the express companies announced an enormous stockholder dividend. Aghast at how rural residents (who constituted 54% of the U.S. population at the time) were being exploited, Congress quickly approved a law establishing Parcel Post across the United States.

Parcel Post went into effect on January 1st, 1913. In only the first four days of service, nearly 1600 post offices handled four million packages. Within six months, approximately three hundred million packages had been shipped across the country via Parcel Post. The result was a sudden and substantial boost for the US economy, and particularly for mail-order department stores such as Montgomery Ward and Sears. Within five years of the establishment of Parcel Post, Sears had doubled its revenues. That year, a large fleet of trucks was brought into service to transport all of the packages.



Figure 9.1. Parcel post area of mail room, U.S. Post Office, Washington, D.C., circa 1920. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-100040.

The Parcel Post Series (1913)

Scott #Q1-Q12

Along with implementing Parcel Post service, the August 24, 1912 law also instructed the Postal Department to prepare stamps specifically for use on packages. Twelve stamps were authorized, in three thematic groups of four each. The lowest denomination stamps – the one, two, three, and four cent – each featured mail delivery workers. The second set – the five, ten, fifteen, and twenty cent – included an image of a postal transportation method at the time. Finally, the highest denomination stamps – the twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five cent, and one dollar – recognized industries that would be utilizing the new Parcel Post service. All of the stamps issued were designed by C. A. Huston of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

The thought behind printing a separate set of stamps for Parcel Post was that this would assist the Postal Department in tracking revenue. However, the new stamps posed difficulties for postal clerks. All of them were the same color and size regardless of value, making it difficult to determine quickly if the correct stamps had been used. They were also too large to fit easily on Parcel tags. In addition, they were printed in sheets of 180 and panes of 45; the odd number of stamps made the accounting process painful. In addition, the new stamps required additional costs for production, handling, and accounting. Rather than issuing a modified set of designs, the Postmaster General decided to cease production of Parcel Post stamps altogether. As of July 1, 1913, the Postal Department began to allow regular postage stamps to be used for packages instead. Remaining Parcel Post stamps were used interchangeably with regular stamps; one-cent Parcel Post stamps can be found affixed to postcards from the time.

Scott #Q1: 1¢ Post Office Clerk



Figure 7.2. 1¢ “Post Office Clerk”, Parcel Post , 1913.

Postal clerks staff post offices, sorting mail and providing retail services to customers. This stamp depicts a scene from the distribution section of the post office in Washington, D.C. Sorting packages to go to different sections of the city or parts of the country is the first step in the parcel distribution process. Almost 210 million of these stamps were released, beginning on November 27, 1912.

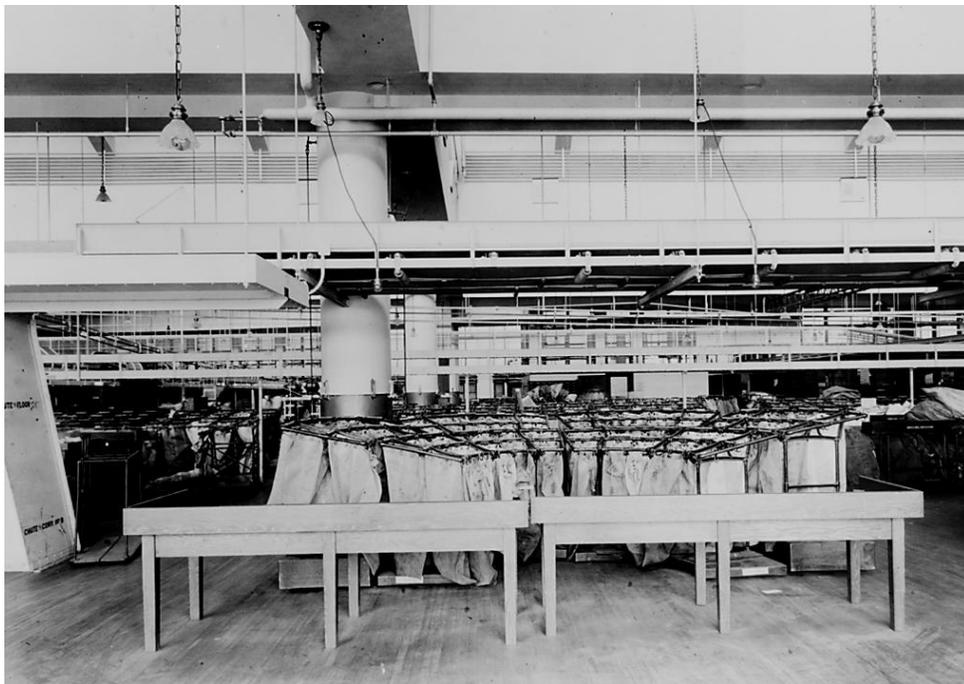


Figure 9.3. Sorting rack, U.S. Post Office, Washington, D.C., circa 1920.
Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-100038.

Scott #Q2: 2¢ City Carrier



Figure 9.4. 2¢ “City Carrier”, Parcel Post Issue, 1913.

According to Federal Jobs Net, city carriers deliver and collect mail in urban and suburban areas, by postal vehicle and/or on foot. The two-cent City Carrier stamp shows a postman laden with mail, standing at the front door of a house. Although he is identified as a city carrier, the evergreen and rhododendron to the left and right of the doorway,

respectively, suggest that the home is actually in the suburbs. In the era before mail slots and mailboxes, postmen would knock on the door or ring the bell, and then hand mail directly to the occupant. Another city carrier is shown receiving a letter from a little girl in the photograph below, taken in 1904. Over 206 million of these stamps were issued, starting on November 27, 1912.



Figure 7.5. City Carrier receiving a letter from a girl, 1904. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-99593.

Scott #Q3: 3¢ Railway Postal Clerk



Figure 9.6. 3¢ “Railway Postal Clerk”, Parcel Post, 1913.

The image on the three cent stamp was engraved from a photo of a clerk standing in the doorway of the mail car on a Baltimore and Ohio train, probably at the loading dock in Union Station, Washington, D.C. This design was not the one originally intended for this stamp. That picture showed a truck backed up to a waiting mail car, with a postal worker about to receive bags from the truck. This

design was rejected because the Postmaster General felt that it focused attention on the truck rather than the worker. Because of this redesign, the three cent stamp was issued much later than most of the others, on April 5, 1913. Only about twenty-nine million three-cent stamps were ultimately printed.



Figure 9.7. Clerk standing in doorway of train, Springfield, Missouri, 1916. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-DIG-nclc-05116.

Scott #Q4: 4¢ Rural Carrier



Figure 9.8. 4¢ “Rural Carrier”, Parcel Post, 1913.

Evocative of earlier days, the four cent stamp in this series depicts a Rural Carrier traveling by horse-drawn carriage. In order to make the image used for engraving this stamp, a mail wagon model at the Post Office Museum in Washington was hitched to a horse and photographed. These carriages were commonly used by Rural Free Delivery workers, as evident in the 1907 photograph

below. By later in the decade, automobiles and motorcycles had largely replaced these wagons on rural delivery routes. Almost 77 million of these stamps were printed and released, beginning on December 12, 1912.



Figure 9.9. Rural Free Delivery carriers, Laceyville, Pennsylvania, circa 1907. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-63444.

Scott #Q5: 5¢ Mail Train



The five cent stamp depicts an advancing steam locomotive with mail bag pick-up device prominent in the foreground. Over 108 million of these stamps were issued, starting on November 27, 1912.

Figure 9.10. 5¢ "Mail Train", Parcel Post, 1913.



Figure 9.11. Railway mail train interior, date unknown. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-108043.

Scott #Q6: 10¢ Steamship and Mail Tender



Figure 9.12. 10¢ “Steamship and Mail Tender”, Parcel Post, 1913.

The image on the ten cent stamp was taken from a photograph of the Kronprinz Wilhelm, a German ocean liner, arriving in New York Harbor on February 23, 1902. A mail tender boat is shown beside the passenger liner. In the background is a dramatic but historically inaccurate view of Staten Island, replete with skyscrapers which it did not possess in 1912. The

photograph below the stamp is believed to depict Captain Ruser of the Kronprinz Wilhelm, standing in the wheelhouse, sometime between 1901 and 1914. Nearly 57 million Steamship and Mail Tender stamps were released, beginning on December 9, 1912.



Figure 9.13. Captain Ruser of the S.S. Kronprinz Wilhelm in the wheelhouse, date unknown. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-67357.

Scott #Q7: 15¢ Automobile Service



On the fifteen cent stamp, a postman laden with mail approaches a small automobile, with Mail Station “A” in the background. Over 21 million Automobile Service stamps were released, beginning on December 16, 1912.

Figure 9.14. 15¢ “Automobile Service”, Parcel Post, 1913.

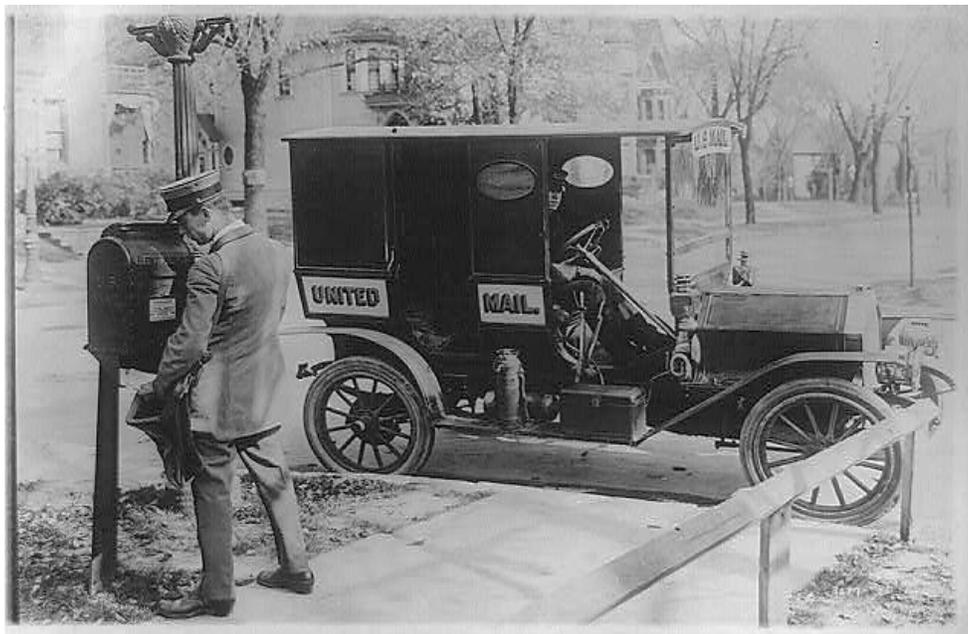


Figure 9.15. Mailman emptying mailbox, early 1900s. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-97709.

Scott #Q8: 20¢ Aeroplane Carrying Mail



Figure 9.16. 20¢ “Aeroplane Carrying Mail”, Parcel Post, 1913.

This stamp has the distinction of being the very first one depicting an airplane to have been issued anywhere in the world. The plane itself is reminiscent of the Wright Brother’s 1903 flyer from nine years earlier. The model used for engraving this stamp was produced by photographing an airplane at College Park, near Washington. The fanciful background landscape was

drawn in later by C. A. Huston. Although the stamp indicates that the airplane is carrying mail, regular air mail delivery service did not begin until 1918. Over 17 million of these stamps were issued, starting on December 16, 1912.



Figure 9.17. Aviator standing beside plane for Cleveland Pittsburgh Air Mail, before 1923. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-DIG-npcc-18543.

Scott#Q9: 25¢ Manufacturing



The twenty-five cent stamp's design shows part of a steel plant in South Chicago. Almost twenty-two million of these were issued, starting on November 27, 1912, the first day Parcel Post stamps were sold.

Figure 9.18. 25¢ “Manufacturing”, Parcel Post, 1913.



Figure 9.19. Steel plant, Ensley, Alabama, 1906. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-104925.

Scott #Q10: 50¢ Dairying



Figure 9.20. 50¢ “Dairying”, Parcel Post, 1913.

The fifty cent stamp in this series was one of three that were issued after Parcel Post service began on January 1, 1913. Along with the one dollar stamp, this one was originally designed to depict an industrial steel mill, the image used instead on the twenty-five cent stamp. The design chosen instead for this stamp shows cows grazing in the foreground

with farm buildings in the background. It was taken from a Department of Agriculture photograph, with the engraving modified to make the farm buildings less prominent. It was finally released on March 13, 1913. A little over two million fifty-cent stamps were issued in all.

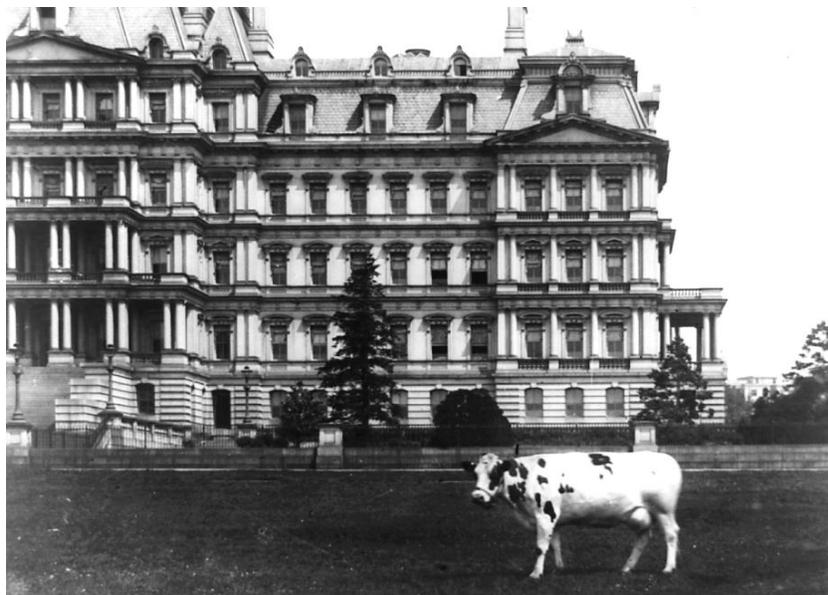


Figure 9.21. President Taft’s cow, Pauline, in front of the State, War, and Navy Building, Washington, D.C., c. 1909-1913. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-94731.

Scott #Q11: 75¢ Harvesting



Figure 9.22. 75¢ "Harvesting", Parcel Post, 1913.

The seventy-five-cent stamp features a grain harvesting scene, with a threshing machine, straw stack, and horse teams. As Max G. Johl describes this stamp in Volume 3 of The United States Postage Stamps of the Twentieth Century, "This was a design especially dedicated to the large agricultural section of the Middle West with its wide

expanse of level fields that made modern farming machinery possible. The vastness of farming is vividly portrayed by the size of the mound of products of this industry as compared to the wagon and machine standing before it." This stamp was the last in this series to be retired; the Bureau made deliveries of "Harvesting" to postmasters until 1922, nearly a decade after the stamp's original Parcel Post function had ceased. About 2.75 million of these stamps were issued in all.



Figure 7.23. Threshing wheat on Beerman's ranch, Emblem, Wyoming, Sept., 1941; photo by Marion P. Wolcott.
Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USF34-058933-D.

Scott #Q12: \$1.00 Fruit Growing



Figure 9.24. \$1.00 "Fruit Growing", Parcel Post, 1913.

The one-dollar stamp is both the highest denomination in this series and the rarest. Another late issue due to redesign of the image (like the fifty cent, this one was originally envisioned as being Manufacturing instead), the Fruit Growing stamp was released on January 3, 1913. Only 1,053,273 of these stamps were issued. The design on

the stamp, as well as the 1905 photograph below it, shows workers in an orchard. The \$1.00 Fruit Growing parcel post stamp was recently ranked #76 in a book on the 100 greatest American stamps.



Figure 9.25. Picking and packing oranges in the orchards near Los Angeles, California, circa 1905. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-26298.