

Volume 39 #3 (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter: July-Sept. 2021)

## GOLD COUNTRY STAMP CLUB NEWSLETTER

Meetings of the Gold Country Stamp Club are held the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays of each month:

Forest Springs Mobile Park Rec Center, 10084 Forest Springs Rd.  
2:00-4:00 pm

**2020-2021 Officers:**

*President:* Bob Brenan—478-0130 \* <rabrenan@gmail.net>

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### The Prez Says

Finally our regular meetings have begun. We will meet the 1st and 3rd Thursdays at the Forest Springs Mobile Park Rec Center, located at 10084 Forest Springs Road, just east of the intersection of Hwy 49 and La Barr Meadows Road. We continue to receive donations of collections with some worthwhile US and worldwide stamps in albums and loose. We also have a small inventory of US Scott album pages and mounts. A number of panes are on consignment including the Civil War, American Music Series, and Legends, which all have appreciated considerably. Our auctions will continue and these items will be available to the high bidder. I'm looking forward to see you at our meetings.

—President Bob Brenan

## Parcel Post History and Stamps

—Ron Tranquilla

### Mail Order and Express were first

The Congress of the Universal Postal Union in 1878 established an “international parcel post system.”<sup>1</sup> After the British parliament approved domestic, colonial, and foreign parcel post services in 1872, some other countries quickly followed suit. The U.S. Post Office Department, however, did not fully participate in this agreement, in that it “refused to institute a domestic service,” though it did agree to deliver parcels that were sent *to* the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Montgomery Ward (1872) and Sears Roebuck & Co. (1873) had been sending one-page advertising flyers through the mail. Rural Free Delivery, fully adopted across the U. S. by 1902, brought these flyers to rural residents and gave them an opportunity to buy goods just as city residents could. Montgomery Ward and Sears, however, delivered ordered goods only to post offices (mostly by railroads) and not directly to residents, so customers had to carry their purchases to their homes themselves, often long distances from their post offices, or pay commercial carriers to deliver their purchases from the post office.

Four of these commercial carriers were “closely tied to the railroads [and] came to dominate the market for carrying packages long distance...and they avoided competing with each other.” They kept prices high and set up rate structures that were confusing to both consumers and shippers. “Rates were determined from 35,000 originating locations....This system required over 600 million rates.”<sup>3</sup> These four companies—Adams Express, American Express, Wells Fargo, and United States Express—were in effect an oligopoly. A Senate report in 1910 revealed that in addition to [these companies] owning millions of dollars worth of stock in each other, railroads owned \$20 million of stock in express companies, and express companies owned \$34 million in railroad stock....While transportation cost the express companies less and less over time, there was no market incentive to pass savings on to the consumer and express companies refused so to do.”<sup>4</sup>

Like the express companies, the U.S. Mail delivered to a pickup point, from Post Office to Post Office, and many rural residents lived a long distance from a train stop or post office. Rural Free Delivery changed all that—both people’s frustration with express and mail order companies, and with their postal delivery—and created a public demand for delivery of parcels and purchases to homes, not a depot.<sup>5</sup> This demand finally overcame the powerful lobby of the express companies and railroads and on July 1, 1902 Rural Free Delivery was adapted. RFD brought “the daily arrival of the mail wagon” carrying mail, magazines, and newspapers...but also catalogs from the growing mail order industry. These mail wagons were larger than needed just for regular mail and so had extra space: “these half-empty mail wagons were [seen] as an unexploited opportunity for the Post Office.”<sup>6</sup>

### Parcel Post

Public opinion and lobbying efforts of large, prominent mail order companies finally pushed Congress precisely to exploit this opportunity. On August 24, 1912, Congress passed legislation that instituted parcel post service and fourth class mail; regulations for the Parcel Post system were set by Post Master General Frank Hitchcock, in Order 6685, dated



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November 30, 1912; the service was slated to begin on January 1, 1913.<sup>7</sup> According to the U. S. Postal Service Inspector General, this new service had as its purpose to introduce *competition* rather than to try through regulation to break the hold of express companies and railroads.<sup>8</sup>

Parcel Post was an instant hit with consumers: “During the first five days of service, 1,594 post offices reported handling over 4 million parcel post packages.”<sup>9</sup> By 1918 a “large fleet of trucks was delivering parcel post shipments of goods directly to the customer. Eggs quickly became a mainstay of Parcel Post.... Small animals that did not require food or water while in transit were accepted as parcel post.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, one child, five year-old Charlotte May Pierstorff, was sent alive from Grangeville, Idaho to Lewiston, Idaho, more cheaply than buying a train ticket. She weighed 48.5 pounds and wore a 32¢ Parcel Post stamp on her coat. She was accompanied by her mother’s cousin, who was a postal clerk and who delivered her to her grandmother’s house. After this parcel post trip, the Post Office barred “all humans and live animals from mail delivery with the exception of bees.”<sup>11</sup>



Weight limits were raised and rates lowered. By the 1920s, the weight limit was 50 pounds to anywhere and 70 pounds within three zones. By that year, on average 17 packages were delivered per year by Parcel Post to every rural address, about one every three weeks.<sup>12</sup> When the weight limits were raised to 70 pounds in 1920, Parcel Post became a favored option for in-town deliveries by city stores.<sup>13</sup> Size limits today are the size of standard USPS mail package or a box “large enough to protect what is sent, up to a size that can be transported in a wheelbarrow.”<sup>14</sup>

As today’s limits suggest, Parcel Post “has evolved into a diverse set of package delivery services that are integral to the Nation’s lifestyle and commerce. Services such as Priority Mail packages, including flat rate boxes; Parcel Select; Media Mail; and Bound Printed Matter, and Standard Post.... On January 27, 2013, the Postal Service dropped the Parcel Post brand name altogether, renaming the service Standard Post. On January 17, 2016, Standard Post was renamed again: ‘USPS Retail Ground.’”<sup>15</sup> In December, 2013, The USPS Inspector General reported that single-piece Standard Post, “descendent of the 1913 breakthrough product, now represents only a minor share of the package delivery marketplace both within the Postal Service and in the package delivery industry as a whole.”<sup>16</sup> The report explains that, “since the withdrawal of DHL from the North American market in 2008, package delivery has been overwhelmingly concentrated in a commercial duopoly [FedEx and UPS] plus the Postal Service.” [I believe that DHL seems since to have returned in limited capacity to the U. S. market] The report concludes that “Despite the dominance of large commercial shippers in the parcel market, the Postal Service continues to be the only provider of universal service to out-of-the-way areas at prices without surcharges.”<sup>17</sup>

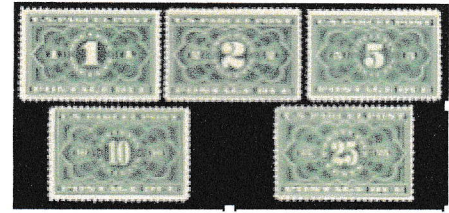
### Parcel Post Stamps

The new law set a new fourth class rate at 1 cent for items weighing 4 ounces or less. Mail above was charged by the pound. These rates were “prepaid by postage distinctive stamps”:<sup>18</sup> Parcel Post stamps, prepared by the Post Office Department. The purpose of these stamps was to help keep accounts, separating general and Parcel Post. These stamps were perforated with 12

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### Parcel Post Postage Due stamps

On August 124, 1912, Congress approved an act authorizing the production of Parcel Post Postage Due stamps. These stamps (Scott Catalogue JQ1-JQ5) were “to be used when inadequate postage was affixed to the parcel. Postage-due stamps were affixed by the postmaster and the amount was...to be paid by the addressee.”<sup>22</sup>



### The End...

Effective July 1, 1913, the Post Master General—with approval of the Interstate Commerce Department— authorized, in order No. 7241, the end of mandatory use of Parcel Post stamps and Parcel Post Postage Due stamps, thereby allowing use of ordinary postage for all classes of mail, and allowing use of Parcel Post stamps to pay postage of all classes of mail—thus ending the Parcel Post program. Parcel Post and PP Postage Due stamps were permitted to be used as regular stamps.<sup>23</sup>

Footnotes:

1. Smithsonian Libraries. “Parcel Post: Delivery of Dreams.” na, nd.  
<https://www.sil.si.edu/ondisplay/parcelpost/cf/view.cfm> Retrieved August 27, 2021
2. Ibid.
3. U. S. Postal Service Office of the Inspector General. “100 Years of Parcel Post.” ( December, 2013). [https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2015/rarc-wp-14-004\\_0.pdf](https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2015/rarc-wp-14-004_0.pdf) Retrieved August 20, 2021
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. p.5
7. *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers*. Headnotes for “Parcel Post Stamps”
8. Inspector General. Op. Cit.
9. Smithsonian Libraries. Op. Cit. —Footnotes continued on the next page
10. Ibid.
11. Wikipedia. “Charlotte May Pierstoff.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte\\_May\\_Pierstorff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_May_Pierstorff) Retrieved August 20, 2021
12. Inspector General. Op. Cit. pp. 9-10
13. Ibid., p. 11
14. Ibid., p. 12
15. Ibid., p. 11
16. Ibid., pp12-13
17. Scott Specialized Catalogue. Op. Cit. —Footnotes continued next page
18. Ibid.