Benjamin Franklin: America’s First Postmaster
As illustrated on these 2006 stamps, Benjamin Franklin was many things, among them- statesman, scientist, printer, and postmaster. He became postmaster of Philadelphia when he was just 31 years old, a position he held from 1737-1753.
Franklin wrote in his autobiography that he was eager to accept the position and “found it of great advantage; for tho’ the salary was small, it facilitated the correspondence that improv’d my newspaper, increas’d the number demanded, as well as the advertisements to be inserted, so that it came to afford me a considerable income.” After only three years, Franklin’s newspaper, *The Gazette*, became the dominant paper in the colonies.
This cover shows three houses on Market Street in Philadelphia that were designed and built by Franklin. Through the archway in the middle is Franklin Court and the site of Franklin’s own house. The house on the left of the archway was used by Franklin as a post office.
Another cover showing the structures built by Franklin. The post office is to the left of the archway. It is still in operation and also functions as a museum.
In 1753, the Postmaster General of the colonies died and Franklin was appointed joint Postmaster General with William Hunter. He used his new position to further improve the postal service. He extended and improved the post roads, he expanded mail service to and from Canada, and he started overnight mail deliveries between Philadelphia and New York City which cut mailing time in half.
It was also at this time that Franklin introduced the penny post and home mail delivery. He reduced prices and expanded mail service for all colonists, not just the wealthy. He introduced a uniform system of accounts to all postmasters throughout the colonies and instructed them to keep precise accounts of their revenues and costs.
In just three years Franklin completely overhauled the colonial postal service showing a profit for the first time ever. The colonists were pleased with its speed, efficiency, and reliability. Franklin's biographer Carl Van Buren wrote in 1938, “No one man before him had ever done so much to draw the scattered colonies together.”
In 1774, Franklin was fired by the Crown for his many revolutionary activities. Without his supervision, the postal service he had dedicated so much time and energy towards began to slowly unravel.
The following year, the Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin as Postmaster General of the United Colonies. The establishment of this organization is the basis of what would become the United States Postal Service. Franklin held this position until late 1776 when he became the diplomat to France.
Covers Honoring Franklin As Postmaster General of The United States
This 1932 event cover honors National Post Office Day. It was cancelled in Franklin, Illinois.
This cover celebrates the 143rd anniversary of the establishment of the United States Post Office in 1789. It also commemorates the laying of the corner stone of the new post office building in Washington in 1932. The cancel is from the Benjamin Franklin Station.
This hand drawn cover from 1938 features a block of six Franklin stamps from the Presidential Issue series. This set is often referred to as “Prexies” by stamp collectors.
This 1938 cover was postmarked in Philadelphia and features six half cent Prexie stamps of Franklin.
This cover was cancelled at the Benjamin Franklin Memorial Station in Philadelphia in 1938 and honors Franklin as the “Father of the U.S. Postal System.”
Another Prexie cover honoring Franklin.
A 1938 cover showing Franklin’s birth and death dates.
This hand drawn cachet is a replica of Franklin's signature and cancel.
This 1938 airmail cover designed by Crosby honors both Independence Hall and Benjamin Franklin.
For his role as postmaster, Franklin was given the honor of being on the United State’s first postage stamp (pictured to the right). The Dorothy Knapp cover celebrates the centenary of the stamp’s issue.
This 1947 cover by Ken Boll commemorates the 100th anniversary of the first United States postage stamp.
This 1947 Ken Boll airmail cover commemorates the 100th anniversary of the first United State’s postage stamp.
This cachet by C. Stephen Anderson honors Franklin as the first U.S. Postmaster General. The stamps were issued in 1955.
This stamp, issued in 1956, honors the 250th birthday of Ben Franklin. The cachet is by Art Craft.
This embossed cover from 1975 honors 200 years of postal service.
This 1978 Art Craft cover commemorates the 7th USA International Philatelic Exhibition.
This event cover from COMPEX, a stamp show held in Chicago, was cancelled on August 28, 1976, and features an orange-red cachet of Franklin.
Another event cover from COMPEX. It was cancelled on August 29, 1976 and features a green cachet of Franklin.
A Fred Collins hand painted cachet featuring an AMERIPEX ’86 postage stamp.
A Chris Calle cachet from 1993 honoring the National Postal Museum.
An embossed ArtCraft business-size cover from 2006 honoring Franklin.
A combination cover featuring four different Franklin postage stamps. It was postmarked in 2006.
A G & W combination first day cover. The cachet features more stamps honoring Franklin.
A 2006 Fred Collins hand painted first day cover featuring a Ben Franklin postmaster stamp.
A souvenir sheet from Pacific ’97 honoring Franklin.
A rainbow of Franklin U.S. definitive stamps.
Annotated Bibliography


