



The Lilac Hinge

Inland Empire Philatelic Society, PO Box 3731, Spokane, WA 99220
<http://ieps-stamps.com/> APS Affiliate 0343-030681

Meetings: 2nd & 4th Tuesdays (except July & December),
Spokane Valley Eagles, E. 16801 Sprague



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Cancelled Meetings

The Eagles continue to be closed, with no more stamp club meetings for now. Here is a list of cancelled meetings and events:

- May 26, regular meeting
- June 9, Board meeting and stamp mixtures

Carrying the Mail By Rail



Mail Train: US 1912 five-cent Parcel Post Issue

— By Larry Mann

At one time most mail was transported by rail between cities and towns across the United States. Passenger trains often carried special Railway Post Office (RPO) cars, where mail was either sorted in route or carried in closed pouches. As recently as 1930, some 10,000 different US railway routes carried mail. Routes ranged from fast express trains connecting major cities to slower trains connecting small towns and villages.

Mail has been carried by rail from the earliest days of railroad history. American railroads date to August, 1829, when the first locomotive, the *Stourbridge Lion*, ran in Pennsylvania. The US Post Office first awarded a contract to a railroad to carry mail in November 1832, for a route from Philadelphia to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a distance of some 30 miles. In the beginning, trains simply carried mail from place to place in closed pouches. The idea of sorting mail in route was slow to develop. The first experiment in doing this was in 1862-63, over a route between Hannibal and St. Joseph, Missouri. By August 1864, the first US Railway Post Office route ran from Chicago, Illinois to Clinton, Iowa on the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. Trains included a special car used to sort and process mail in route.



Railway Postal Clerk: three-cent Parcel Post



1923 Spokane & Seattle RPO train 4 cancel for an eastbound Great Northern train. The route existed from 1893-1934.

Mail cancelled in the cars received special RPO cancels, such as the one at top right. Cancels designated the date, route name, and sometimes the train's number. RPO cancels are highly collectable and illustrate the different railway mail routes. The top left Parcel Post stamp from 1912 shows an important invention that aided in the pickup and delivery of mail. The stamp pictures the side of a railway mail car, door open, a clerk pulling a metal "catcher arm" towards him. A mail bag is attached to the arm. Moments before, the bag had been snagged from a steel hook and arm. Such arms were positioned on station platforms, allowing a train to pick up a mail bag without stopping. Mail bags to be left at a station were often thrown out of the car as the train passed the station. While trains usually stopped to deliver mail at larger cities, this process simplified pickup and delivery of mail in smaller towns and villages.

The process required considerable skill to do correctly. The incoming bag might be missed if the catcher arm was held out too late. Stations didn't always position the arm on the same side of the platform, and an RPO clerk would miss the bag if he tried to pick it up from the wrong side of the train. The National Postal Museum Web site contains an article on catching mail, and some of the other things that might go wrong:

Exchanging the mail was a two-part process: after the clerk snagged the mail bag with the catcher arm, he had to toss out the mailbag for that station. If a clerk did not kick the mailbag out far enough, it could get trapped beneath the wheels of the train, bursting open and sending letters flying everywhere. The clerks called such small disasters "snowstorms." On the other hand, too much "oomph" could also cause difficulties. One poor clerk tossed the mailbag out with such force that it sailed through the bay window of the station house. Another clerk kicked off his shoe along with the bag.

For Sale: San Marino collection. 2020 catalogue value, \$6,000. It is mounted in a Lighthouse hingeless album, value \$800. Sale price is \$1,500 for the collection. Contact Ken Rehfeld, 924-6375.

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