

A Kids' History of the United States Postal Service



Publication 100-K
October 2023

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Introduction

The Postal Service began delivering mail for America in 1775. It is the largest communication network in the world. It's the only one that serves all Americans, wherever they live.

People today have lots of ways to send messages. Texting, email, and phone calls are a few of the ways. But after more than 200 years, the Postal Service still connects us. It delivers cards, letters, and packages to our largest cities and tiniest towns, 6 and sometimes 7 days a week.

The United States Postal Service is sometimes called the U.S. Postal Service, the Postal Service, or just USPS. This is its story.

1775: Benjamin Franklin, Postmaster General

In April 1775, American colonists and British soldiers began fighting in Massachusetts. These battles were the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

A month later, leaders of the American colonies met in Philadelphia. They made plans to defend the colonies from the British. On June 14, the leaders created an American army. They made George Washington the head of the army, or "general." On July 26, the leaders created an American postal system. They made Benjamin Franklin the head of the postal system, or "postmaster general."

*A **revolution** is a sudden change of government. The Revolutionary War is also called the "War of Independence." **Independence** is freedom from the control of others.*

There were no telephones back then. The best way to share information was to put it on paper. Messages were written in letters and newspapers. The letters and newspapers were delivered by private messengers or sent through the postal system.

The postal system was so important that American leaders created it very early, in July 1775. That was a year *before* they declared independence from Britain. If they weren't able to communicate, the American colonies could not have joined together, or become "united." If the colonies did not unite, there would be no United States!

*How did the **postal system** work? Post Offices were in the biggest towns. Men called "post riders" traveled between the Post Offices. They were called "post riders" because they rode horses. They picked up and dropped off letters. People could send a letter to someone who lived near a Post Office far away. Then that person could pick it up at their Post Office. Post riders also carried newspapers.*



Did you know? There were dozens of Post Offices in the colonies before 1775, under the British. Benjamin Franklin was one of the British postmasters general of the American colonies before he was the American postmaster general! Before that, he was a postmaster in Philadelphia.

MATCH THE STATE CAPITALS

The 13 American colonies became the first 13 states. Draw lines connecting the states with their capitals. See how many you can get!

Connecticut	Dover
Delaware	Atlanta
Georgia	Albany
Maryland	Trenton
Massachusetts	Raleigh
New Hampshire	Providence
New Jersey	Annapolis
New York	Columbia
North Carolina	Boston
Pennsylvania	Concord
Rhode Island	Harrisburg
South Carolina	Hartford
Virginia	Richmond

Sometimes the best way to share information is to put it in writing. Play the game “Telephone” to see how messages can change when they’re not written down:

Gather 3 or more players (5 or more is even better!). Have everyone sit in a circle or stand in a straight line. The first player whispers a tricky sentence into the ear of the player sitting to the right, so no one else can hear it. That player listens very closely — and gets only one chance to hear it! Then that player tries to correctly say the sentence into the next player’s ear.

One by one, each player whispers the sentence to the next player. Then the last player says the message out loud to everyone.

Did the message change much?



A Growing Country

When Europeans first came to North America, they sailed in ships across the Atlantic Ocean. At first they settled along the seashore. The first American cities grew up around the harbors where Europeans first landed.

As cities got crowded, more and more people moved west. They were looking for their own land to farm and a better life.

The peace treaty that ended the Revolutionary War in 1783 set the borders of the new United States. At first, the Mississippi River was the country's western border. This territory included the future states of Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.

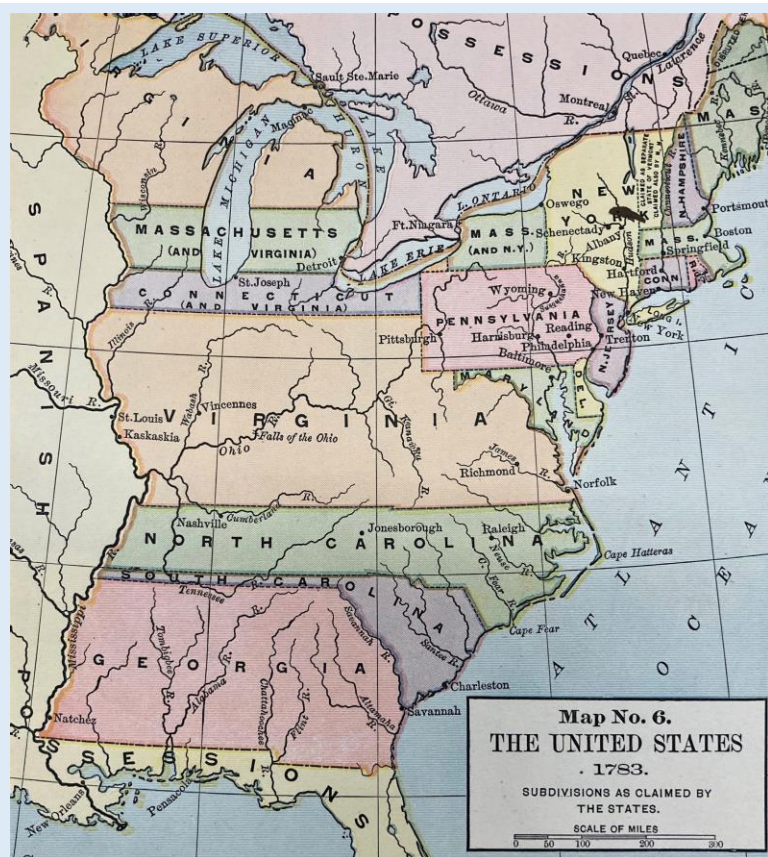
*A **treaty** is an agreement between different countries.*

*A **network** is a group of people or things that are connected to each other, like a net.*

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 moved the border further west, to the Rocky Mountains. Later treaties with Spain, Britain, and Mexico made the country even larger.

The country grew in leaps and bounds. The postal network did too. In the 1790s, mail was delivered as far west as Mississippi and Illinois. In 1804, mail service crossed the Mississippi River, to reach Louisiana and Missouri. In 1821, mail was delivered to settlers in Florida.

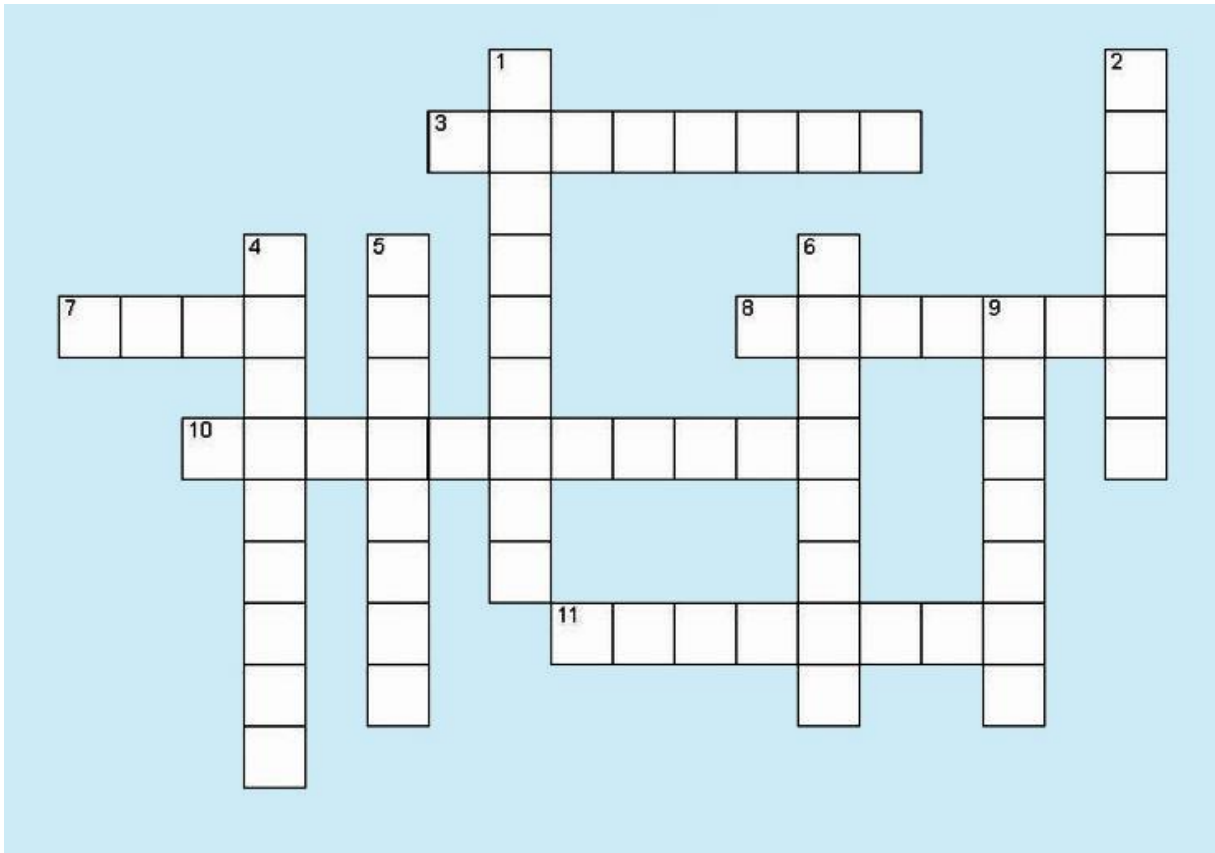
Did you know? At first, the postal system, or "Postal Service," was called the "Post Office" or "General Post Office." The postmaster general started calling it the "Post Office Department" in the 1820s.



In 1783 some states stretched west to the Mississippi River. New states were later formed from this land.

WESTWARD EXPANSION CROSSWORD

After the American Revolution new territories joined the original 13 states. Read the clues below to identify 11 of the states formed from these territories. All their names appear on page 5.



ACROSS

- 3 The Bluegrass State; it's the home of a famous horse race.
- 7 The Buckeye State; its capital is Columbus.
- 8 The Sunshine State; Everglades National Park is located here.
- 10 An American Indian word for "big river"; Elvis Presley was born here.
- 11 An American Indian word for "big lake"; its biggest city is Detroit.

DOWN

- 1 The Volunteer State; "Music City, U.S.A." is located here.
- 2 The Heart of Dixie; alphabetically, it's the first state.
- 4 The Pelican State; the city called "The Big Easy" is located here.
- 5 The Show Me State; the city of Saint Louis is located here.
- 6 The Land of Lincoln; its biggest city is Chicago.
- 9 The Hoosier State; it's the home of a famous car race.

California or Bust!

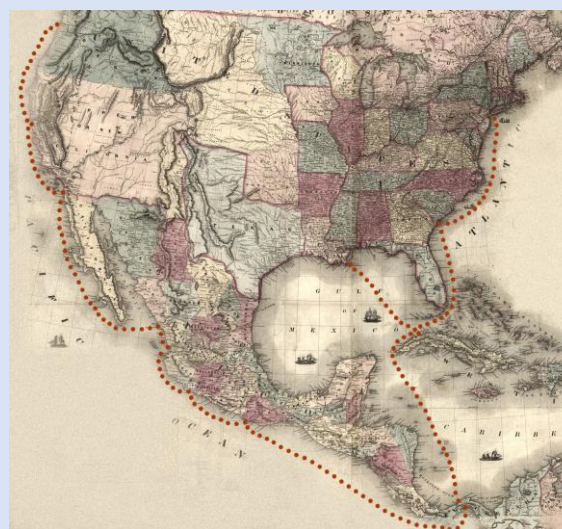
Before the 1840s, few Americans went to California. But then two things happened that changed history.

In February 1848, a treaty with Mexico gave a lot of Mexico's land to the United States. The new land stretched from Texas to California.

Around the same time, gold was discovered in California. When news of the discovery reached the eastern United States, thousands of people moved to California. They wanted to find gold and get rich. The Gold Rush was on!

Getting mail from the east coast to California was a big problem for the Post Office Department. Between Missouri and California were nearly 2,000 miles of plains, deserts, mountains, and dangerous river crossings. Getting mail to California by sea took a long voyage to Panama, where travelers crossed a narrow strip of land to reach the Pacific Ocean. There, another ship took the mail the rest of the way to California.

Overland mail routes to California were added in the 1850s. The longest was the Butterfield Overland Mail route. In 1858 it connected the east with San Francisco by stagecoach. A one-way trip was 2,800 miles and took about 22 days.



The dotted line on this map shows the ocean route from New York to California in 1849.

A mail route is the usual path taken to get mail from one place to another.

Overland means the path goes over land, not by sea!



Did you know? Stagecoach travel wasn't just slow, it was painful! Dirt roads were so bumpy that passengers couldn't help banging into each other. A stagecoach held nine passengers inside, but it was a tight squeeze. Six of the passengers faced each other knee-to-knee. Some passengers smoked or chewed tobacco. After weeks without a bath, people smelled pretty bad. Windows let in fresh air, but also dust and dirt that would cover everything and everybody.

WORD SEARCH

In 1849, nearly 100,000 people rushed to California in search of gold. Most of them never found any.

Can you find the words below in this puzzle? Words can go in any direction and can share letters.

U	D	A	S	T	S	E	W	V	W	D	S
S	N	I	E	T	X	A	O	H	S	E	G
N	A	N	A	S	R	Y	C	E	A	R	N
I	L	R	X	M	A	E	T	H	E	E	I
A	R	O	U	G	A	U	S	Y	S	V	S
T	E	F	E	R	O	N	T	E	A	O	S
N	V	I	K	R	W	A	A	W	D	C	O
U	O	L	P	Z	E	R	Y	P	S	S	R
O	M	A	U	R	U	D	L	O	G	I	C
M	F	C	T	S	N	I	A	L	P	D	Z
S	U	M	H	T	S	I	F	C	U	G	L
S	U	O	R	E	G	N	A	D	J	V	T

CALIFORNIA

DESERTS

ISTHMUS

PANAMA

RUSH

CROSSINGS

DISCOVERED

MOUNTAINS

PLAINS

VOYAGE

DANGEROUS

GOLD

OVERLAND

ROUTES

TREATY

***Did you know?** San Francisco's football team, the 49ers, was named after the gold-seekers who came to California during the Gold Rush. They were called the 49ers because most of them headed there in 1849.*

1847: First U.S. Postage Stamps

Before postage stamps were invented, postmasters wrote the price of postage on the letter. The cost to mail a letter (called the "postage rate") depended on how many sheets of paper were in the letter and how far it went.

The United States started selling its first two postage stamps on July 1, 1847. One had a picture of Benjamin Franklin and cost 5 cents. The other had a picture of George Washington and cost 10 cents.



First U.S. postage stamps, 1847

The second most popular image on U.S. stamps has been Benjamin Franklin. More than 100 different stamps have his picture. Do you know who has been on the most U.S. stamps?

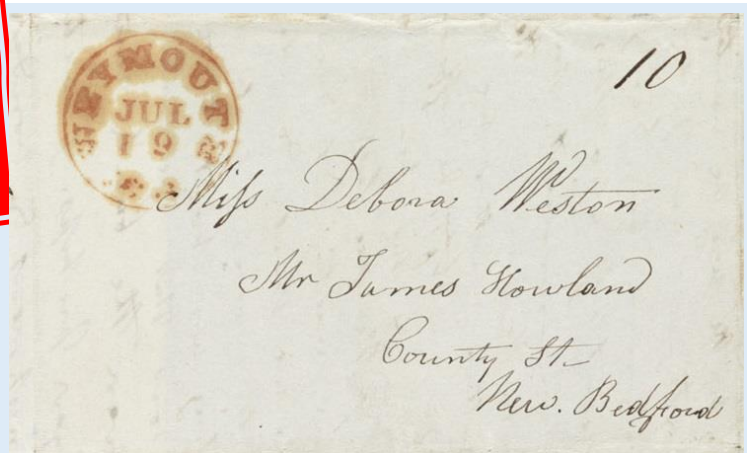


Did you know? Stamps come in all sorts of colors and designs. Visit your Post Office to see the newest stamps or look for them at <https://store.usps.com/store/home>.

First American philatelist

"Philatelist" is a fancy name for a stamp collector. The first stamp collector in the U.S. was David Latimer, a schoolboy in New Jersey. He pasted 35 stamps inside one of his textbooks around 1856.

Before 1855, you could send a letter without paying postage. If you didn't pay, the person you sent it to had to pay for it!



This letter was mailed in 1836, before postage stamps were invented. Can you find where the postmaster wrote the postage rate?

SPOT THE MISTAKES

In 1952, the Post Office Department issued a stamp honoring women who served in our armed forces. The pictures below show the stamp — but one of them is a fake! Can you spot the stamp below that's different from all the others? It has 10 mistakes. See if you can find them all.



DESIGN-A-STAMP

Every year the Postal Service issues dozens of new stamps. They celebrate American history, culture, people, places and other important subjects. Design your own postage stamp here, showing what is important to *you*.



1860: Pony Express

In 1859, there were two ways to mail a letter from the east coast to California:

- By steamship through Panama, which took about 25 days.
- By railroad and stagecoach, which took about 26 days.

In 1860, a private company promised to deliver mail from the east coast to California in just *12 days!* How could they do it? There were no railroads west of Missouri, and cars weren't invented yet. The quickest way to travel was on a fast horse. And that's what they did! They used a horse relay system called the Pony Express. It started in St. Joseph, Missouri, where the railroad from the east ended.

***Did you know?** The Pony Express promised to get a letter from New York to California in about 12 days, but it also carried telegrams, which people could send to each other even faster — in about 8 days.*

The company bought more than 400 horses and hired more than 100 boys and young men to work as relay riders. More men were hired to work at stations along the way. The stations were about 10 miles apart. At the stations, riders could get a fresh horse, grab a bite to eat, or quickly hand the mail to a new rider.

Pony Express riders rode about 75 to 100 miles a day. Their average speed was 10 miles per hour. The mail never stopped moving! At the end of each ride, the rider gave the mail to the next rider. Riders carried mail back and forth, between Missouri and California, night and day.

The Pony Express ran for 18 months, from April 1860 to October 1861. It ended when the cross-country telegraph line was finished. At first the Pony Express was a private service, but for the last four months it carried U.S. Mail. Even though it had a short life, the Pony Express is one of the most famous legends of the Old West.

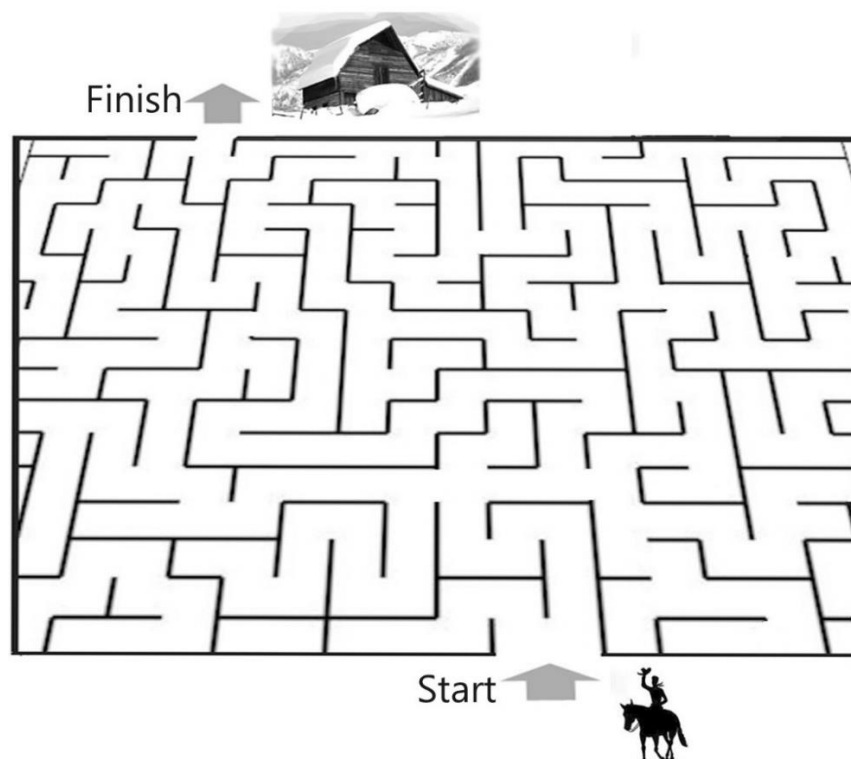


Pony Express stamp, 1960

HELP THE RIDER

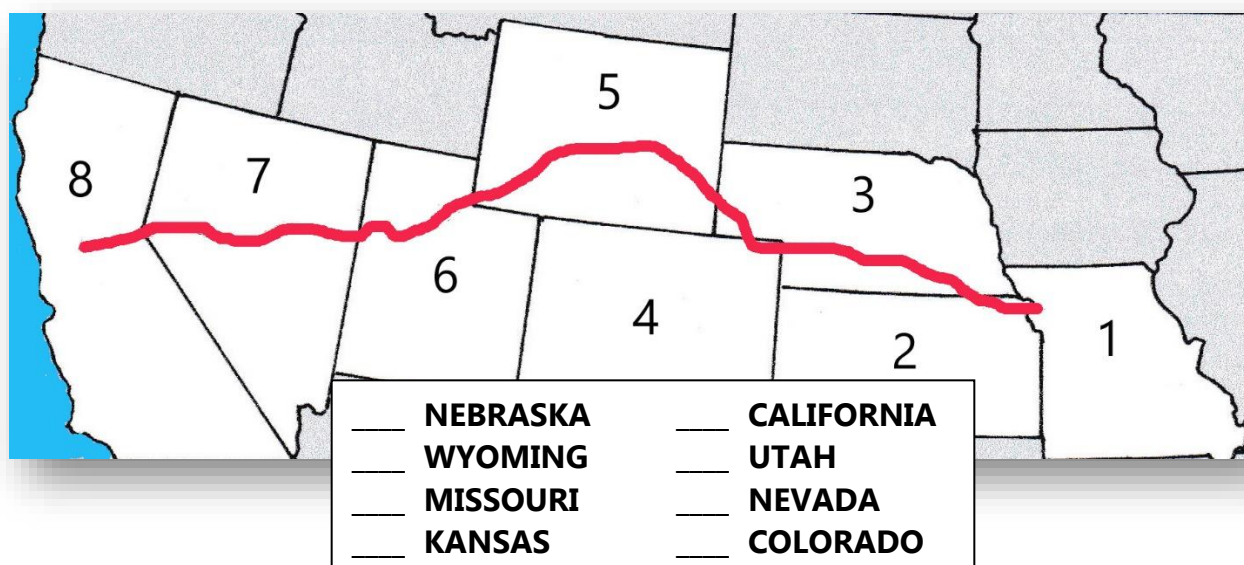
The fastest delivery by Pony Express was in March 1861, when Abraham Lincoln's first speech as President was carried from St. Joseph to Sacramento in just 7 days and 17 hours.

In winter, snow sometimes buried the trails. See how quickly you can help this rider find a safe path to his next station.



NAME THE STATES

The Pony Express ran through 8 states. Can you identify them?
Match the number on the map to the state's name.



Civil War

In the early 1800s, the United States added new lands in the West and grew larger. But at the same time, the country was starting to come apart.

In the 1860s, eleven states in the South wanted to leave the United States. They formed their own country, called the "Confederate States of America." President Abraham Lincoln asked men in the North to fight to keep the Union together. In April 1861 the country started fighting a Civil War. It lasted 4 years, until April 1865, when the South surrendered.

During the war, Congress changed the postal system to make it easier for Americans to use:

- In 1863, letter carriers began delivering mail to people's homes in the biggest cities. Before then, people had to pick up their mail at a Post Office, unless they paid extra for a letter carrier to bring it to their home.
- Starting in 1863, it cost the same to mail a letter to someone who lived only 30 miles away or 3,000 miles away. Before then, it cost more money to send letters far away.
- In 1864, Post Offices started selling money orders. This made it safer for soldiers to mail money home.

All three of these improvements became permanent. They're still around today!

Did you know? One of the main reasons the South wanted to leave the Union was because of slavery. The South wanted to allow slavery in the new western lands. The North didn't want slavery to spread to new states and territories.

A **money order** is a special piece of paper, like a check. To buy a money order, a customer brings cash to the Post Office. The clerk or postmaster fills out the money order with the amount of dollars and cents. Whoever the customer sends the money order to can take it to a Post Office and get that exact amount of cash.

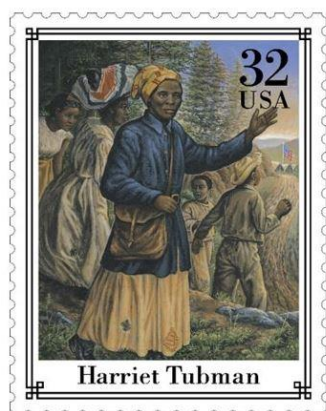


Did you know? Long before he was president, Abraham Lincoln was the postmaster in New Salem, Illinois. He got the job in 1833 when he was only 24 years old.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HEROES

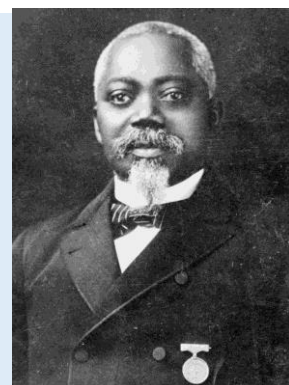
Many Americans worked to end slavery before it ended in the United States in 1865. People who worked to end slavery were called "abolitionists." Some abolitionists were former slaves who wanted to help other slaves become free.

Read the descriptions of the three abolitionists below and match them with their stamp.



- A. I escaped slavery in 1838. I fought against slavery by writing, giving speeches, and printing a newspaper called *The North Star*.
- B. My autobiography was published in 1850 and my speeches drew large crowds. I spoke against slavery and for women's right to vote.
- C. I escaped slavery in 1849. I became a conductor for the Underground Railroad. I led many enslaved people to freedom, including members of my own family.

Did you know? During the Civil War, William Carney fought in the Union Army with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. He was the first African American to earn the Medal of Honor. Congress gave it to him for his bravery at the battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July 1863. After the war, he was one of the first letter carriers in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He delivered mail in New Bedford for almost 32 years, from 1869 to 1901.



William Carney

1869: Railroads Cross the Country

Soon after the first railroads were built in the United States in the 1830s, they were used to move mail. Railroad tracks were better than dirt roads. Also, steam locomotives were faster and stronger than horses.

The first railroads were short and disconnected. When railroads got longer and better connected, more mail was moved by trains.

In 1869, a railroad connecting the East Coast with California was finished. It was called the "transcontinental railroad" because it went all the way across the continent of North America. For the first time it was possible to travel across the entire country by train. That also sped up mail delivery! Once the transcontinental railroad was built, sending a letter from New York to San Francisco took just 7 days, instead of almost a month.

*A **locomotive** is the vehicle that pulls the rest of the cars of the train. It is also called the "engine" because it makes the train move.*

***Transcontinental** means going across an entire continent.*

From the 1870s to the 1950s, railroads were the main way that mail moved in the U.S.



Inside a Railway Post Office, around 1900

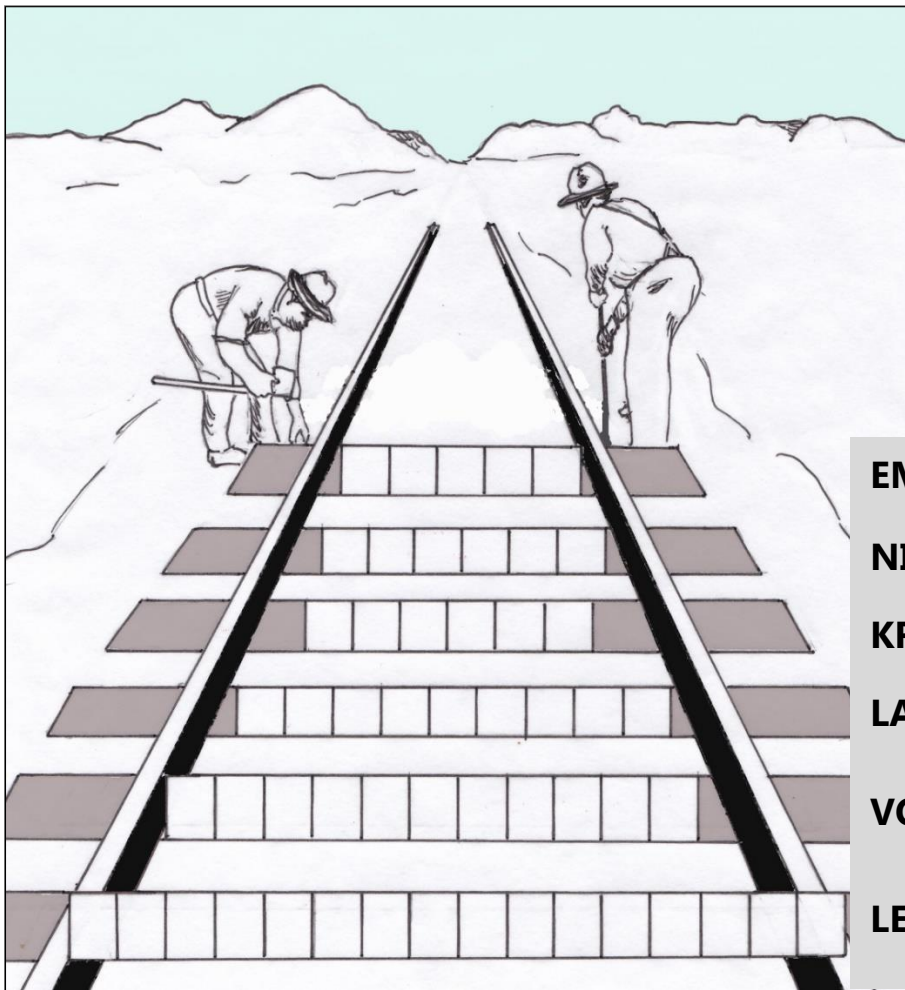
Train cars were so large that some were turned into "Railway Post Offices." Workers called "railway mail clerks" worked inside the mail cars, sorting mail for Post Offices along the line while the trains were moving.

***Did you know?**
The first railroad in the United States was the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. When it began carrying passengers in January 1830, one horse pulled the train cars. The next year, a steam locomotive replaced the horse.*

THE GREAT RAILROAD RACE

Two companies began building the transcontinental railroad in 1863. The Union Pacific started in Iowa and headed west. The Central Pacific started in California and headed east. The U.S. government gave them money and land for every mile of track they finished. They raced to build the most! They met in Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869. The two sets of tracks were joined there, completing the transcontinental railroad.

Help these men build railroad tracks! See how quickly you can unscramble the words below and write them correctly in the spaces. All the words appear on page 15.



EMATS

NISTRA

KRCATS

LARDORIAS

VOLOMIESCOT

LEANIAONNCTNTRST

1863: Free Delivery in Cities

Before the Civil War, mail was delivered to the Post Office and people had to pick it up. If you wanted it delivered to your home or business, you had to pay someone to do that. That changed in 1863, when “free city delivery” began in 49 of the country’s biggest cities. For the first time, letters had to include a street address to be delivered. Free city delivery caught on quickly. By 1900, nearly 800 cities had free delivery service.

The Post Office Department hired “letter carriers” to deliver the mail. Letter carriers made several trips throughout the day. Their routes were all on foot and they walked many miles. Besides delivering mail to homes, letter carriers gathered mail from “collection boxes” and brought it back to the Post Office.

At first none of the houses had mailboxes or mail slots. Letter carriers had to knock on customers’ doors and hand them their mail. They used door knockers to save their knuckles, and sometimes used whistles. If nobody answered, they took the mail back to the Post Office and tried again on their next trip.



Delivering in Wisconsin around 1908

At first city letter carriers handed mail directly to customers. This took a long time! In 1923 the Post Office Department asked everyone to get a mailbox or mail slot.



Letter carrier, 1923

In the early 1900s letter carriers had to carry up to 50 pounds of mail at a time. Some carriers walked 22 miles a day!

PATCH MATCH

City letter carriers have worn uniforms since 1868. In 1956, patches were added to the uniform. The design of the patch changed in 1965, 1970, 1991, and 1995.

Can you guess which patches below came first? Number the patches, oldest to newest, from 1 to 5.











COLLECTION BOXES

The first collection boxes were put on city streets in 1858. At first they were called "letter boxes." They were for letters only. They were attached to lampposts. In the 1890s, larger collection boxes that stood on the ground were also used. In the 1950s they became the standard box.

The box color has changed several times. From 1897 to 1905, boxes were silvery-white with red lettering. Then green was the standard color. That changed in 1955, when boxes were painted red, white, and blue. In 1970, the color changed to today's dark blue.



Collecting mail in 1896 (left) and in 2004 (right)

1896: Free Delivery in the Countryside

People who lived in the city loved free mail delivery, but in the late 1800s, most Americans lived on farms and ranches, or in small villages. They asked, "Why can't our mail be delivered like it is in the city?"

In 1896 the Post Office Department began "rural free delivery," or RFD. With RFD, farmers and people who lived in the countryside had their mail brought directly to their homes.

Rural means in or having to do with the countryside.

Delivering mail in the countryside was very different from delivering in the city. In the country, people lived so far apart that the only way to reach them was by using a horse and wagon. Also, some country roads were bumpy, rocky, muddy, and blocked by gates or livestock.

Rural letter carriers needed good roads before they could deliver the mail. People asked their local governments to help fix the roads so that they could get their mail delivered.

Many of the first rural carriers were farmers who delivered the mail in the morning and worked on their farm in the afternoon. They used their own wagons and horses, and the Post Office Department paid them extra for that. In the wintertime, some rural carriers used sleighs.



Muddy road near Saint Paris, Ohio, 1921

In wet weather, dirt roads became too muddy for travel. To keep receiving free delivery, rural Americans had to improve their roads.



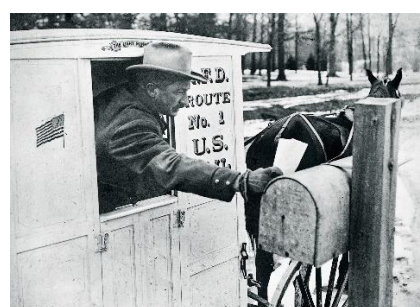
The number of rural carriers jumped from under 500 in 1899, to more than 32,000 in 1905. By the 1920s most rural carriers switched from horses to automobiles. Today only about one third of rural carriers use their own vehicles — the rest drive postal vehicles.

Iva Tyson, 1905

In 1905 Iva Tyson became the first rural carrier in Goodrich, Kansas. At the time, women mail carriers were rare. Today, most rural carriers are women.

SPOT THE IMPOSTER

Eight of the photographs below show rural carriers delivering mail. One of the photographs shows a city letter carrier. Circle the photograph that does NOT show a rural carrier.



Did you know?

Some rural carriers used motorcycles and even bicycles to deliver mail before they switched to automobiles.

To deliver mail through snow, rural carriers had to get creative. The rural carrier on the left put skis on the front of his vehicle and special tracks on his rear tires. The carrier on the right used a long pole to reach over snowbanks.



Harbor Springs, Michigan, 1931



Cleveland, Ohio, 1975

1913: Parcel Post

Today we can shop online and have our orders delivered to our house the next day. Things didn't used to be that easy. Before 1913, the Postal Service wasn't allowed to deliver packages that weighed more than 4 pounds. Anything heavier than that was shipped by express companies or railroads. People often had to pick up their merchandise from the local railroad depot. And people who lived in the countryside were just out of luck.

On January 1, 1913, the Post Office Department started a new service called "Parcel Post." Suddenly, people all over the country could order merchandise from mail order catalogs (also called "wish books") and have their orders delivered right to their mailbox. In the first 6 months of Parcel Post, the Post Office Department delivered *300,000,000* packages. One of the biggest mail order companies was Sears, Roebuck and Company. In 1913, Sears filled *five times* as many orders as it had the year before.

Mail order wasn't the only thing Parcel Post was used for. People mailed all kinds of surprising things, including food — even eggs! College students started mailing their dirty laundry home. In Utah, 37 tons of bricks were mailed to build a bank. Although it was against the rules, a few people even mailed their kids by Parcel Post!



City carrier with parcels of dirty laundry, around 1923.

They mailed WHAT?

Just a few weeks after Parcel Post began, Jesse and Mathilda Beagle "mailed" their 8-month-old son James to his grandmother, who lived a few miles away near Batavia, Ohio. Baby Beagle was just under the 11-pound limit for parcels. Rural Carrier Vernon Lytle picked up the baby from his parents' house and carried him in his mail wagon to his grandmother's house. The postage was fifteen cents.

Although it was against postal regulations, several children traveled via U.S. Mail in the early years of Parcel Post. Initially the only animals that were allowed in the mail were bees and bugs. In 1918, day-old chicks were allowed in the mail. In 1919, some additional "harmless live animals" were permitted, but children did not fall into this category.

HOW MUCH POSTAGE?

In 1913 the Post Office Department sold 12 new stamps just for Parcel Post. The stamps cost from 1 cent to 1 dollar. It cost more to mail heavier packages. It also cost more to mail packages going farther away.

Suppose that in 1913 you wanted to mail a package that weighed 11 pounds to the 4th zone. Use the rate chart below to figure out how much postage you would have needed. After you find the correct postage, figure out what combination of stamps equals that amount. Circle the stamps you would have needed to stick on the package. *Hint: There's more than one right answer!*



RATES OF POSTAGE

Parcels weighing four ounces or less are mailable at the rate of one cent for each ounce or fraction of an ounce, regardless of distance. Parcels weighing more than four ounces are mailable at the pound rate, as shown by the following table, and when mailed at this rate any fraction of a pound is considered a full pound.

Weight.	*1st zone.		2d zone rate.	3d zone rate.	4th zone rate.	5th zone rate.	6th zone rate.	7th zone rate.	8th zone rate.
	Local rate.	Zone rate.							
1 pound ...	\$0.05	\$0.05	\$0.06	\$0.07	\$0.08	\$0.09	\$0.10	\$0.11	\$0.12
2 pounds...	.06	.08	.10	.12	.14	.16	.19	.21	.24
3 pounds...	.07	.11	.14	.17	.20	.23	.28	.31	.36
4 pounds...	.08	.14	.18	.22	.26	.30	.37	.41	.48
5 pounds...	.09	.17	.22	.27	.32	.37	.46	.51	.60
6 pounds...	.10	.20	.26	.32	.38	.44	.55	.61	.72
7 pounds...	.11	.23	.30	.37	.44	.51	.64	.71	.84
8 pounds...	.12	.26	.34	.42	.50	.58	.73	.81	.96
9 pounds...	.13	.29	.38	.47	.56	.65	.82	.91	1.08
10 pounds...	.14	.32	.42	.52	.62	.72	.91	1.01	1.20
11 pounds...	.15	.35	.46	.57	.68	.79	1.00	1.11	1.32

*For a full explanation of the rates of postage in the First Zone see the Parcel Post Guide.

1918: Flying High!

The first successful airplane flew in 1903. Just 8 years later, the Post Office Department was experimenting with ways to fly the mail. In 1918, scheduled airmail service began. By 1920 a transcontinental airmail route connected New York and San Francisco. Mail that once took weeks to travel coast to coast now made the trip in a day and a half!

Creating the airmail network was not easy. To move mail by stagecoaches, steamboats, and trains, the Post Office Department paid private companies to do the work. But airmail began before there were any private airlines. The Post Office Department had to buy its own airplanes, build its own airfields, and hire its own pilots and mechanics. In the beginning there were no radios or flight instruments. It was easy for pilots to get lost!

During the first 3 months of airmail service, Army pilots and planes flew the mail. The Army helped start airmail service so its pilots would get more practice flying.

Flying the mail was dangerous work. Pilots flew in open cockpits in all kinds of weather. The first airplanes were mostly wood and cloth held together with wire. There were lots of crashes and accidents. Thirty-four airmail pilots died on the job from 1918 to 1927, and there were more than 5,000 emergency landings.

By the mid-1920s, flying was safe enough for private airlines to do the work. In 1926, the Post Office Department began paying airlines to fly the mail. Many U.S. airlines, like Delta, American, and United, started out by flying airmail in the 1920s and '30s. Before long they were able to make money by flying passengers too.

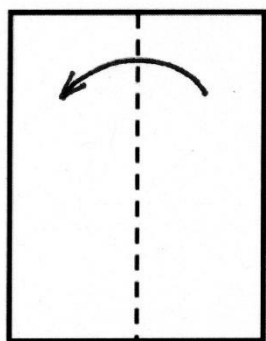


Crash landing, June 1918

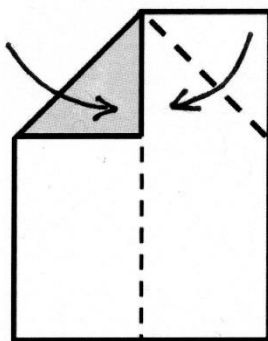
At first, flying was very dangerous. On June 6, 1918, Lieutenant Torrey Webb flew from New York to Boston, looking for a good airmail route. His plane tipped over when he landed near Boston. Luckily, he wasn't injured!

MAKE A PAPER AIRPLANE

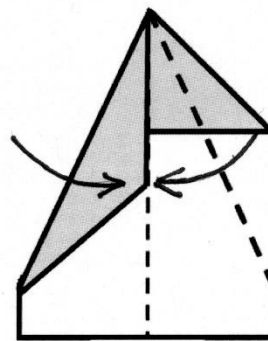
The Wright brothers made history in 1903. The first flight of their powered airplane lasted 12 seconds. How many seconds can your paper airplane stay in the air? To make your own airplane, grab a piece of paper and follow the directions below.



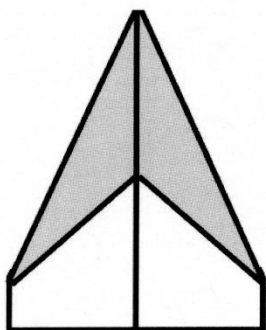
1



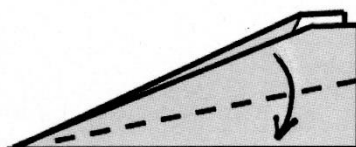
2



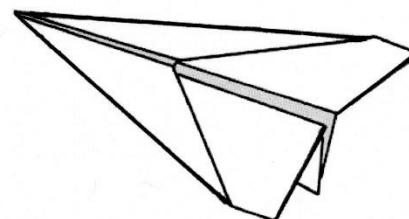
3



4



5



6

First civilian airmail flight, 1918

Pilot Max Miller takes off from the College Park, Maryland, airfield, on August 12, 1918. On that day, Post Office Department pilots and planes replaced Army pilots and planes.



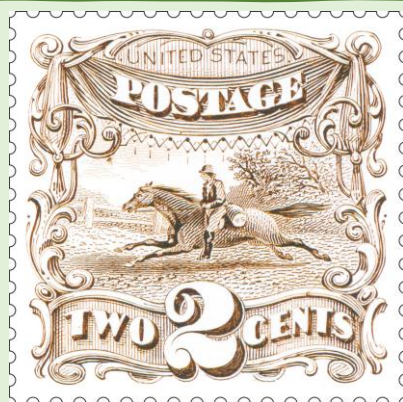
Animal Helpers: Horses, Mules, Oxen, and ... Reindeer?

For centuries, animals have helped humans move, deliver, and even protect U.S. Mail.

Early post riders rode on horseback, while teams of horses were used to pull the stagecoaches that carried mail. Horses, mules, and oxen were used to pull mail wagons and sleds. In Alaska, even reindeer pulled mail sleds!

Animals that are used to pull things are called "draft animals." Before trains and automobiles were invented, horses were the most common draft animals. Horses were so popular that at first some people called trains "iron horses." Cars were sometimes called "horseless carriages." Horses are fast, powerful, and easy to work with.

Mules are half-horse and half-donkey. They are smaller and less powerful than horses, but are tougher and live longer. Cattle that are used as draft animals are called oxen. Oxen are slow, but very strong. They can pull heavy loads over very rough trails.



Post rider and horse stamp, 1869

This was the first U.S. stamp to have a picture of an animal. It was also the first to show something besides the portrait of a national leader.

Did you know? Horses have good memories. Many horses memorized their daily work routines, which made it easier for their human partners to do their jobs. In the 1890s, George Jones, a letter carrier in Scranton, Pennsylvania, let his horse drop him off at the Post Office with the mail. Then the horse would trot himself and the mail wagon back to his stable down the street, all by himself.



Reindeer with mail in Alaska

In 1899 reindeer began pulling sleds of mail on a few routes in northwestern Alaska. Reindeer were stronger than dogs, but they were harder to train.

MEMORY GAME

Memory is a skill. If you practice using your memory, it will improve!

In 2016, the Postal Service celebrated 20 popular pets in postage stamps. Twelve of them are pictured below. Study the pictures for 30 seconds, then cover them or turn the page and try to remember all the animals you saw. You can tell a partner what they were or write them down.

Advanced level: Same as above, but try to remember all the animals in the correct order, from left to right.



Did you know? In the 1920s, horses and mules were mostly replaced by automobiles. But mules are still used to carry mail to the Supai Post Office in Arizona, at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. No road goes there — only a steep, rocky trail.

Animal Helpers: Dogs and Cats

Dogsleds were used in parts of the country where snow and ice made it hard for horses to walk. Dogsleds were pulled by dog teams, which usually had 5 to 12 dogs — and they were strong! They could pull sleds loaded with hundreds of pounds of mail.

Dogs also helped the Postal Service in other ways. Some dogs traveled with letter carriers, keeping them company. Some dogs even guarded the mail while carriers made their rounds.

In small towns, some dogs carried mailbags between railroad stations and Post Offices. They did it by carrying mailbags between their teeth. In New York, a dog named Kazan carried mail to the Swain Post Office in the 1920s. Kazan wouldn't let anyone touch the mailbag when he was carrying it. In Wisconsin, Laddie carried mail to the Little Rapids Post Office in the 1930s. He barked for help if the mailbag was too heavy.

Cats helped too, by protecting mail from mice and rats in Post Offices. Rodents liked to eat the glue used on envelopes and packages. Some postmasters got an allowance for cat food. In 1897, sixty cats patrolled the main Post Office in New York City.

In Alaska, airplanes replaced most dog teams in the 1930s. The last regularly scheduled dogsled mail route ended in 1963, when Chester Noongwook of Savoonga, Alaska, retired his team.

Owney, Mascot of the Railway Mail Service

In 1888, a scruffy terrier wandered into the Post Office in Albany, New York. Postal employees allowed him to stay and named him Owney. Soon Owney began riding mail wagons to the train depot. Then he rode the railway mail car down to New York City and back to Albany. Postal clerks bought him a collar with a tag reading "Owney, Post Office, Albany, N.Y.," in case he got lost. Soon he traveled all over the United States.

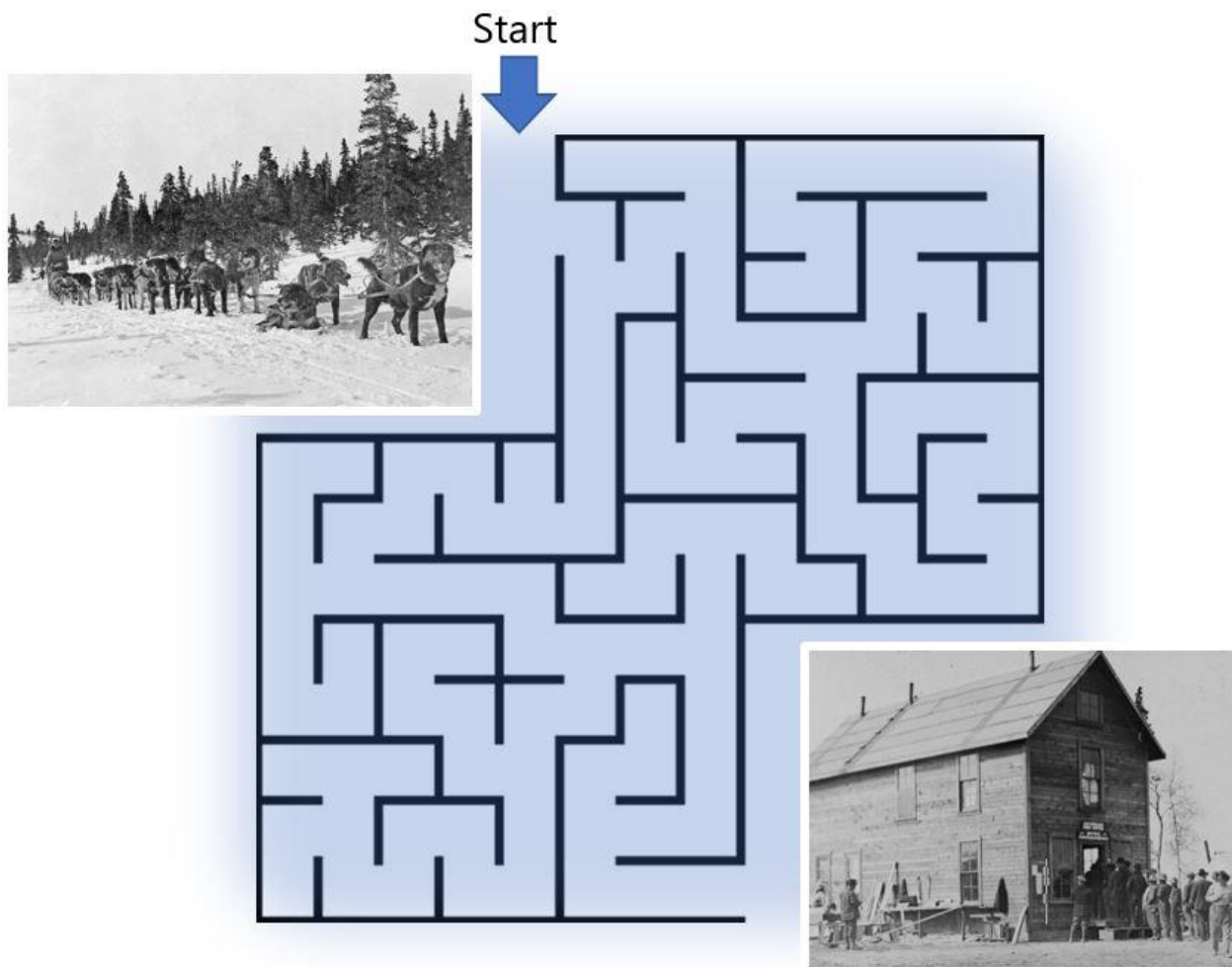
Railway mail clerks clipped baggage tags to his collar, to show where he'd been. In the 1890s, he was the most famous dog in America. His collar got so heavy with tags that Postmaster General John Wanamaker gave him a little jacket, to hold all the tags. Eventually Owney traveled the world. He visited Mexico and Canada by train, and then Japan, China, Singapore, Suez, Algiers, and the Azores, by steamship. In 2011, the Postal Service issued a postage stamp in Owney's honor.



Owney the Postal Dog stamp, 2011

HELP THE DOG TEAM

See how quickly you can help this dog team find its way to the Post Office.



Dorsey, the Mail-Carrying Canine

In 1885, the postmaster of Calico, California, adopted a black and white collie named Dorsey. Calico was a silver mining town in the Mojave Desert. One day, the postmaster wanted to send a letter to his brother who was at a mining camp several miles away. Dorsey had been to the camp before, and the postmaster wanted to see if Dorsey could deliver the letter. He tied it to Dorsey's neck, pointed him towards the camp, and Dorsey was off! The next day, Dorsey came back with his brother's reply tied around his neck. After a few more successful trips, Dorsey became the unofficial carrier for the route. A special mailbag was strapped onto his back. According to one story, the miners were so grateful that they ordered a steak for Dorsey every night.



Dorsey, 1885

Magic Numbers and Tiny Codes

In the second half of the 20th century, the amount of mail sent in the U.S. doubled and then doubled again, from around 50 billion pieces in 1950 to more than 200 billion pieces in 2000. The number of addresses grew too. It was hard for postal clerks and letter carriers to sort all that mail. The carriers also had to travel farther to reach all the new addresses.

How did the Postal Service keep up? The answer was ZIP Codes! ZIP Codes combined regional, city, and state information into five numbers. ZIP Codes were added to addresses in 1963. Before that, clerks had to memorize the names and locations of thousands of Post Offices so they could sort the mail.

ZIP Codes made it easier for people to sort mail. They also allowed computers to do the sorting. When the five digits were converted into barcodes, electronic sorting machines could "read" addresses and automatically sort letters much faster than a person could.

In the 1980s the Postal Service made ZIP Codes longer with ZIP+4 (four more digits after the ZIP Code's five digits). In the 1990s extra digits

allowed the machines to print barcodes and sort the mail into delivery order. This saved carriers lots of time.

WHAT ZIP CODES MEAN

NATIONAL AREA DESIGNATIONS



NATIONAL AREA

ZIP CODE DIGIT DESIGNATIONS

1st DIGIT

2nd DIGIT

3rd DIGIT

4th DIGIT

5th DIGIT

SECTIONAL CENTER

POST OFFICE

OR

OR

LARGE CITY

DELIVERY AREA

***Codes** are words, letters, or other symbols used in place of other words and letters. A barcode is a code made up of tiny lines or bars. The barcode on a piece of mail addressed to you has all your address information. A computer can read that barcode and sort that piece of mail to your exact address!*

The first number in the ZIP Code tells us which part of the country you are in. The last numbers identify your local Post Office.

DO YOU KNOW THE STATE ABBREVIATIONS?

To make room for the ZIP Code in the address, state names had to be shortened. Shorter versions of names are called “abbreviations.” At first, some of the abbreviations had three or four letters. That was still too long. In October 1963, the Post Office Department decided that two letters were enough. Florida was easy (FL), but some of the others were trickier.

Can you match the following states to their abbreviations?
Draw lines connecting each state with its postal abbreviation.

Alaska	CO
Arizona	CT
Arkansas	IN
California	MN
Colorado	AK
Connecticut	AZ
Idaho	IL
Illinois	ID
Indiana	AR
Iowa	MI
Maine	CA
Maryland	MA
Massachusetts	MS
Michigan	IA
Minnesota	ME
Mississippi	MD
Missouri	MO

Bonus Round: That’s not a state!

Did you know that the Postal Service delivers to some places that aren’t U.S. states? For the price of a single postage stamp, you can mail a letter to any of these places — from the nation’s capital to distant Pacific islands! Draw lines matching these place names with their postal abbreviations.

American Samoa	AS
District of Columbia	MP
Federated States of Micronesia	DC
Guam	PW
Marshall Islands	FM
Northern Mariana Islands	GU
Palau	PR
Puerto Rico	VI
U.S. Virgin Islands	MH

How to Mail a Letter

It normally takes 1 to 5 days for the Postal Service to deliver First-Class letters anywhere in the country. Wouldn't it be cool if you could travel first class across the country for just the cost of a stamp?

A "Forever" stamp pays the postage for a 1-ounce, First-Class letter, but how much is an ounce? It's usually about the weight of four sheets of paper and an envelope. To be sure, you can weigh your letter on a kitchen scale. Or make your own scale following the directions below.

Envelopes with unusual shapes are fun, but they can't go through the mail. Only rectangular envelopes can be mailed, and they can't be too big or too small. The minimum size is 3-1/2" high by 5" long, and the maximum is 6-1/8" high by 11-1/2" long. Use light-colored envelopes and write with dark ink. Printing in clear, separate letters is better than cursive.

The address needs to be in the right place on the envelope. It should be in the center of the envelope and parallel to the wide edge. You need to leave some blank space between the address and the bottom of the envelope, about 5/8". That will leave room for a barcode. The bottom line of the address should have the city, state, and ZIP Code. The next line up should have the street address. The top line should be the name of the person you're writing to. Put your return address in the upper left corner.

Don't forget to put a stamp in the top right corner!

Does your letter weigh under an ounce?

A letter that weighs more than 1 ounce will need more than one postage stamp!

To make your own scale, gather a plastic hanger, two paper or plastic cups, string or yarn, and a hole punch. Punch holes on opposite sides of the cups and pass the yarn through the holes. Then hang the cups on the hanger, as shown in the photo.

In one cup, place 5 quarters (which together weigh 1 ounce).

In the other cup, place your letter. Bend it gently to fit in the cup. If it weighs more than 1 ounce, that cup will hang lower!



PRACTICE ADDRESSING AN ENVELOPE

People love to get cards and letters in the mail! You can send mail to anyone whose address you know. A correctly addressed envelope needs your return address, a mailing address, and a postage stamp. Practice addressing this envelope:

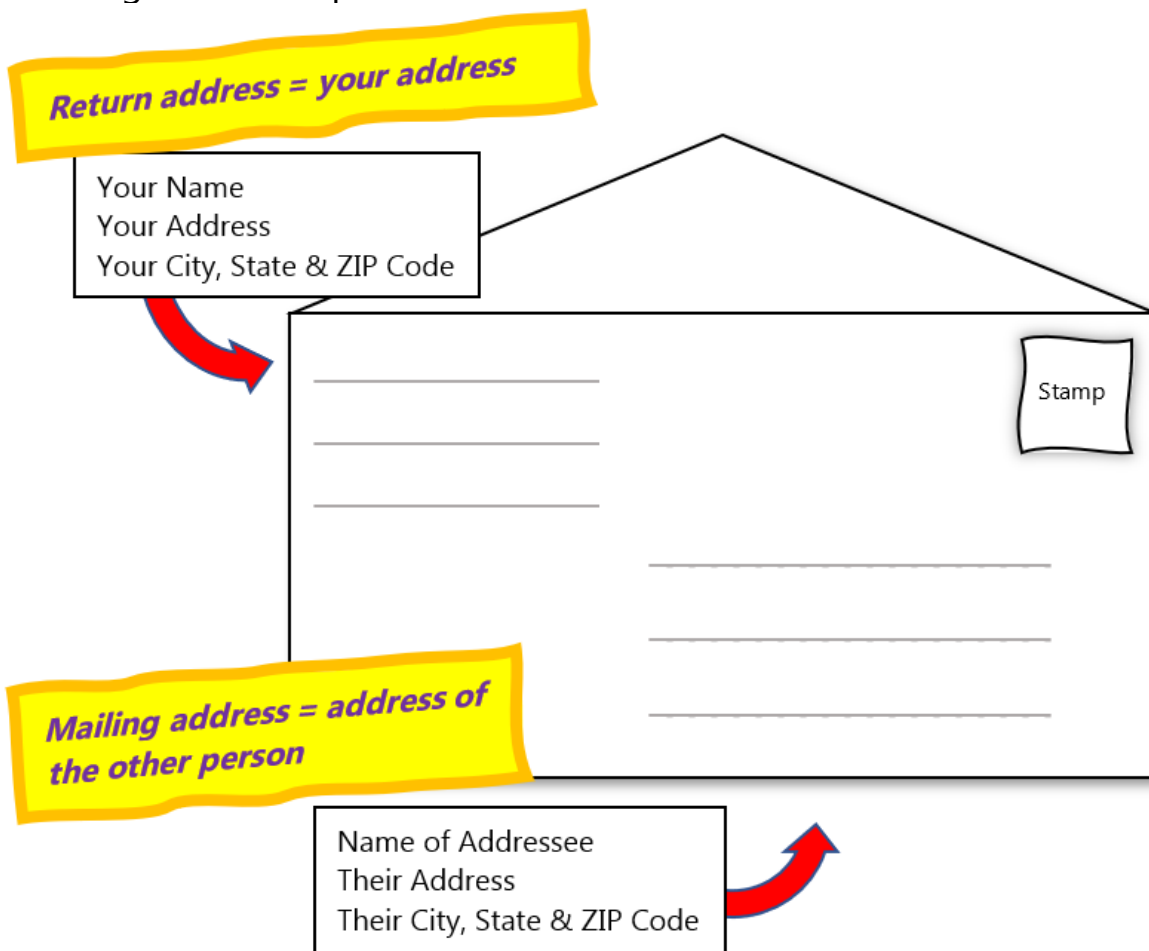
Return address = your address

Your Name
Your Address
Your City, State & ZIP Code

Stamp

Mailing address = address of the other person

Name of Addressee
Their Address
Their City, State & ZIP Code

A diagram of an envelope. At the top left, a yellow banner says "Return address = your address". Below it is a box for the return address with the text "Your Name", "Your Address", and "Your City, State & ZIP Code". A red arrow points from this box to the top left corner of the envelope. On the right side of the envelope, there is a box labeled "Stamp". At the bottom left, another yellow banner says "Mailing address = address of the other person". Below it is a box for the mailing address with the text "Name of Addressee", "Their Address", and "Their City, State & ZIP Code". A red arrow points from this box to the bottom right corner of the envelope. The envelope itself has horizontal lines for the address and a vertical line for the flap.

Did you know? The Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 transformed the U.S. Post Office Department into the U.S. Postal Service in 1971. Before the law changed, taxes helped pay for the Postal Service. Now the Postal Service mainly relies on the money it makes by selling stamps and other products.

Postal seal before 1970:



Postal seal since 1970:



USPS logo since 1993:



Timeline

1775



1775: Benjamin Franklin appointed first postmaster general by the Continental Congress



1785: Congress encouraged use of stagecoaches to carry mail

1788: U.S. Constitution gave Congress the power "to establish Post Offices and Post Roads"

1800

1815: First steamboat mail contract

1825



1847: First U.S. postage stamps



1849: Gold Rush in California; First U.S. Mail arrived in California by steamship

1850



1860: Pony Express began



1863: Free city delivery began

1864: Railway Mail Service began



1858: First street letter boxes; Butterfield Overland Mail began

1875



1888: Owney adopted by postal clerks in Albany

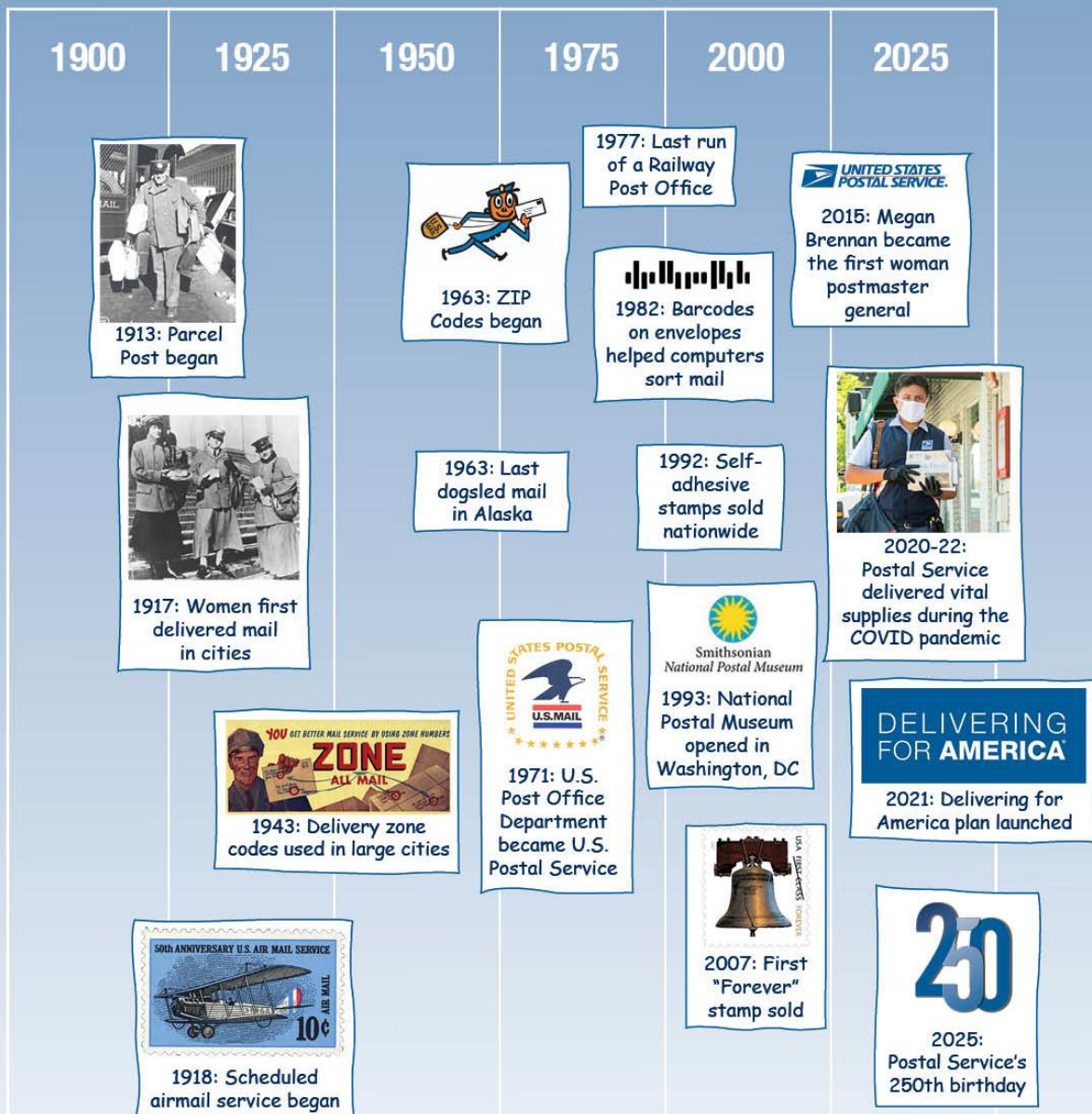
1899: Reindeer hauled mail in Alaska



1896: Rural free delivery began

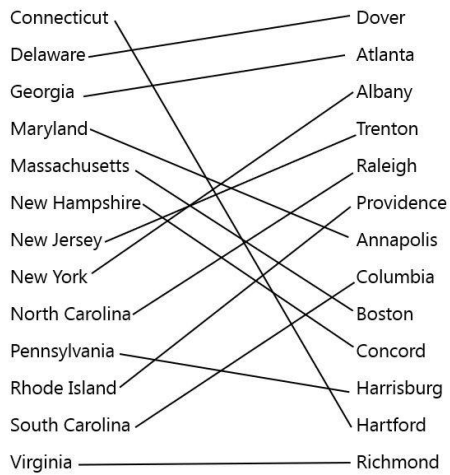


1869: Transcontinental railroad completed



Answers

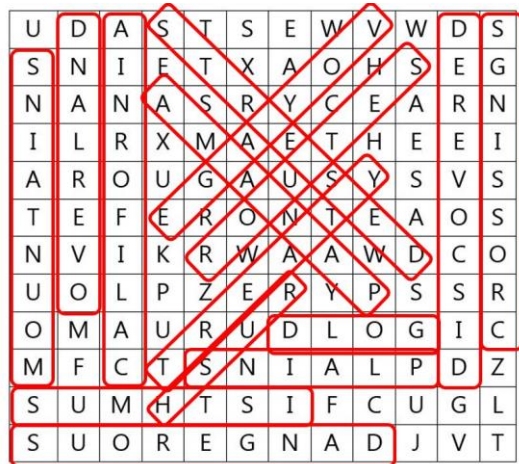
p. 4



p. 6



p. 8



p. 9

George Washington has appeared on the most U.S. stamps. On the 1836 letter, the postage rate ("10") is written in the **upper righthand corner**.

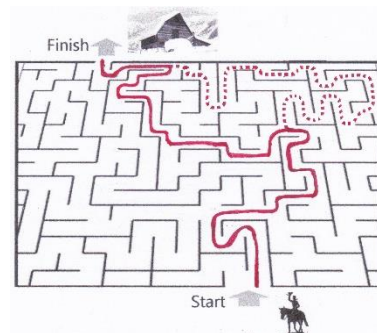
p. 10

The stamp at bottom left is a fake.



p. 12

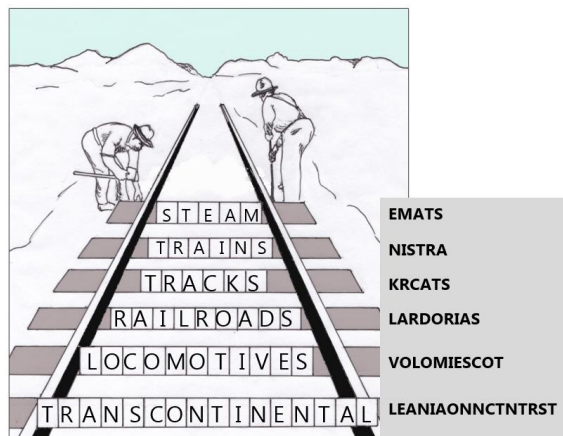
There are two possible routes.



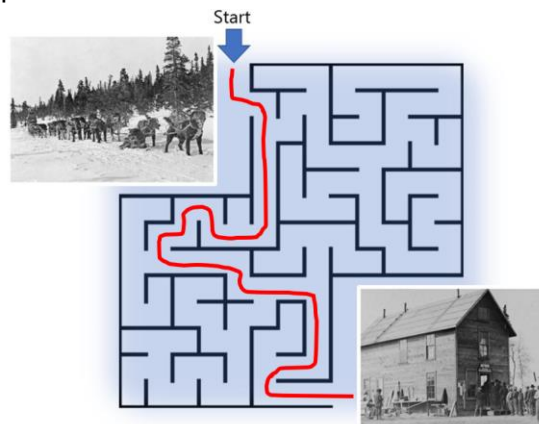
p. 14



p. 16



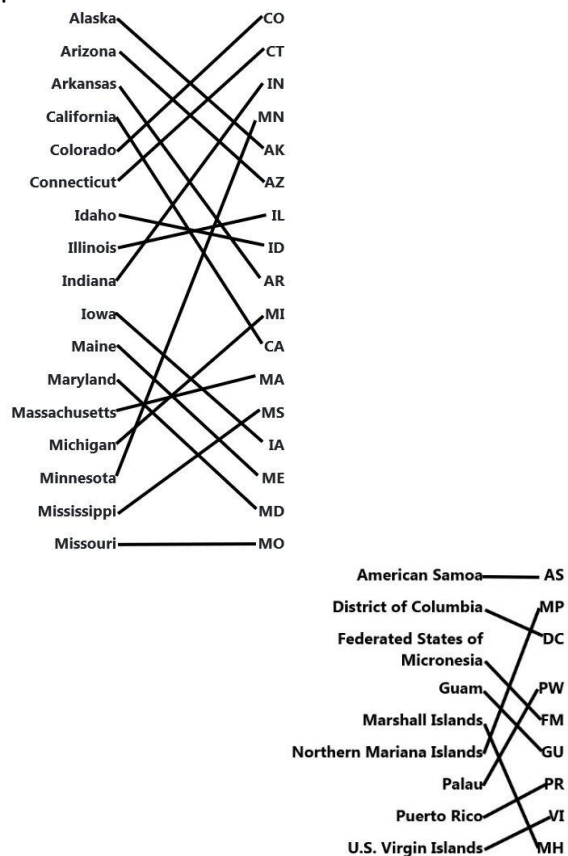
p. 28



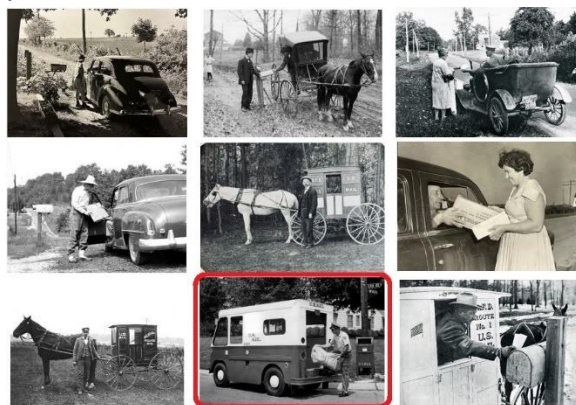
p. 18



p. 30



p. 20



p. 22

You would need postage worth 68 cents. The highlighted stamps are one possible solution.



p. 37

1. Benjamin Franklin.
2. Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.
3. Cross-country telegraph line.
4. Civil War.
5. Rural free delivery.
6. 4 pounds.
7. Reindeer.
8. Grand Canyon, Arizona.
9. New York City.
10. 1 ounce.

QUIZ YOUR PARENTS!

Test your parents to see how much they know about postal history. (If they don't know all the answers, lend them this book!)

1. Who was the first American postmaster general?
2. The first two U.S. stamps had pictures of which two men?
3. The Pony Express ended in 1861 after the completion of what line?
4. Free delivery of mail in cities started during which war?
5. What does RFD stand for?
6. Before 1913, how heavy was the heaviest package you could mail?
7. In Alaska, what type of deer were once used to haul mail?
8. Where in the U.S. are mules still used to carry the mail?
9. Sixty cats once worked in the Post Office in what U.S. city?
10. A Forever stamp will always pay the postage of letter weighing up to how many ounces?

Bonus fact: The Postal Service sold its first Forever stamp in 2007. It had a picture of the Liberty Bell, the symbol of American freedom.



To Learn More...

The United States Postal Service provides information on postal history at <https://about.usps.com/who/profile/history/>.

The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum provides numerous postal history resources at <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/learn>. Or visit the National Postal Museum the next time you're in Washington, DC!

The Postal History Foundation offers lesson plans, activity sheets, and stamp collecting tips and starter kits. Visit <https://postalhistoryfoundation.org/education/>.

The American Philatelic Society offers stamp-related lesson plans and resources at <https://stamps.org/learn/educator-resources>.

Questions? Contact the USPS historian at phistory@usps.gov or write to:

Historian
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20260-0012



Would you like to see some of the world's most historic and famous stamps? In 2013, the largest stamp gallery in the world opened at the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum in Washington, DC. *Admission is free!*