

July 1, 1971: Postal Service Day

The United States Postal Service officially began operations as an independent agency on July 1, 1971, "Postal Service Day." Post Offices nationwide commemorated the day with a new postage stamp and a free souvenir envelope. Official ceremonies, open houses, facility tours, refreshments, entertainment and other festivities also marked the day.

On August 12, 1970, President Richard Nixon signed into law the *Postal Reorganization Act*, the most comprehensive postal legislation since the founding of the republic. The law transformed the cabinet-level Post Office Department into a newly independent establishment of the executive branch called the United States Postal Service. While portions of the law took effect in the months following its passage, the law didn't take full effect until July 1, 1971.



Signing of the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970

Postmaster General Winton Blount (at left) watched as President Richard Nixon signed the Postal Reorganization Act into law on August 12, 1970. On July 1, 1971, the law became fully effective, transforming the Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service.

To mark the transition, Nixon proclaimed July 1, 1971, as "National Postal Service Day," a day "set aside ... to give recognition to the contributions made through the years by the men and women of the Post Office who have served the Nation so faithfully and to mark the inauguration of the United States Postal Service."¹ Postmaster General Winton Blount called it "a day when the general public and the people of the Postal Service [could] join together in a warm and friendly manner."²

In preparation for the event, Blount designated the week of June 21–27 Postal Clean-Up Week. He explained it was an "opportunity to improve the cleanliness and orderliness of our immediate work areas ... to present our very best image to our customers."³ In some areas, Postmasters visited neighboring offices to ensure compliance with the clean-up. Prosper, Texas, Postmaster Donald Reece was pleased that the inspection found his office "very clean and well-organized." After inspecting the Prosper office, Rubye Hill, Postmaster at Westminster, wrote, "I marked your post office good and excellent for everything."⁴

Also in June, the Postal Service mailed every household in the country a leaflet with mailing tips and announcements about inaugural day activities and the souvenir envelopes. Another pamphlet, called *Your New United States Postal Service*, was distributed to Post Offices in the largest cities, to be handed out to customers.

The Postal Service commemorated its inaugural day by issuing an 8-cent stamp featuring its new official seal, an “eagle poised for flight,” which replaced the post rider on horseback that had represented the Post Office Department since 1837. In a break with tradition, the new stamps were placed on sale at every Post Office in the nation on the same day. Customarily, new stamps were sold in just one city on the first day of issue. On July 1, 1971, for the first time, first-day covers — collectible envelopes featuring the new stamp — could be obtained in all cities and towns that had a Post Office. To make it easier for would-be collectors to obtain a first-day cover, special souvenir envelopes were handed out, one per customer. After obtaining the envelope, customers could purchase and place one of the new stamps on it and obtain the July 1 postmark.

On July 1, Postmaster General Blount began his day with a visit to the Washington, DC, studios of NBC for an interview for the *Today Show*. He then returned to headquarters for a special ceremony dedicating the new stamp and the new Postal Service. Honored guests included members

of the Postal Service’s new Board of Governors, members of the President’s Cabinet, Members of Congress, former Postmasters General, labor and business leaders, and top postal staff. The U.S. Air Force Singing Sergeants opened the ceremony, which featured speeches by Frederick Kappel, who had chaired the Presidential Commission that wrote the blueprint for the *Postal Reorganization Act*, and George Schultz, director of the Office of Management and Budget. President Nixon, unable to attend in person, sent a message calling Postal Reorganization “one of the major achievements of my administration.”⁵

The ceremony was telecast live to the Postal Service’s five regional offices. Employees at postal headquarters gathered in the building’s auditorium to watch the ceremony via closed-circuit color television. Headquarters employees were also invited to attend an evening reception in the auditorium, which was specially decorated for

How to help Mail Service work better for you

On July 1st, the new United States Postal Service will be officially launched as an independent arm of the government, dedicated to providing the services you need efficiently and economically. The improvements we plan will take time, but we are confident they will be accomplished. Your cooperation is important too and so we have sent you this leaflet to help you help us make the mails work better.

Winton M. Blount
Postmaster General

Postal Service mailer, June 1971
In June 1971, the Postal Service sent every U.S. household a leaflet with mailing tips and news of inaugural activities planned for Postal Service Day.

Souvenir first-day cover
In a break with tradition, stamps featuring the Postal Service’s new emblem were placed on sale at every Post Office in the nation on July 1, 1971. Special souvenir envelopes were handed out free to customers.

the event. Seats were removed; bunting, posters and other trim were put up; the U.S. Army Combo provided music; and there was a buffet to serve more than 3,000 employees, spouses and guests.⁶

While the ceremony was going on in the nation's capital, Postal Service Day celebrations were held at thousands of Post Offices nationwide. Programs at local Post Offices took a variety of forms, "from helicopter delivery of mail at Glen Falls, New York, to Miss ZIPs in hot pants in Louisville, Kentucky."⁷

Across the country, many city councils and mayors issued official Postal Service Day proclamations. Some celebrations featured flag-raising ceremonies and the singing of the national anthem. In Wisconsin, the *Waukesha Daily Freeman* reported that

the president of the Chamber of Commerce and the town's mayor would be on hand when the local Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops raised the flag at the Post Office. Waukesha Postmaster John Freeman invited residents "to stop in for a cup of coffee, watch a movie and take a tour."⁸

In other locations, the American flag was raised by postal employees. In Naugatuck, Connecticut, the entire staff of the Post Office planned to gather around the flagpole for the raising of the flag by a custodian, a letter carrier and a postal clerk, while a bugler played "To the Colors." This was to be followed by a noontime concert on the lawn by the Naugatuck Fife and Drum Corps.⁹

Live music was a popular feature at many of the festivities. Some of the larger cities had performances by their Post Office band, while others heard from talented individual employees.¹⁰ In Cumberland, Maryland, letter carrier John Ed Sell planned to give an organ recital.¹¹ At the May Post Office, in Brown County, Texas, Postmaster Margrette Alford played the guitar, accompanying old-time fiddler Arthur Vernon. For ninety minutes the crowd at the Post Office enjoyed "a foot-stomping rhythm."¹² In Las Cruces, New Mexico, visitors were entertained by a mariachi band, while Postmaster Solomon Alvarez used a gold shovel to break ground for a new Post Office building.¹³

Tours and open houses were the most common form of observance. In Indiana, *The [Jasper] Daily Herald* reported that Postmasters John Garrett of Huntingburg and Charles Seger of Jasper would host tours through their facilities, with employees on hand to explain their operations.¹⁴ In Illinois, the *Forest Park Review* reported that visitors to the Forest Park Post Office would be greeted by clowns from the Newcomers Club, handing out candy to children, while separate tours would be conducted for adults and children.¹⁵

In Cumberland, Maryland, the day was to be marked by a tree-planting ceremony to honor all retired and deceased postal employees. A blue spruce donated by the Garden Club was to be planted by Boy Scouts whose parents worked at the Post Office. Many Postmasters offered refreshments during Postal Service Day, and Cumberland was no exception. Postmaster William Orndorff planned to offer "coffee and doughnuts for the early morning mailers and punch and cookies in the afternoon," with refreshments sponsored by the ladies of the Letter Carriers Auxiliary.¹⁶



Postal Service Day celebrations, Castlewood, Virginia, July 1, 1971
Photo courtesy of the Clinch Valley Times
Postal employee Hazel Farr (left) and Officer-in-Charge Ruth Milton posed in front of the Post Office in Castlewood, Virginia, on July 1, 1971.

Postmasters nationwide hosted a special photograph exhibit in their Post Office lobbies on Postal Service Day. Called "These Are the People Who Are the U.S. Postal Service," the display featured sixteen 12"x18" photographs of postal employees on the job, from mail handlers to Postmasters; it was sent to all Post Offices, stations and branches. The purpose of the photograph exhibit was to acquaint the public with the various kinds of jobs postal workers did, and the range of personalities and individuals who made up the United States Postal Service.¹⁷

In addition to displaying the photographs, an 11-minute film, "More and Louder," was screened in the lobbies of many of the nation's larger Post Offices. The educational film, produced to acquaint the public with the new Postal Service, included "man-on-the-street" interviews about the public perception of the Postal Service, showed postal workers on the job, and also featured an animated "history of the U.S. Mail from Colonial America to the Moon."¹⁸

An "action news report" issued by the Office of the Postmaster General summarized events planned for several major cities, including Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco.¹⁹ In Detroit, choral groups from the Detroit Post Office planned to give a July 1st concert in the heart of that city, while the city's Postmaster appeared on local television to discuss the celebration. Plans also called for a key race at the Detroit Race Course to be dubbed the "Postal Service Stakes," while at the ballpark, Postal Service Day would be proclaimed during the Detroit Tigers-Boston Red Sox baseball game.

Motorists around Chicago were due to be greeted by electric billboards along the expressways announcing Postal Service Day. The city's largest postal facilities, meanwhile, would be decorated with banners and red, white, and blue pennants reading "Customers First" and "Pride." Postmaster Henry McGee provided buttons with the new Postal Service seal to all employees and asked that they wear them to show their pride.



Postal Service Day celebrations, Dante, Virginia, July 1, 1971

Photo courtesy of the Clinch Valley Times

Postmaster Glenn Litton posed with coworkers Patty Surber and Beulah Worley in the lobby of the Dante, Virginia, Post Office on July 1, 1971. On the wall behind them can be seen a portion of the photographic display "These Are the People Who Are the U.S. Postal Service."



Postal Service Day celebrations, New York City, July 1, 1971

Robert Strachan, New York City's Postmaster, answered questions from the media in front of the Post Office on July 1, 1971.

In San Francisco, Postmaster Lim Lee's staff decorated all the city's branch offices and scheduled guided tours of the Rincon Annex, to show the public its modern mail processing equipment and mail handling methods. Befitting San Francisco's reputation as a cosmopolitan city, Western Regional Postmaster General Fred Huleen planned to host a reception which included Consuls General from many foreign nations.

In New York City, Postmaster John Strachan hosted a "gala program" on the massive steps in front of the Main Post Office at 33rd Street and Eighth Avenue.²⁰ The New York Post Office Band performed while employees distributed "seemingly limitless quantities" of the souvenir envelopes.²¹ During the event "Miss USPS" made her debut — multiple debuts actually, as there were "several young women performing as 'Miss United States Postal Service.'"²²

Regional Postmaster General Harold Larsen, speaking at the celebration in New York City, used the Postal Service's new emblem as a metaphor for the new Postal Service: "Today we lose our horse and rider, but we are gaining the eagle as a symbol more in keeping with the times."²³



Postal employees in New York City, July 1, 1971
Women employees wearing Miss U.S.P.S. sashes, serving as postal ambassadors, posed with members of the uniformed postal security force at the New York Post Office.



Postal Service Day celebrations, New York City, July 1, 1971
Employees, dignitaries, well-wishers, and members of the media attended Postal Service Day festivities on the front steps of the main Post Office in New York City. Music was provided by the New York Post Office Band.

¹ Richard M. Nixon, "Proclamation 4061—National Postal Service Day," June 19, 1971, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-4061-national-postal-service-day>, accessed February 19, 2021.

² *The Wise County Messenger* (Decatur, Texas) June 24, 1971, 1.

³ *The Postal Bulletin*, May 20, 1971, 1. "Clean-up weeks" had been held periodically since at least the 1950s. The earliest reference found in the *Postal Bulletin* was on March 31, 1953.

⁴ *The Courier-Gazette* (McKinney, Texas), July 12, 1971, 3.

⁵ *Postal Leader*, July 1971, 1,

⁶ Details of inaugural events at headquarters can be found in the June 30, 1971, issue of the headquarters newsletter *The Postal Pulse*, and in itineraries in the files of the USPS Historian.

⁷ *Postal Leader*, July 1971, 1. In 1969, the Post Office Department began a "Miss ZIP" program in select large Post Offices, placing women employees wearing blue miniskirts and beauty contestant-style red and white "Miss ZIP" sashes in Post Office lobbies to answer customer questions, provide mailing tips, and sell stamps.

⁸ *Waukesha Daily Freeman* (Waukesha, Wisconsin), June 29, 1971, 2. The Postmaster was referring to the film "More and Louder" (see page 4).

⁹ *Naugatuck Daily News* (Naugatuck, Connecticut), June 30, 1971, 1.

¹⁰ Employees in more than two dozen cities played in Post Office bands in the early to mid-1900s, performing at public and private events, in parades, and at postal ceremonies. The first postal bands were organized in the 1890s; the New York Post Office band was reportedly formed in 1917 and played at special events as late as 1989.

¹¹ *The Cumberland News* (Cumberland, Maryland), June 30, 1971, 16.

¹² *The Brownwood Bulletin* (Brownwood, Texas), July 2, 1971, 2-A.

¹³ *Las Cruces Sun-News* (Las Cruces, New Mexico), July 1, 1971, 1.

¹⁴ *The Daily Herald* (Jasper, Indiana), June 24, 1971, 5.

¹⁵ *Forest Park Review* (Forest Park, Illinois), June 23, 1971, 4.

¹⁶ *The Cumberland News* (Cumberland, Maryland), June 30, 1971, 16. The National Association of Letter Carriers Auxiliary was established in 1905 by a group of wives, daughters, mothers and sisters of letter carriers, to lobby for better working conditions and better benefits for carriers and their survivors. In 2021, the Auxiliary was still active, and welcomed all letter carrier family members and friends.

¹⁷ "U.S. Postal Service Day Action News Report," in the files of the USPS Historian.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *The New York Times*, June 27, 1971, D-30.

²¹ Ibid., July 2, 1971, 15.

²² Ibid., June 27, 1971, D-30. Women employees wearing "Miss U.S.P.S." sashes served as roving customer service representatives at the New York Post Office on Postal Service Day.

²³ Ibid., July 2, 1971, 15. The new seal of the Postal Service depicting an eagle had been officially adopted in August 1970, with the signing of the *Postal Reorganization Act*.