



POST ROADS

The first official postal service in the British colonies was established in 1639 when the General Court of Massachusetts designated Richard Fairbanks' Boston tavern as the official repository of mail brought from overseas. Mail between the colonies was the responsibility of each colonial government. In 1673 Colonial New York Governor Francis Lovelace established a monthly mail delivery, called a "post," between New York and Boston. The route between the two cities became known as the "Old Boston Post Road."

The British Crown established the first centralized postal service in the colonies in 1692. According to British colonial practice, a private individual, Thomas Neale, received the grant to operate the system. Neale lived in England and had no intention of moving to the colonies, so he appointed Andrew Hamilton of New Jersey as the deputy postmaster general. In 1707, the British bought back the rights to the North American postal system from Hamilton's heirs.

Several men were appointed postmaster between 1707 and 1776. The most notable among those to hold the position was Benjamin Franklin who became postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737 at the age of thirty-one. In 1753, the Crown appointed Franklin and William Hunter, postmaster of Williamsburg, Virginia, as joint postmasters general for the colonies. When Hunter died, John Foxcroft replaced him. Foxcroft and Franklin served as joint postmasters general until the War for Independence began in 1776.

Benjamin Franklin revised and revitalized the Colonial Postal Service. He toured the colonies as far south as Virginia and ordered new road surveys. Newer, shorter routes between towns and cities were opened as a result of his actions. Milestones were placed along roads that carried the mail. These roads were called "Post Roads," not because of the mile markers, but because they carried the mail, the "post." For the first time in the colonies, "post riders" traveled these new post roads at night. All of this change resulted in an improved efficiency and a reduction in the delivery time for the mail.

After the War for Independence, the Articles of Confederation authorized the national government to create post offices, but not post roads. Adoption of the Constitution changed this. The Post Office Act of 1792 gave the Congress the power to establish not only post offices, but also post roads. By 1800, Congress had designated 20,000 miles of post roads. By 1812, the US had over 39,000 miles of post roads and 2600 post offices. In 1838, the Congress designated all existing and future roads as post roads.