“It’s in the Bag” - The Shape of Turn-of-the-Century Mail

by Diane DeBlois & Robert Dalton Harris
IMPORTANT.

Weighing of Mail in all Post Offices.

TO ALL POSTMASTERS:

The following letter has been sent to every postmaster in the United States:

If any postmaster has not received a copy thereof with the accompanying blanks, he will notify this office at once in order that duplicate blanks may be sent out.

Respectfully,

CH. EMORY SMITH,
Postmaster-General.

OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL,
Washington, D. C., August 21, 1899.

Sir:
The Department desires definite information regarding:

1. The weight of mail matter originating in the United States every twenty-four hours, together with the weight of the equipment necessary to transport the same.

2. The total weight of mail matter, equipment, supplies, etc., passing over steam railroads every twenty-four hours.

A weighing of mails is hereby ordered at your post office to commence on the morning of October 3d, immediately after midnight, and to continue for thirty-five successive days, ending at midnight November 6th, 1899.

Two blanks will be sent you, upon one of which you will keep your daily record of weights, and upon the other you will copy the information from the first blank at the close of the weighing, and forward this copy in the envelope furnished with the blanks. The original blank on which you make your daily entries you will retain in your office.

It is believed that the blanks explain themselves, and great care has been taken to make the instructions as plain as possible. If there is any part of these instructions that you do not understand, inform this office and further information will be given you.

This is a work of great magnitude and it is of the utmost importance that it be correctly done.

Very respectfully,

CH. EMORY SMITH,
Postmaster-General.
Form 5-4407 distributed to all post offices
Eugene Francis Loud (1847-1908),
Chairman of the House Committee on Post Roads, 54th-57th Congress

Total weight of mail matter of all classes:
150,132,405

Total weight of Second Class Mail:
37,820,856
SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO PART 1.

The weight of all matter actually deposited in your post office for mailing, including that for local delivery, either postage paid or free matter, must be accounted for under the proper class heading to which it may belong. Registered matter should be accounted for the same as other matter according to the class. The pouches and sacks in which this matter is dispatched should be weighed separately, and the weight of the same entered under the heading "Equipment." The weight of the pouches, sacks, etc., must not be included with the weight of the mail contained therein.

Bear in mind that in this table you should only show the weights of mail matter, by classes, which actually originates at your post office, and in no case that which you receive from any other post office.

Instructions on the back of Form 5-4407

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO PART 2.

Postmasters are only to enter in Part 2 the weight of mail SENT to railroad routes (steam railroads), and in no case that which is received from any railroad. No attention is to be paid to any mail matter received through other offices if such matter has already been carried on a railroad and weighed. Any mail matter received from other post offices by messenger, star route, and steamboat routes, and which is forwarded by railroad, should be weighed and reported in Part 2.

Second-class matter sent direct to trains by publishers and news agents should be accounted for by the postmaster receiving payment for postage on same on both Part 1 and Part 2.

Term "Equipment" means pouches, locks, sacks, or any receptacle for forwarding mail matter. These are to be weighed separately and reported as Equipment.

The weight of mails to be entered under the headings of "First-class matter," "Second-class matter," "Third and fourth class matter," and "Government free matter," should not include the weight of the pouches or sacks in which the mail is contained. The pouches or sacks should be weighed separately and accounted for under the heading "Equipment."
Total weight of mail matter of all classes: 
150,132,405

Total weight of equipment: 
76,866,031
A STORE ROOM IN THE BAG SHOP.
First Class Mail Pouch

Horse Bag for Star Route
Rail Road Mail Bags


Postmistress, at a small station where there was no mail crane, holding the bag to be caught by a passing train (1875).
THE TRANSFER OF MAIL AT THE GRAND CENTRAL STATION.
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1891 advertisement
For *Comfort* Magazine
in the trade publication
*Printers’ Ink*
In 1899 Los Angeles would have received many more periodicals from Augusta than it sent in return.
1891 advertisement for Allen’s Lists in *Printers’ Ink*
1891 advertisement for Comfort magazine in the trade publication Art in Advertising
1891 advertisement defending *Comfort* magazine against charges of abusing the Second Class mailing privilege in the trade publication *Art in Advertising*
September 1895 issue of *Comfort* magazine,
mailed to subscriber
Adel Fariss
(in Colorado: 1890 Census)
September 1895 *Comfort* art novelties for children, in color thanks to investment in a 5-color Hoe Press in 1892.
September 1895 *Comfort*, a regular “Science” column

*Copyright, 1895, by The Gannett & Morse Concern.*
September 1895 *Comfort* ad for Oxien - the founding product of the Gannett publishing empire: a remedy originally sold as a drink but reformulated as tablets for mail order.
Comfort, a sampling of mail order ads for products (weighing less than 4 pounds) that could be sent through the mail.
HELP YOUR YOUNG FRIENDS.

YOUNG HUSTLERS WANTED.

Boys and Girls Get Rich.

Big Dollars For Young Workers or Hustlers.

Comfort has never been sold on streets or news stands. It has gone only to subscribers in the mail. Now that it is printed in bright lithographic colors on heavy paper and has been enlarged one-third in number of pages, thousands of requests have come to us for single copies. Hereafter we shall publish a special news-stand edition on heavy cut paper, which will be sold at 5 cents a single copy and contain much additional and interesting matter that does not appear in its regular columns.

We Want a Hustler in Every Place.

Hundreds of smart, active boys and girls in every locality have several hours spare time every week. We want such ones to work for us just a little while every month selling Comforts at 5 cents each on good terms that will make money. The more they sell the bigger the pay.

They take no possible risk. We send the bundle of papers every month and they sell them like hot cakes at 5 cents each. Everyone wants Comfort as soon as they have seen it once. After they have sold all that they can they take their blanks and make a settlement with us direct. They pay only for what they sell and do not have to send a single cent until the papers are sold.

September 1895 Comfort magazine inducements for “Hustlers” to enlarge the subscription list
September 1895 *Comfort* magazine ad to induce subscribers to pay their arrears with a new subscription.
Third Augusta publishing giant: Vickery & Hill (ca1900 postcard)

It is Longfellow, I think, who refers to somebody’s footprints, which another forlorn and shipwrecked brother seeing may take heart again, or words to that effect; and a case in point is the Gannett & Morse Concern of Augusta. Some three years ago Mr. Gannett’s footprints encircled a peanut stand on a side street, but to-day they chase around a press that cost $22,000 and that prints 523,000 *Comforts* per month. Although a dyspeptic blue sign informs the passer-by that the Gannett & Morse Concern dwell within, there is no Morse—only Gannett. The concern is Mr. C. A. Price, one of the brightest young men I have encountered for some time. Mr. W. H. Gannett is perhaps three and thirty, and has the fatal gift of beauty. He is building up a great property, yet you couldn’t hire me to subscribe for his paper. It isn’t my style; but for the bucolic countryman there is no such treat as *Comforts*. It is the acme of Art, Science, and Literature, as the sub-title modestly claims. To them it represents the highest achievements of intellectual effort, and has a constituency among the great middle class people in the agricultural districts that would be a credit to any paper. It is one of those monthlies published at twenty-five cents a year, which accounts no doubt for its enormous circulation. I am simply amazed at the business they have picked up since their beginning. Already improvements in the paper are contemplated, and during the fall I think *Comfort* will take a step in a direction approaching my aesthetic taste. I cannot understand how a paper can be made for such an insignificant sum, and I presume it would be impossible but for the enormous circulation. I am told that the sale of their premium articles is quite a revenue in itself and that the merchandise alone thus disposed of yields a handsome profit in addition to the paper. Truely, the ways of the modern publisher is past finding out.
Loading Second Class Mail sacks at a railroad siding
New, lighter, Second Class Mail sacks
Mail density (weight multiplied by frequency) for 3 classes of compensation per ton per mile. Asymmetry in distribution of mail
President Roosevelt:
“Those guilty of bad methods or irregularities in the government service must be dismissed. No friends, no favors, no party!”