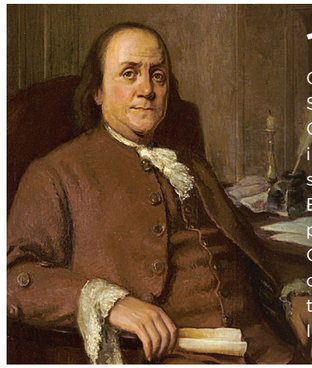
The Time of Our Life: 1775-2025

The history of the Postal Service is a recurring pattern of innovation and growth to build an organization that binds the nation together and meets its evolving mailing and shipping needs.



1775

On July 26, 1775, the Second Continental Congress creates an independent postal system and appoints Benjamin Franklin postmaster general. On Aug. 7, 1775, he creates the precursor to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

1792

The Post Office Act of 1792 codifies the primary control by Congress over postal policy and route designation.

1838

U.S. railroads are congressionally designated as post routes.

1845

The Post Office starts the **first commercial telegraph service**.

1847

The first U.S. postage stamps are authorized, encouraging senders rather than recipients to pay for mail.

1858

The installation of **street letter collection boxes** begins.

1860

Pony Express starts April 3, 1860. It continues through Oct. 26, 1861, two days after the completion of the transcontinental telegraph.

1970

On Aug. 12, 1970, President Richard Nixon signs the **Postal Reorganization Act**, transforming the Post Office Department into the independent, self-financing U.S. Postal Service on July 1, 1971.

1963

The Zone Improvement Plan's ZIP Code is introduced July 1, 1963, to speed up mail processing. In 1965, the Post Office Department becomes **the first postal system to use optical scanners** to read ZIP Codes. These machines sort mail at a rate of up to 36,000 letters per hour.

1968

Priority Mail service begins.

1920

Postage meters authorized.

1942

V-Mail (or Victory Mail) becomes a critical part of the war effort, connecting troops in Europe and Asia with their families back home.

1913

Parcel Post service begins Jan. 1, 1913. More than 4 million packages are handled in the first five days, and roughly 300 million are handled in the first six months.

1911

First authorized U.S. Mail flight.

1902

Rural free delivery becomes a permanent service.

1872

The U.S. Post Office Department is formally established as an executive department, with postmaster general elevated to a Cabinet position.

1893

First commemorative stamps issued.

1861-1865

The Civil War marks a period of postal innovation, including the **creation of money orders, mail-in ballots, free city delivery and postage based on a letter's weight** rather than distance traveled. **The first U.S. Railway Post Office route** is established in 1864.

1975

Post Office class categories are eliminated.

1977

The last Railway Post Office makes its final run.

1983

The ZIP+4 code is introduced.

1994

The Postal Service goes online with *usps.com*.

2006

The Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act is signed into law, making more than 150 changes to USPS regulations.

2007

The first Forever stamp — the Liberty Bell — is issued.

2014

Sunday package delivery begins.

2017

USPS launches its free Informed Delivery digital preview and tracking service.

2020

More than 40 percent of American voters cast ballots by mail.

2021

On March 23, 2021, **USPS enacts its Delivering for America plan** to modernize and revitalize the organization into a competitive, financially sustainable operation that can continue to meet its universal service obligation.

2022

USPS assembles and delivers COVID-19 test kits to homes nationwide. **The Postal Service Reform Act** authorizes key financial components of the Delivering for America plan.

2024

The first Next Generation Delivery Vehicles are deployed.

2025

USPS celebrates 250 years of helping to shape America.

Adapted from Publication 100, The United States Postal Service: An American History.