



National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408-0001

Research Guide to Post Office Department Records at the National Archives, Washington, DC, Area

Claire Kluskens
(January 2016 edition)

Please direct inquiries to the appropriate reference unit

Part 1 – Overview

The National Archives and Records Administration is the repository of the permanently valuable records of the U.S. Federal Government. Textual records of the Post Office Department (Record Group 28) are located at the National Archives Building, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20408.

“**Post Office Records**” web page at www.archives.gov/research/post-offices provides information about selected microfilmed records.

Part 2 – Microfilmed Records (Archives I)

Microfilmed Records may be examined in the National Archives Building (Archives I), 700 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, DC, at any time during normal research room hours. No prior arrangement is needed. Selected microfilmed records are available at NARA’s 13 regional archives. Some of these are now online also!

Descriptive pamphlets with roll lists (for M-publications) and roll lists (for some T-publications) are available (1) in the microfilm reading room and (2) online for free in NARA’s “Order Online” system. To locate this information in “Order Online” go to <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline> then click on “Microfilm” then enter the microfilm publication number in the search box. Click on the microfilm publication title, then click on “View Important Publication Details” to view the descriptive pamphlet or roll list.

Postmaster Appointments

M1131. *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, Oct. 1789–1832 (4 rolls)*. Generally arranged alphabetically by name of post office without regard to state or county. Shows the name and dates of appointment of postmasters and, after 1814, the dates of establishment of post offices. Roll 1, 1789–1818; Roll 2, 1814–1823; Roll 3, 1824–1828; Roll 4, 1828–1832.

M841. *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832–September 30, 1971 (145 rolls)*. *Ancestry.com*. Arranged alphabetically by state, then by county, then by post office. Includes dates of establishment and discontinuance of post offices, names of postmasters with dates of their appointment. The records do not specifically indicate when the postmaster resigned or was terminated but the length of service can be approximated by noting the date of appointment of the postmaster’s successor. Women were frequently appointed postmasters of small rural post offices, with their numbers increasing in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Other Postal Employees

Records relating to other postal employees are less comprehensive than those for postmasters. The following records have been microfilmed.

M1846. *Record Cards of Letter Carriers Separated from the Postal Service, 1863–1899 (3 rolls)*. Includes records for 16,000 letter carriers serving 650 post offices. Arranged alphabetically by state, then by name of post office (city), and then by name of letter carrier. Each card indicates the post office name, letter carrier's name, date of appointment, and date and cause of separation from employment. Causes include "resigned," "transferred," "died," "dropped," or "removed." If removed, the reason is occasionally noted. Date of separation is noted for those separated after 1873.

M2075. *Record of Appointment of Substitute Clerks in First- and Second-Class Post Offices, 1899–1905 (1 roll)*. Includes employees from 1,294 post offices; see the microfilm descriptive pamphlet for all post office names, and volume and page number. Indicates each clerk's name, date of appointment as a substitute, and date of appointment as a regular clerk. Also includes other **substitute employees** at these post offices: Chicago: messenger boys, printers, carpenters, messengers transferred to senior substitute clerks, laborers, and stenographers and typewriters, and temporary elevator conductors and oilers; (2) New York: porters and laborers; (3) San Francisco: one watchman and three laborers.

M2076. *Index and Registers of Substitute Mail Carriers in First- and Second-Class Post Offices, 1899–1905 (1 roll)*. Reproduces two series:

- (1) An incomplete index, 1891–1896, arranged roughly alphabetically by the first two letters of the carrier's surname. Most listed carriers have surnames beginning with the letters A–M. It does not include carriers for some of the cities included in the registers, and does not cover the entire date span of the registers. Provides date of appointment post office (city) number, and remarks. A list of city numbers is provided in the microfilm descriptive pamphlet to enable use of the registers.
- (2) Registers, 1885–1903, include carriers from 295 post offices, arranged roughly alphabetically by name of post office and then by date of resignation or removal from office. The microfilm descriptive pamphlet includes an alphabetical list of cities that indicates the volume(s) and page number(s) where information about those cities is recorded.

M2077. *Indexes to Rosters of Railway Postal Clerks, ca. 1883–ca. 1902 (1 roll)*. Reproduces *three volumes* each containing *two types* of indexes: (1) indexes to railway postal routes arranged roughly alphabetically by name of cities on the route, such as "Bruce, Wis. To Minneapolis, Minn." and (2) indexes to clerks arranged roughly alphabetically by the first one or two letters of the clerk's surname. Both types of indexes indicate the volume letter (A–F) and page number in the unmicrofilmed series, "Rosters of Special, Route, and Local Blank and Stamp Agents and Rosters of Postal Clerks, 1855–97 [sic]", designated as Series 119 in *Preliminary Inventory 168*.

Administrative Records

The Post Office Department generated many administrative records relating to its functions. These records have been microfilmed:

M601. *Letters Sent by the Postmaster General, 1789–1836 (50 rolls)*. Correspondence with postmasters and other people on various matters, including lost mail, office furniture and other items the postmasters needed. (Note: *Letters sent, 1837–1952*, do exist but have not been microfilmed. Unfortunately, by the 1850s, this series only contains the most significant letters—to Congressmen, Treasury, and other officials.)

A4209, *Record Book of Stamp Shipments to Postmasters, July 1847-June 1853 (1 roll)*. This contains a record of the number and dollar amount of postage stamps sent to post offices. Postmaster names are given. Larger post offices would distribute stamps to smaller ones. Distribution of the first adhesive postage stamps began on July 1, 1847.

A4212, *First-, Second-, and Third-Class Post Office Receipts and Postmasters' Salaries, 1895-1905 (2 rolls)*. Contains the amount of sales receipts of each post office plus the amount the postmaster was paid.

M1918. *Stamp Bill Books of the Post Office Department, September 30, 1870-July 10, 1897 (2 rolls)*. The Stamp Bill Books include statements of purchases of ordinary postage, commemorative, specimen, postage-due, special delivery, newspaper, and periodical stamps; stamped envelopes; newspaper wrappers; registered-package envelopes; letter-sheet envelopes; and postal cards.

Roll 1: Book 1, Sept. 30, 1870-Dec. 1875; Book 2, Jan. 1876-Dec. 1879; Book 3, Oct. 1879-Dec. 1883; Book 4, Jan. 1884-Dec. 1888.

Roll 2: Book 5, Jan. 1889-Mar. 1893; Book 6, Mar. 1893-June 1897.

T268. *Journal of Hugh Finlay, Surveyor of Post Roads and Post Offices, 1773-1774; and Accounts of the General Post Office in Philadelphia and of Various Deputy Postmasters—"The Ledger of Benjamin Franklin"—Jan. 1775-Jan. 1780 (1 roll)*.

T1254. *Records of the Office of Chief Clerk, Letters Sent, March 6, 1885-April 25, 1910 (62 rolls)*. Arranged chronologically by date. Letters to postmasters and others.

Part 3 – Published U.S. Government Records (Archives I)

Some of these may also be found online; try your favorite search engine and see what you can find.

Official Register of the United States (1816, biannually 1817-1959), includes postal employees through 1911, including position, salary, and other information. Available in the Archives II Library, the Library of Congress, and other large libraries. Links to online volumes can be found here: <http://www.ancestrypaths.com/tips-and-techniques/old-online-digital-books/official-register-of-the-united-states/>.

U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection (a Proquest online database) available free on computers in any National Archives research room:

- House and Senate Committee Prints & Misc. Publications 1817-1952
- House and Senate Hearings, 1817-present
- House and Senate Documents, 1817-present
- House and Senate Reports, 1817-present
- Serial Set, 1789-present
- Serial Set Maps, 1789-present

Congressional Record (Physical copies are available in East Wing of Room 203, National Archives Building, and at U.S. Government Depository Libraries (large public libraries). These includes mention of postmasters for whom Senate confirmation was required. Available online at:

1789-1824: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwac.html> (*Annals of Congress*)

1824-1837: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwrd.html> (*Register of Debates*)

1837-1873: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwgc.html> (*Congressional Globe*)

1873-1875: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwcrlink.html>

Claire Kluskens, “Research Guide to Post Office Department Records at the National Archives, Washington, DC, Area,” page 4 (January 2016 edition)

1873-1997: Libraries that have Lexis-Nexis

1986-1988: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=congreCORD> and follow links

1989-2016: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/LegislativeData.php?&n=Record>

1994-2016: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CREC>

1995-2016: <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record>

Part 4 – Textual Records (Archives I)

Original textual records (records that have not been microfilmed) must be pulled (retrieved) from the stacks. Pull requests must be submitted Monday–Friday. The deadline for the last pull request is 2:30 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, and 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. After records are pulled, original records may be examined in the Central Research Room (Room 203) during normal research room hours, including Saturday. Staff and finding aids are available in the Finding Aids Room to assist you. For more information, email: archives1reference@nara.gov.

Research strategy: Research in *most* Post Office Department records requires that you choose record series that include (1) the geographic area of interest (2) for the time period of interest, and then (3) then search within the series for records of that post office (or mail route, etc.). If you are interested in certain specific topics, such as the Railway Post Office or airmail would also winnow the search window.

Online Finding Aids. You can start your research online at home by using the Research Strategy outlined above to identify the record series that may be helpful.

If you need a general informational overview of what kinds of records exist for the Post Office Department, go to this page <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/028.html> in the *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States*, is a good place to start. It gives an overview of the history, structure, and records of federal agencies. Then, to learn more specific information, click on “Search this Record Group in the National Archives Online Catalog.”

National Archives Catalog, online at catalog.archives.gov, describes most records at the series level. There are also some references to specific postmasters and post offices in both RG 28 and other record groups. Search for post office or postmaster name.

Print Finding Aids are available but out of date.

Arthur Hecht, et al., comps., *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Post Office Department*. Preliminary Inventory No. 168. (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1967). Records accessioned through 1967. Lists about half of the record series in NARA custody.

Arthur Hecht, comp., *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Bureau of the Second Assistant Postmaster General, 1814-1946*. Preliminary Inventory No. 82. (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1955) is online at http://www.genealogycenter.info/nara/preliminventories/search_narapi82.php but is out of date. The series titles, series numbers, and description of records may have changed. See at www.catalog.archives.gov for updated information.

Arthur Hecht, comp., *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Office of the Postmaster General*. Preliminary Inventory No. 99 (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1957) is online at http://www.genealogycenter.info/nara/preliminventories/search_narapi99.php but is out of date. The series titles, series numbers, and description of records may have changed. See at www.catalog.archives.gov for updated information.

Claire Kluskens, "Research Guide to Post Office Department Records at the National Archives, Washington, DC, Area," page 5 (January 2016 edition)

Arthur Hecht, et al., comps., *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Bureaus of the Third and Fourth Assistant Postmaster General, the Bureau of Accounts, and the Bureau of the Chief Inspector of the Post Office Department*. Preliminary Inventory No. 114 (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1959) is online at http://www.genealogycenter.info/nara/preliminventories/search_narapi114.php but is out of date. The series titles, series numbers, and description of records may have changed. See at www.catalog.archives.gov for updated information.

Part 5 – Records at Archives 2

The National Archives at College Park (Archives 2), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, has textual records, microfilm maps, photographs, and motion pictures.

Textual Records (Textual Research Room, 2nd Floor)

Finding aids are available in the research room. Requests to pull maps from the stacks must be made Monday through Friday; no pulls are done on Saturday. For more information, email archives2reference@nara.gov

Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State

Entry 791, Commissions of Deputy Postmasters, 1836–1874. 11 vols. Fair copy of the commission sent to the appointee.

Entry 792, Temporary Commissions of Deputy Postmasters, 1837–1873. 5 vols. Fair copy of the commission sent to the appointee.

Entry 798, Card Record of Appointments Made from 1776 to 1960 (54 feet). Cards, 4- by 6-inch, arranged alphabetically by name of appointee. Includes persons appointed and commissioned under seal of the Department of State. Includes deputy postmasters.

Record Group 130, Records of the White House Office

Registers of appointment to public office, 1857-1913, include postmasters with their dates of nomination and confirmation.

Maps (Cartographic and Architectural Research Room, 3rd Floor)

Finding aids are available in the research room. Requests to pull maps from the stacks must be made Monday through Friday; no pulls are done on Saturday. For more information, email carto@nara.gov.

Online information:

General Information Leaflet 26, *Cartographic and Architectural Records* (rev. 2004), at www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/26-cartographic.html provides an excellent overview of the records.

Select List 29, *List of Selected Maps of States and Territories* (1971) at www.archives.gov/publications/finding-aids/maps provides information about a limited number of maps.

Photographs (Still Pictures Research Room, 5th floor).

Finding aids are available in the research room. Photographs of post offices, postal workers, etc., can be found in many record groups, so do not limit yourself to RG 28. Requests to pull still pictures from the stacks must be made Monday through Friday; no pulls are done on Saturday. For more information, call 301-837-0561, or email stillpix@nara.gov.

Online Information and Images:

Claire Kluskens, "Research Guide to Post Office Department Records at the National Archives, Washington, DC, Area," page 6 (January 2016 edition)

The National Archives Catalog at www.catalog.archives.gov provides information about, and digital images of, a limited number of photographs.

Motion Pictures

The Motion Picture, Sound, and Video research room (5th floor) has finding aids that may be consulted during normal research room hours. Information about procedures and finding aids is at www.archives.gov/dc-metro/college-park/visit-motion-picture-room.html. For more information, call 301-837-3520, or email mopix@nara.gov.

Online Information:

The National Archives Catalog at www.catalog.archives.gov provides information about, and digital copies of, a limited number of motion pictures.

Part 6 – Other U.S. Government Websites

United States Postal Service (USPS)

Postmaster Finder. <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postmasterfinder/welcome.htm>

Includes most postmasters appointed after 1986, and *some* postmasters appointed from the late 1700s to 1986. Also includes the dates of establishment and discontinuances of post offices.

Postal History. <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/welcome.htm>

Information about significant dates in postal history, stamps and postcards, postage rates and historical statistics, photographs, postal employees, moving and delivering the mail, post offices and facilities, uniforms and equipment, and research sources.

National Postal Museum (part of the Smithsonian Institution)

Home Page – www.postalmuseum.si.edu/index.html

Library Home Page – <http://library.si.edu/libraries/postal-museum>