Norfolk's First Post-Revolutionary Post Office

Norfolk's first post-Revolutionary post office was opened on or near Main Street in 1777, amid the rubble left from the British bombardment on New Year's Day a year earlier. As Norfolk rebuilt, the post office remained on Main Street and local residents, calling there for their mail, grumbled that the post office was more convenient to merchants and shippers than to the general population. Free mail delivery was authorized only to cities with a population above 20,000. Norfolk achieved this status in 1873 and the first letter carriers were hired. The Norfolk *Virginian* predicted that the new system would be a success "so long as the carriers are honest." Carriers may have been honest, but early efforts at mail delivery were anything but smooth. In 1882, the Norfolk *Landmark* printed a series of cartoons lampooning postal service in Norfolk, depicting the post office as a giant turtle, and reporting as many as 20 pieces of mishandled mail daily.

By 1886 the Post Office employed nine carriers and soon, only New York surpassed our daily delivery service to downtown businesses (seven in 1889). Carriers made two deliveries daily to residences, reaching outlying areas such as Huntersville and Lamberts Point on horseback. The first branch post office opened in Berkley when that neighborhood was annexed in 1906. Other stations followed as new suburbs were annexed, two of them, Wright and Milan, named for early Norfolk postmasters. The cost of mailing a first-class letter remained under a dime until 1974, when postage rose from eight to ten cents.

Pages from Norfolk's Past are researched and written by Peggy Haile McPhillips, City Historian