CROSS-REFERENCING LETTERS & POSTCARDS WITH DOCUMENTS & PHOTOS

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Dating correspondence

Terminology

- General delivery – Where a person could pick up mail even when he/she did not live in the location; mail held at the PO for recipient
- Indicia (pronounced "in-di'-sha") – Postal markings or labels affixed to mail item
- **Mail – from French *Male* meaning sack, wallet, or bag; 1650s: "a mail of letters" metamorphosed into "mail" being the letters; sent overseas – mail; domestic mail - post**
- Mail order – Business that sends items via USPS
- Star route – rural route with mail delivered by private contract with USPS
- **Post – Literal location of community announcement; nailed to a post or inn door**
- Post-bag – British – Mail bag
- Postcode – Number & letters for ease of mail delivery - Brit
- Posthaste *(post haste)* – Get the information out as fast as possible (deliver the message ASAP)
- *Poste restante* – direction written on mailed item that mail should be held at PO for addressee - Europe
- Postmark – AKA "Cancellation Stamp" – applied by PO, identifying date & place of mailing
- Postpaid – postage pre-paid by sender (essentially opposite of COD)
- Post road – route over which mail is transported
- RFD – Rural Free Delivery (postal delivery in rural areas, via vehicle)
- RR – Rural Route
- COD – Cash on Delivery
- PO – Post Office (e.g., "PO Box")
- APO – Army/Air Force Post Office
- FPO – Fleet (Navy) Post Office

> Check vocabulary – only words in existence at the time are likely to appear (unless it is inadvertent). Modern terminology means modern date of creation (or a time machine, perhaps?). Looking at language use in correspondence can help with dating it.

Mail by the numbers

- 1943 – Zones were implemented (started with 2 digits, then expanded to 3; added to written address *between* town and state; only larger cities/towns had zone numbers)
- 1963 – ZIP (Zone Improvement Plan) was instituted when zone numbers became too long
    - Initial ZIP codes were for businesses and government; later expanded to general public
    - By late 1960s, ZIP code use was common
- 1983 – ZIP+4 was implemented; still (2023) not used by everyone
- US location, determined by ZIP:
    - 1st number – general geographic location (NE to far West)
    - 2nd & 3rd numbers – location of central Post Office of the region
    - 4th & 5th numbers – location of the smaller Post Offices or zones for given addresses

Mail by the letters (state abbreviations)

- 1831 – no uniform arrangement
- 1874 – 3 or 4 letters (only first one capitalized, others in lower case) with period at end
- 1943 – additional change (first letter capitalized, others lower case) with period at the end
- June 1963 – State abbreviation as above, but all letters capitalized and no period at end
- October 1963 – 2 letters, capitalized, no period, to make room for ZIP codes

Costs over the years
- First "stamps": hand-stamped onto piece of mail (no envelope then); letters, etc. arrived COD
- Prepaid postage (some overlap with the COD form of delivery)
  - In London, 1680 – "Penny Post," - 1¢
  - In US, May 1840 – 1¢ stamps could be purchased in perforated sheets with adhesive on the back – called "Penny Blacks"
- Before 1847 – Cost was determined by "distance zones"
- After 1847 – Costs were elevated by other variables
  - Heavier &/or larger items were more costly
  - "Ship fees" were added for mail coming from overseas
- First class, 1863 on
  - 1863 - 3¢/half ounce; 6¢/ounce
  - 1883 - 2¢/half ounce; 4¢/ounce
  - 1885 - 2¢/ounce
  - 1917 - 3¢/ounce (result of WWI?)
  - 1919 - 2¢/ounce
  - 1932 - 3¢/ounce
  - 1958 - 4¢/ounce
  - 1968 - 6¢/ounce
  - Etc.
- Post cards, 1863 on (rates fluctuated)
  - 6¢ in 1863 to
  - 4¢ in 1883 to
  - 2¢ in 1885 to
  - 1¢ in 1898; then back and forth between 1 & 2¢ until 1925 . . . 1¢ for stamped cards, 2¢ for postcards
  - Rates went up significantly from 1958 on

  But always less than first class

> Post cards & even letters were usually preferred over phone calls:
> - A call over 4 miles was Long Distance, so the LD operator was needed and the fees were much higher than "Local" calls
> - A 1- or 2-cent post card could get the information via post (possibly even clearer, given potential phone connection issues); letters across town could be received in less than a day

Delivery changes over the years
- Pony Express, 1860-1861 (see references in bibliography)
- 1864 – first mail transport via transcontinental rail travel helped bring down postal costs
- By 1899, Rural Free Delivery was operating in every state & territory in the Union
  - Prior: Post Office was the hub of the community
  - PO was often inside the mercantile with store owner as the local Postmaster
  - RFD necessitated more and better roads; improvement affected all travelers
- Before 1950, mail coming by postal carrier (AKA mailman) was delivered twice a day

Common topics
Correspondence can help find these various records:
- Vital records
- Newspapers
- City directory listings
- Court documents
- Military records
- Cemetery data & location
- Tax records
- Town, County, &/or State histories (in book form or online)
- Photographs (with possible identification)
- Journals, diaries, & additional correspondence
- Etc.

. . . by providing updates and information about:

> Prior to 1963, Indiana was abbreviated Ia. With the 2-letter abbreviations, IA was assigned to Iowa (case sensitive and no period)

- Family (who, when, where, of events, additions, etc.)
- Occupation (what the jobs were, who, where, & when, etc.)
- Residence (who moved where, when, & why, etc.)
- Travel & migration (who was coming/going, why, & how, etc.) – often noted by post cards
- Immigration & naturalization (who, where, when, why, how, etc.)
- Illness & death (what, where, to whom, etc.)
- What happened to _____ (when, where, why, etc.)
- Economic & political climates and issues (why, how, when, etc.)
- Nicknames (identified often in texts of letters – but reasons for them: not always clear)

Finding, reading, identifying, & citing the mail
- Some return addresses &/or cancellation stamps may be on the back of the envelope
- 4-page stationery (8x10 paper, folded in landscape)
    - Page 1 – first panel (outside) of folded item
    - Page 2 – inside, right panel
    - Page 3 – inside, left panel
    - Page 4 – outside of right panel (but may be interchanged with page 3)
- Address numbers &/or streets may have changes over the years – always check if there is any question (https://stevemorse.org/census/changes.html)
- Literacy was not a given:
    - 1880 – 20% of the world's population could read & write
    - 1880 – 83% of US population could read & write (but not necessarily in English)
- Citing letters (if either correspondent is living, abbreviate address to city, state, & country):
    - Author (writer) of letter with address & date
    - Type of correspondence (letter, post card, telegram, etc.)
    - Recipient of letter, with relationships clarified (if pertinent), address, & any significant date difference
    - Page number(s), if applicable
    - Who "holds" the correspondence plus
        - His/her location (city, state, country)
        - Date the missive was last known to be in this person's possession
    - Any relevant details (e.g., general topic, such as "Civil War correspondence")

> This is ONE way to cite the material
> (see Elizabeth Shown Mills's *Evidence Explained* for other variations)
>
> Virginia J. Wilcox, 5419C University Ave., Chicago 15, Illinois; personal letter to mother,
>   Emma Hollander Johnson, Hartland, Wisconsin; dated 5 August 1945 (postmarked
>   10 August 1945); subject: Manhattan Project and atom bomb, pp. 8-9. Original,
>   in possession of Jean Wilcox Hibben, Riverside County, California, in January 2023.

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John, Richard R. *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995.

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Watkins, Derek. "Posted: Visualizing US Expansion through Post Offices," *Derek Watkins . . . Creative Mappings,* blog, 6 August 2011. Accessed online at https://derekwatkins.wordpress.com/2011/08/06/posted/

Wikipedia. "United States Postal Service." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.* 24 November 2011. Accessed from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Postal_Service .

Some Wikipedia articles with USPS info as noted in URLs (some of these are missing references; use as general information & clues on the topic)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ZIP_Code_prefixes
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rural_Free_Delivery (list of RFD routes & dates established)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pony_Express
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage_stamps_and_postal_history_of_the_United_States
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage_stamp
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Penny_Post
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postal_history
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage_stamp_gum

Additional websites with general information on USPS & its history

https://guides.loc.gov/this-month-in-business-history/july/zip-code-introduced
https://history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-postal-system-established
https://history.com/news/post-office-mail-delivery
https://smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/brief-history-united-states-postal-service-180975627/
https://grit.com/community/history/history-of-rural-free-delivery-zm0z13ndzgou/
https://about.usps.com/who/profile/history/rural-free-delivery.htm
https://nationalmailboxes.com/learn/
https://britannica.com/topic/Rural-Free-Delivery
https://wpr.org/when-mail-came-rural-wisconsin
https://constitutionfacts.com/founders-library/early-american-postal-system/
https://about.usps.com/who/profile/history/state-abbreviations.htm#:
~:text=To%20make%20room%20for%20the,the%20current%20two%2Dletter%20abbreviation
https://history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-pony-express
https://nps.gov/poex/learn/historyculture/index.htm
https://ponyexpress.org/historical-timeline
https://archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/fall/fast-mail-1.html#:~:text=
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https://savethepostoffice.com/