

U.S. Post Office Is World's Largest Business

Editor's note: This is the first of a five-part series describing the operation and activities of the U.S. Post Office.

By HARRY FERGUSON
United Press International
 Washington - UPI - "I could easily do without the post office," wrote Henry David Thoreau. "I have never received more than one or two letters in my life that were worth the postage."
 Most Americans violently disagree with Thoreau, a 19th century nature lover and philosopher who once broke off a conversation with the abrupt statement that he had a date to go commune with a tree. Americans are the world's greatest letter writers and the United States Post Office processes more than two-thirds of all the mail in the world.

Every working day the Post Office delivers 180 million pieces of mail - almost one for every person in the nation. It claims to be the world's biggest business with more than 500,000 employees and an annual budget of \$4.9 billion. That claim is correct in the sense that the Post Office Department is engaged in selling services and materials for a fee. But the Defense Department with an annual budget of around \$50 billion, makes the Post Office look like a pygmy in the federal structure. The difference is that the Defense Department isn't selling anything but is primarily a buyer interested in the security of the United States.

Most Common Complaints
 By and large the American public and the Post Office Department get along pretty well, but there are irritations which cause both to complain. The most common complaints from the public:

-The stamps don't stick, or they stick together in booklets and rolls. The Post Office department is trying to solve this by putting silicone treated interleaves in the booklets.

-It takes longer for a letter to get from the Bronx in New York to Manhattan than it does for one to get from Boston to the same address. That happens, all right, and for this reason: a clerk in the Bronx Post Office makes a mistake and tosses the letter in the

West Side Manhattan slot instead of the East Side. But it's fairly rare.

The postman stuffs the mail box with "junk mail." This is a highly controversial question which we shall examine in detail, but a brief explanation is that the Post Office Department merely delivers the mail; it doesn't originate it. Congressional action would be necessary to eliminate "junk mail," and Congress itself is one of the worst offenders.

Delays in Delivery
 A letter sometimes will be in transit for years. Example: On April 9, 1923, a store in a Kansas town mailed a letter to a man in a Missouri village. On Aug. 30, 1962, the letter was delivered to the man in Stockton, Calif. What had happened was that on July 31, 1962, the letter was found under the platform of a weighing machine in the Missouri village post office where it had been for 39 years. Sometimes letters slip through cracks in the post office floor and remain there until the building is torn down or renovated.

The Post Office Department

is reluctant to criticize the public, but it does have some things to chide us about.

-Last year there were 22,300,117 Americans who addressed letters and packages in such crazy fashion that nobody could read them. All that mail ended up in the Dead Letter Office. The worst part of it was that, not only was the address illegible, but there was no return address or if there was one it, too, was unreadable.

-Americans are restless people and 30 million of us change addresses every year. This makes things tough for the Post Office, but they realize nothing can be done about it and carry on the best they can.

-Many people like to play games with the Post Office Department by simply writing "Bing" on an envelope and mailing it. Thirty years ago, when the mail was not so heavy, postal employees had time to try to figure things out and usually the "Bing" mail was delivered fairly quickly to Bing Crosby who was at the height of his radio popularity. This is called "puzzle mail" and the Post

Office wishes you would stop it.

Advertisers Are Problem
 -Advertisers are a problem when they send samples by first class mail. Some of the things sent through the mail are tops of tin cans, nails ("nail down your future with life insurance"), tops of soft drink bottles, bleaches and detergents in thin cakes that look like candy. These things make it difficult for the Post Office to put letters through the automatic machines.

-Women, estranged from their husbands have a habit of taking all their bills on the first of the month, sticking them in an envelope carrying a five cent stamp and mailing it to him. The five cent stamp isn't enough postage and the weight of the bills frequently breaks the envelope and spills everything.

newspaper instead of clipping the item, thereby incurring a delay because of insufficient postage.

Has Many Enterprises
 If the Post Office Department had nothing to do except pick up and deliver the mail, life would be easy and it would not incur an annual deficit of \$293 million. But it is in all sorts of enterprises: it is a giant detective agency with 1,500 postal inspectors in 400 cities; it registers 3 million aliens each

year; it distributes income tax forms and census blanks; its rural deliverymen take a census of wildlife; it is one of the world's biggest auctioneers of articles that cannot be delivered; it is an enormous bank selling postal money orders and taking in postal savings accounts; it merchandises \$3.5 million a year worth of special stamps to philatelists.

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Small Worlds Around Us

By LYNN M. WATKINS
 (Register and Tribune Syndicate, '563)

Old Legends Never Die. They Just Turn Into Facts
 With sophisticated smugness we laugh at those uninformed folks that believed that leprechauns inhabited hollow trees, birds migrated to the moon, or spent the cold winter months buried in the mud of a pond bottom.

We have slammed the door on such nonsense, but we snugly hold onto some equally silly legends and become extremely vocal, if not abusive, when told our beliefs have no foundation in scientific fact.

Many old legends, myths and even superstitions are very comforting to live with. They provided us with an escape of sorts from more present worries or complex problems with which we know we cannot cope. Some legends were so colorful or so romantic we just can't bear to give them up.

Childhood holds no monopoly on legends, for many adults also enjoy living with the beliefs handed down by forefathers. Age old superstitions are difficult to abandon. Legends we have believed in for years, we strive to retain. And many legends deal with animals.

Actually it could not happen, but just who should contradict the lady that saw a mother snake swallow her young and later allow them to escape after the danger was past? If told she was seeing things that didn't happen, she would be pretty indignant. "You mean to tell me," she demanded, "I lied about it when I saw it with my own eyes, and my mother has seen it countless times?"

Own Eyes
 How can you argue with that person who with his own eyes saw a toad that had been sealed up in a concrete cornerstone for many years hop away as lively as ever when the cornerstone was broken open? This person, by his own vehement admission, was there when the stone was opened. His father was there when the cornerstone was placed, and he himself had lived in the near vicinity all his life, and knew the concrete had not been disturbed for many years.

"Just how," he wants to know, "can science or anyone else contradict what he and dozens of his neighbors saw the day the old cornerstone was split?" The legend of the toad in the cornerstone has a pretty firm place in some branches of folklore and legend.

Horsehair Rope
 Or consider the man who had been a cowboy and had slept more nights on the prairie than in a bed. He always protected himself by encircling his bedroll with a horsehair rope, firmly believing that no rattlesnake in the world was ever known to cross a horsehair rope.

Consider a man who constantly makes decisions and is recognized as a serious thinker that can discuss intelligently many subjects but who canceled his subscription to a newspaper because it contradicted his boyhood belief that a horsehair soaked for a time in water would turn into a horsehair snake. He said that he had, while a small boy on the farm, placed the hair from a horse's mane in a water trough and later removed the snake. Besides, he knew of many other boys that had performed the same experiment.

What persists in the way of legends or superstitions is usually that which is spectacular, romantic, colorful, or that which catches our imagination. Seemingly, old legends never die, they just turn into facts.



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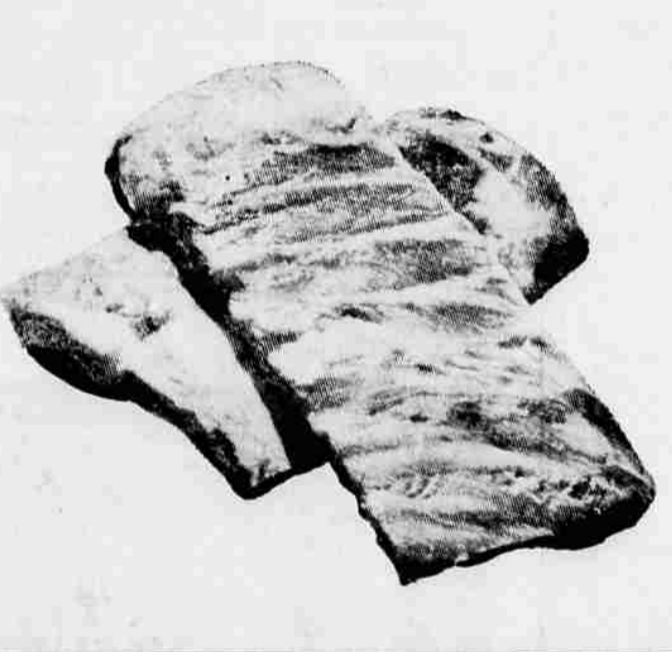
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