

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF POSTMASTER
GENERAL--POSTAL SERVICE: HEARINGS,
SIXTY-SEVENTH CONGRESS,
SECOND SESSION, H. R. 9463, JANUARY
6 AND 13, 1922, PART I, PP. 2-22, PART
II, PP.51-63**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS OF POSTMASTER
GENERAL—POSTAL SERVICE**

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HEARINGS

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BEFORE THE

U.S. Congress. House. **COMMITTEE ON THE
POST OFFICE AND POST ROADS OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

SIXTY-SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

H. R. 9463

—
JANUARY 6 AND 13, 1922
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PART 1



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GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
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COMMITTEE ON THE POST OFFICE AND POST ROADS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

SIXTY-SEVENTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION.

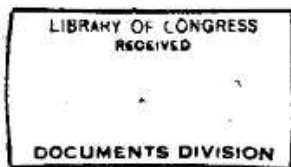
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RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL—POSTAL SERVICE.

COMMITTEE ON THE POST OFFICE AND POST ROADS,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Friday, January 6, 1922.

The committee met at 11.30 o'clock a. m., Hon. Halvor Steenerson (chairman) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. We have before us now this omnibus bill which I understood the department wanted to be heard upon. It is H. R. 9463. I wish to state to the committee that the annual report of the Postmaster General contains a number of recommendations for legislation, and instead of introducing a bill on each subject, which I think the department thought would be done, I took all but two or three of these recommendations and put them in what I call an omnibus bill, H. R. 9463. They relate to various subjects and they are discussed in the report of the Postmaster General. The recommendations are on page 127 and the discussion of them is on page 84, but we have present here representatives of the department that might properly be heard now.

The first section of this bill provides that the Postmaster General may determine whether mail insufficiently or improperly addressed shall be given directory service, and is authorized to collect a fee of 1 cent on each piece delivered or returned to sender, if directory service has been accorded to such mail in effecting or attempting to effect its delivery.

Now is there anyone present representing the department who will explain that section?

STATEMENT OF MR. W. R. SPILMAN, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE DIVISION OF POST OFFICE SERVICE.

Mr. SPILMAN. This is a matter in which the First Assistant is primarily interested. Dr. Work is exceedingly busy just at this time and is unable to attend the hearing this morning.

Mr. RAMSEYER. Are you talking now on the first section of the bill?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, about directory service.

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes, sir. When mail is undeliverable as addressed it is given what we call "directory service." The department avails itself of privately published directories in the main and keeps them up to date from information gained from the handling of mail and change of address orders that they have received, and thus has a pretty complete directory, although not absolutely complete. Undelivered mail goes to the directory-service section and is there examined by clerks for the purpose of determining whether or not they can locate the proper address of the addressee; whereupon if found, the address is changed and the letter delivered; if not found, and the letter bears the address of the sender, the letter is returned. That service is being performed without any compensation for it. It has now reached a considerable magnitude. All of us are more or less prone to say, "Well, I don't remember that address; the post office will get it." Then the mailing lists that are maintained by various advertising agencies are so incomplete, or inaccurate, rather, that it results in our getting a great deal of mail improperly addressed, incorrectly addressed, on which directory service must be given.

One of the greatest difficulties advertising agencies, and even governmental agencies, have to meet is to maintain correct mailing lists, so this sort of service must be performed—I say "must"—it has been a development, and now it is taken as a matter of course by the people, by the public, and to a considerable extent must be continued. The question has been suggested, however, as to whether or not the continuance of it has not fostered carelessness in addressing

mail, to the end that we have a great deal of insufficiently addressed mail that we would not have if the people understood that it must be correctly addressed. So the proposed legislation is in the terms you note—at present there is no law on this subject—that the Postmaster General may determine whether mail insufficiently or improperly addressed shall be given directory service.

Several years ago the express companies, for example, were depositing in the mails notices to consignees of the receipt of shipments, without street numbers in the address. They would not take the trouble to include the street number, leaving that for the post offices to supply. There was so much of that that the department issued an order that where postal cards received in large quantities, evidently from the same source, came in without street numbers that they would not be given directory service. That has corrected that evil to a considerable extent, but still the volume of mail requiring this service has grown.

Mr. PAIGE. Does this directory service prevail throughout the country or only in the large cities?

Mr. SPILMAN. It is general throughout the country at post offices where City Delivery Service is in operation. Of course, in the smaller offices it amounts to very little. The large cities is where its magnitude is such that it involves considerable cost. In New York the total number of pieces handled per day of all classes—I had better give it this way—the total number of pieces of mail, all classes, supplied with address from directory was 31,904.

Mr. HARDY. For how long a time?

Mr. SPILMAN. One day. Let me first say, the total number of pieces given directory service daily was 108,818. The total number on which addresses were supplied, as already stated, was 31,904. Now, that is supplied from directories, understand, gentlemen. In many cases the searchers are so familiar with the addresses of addressees receiving mail incorrectly addressed which is not known to the carrier or the other clerks who handled the mail that 11,274 pieces are given the correct address without searching the directory. Of that same class, the searcher, by reason of his familiarity, knows that the name is not in the directory, and he is able to dispose of \$6,000 on the average. The number of those given search of the directory and address not supplied was 32,604.

Stating it to you in another way, the percentage of matter handled and delivery effected was 39 per cent; matter forwarded to dead-letter division because address could not be supplied, 27 per cent; average cost per piece for giving this service at New York is $4\frac{1}{2}$ mills.

Mr. RAMSEYER. You would not charge a cent on all of it?

Mr. SPILMAN. It is not all handled as cheap as that.

The CHAIRMAN. This is in New York?

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Have you got the number of clerks employed in this special service at New York?

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes, sir; there are 90 regularly assigned to that work, eight hours a day, at an average daily cost of \$430.21.

Mr. PAIGE. One cent postage additional on 31,000 would lighten the cost to the department quite materially.

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes.

In response to your comment, Mr. Ramseyer, we would not get a cent on every piece of this mail that we handled, you see; the proposal is that a fee of 1 cent on each piece delivered or returned to sender be charged if directory service has been accorded. Now, if there is no return card on that we can not return it; we have given it directory service without any fee. In working this out it might be determined not to give directory service unless there were a return card on it.

Mr. BELL. Is that all classes of mail, Mr. Spilman?

Mr. SPILMAN. That is all classes of mail.

The CHAIRMAN. Circulars as well as first-class mail?

Mr. SPILMAN. No. The Postal Regulations, with reference to directory service, is as follows:

"SEC. 607. At city delivery offices where a city directory is available it shall be used when necessary to ascertain the addresses of persons to whom letters are directed, and it should also be used in the case of transient newspapers and other matter of the third and fourth classes where the error in or omitting of the street address is evidently the result of ignorance or inadvertence; but, when circulars, printed postal cards, or other matter, except letters, arrive at any post office in large quantities, mailed apparently by the same person or firm, and from which the street addresses have been omitted, the directory need not be used to

supply such omissions, and all such circulars, etc., which can not be delivered through boxes or by letter carriers shall be placed in the general delivery to await call."

The CHAIRMAN. Do you think that this 1 cent will be sufficient to pay this \$430 a day expense in New York?

Mr. RAMSEYER. There are over 100,000 pieces, he says, and that would be over \$1,000 a day that might come off of this if you collect it.

Mr. SPILMAN. If we collect it.

Mr. SPILMAN. If we collect it. There are 31,000 and 11,000 that we were able to deliver, 31,000 by searching the directory and 11,000 where the searcher knew the address without having to turn to the book.

Mr. HARDY. You would only collect \$110 on the whole proposition.

Mr. SPILMAN. On the total number?

Mr. HARDY. Yes.

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes; we would not collect that because there would be a considerable quantity of that that would not bear a return address.

Mr. HARDY. But if you got directory service and delivered 31,000 and 11,000, that would be 42,000 in all.

The CHAIRMAN. As I understand this directory service, when it is successful and you find the man and deliver the mail to him, you do not get the cent.

Mr. SPILMAN. No, sir. The bill contemplates that a fee of 1 cent shall be collected on each piece delivered or returned to sender; if we fail to deliver and the return card is on the envelope, we return it and charge the sender.

Mr. RAMSEYER. If the return card is not on there, it goes to the dead letter office and they find out who sent it and send it back to him and then collect it. You ought to charge for dead-letter service, too.

Mr. HARDY. There is a dead-letter charge now, is there not?

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes, sir.

Mr. HARDY. If you send a letter and the post office can not find the addressee and it goes to the dead letter office and they send it back to you, they charge you a cent for it.

Mr. RAMSEYER. I never heard of that.

Mr. HARDY. I think that is right.

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes, sir; that is right—3 cents.

The CHAIRMAN. But the letter that is delivered after you have searched the directory, delivered to the addressee, that is to be charged for?

Mr. SPILMAN. The bill contemplates authority to collect 1 cent for that service.

The idea of suggesting this charge, gentlemen, is that ultimately people will be more careful and the directory service will diminish. At Chicago there are 41 employees engaged in this service. The average cost per piece is 1.1 cents, 1 cent and 1 mill. The average number of pieces is, first class, 29631; that is the number of pieces given directory service. This report does not give it in detail the New York report does, as to the mail delivered by virtue of searching the directory and that that was delivered by virtue of the knowledge of the searcher, and so on. Second class, 335; third class, 879; fourth class, 1,178.

The percentage of this matter on which delivery is effected is 48 per cent; the percentage of matter forwarded to the dead-letter division, 13 per cent.

Now, I have reports from 50 of the largest offices, and I only care to go as far as you gentlemen desire in giving you this data.

Mr. HARDY. I would suggest that if you have got any summary of the whole business you might give us that.

Mr. SPILMAN. It has not been completed. We intend to make it, however.

Mr. PAIGE. The same conditions exist practically everywhere?

Mr. SPILMAN. With a varying cost per piece. That calls for some further attention by the department to get at why it is there should be such a variation in cost. That, of course, is a matter of management.

Mr. RAMSEYER. What is the policy of the department toward this innovation? Of course, you would be penalizing ignorance in the large cities, and the poor fellow who has got to move once in a while, and his friends haven't heard that he has moved and changed his address, while the well-established firms and prominent people in the city, the post-office officials know them, even though the street and number is not given. You would not collect off of them?

Mr. SPILMAN. But a certain service has got to be performed in getting to where he is.

Mr. PAIGE. He can afford to give 1 cent for it.

Mr. RAMSEYER. But the prominent fellow, the post-office officials know when he is; theoretically, they ought to know where all the people live in the city or town—of course, in the smaller towns in my State, there would not be anybody but what the post-office clerks would know, but that is not the case in the large cities.

Mr. SPILMAN. At the smaller towns directory service is not necessary for the reasons you stated. It is not penalizing ignorance altogether. It is from one standpoint, it is true, but in the main it is penalizing carelessness, unwillingness to take the time and trouble to put on the correct address.

As Mr. Ramseyer intimated, the failure to deliver at the smaller places is due to people moving away. If they are at that place, delivery is effected without directory service, because, as he points out, in those places the clerks know the people. The inquiry of this business is in the large cities where, in the very nature of things, clerks can not know the hundreds of thousands of people there, and the undelivered matter, the bulk of it, is addressed to persons who have left the community and there is no trace of them.

Mr. PAIGE. Can you conceive of any person who would not be willing to pay 1 cent postage on a letter if that letter contained a check or contained the offer for a job? He would be very willing to pay that 1 cent to have that delivered.

Mr. SPILMAN. Certainly.

Mr. HARDY. But what proportion of the mail contains checks or offers of jobs? Most of this stuff would contain circulars.

Mr. PAIGE. Out in your district I would say 90 per cent of it.

Mr. HARDY. No; most of these letters would be from mail-order houses, Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck & Co.

Mr. SPILMAN. No; I do not think you can place the chief portion of this mail on any one agency. It is a very general difficulty we have. Of course, it is largely on advertising agencies of all kinds who have inaccurate mailing lists, but I do not think we can place the responsibility on anyone more than another.

Mr. HARDY. I did not intend any individual; I meant that class of mail-order houses merely that it would incense the people very much to have to pay that 1 cent on something they did not want. That would be rather unpopular.

The CHAIRMAN. Can you tell us what the post office does with letters addressed to men that have died?

Mr. SPILMAN. If it is undeliverable it goes to the dead-letter office.

The CHAIRMAN. Of course, it would be undeliverable then, because the man is dead.

Mr. SPILMAN. It might be deliverable to his relatives—to his kinfolks.

The CHAIRMAN. They do deliver it then?

Mr. SPILMAN. Oh, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. To his relatives?

Mr. SPILMAN. Unless it is matter of a class that it is specifically prescribed shall not be delivered except to addressee. That is a very small proportion.

So far as the payment of this fee is concerned, gentlemen, it is in the same situation as postage due. If a carrier comes to your door with a postage-due letter and you examine it and say "I don't want that," that ends it.

Mr. RAMSEYER. I know, with postage due, the sender puts a 2-cent stamp on it and it ought to have a 4-cent stamp, and it comes to you and you see it is a fat letter and you pay the 2 cents, but here comes a carrier with a letter with 1 cent due and you ask "What is the reason?" "Well, we had to look you up in the directory." "Well, why didn't you know where I was? I have been here right along." The carrier probably knows where this man lives; the clerk in the post office did not know, and he had to look up the directory before he could assign it to the right carrier.

Mr. SPILMAN. No; pardon me, Mr. Ramseyer, if it was deliverable by carrier it would go to the carrier of the district to which it was addressed. Now, if the patron leaves a change-of-address order, that automatically would go to the change of address, but if the patron has failed to give a change-of-address order so that the post office is not advised as to his new address, then this penalty applies.

Mr. RAMSEYER. But take a letter like this: Suppose I have got a friend in New York City named John Smith and I simply address it "John Smith, New York City." I have forgotten the street number, so I simply sent it to New York City. Now, the clerk gets hold of that letter and he doesn't know what carrier to assign it to, and he has got to go to the directory.

Mr. SPILMAN. This bill contemplates that John Smith shall pay 1 cent for the privilege of getting that letter.

Mr. RAMSEYER. That is what I understand.

The CHAIRMAN. On the whole, the first-class mail is very profitable, and this service relates to first-class mail in the main?

Mr. SPILMAN. In the main; yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. So that the public is still paying more than the whole service cost, including this directory service.

Mr. RAMSEYER. To carry that thought a little further—this letter addressed to John Smith—if that letter should happen to fall into the hands of clerk A, for instance, he knows John Smith; he knows just where he is and he throws it to the right carrier; but if it gets into the hands of B, who does not know John Smith, it is referred to this directory service and they have got to look him up, and then John Smith happens to be unfortunate in that letter not getting into the hands of the clerk that knew where he lived.

Mr. SPILMAN. John Smith was unfortunate, taking your illustration exactly as you gave it, in that the sender did not include his street number or location in the address.

Mr. RAMSEYER. I appreciate that. Of course, in New York City you ought to educate the public—and you are doing it right along—to write the street number on letters.

Mr. HARDY. If this penalty was charged directly to the fellow who mailed the letter, it would most often fall on the big firms who send out a big mailing list, and it would be a very proper penalty charge; but when it is divided up amongst all these little individuals, half the mail they get they do not care for, and I think you would find it a very unpopular proposition.

Mr. SPILMAN. You can not locate the sender, you see, in a very large portion of instances. You are not able to locate the sender.

Mr. HARDY. I know that.

Mr. SPILMAN. That is why we propose this double-headed rule.

Mr. RAMSEYER. I get some mail addressed to me simply by name, Washington, D. C., and occasionally I see marked on there "H. R.," which means House of Representatives—that is, with pencil. Undoubtedly that received directory service; the clerk who got that letter did not know that I was in Congress, and therefore it had to have directory service. Again I get letters addressed in exactly the same way without any pencil marks on them at all. Probably some clerk down there knew that I was on the Post Office Committee and sent the letter to the station in the House Office Building and it did not get directory service.

Mr. SPILMAN. They would not necessarily write "H. R." on when it was given directory service. They would have a package of those letters that are called "official," and they would go down to the official section and there they know the Members of Congress better. As a matter of fact, mail for Members of Congress goes direct to the branch post office of the House of Representatives.

Mr. PAIGE. I do not see why, if this applies to first-class mail, why anybody should object seriously to the proposition.

Mr. HARDY. It does not apply to first-class mail alone; it applies to any class mail.

Mr. PAIGE. I understood the chairman to say it did.

The CHAIRMAN. It applies to first-class mail mainly. Wasn't that what you said?

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes; based upon the fact that the very much larger portion of the mail given directory service is mail of that class.

The CHAIRMAN. But there is some of it third class?

Mr. SPILMAN. There is some of all classes.

Mr. RAMSEYER. Do I understand this section has the approval of the Postmaster General?

Mr. SPILMAN. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Have you got anything more to submit to the committee, Mr. Spilman?

Mr. SPILMAN. No; the annual report of the Postmaster General gives a statement of the matter very briefly.

Mr. RAMSEYER. I think, as Mr. Hardy suggested, you should summarize that.

Mr. SPILMAN. A letter that is being prepared in the department will give you an epitome of the situation, and then accompanied by a summary of this data here will give you a comprehensive idea of the whole thing.