

NEW POSTAGE ACT.

AN ACT further to amend the act entitled "An act to reduce and modify the rates of postages in the United States, and for other purposes," passed March three, eighteen hundred and fifty-one.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That, in lieu of the rates of postage now established by law, there shall be charged the following rates, to wit :

For every single letter in manuscript, or paper of any kind in which information shall be asked for or communicated in writing, or by marks or signs, conveyed in the mail for any distance between places in the United States not exceeding three thousand miles, three cents ; and for any distance exceeding three thousand miles, ten cents.

And for a double letter there shall be charged double the rate above specified ; and for a treble letter, treble those rates ; and for a quadruple letter, quadruple those rates ; and every letter or parcel not exceeding half an ounce in weight shall be deemed a single letter ; and every additional weight of half an ounce, or additional weight of less than half an ounce, shall be charged with an additional single postage ; and upon all letters passing through or in the mail of the United States, excepting such as are to or from a foreign country, the postages as above specified shall be prepaid, except upon letters and packages addressed to officers of the government on official business, which shall be so marked on the envelope. And from and after the first day of January, eighteen hundred and fifty-six, the Postmaster General may require postmasters to place postage stamps upon all prepaid letters upon which such stamps may not have been placed by the writers.

And all drop-letters, or letters placed in any post office not for transmission through the mail, but for delivery only, shall be charged with postage at the rate of one cent each ; and all letters which shall hereafter be advertised as remaining over, or uncalled for, in any post office, shall be charged with one cent each, in addition to the regular postage, both to be accounted for as other postages now are.

Sec. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That it shall not be lawful for any postmaster or other person to sell any postage stamp or stamped envelope for any larger sum than that indicated upon the face of such postage stamp or for a larger sum than that charged therefor by the Post Office Department ;* and any person who shall violate this provision shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction thereof shall be fined in any sum not less than ten nor more than five hundred dollars. This act to take effect and be in force from and after the commencement of the next fiscal quarter after its passage. *Provided,* That nothing herein contained shall be so construed as to alter the laws in relation to the franking privilege.

Sec. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That for the greater security of valuable letters posted for transmission in the mails of the United States, the Postmaster General be and hereby is authorized to establish a uniform plan for the registration of such letters on application of parties posting the same, and to require the prepayment of the postage, as well as a registration fee of five cents on every such letter or packet to be accounted for by postmasters receiving the same in such manner as the Postmaster General shall direct : *Provided,* however, That such registration shall not be compulsory ; and it shall not render the Post Office Department or its revenue liable for the loss of such letters or packets or the contents thereof.

Approved March 3, 1855.

* That is, the charge for postage stamps must not be more than the sum indicated on their face, and no higher price must be charged for stamped envelopes than is charged by the Department.

INSTRUCTIONS TO POSTMASTERS.

By the act of March 3, 1855, requiring the pre-payment either by stamps, stamped envelopes or in money, of all letters to places within the United States, from and after April 1st, 1855, the single rate under 3,000 miles is three cents, and over 3,000 miles, in the United States, ten cents. From and after January 1st, 1856, all such letters must be pre-paid either by stamps or stamped envelopes. The franking privilege is continued, and by another act extended to Ex-Vice Presidents of the United States.

The law relative to drop letters is not changed in any particular by the recent act.

The act of March 3, 1855, making no provision for unpaid letters to places within the United States—on the same or day following any such unpaid letter or letters being put into a post office, the Postmaster thereof will post up conspicuously in his office a list of the same, stating that they are held up for postage. Any unpaid letters, dropped into mail cars to be forwarded, must be deposited by the route agents in the post office at or nearest the point where they are received, and the postmaster will add them to his list, stating that they were put into the cars unpaid. If not attended to, all such letters must be returned monthly to the dead letter office.

Letters *part paid* should be despatched, charged with the additional postage due at the pre-paid rate, according to distance, established by said act, except where the omission to pay the correct amount is known to have been intentional, when they should be treated the same as letters wholly unpaid.

It is proper to forward a letter when duly requested. When forwarded, no additional postage should be charged, if the letter, contrary to its address, has been mis-sent. If it has been sent according to its address, and then forwarded, it must be charged with additional postage, at the pre-paid rate, according to distance, established by the act of March 3, 1855, which additional postage may be paid either at the forwarding office or at the office of delivery.

The franking privilege is not changed by the new postage act of 3d March, 1855. Of course all persons entitled to this privilege before the passage of the late law still retain it. Any postmaster, whose compensation for the last preceding fiscal year did not exceed \$200, can send through the mail all letters written by himself, and receive letters addressed to himself, on his private business, free of postage, the weight of each letter not to exceed half an ounce. He cannot receive free nor frank printed matter of any kind; nor letters addressed to his wife, nor any other member of his family; nor can he frank letters to editors or publishers containing money in payment of subscription.

The franking privilege of postmasters whose yearly compensation exceeds \$200 is restricted to sending and receiving free, written communications relating exclusively to the business of their offices, or of the post office department. The penalty for a violation of law in this particular is \$300.

It being impracticable in all cases to determine what postmasters are entitled to receive their private communications free, a manuscript letter addressed to a postmaster should not be detained in the mailing office, for the reason that the postage on it is not pre-paid, except in cases where it is known that the postmaster addressed is not entitled to receive his private letters free. And if letters to any postmaster are known to relate exclusively to "post office business," being so superscribed, they should be mailed free.

Any postmaster receiving a letter free, which should have been charged with postage, is bound by his oath of office to charge himself with such postage in his account with the department.

Postmasters are required to report to the department all violations of the franking privilege.

The law, fixing the penalty for violation at fifty dollars, provides "that no postmaster or assistant postmaster shall act as agent for lottery offices, or under any color of purchase, or otherwise, vend lottery tickets;" and that "no postmaster shall receive free of postage, or frank lottery schemes, circulars or tickets." Therefore, all such lottery schemes, circulars or tickets, addressed either to a postmaster or assistant postmaster, must hereafter be excluded from the mail, together with all other transient matter of this kind, addressed simply to an office and not to any individual.

Copyright books, charts, &c., required to be delivered to the library of Congress or Smithsonian Institution, and which are entitled to pass free in the mail, should be superscribed "Copyright for Congress Library," or "Smithsonian Institution," as the case may be.

All letters placed on a mail steamboat, on which the mails are in charge of a route-agent, should go into the hands of such agent; and on these letters the master of the vessel is not entitled to receive any compensation. None but pre-paid letters should be received on such steamboat, and these should be duly mailed. But should any chance to be unpaid, they should be deposited by the route-agent in the post office at or nearest the point at which they are received, and the postmaster should post up a list of them, with the unpaid letters dropped into his office, adding that they were put on board the steamboat unpaid.

In like manner, when practicable, all letters should be pre-paid which are received by steamboats or other vessels not in the mail service, or carrying the mail with no route-agent on board. When pre-paid, the master of the vessel, if under contract to carry the mail, may receive one cent "way," and if not under contract with the department, two cents each from the postmaster in whose office he deposits them; and they should be delivered to their address without any charge beyond the amount pre-paid. But if unpaid, they should be treated as ship-letters, and are chargeable as such with a postage of six cents if delivered at the office at which the vessel shall arrive, and with two cents in addition to the ordinary rate of postage if destined to be conveyed by post to another place. In the latter case, the master of the vessel is entitled to receive two cents a letter.

Persons desiring to send their letters by steamboats can most readily accomplish their object by enclosing such letters in the stamped envelopes issued by the department, inasmuch as letters so enclosed may be conveyed out of the mail without a violation of law, and need not be delivered to the postmaster on the arrival of the vessel.

Letters relating exclusively to the cargo of the vessel by which they are conveyed are not subject to postage, but should be left unsealed—the law relating to such letters remaining unchanged.

Ship letters, as they cannot be prepaid, and are not supposed to be embraced in the new act, will continue to be despatched agreeably to the provisions of the 15th section of the act of March 3, 1825. Abstract logs, addressed to the Superintendent of the National Observatory, are to be treated as ship letters.

The rates and regulations in regard to letters to or from Canada and all other foreign countries are not changed by the new act.

Every Postmaster, in addressing the Department, should be careful to write the name of his office, County and State, at the head of his letter, and to avoid writing upon more than one subject in the same letter. He should then postmark the letter with the name of his office and State, as well as date of mailing, and address it to the proper bureau.

In stamping letters, great care should be observed to render the impression distinct and legible.

JAMES CAMPBELL,
Postmaster General.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
May 15, 1855.

Contributed By
Russ Ryles
4/9/2020