



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



Above: 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 Aug. 12, 1970. On July 1, 1971, the law became fully effective, transforming the Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service.

50 Years of the United States Postal Service



A little more than 50 years ago, the American public got its first glimpse of the now-famous “eagle poised for flight,” the emblem of the new United States Postal Service. The eagle replaced the old “post rider on horseback” and announced that the Postal Service had become a modern, forward-thinking organization. For employees of the Postal Service, the change was not just symbolic but marked the beginning of an independent, self-supporting way of doing business.

Restoring the public’s trust in a national institution

For nearly two centuries, the Post Office Department had served the needs of the nation remarkably well. But by the 1960s, the Department was struggling to meet the demands of the modern era. Aging facilities, inadequate equipment, antiquated work methods, low employee morale and a burdensome oversight structure brought the postal system to the brink of collapse. With its future in jeopardy, political leaders from both parties agreed: *something had to be done.*

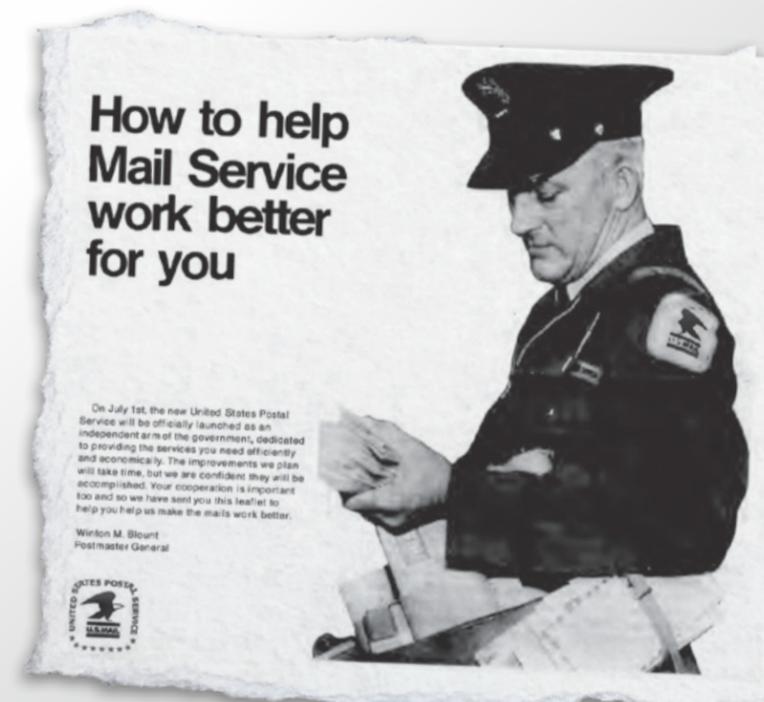
Postal customers grew frustrated with ever-slower, unreliable service. Postal workers, seeing their pay, benefits and working conditions lagging behind the private sector, demanded the right to negotiate. Policymakers wanted a dynamic engine for economic growth — an innovative, efficient, self-supporting postal system, free from political meddling. Everyone wanted the Postal Service to perform at a higher level.

Reaching an agreement was not easy. The cooperation, compromise and collaboration needed to pass legislation took years of hard work and repeated efforts. A week-long strike in March 1970 by more than 152,000 postal employees brought the need for reform front and center.

Postmaster General Winton Blount later recalled, “short of world war, I cannot think of another endeavor that required the degree of common commitment that postal reform required.” Without the bipartisan support of legislators, the support of postal management, and the backing of labor leaders and their organizations, representing hundreds of thousands of postal workers, the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 — the framework of today’s modern, independent Postal Service — would not have passed.

Below: 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.





The next chapter in Postal Service history

July 1, 1971 — National Postal Service Day — was the dawn of a new era. Gone was the antiquated Post Office Department with its post rider on horseback. In its place stood the modern, independent United States Postal Service, represented by the eagle, an image that Regional Postmaster General Harold Larsen at the time called “a symbol more in keeping with the times.”

As the Postal Service continues to evolve to meet new challenges, our mission remains unchanged — to bind the nation together. Fifty years ago, when dramatic changes were needed to fulfill our mission, our postal predecessors dared

take those risky steps. That same sense of unwavering dedication to our mission will sustain us in the decades to come.



Customers — having endured recurring wide-spread delivery outages in the late 1960s and decades-long performance degradation — wanted better service.

Creation of the Postal Service improved performance and professionalism

The Postal Reorganization Act was the most comprehensive postal legislation since the founding of the republic. The postmaster general no longer served in the president’s cabinet and the Congressional role in postal operations was transferred to the board of governors.

The new Postal Service was a bold experiment — a new type of government agency designed to run like a business, pay its own way, and hire and promote employees of all backgrounds based on their abilities. For the first time, the Postal Service could form strategic partnerships with the mailing industry to meet the needs of American commerce and consumers. Advances in automation, logistics and business practices improved reliability, delivered greater value for the dollar and spurred strong growth in revenues. By any measure, the experiment was a success.



Witnesses to History: Employees recount the Postal Service’s first day

In celebration of the Postal Service’s 50th anniversary, the USPS Historian’s Office, in early 2021, interviewed 25 current postal employees who witnessed the transition from the U.S. Post Office Department to the United States Postal Service.

“It is an honor to record these first-hand accounts from postal workers still serving their communities 50 years later,” says USPS Historian Jenny Lynch. “These recollections provide a deep and warm account of this important day in the history of the Postal Service and serve as a reminder that at its core, USPS is about individuals serving their communities,” she adds.

The 25 postal workers represent the diversity of the postal network, with some serving in the nation’s largest cities — New York, Los Angeles and Chicago — and others some of its smallest towns, including Hebron, NE, and Bristol, VT.

“While their backgrounds and careers differed, these interviews clearly illustrate that every one of these veterans of the Postal Service have a love for the job, are dedicated to their customers, and hold respect for both customers and their co-workers,” notes Lynch.

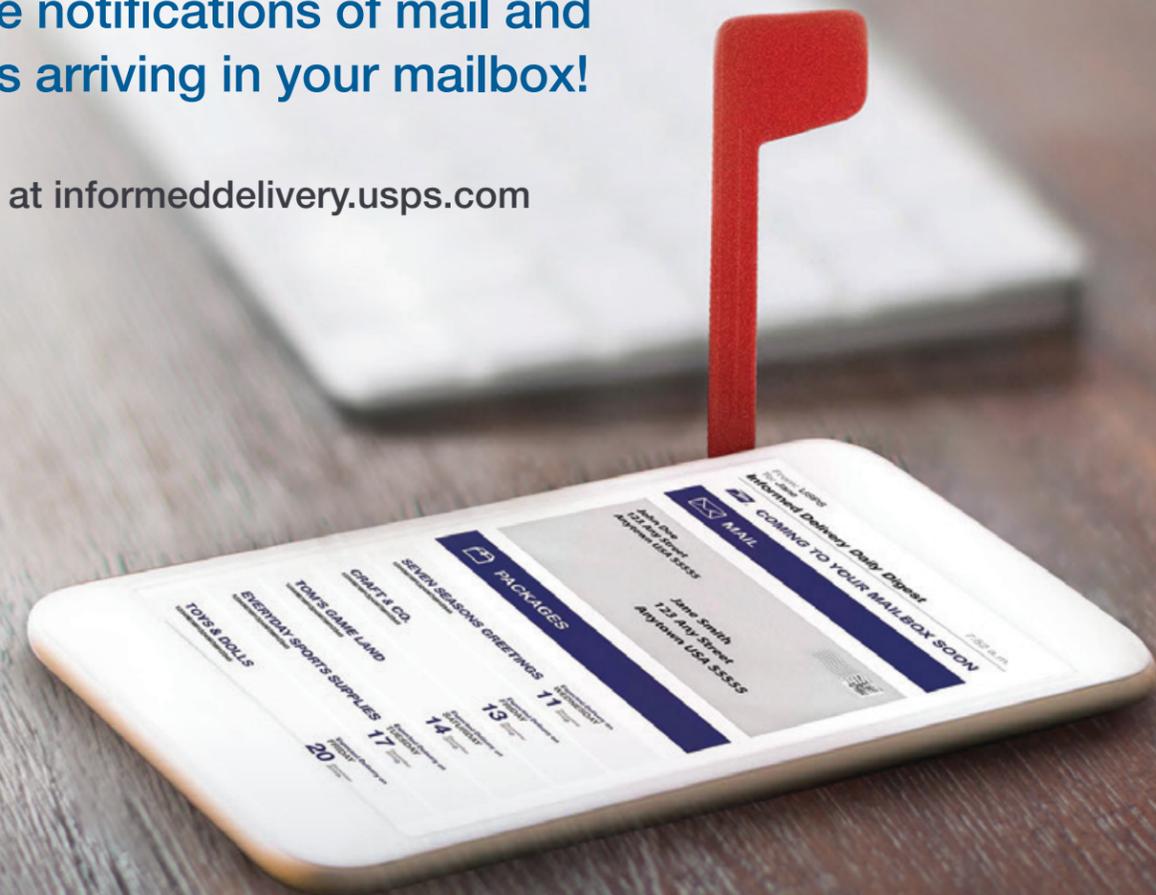
For more on the USPS 50th Anniversary Oral History Project, visit about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/fifty-years-of-service-1971-2021.pdf



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