

A4209

RECORD BOOK OF
STAMP SHIPMENTS TO POSTMASTERS,
JULY 1847–JUNE 1853

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INTRODUCTION

On the single roll of this microfilm publication, A4209, is reproduced a record book of stamp shipments to postmasters and route agents, July 1, 1847–June 30, 1853, from Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group (RG) 28.

BACKGROUND

The position of Postmaster General was created by the Second Continental Congress, July 26, 1775, and continued by the Confederation Congress, following ratification of the Articles of Confederation, March 1, 1781. A temporary Office of Postmaster General was established in the Federal Government by the Post Office Act (1 Stat. 70), September 22, 1789, and the permanent Post Office Department was established by the Post Office Act (1 Stat. 232), February 20, 1792. The Postmaster General was made a Cabinet member in 1829, and the Post Office Department was elevated to Cabinet status by the Post Office Act (17 Stat. 283) of June 8, 1872. The Post Office Department was abolished, effective July 1, 1971, by the Postal Reorganization Act (84 Stat. 719) of August 12, 1970, and its functions were transferred to the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

The Third Assistant Postmaster General supervised and managed the financial business of the Post Office Department, including the distribution of postage stamps and other matters that were not specifically delegated by law to the Treasury Department's auditor of the post office. (*Laws and Regulations for the Government of the Post Office Department*, Regulations, Ch. 1, §4, and Ch. 50, §390 (Washington: C. Alexander, printer, 1852).

Postage stamps were first authorized by an act of Congress of March 3, 1847 (9 Stat. 188), that directed the Postmaster General to "prepare postage stamps, which, when attached to any letter or packet, shall be evidence of the payment of the postage chargeable on such letter." Before the introduction of stamps, the postmaster would write the name of the post office, the date it would leave his post office, and the amount of postage paid in advance. Persons sending mail could either prepay the postage or require the recipient to pay it. Prepayment became mandatory on April 1, 1855, pursuant to an act of March 3, 1855 (10 Stat. 641). Prepaid postage stamps were an innovation that made the postal system more convenient to use, thereby increasing its business.

Distribution of the first adhesive stamps began on July 1, 1847. The basic postage rate was 5 cents for half-ounce pre-paid letters destined for locations under 300 miles, or 10 cents for destinations over 300 miles. The 5-cent stamp printed in brown ink featured Benjamin Franklin, while the 10-cent stamp printed in black ink depicted President George Washington. Use of these stamps was discontinued when the cost of prepaid postage was reduced by an act of March 3, 1851 (9 Stat. 587). The new basic rate, effective July 1, 1851, was 3 cents for prepaid letters weighing less than one-half ounce destined for locations under 3,000 miles, or 6 cents if over 3,000 miles. One cent was

the charge for “drop letters” placed in a post office for delivery at that office. New blue-ink 1-cent Franklin, 3-cent red/orange-ink Washington, and 12-cent black-ink Washington stamps came into use. The next rate change occurred on April 1, 1855, when the over 3,000-mile rate increased again to 10 cents and a new green 10-cent Washington stamp was issued.

RECORDS DESCRIPTION

This microfilm publication reproduces a single volume containing records of stamp shipments sent to postmasters and route agents from July 1, 1847, to June 30, 1853. The volume is paginated 1–21, then 46 unnumbered pages, 92–201, 208–257, 266–309, 318–371, and 374–535. Despite the odd pagination, it is likely that no information is missing or omitted. The largest chronological “gap” in recordkeeping—June 10–29, 1851—is easily explained as a decision by the Post Office Department to stop distributing 5- and 10-cent stamps due to the impending July 1, 1851, rate change. Information was recorded in these pre-printed columns:

COLUMN	EXPLANATION
Day Sent	The date the stamps were sent by the Third Assistant Postmaster General
Date of Receipt	The date the postmaster or route agent received the stamps; he was required to “promptly transmit” a receipt to the Third Assistant Postmaster General.
Office and Postmaster	Names of post office and postmaster
Denominations, 10s and 5s	The number of stamps of each denomination sent. Beginning at page 92 (June 30, 1851), the number of stamps of the new denominations—12, 3, and 1—were recorded instead, with 12 at the far right of the “Office and Postmaster” column, “3” annotated over the 10, and “1” annotated over the 5. Relatively few post offices received shipments of the 12-cent stamp.
Amount	The total dollar value of the postage sent.

Records of stamps returned from postmasters and route agents, as well as accounting tallies, are interspersed with the records of stamp shipments sent. The last few pages of each section (see table of contents) are sometimes devoted to returns.

Route agents were contractors who transported mail from one post office to another along a designated route. Route agents were not mentioned in this volume after 1849, so they may not have been distributing stamps to smaller post offices after that date. Post office regulations from 1852 stated that “These stamps are furnished to one or more of

the principal postmasters in each county, who are required to supply the other postmasters in their respective vicinities, *upon being paid for the amounts applied for and furnished.*” (*Laws and Regulations for the Government of the Post Office Department, Regulations, Ch. 50, § 368* (Washington: C. Alexander, printer, 1852).

This volume of stamp shipments was microfilmed in about 1967. A negative roll of the microfilm was transferred to the National Archives, which caused a title page and the image of the National Archives “seal” to be filmed and spliced onto the roll in 1967. The current (2013) location of the original record book has not been researched, but the label on the original roll of negative microfilm states: “Original Volume retained by the Post Office Department. (2-6-67).” This film was assigned the publication number A4209 in 2013 in order to issue it as a National Archives Microfilm Publication.

CONTENTS

PAGES	DATE RANGE SECTIONS
1–21	July 1, 1847–June 27, 1849
unnumbered (46 pages)	July 3, 1849–June 9, 1851
92–201	June 30, 1851–Jan. 2, 1852
208–257	Jan. 1–Mar. 29, 1852
266–309	Apr. 1–June 29, 1852
318–371	July 2–Sept. 30, 1852
374–535	Oct. 1, 1852–June 30, 1853