CELEBRATE OWNEY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Owney traveled the country on mail trains in the 1890s. This summer, he embarks on a new adventure: becoming a postage stamp!

The release of the Owney commemorative postage stamp is a great opportunity to celebrate mail, stamp collecting, trains, dogs, and American history. Stamp clubs, post office, model train clubs, and other organizations across the country will get in on the fun by inviting the public to celebrate Owney’s stamp.

This packet provides activity guides, printable materials, and ideas to make your Owney celebration extra special.

Who was Owney? Owney was a stray dog who wandered into the Albany, New York, post office in 1888. The clerks let him stay the night, and he fell asleep on a pile of empty mailbags. Owney began to ride with the bags on Railway Post Office (RPO) train cars across the state... and then the country! The RPO clerks adopted Owney as their unofficial mascot, marking his travels by placing medals and tags from his stops on his collar.

When will his stamp be issued? July 27, 2011 at 11 a.m. at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington, DC.

Where can I find more information or share my ideas? Visit postalmuseum.si.edu/Owney You can also stay in touch with Owney news and ask Owney questions at Facebook.com/Owney or Twitter.com/OwneytheDog The American Philatelic Society has also gathered Owney resources at www.stamps.org/cac/owney.
WHO IS OWNEY THE DOG?

In his day, Owney (about 1888–1897) was the most famous dog in America, celebrated for traveling the length and breadth of the country on mail trains. His adventure began when he followed some mailbags onto a train in Albany, New York. After that, he never stopped moving.

Clerks working on Railway Mail Service loved having Owney on board and adopted him as their mascot. Owney gained notoriety and appeared in headlines from the *San Francisco Call* to the *New York Times*.

At that time, most of the nation’s mail was sorted and moved on trains. Railway accidents were common and the clerks’ jobs dangerous. Clerks considered Owney a good luck charm because they believed that he had never been in a train wreck. To mark Owney’s trips on their trains, the clerks began adding medals and tokens to his collar.

So many people added tags to Owney’s collar that Postmaster General John Wanamaker gave him a harness on which to display his collection. Owney jingled “like a junk wagon” when he walked because of all the tokens he carried. The Postal Museum has more than 300 of his tags!

In 1895 Owney made an around-the-world trip, traveling with mailbags on trains and steamships to Asia and across Europe, before returning to Albany.

After Owney’s death in 1897, his mail clerk friends raised money to preserve their mascot. Owney was taken to the Post Office Department’s main building in Washington, D.C. In 1911 the Department gave Owney to the Smithsonian. On July 27, 2011, Owney will be commemorated on a US postage stamp to be issued at the Postal Museum.
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MAKE A TAG FOR OWEY

**Summary:** In this activity, kids create tags for Owney. The tags share something about the kids' town or state. What would Owney have seen if he visited? What symbolizes our state or town? When complete, kids can attach their tags to a stuffed dog toy.

As Owney’s travels took him further away from his home in Albany, New York, Railway Mail Service clerks and others added tags to Owney’s collar to track his travels. When they became heavy, the Postmaster General gave him a harness to better carry his tags. These tags tell us where Owney went and what he did. After making their tags, kids can take their tag home, attach their tag to the collar of an Owney plush, or tape their tag to a US map on their hometown.

**Why:** This activity challenges kids to think about where they’re from and what symbolizes your state or town. Symbols (such as a landmark, local food, state bird, or famous person) help kids use their art to identify and share what is special about their community. Tags were souvenirs Owney collected on his travels; kids today may collect postcards, snow globes, pens, or stickers.

**Time:** 2-8 minutes

**You’ll need:**
- Tag templates printed and cut out (one per participant)
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Printed examples of Owney's real tags (provided on the next page)
- If kids will attach their tags to a stuffed dog toy, you’ll need a hole punch, yarn, and dog toy (you can [purchase an Owney plush here](#))

**Recommended age group** – 4 and up

**Here’s what to do:** Explain that Owney traveled the country on mail trains, collecting tags along the way. Share examples of the tags he received. Ask children to identify where he was given the tag and who gave it to him. Instruct children to imagine that Owney is visiting their town. Make a tag for Owney from the town or state, including the name of the place, one symbol that represents it, and their name. For example, a tag from Miami, Florida could include a beach scene, palm tree, or Miami Dolphins logo. When kids complete their tags, they can attach it to the collar of a plush Owney dog. If desired, participants could also attach tags to a US map, city map, or neighborhood map to indicate where they are from and practice geography skills.
Materials for: Make a Tag for Owney
Materials for: Make a Tag for Owney
Materials for: Make a Tag for Owney

E. D. SIMPSON, RUNNING WATER, S. D. DAKOTA.
1893.

Compliments Produce Exchange.
TOLDO, O.

DOG TAX
1891
MAYSVILLE, K.
N0.90

Smithsonian
National Postal Museum
**POOCH POSTAGE**

**Summary:** US postage stamps may be small but they carry a big message. In this activity, kids design stamps celebrating the importance of “man’s best friend.” Kids learn that dogs (like Owney) are important to our history and culture and how a topic gets to be on postage stamps. The stamps can be displayed, entered into a contest, turned into real postage, or printed on sticky labels.

**How does something end up on a stamp?** The subjects featured on postage stamps are carefully chosen. Each stamp subject idea starts as a suggestion from the public. People send thousands of suggestions. Each suggestion is reviewed to see if it matches a list of requirements.

The suggestions are then given to the Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC). They review them and make recommendations to the Postmaster General on what stamp subjects to print.

Five of the 12 CSAC Rules are listed below. In order to become a stamp, a subject must feature one of the following:

1. American/American-related themes, including national symbols, holidays, and nature
2. Characters, but not living people
3. People only five years after the individual’s death unless it is a U.S. president (they are traditionally honored on their first birthday in the year after their death)
4. Events, persons, themes of national importance only (regional themes are not allowed)
5. American States

For more information about the requirements for stamps, follow this link: [www.usps.com/communications/organization/csac.htm](http://www.usps.com/communications/organization/csac.htm)

**Why:** This activity helps kids understand why it’s so important that Owney was selected to be on a US postage stamp. It also encourages them to think about the messages stamps carry—and look at their mail in a whole new way!

**Time:** 5-15 minutes

**You'll need:**
- Stamp templates (at least one per participant)
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Printed examples of real stamps commemorating dogs
- If kids will display their stamps, a cork board, tape, or other display method
- If the stamps will be turned into sticky labels or real postage, you will need a scanner.
Recommended age group – 4 and up

**Here’s what to do:** Explain that Owney has been selected to be featured on a US postage stamp. Discuss why this is important: stamps are seen by many people around the world, stamps represent what is important to American history and culture, only important people (or animals) are selected to be on stamps, and stamps are fun. Discuss why Owney is important and why people all around the country love him.

Explain that the kids will make their own stamps celebrating dogs. But they can’t draw “just any old dog!” There are rules about what subjects can be on postage stamps. Discuss the rules above. Your own pet won’t be featured on a US postage stamp because stamp subjects must have national importance; consider ways in which dogs have national importance. Show examples of stamps commemorating dogs and discuss why the dog is important. For example, the “Humane Treatment of Animals” dog is important because he reminds people to treat animals kindly. The “Seeing for Me” dog is very important because service animals help people who are blind.

Instruct the kids to design their “pooch postage” keeping in mind that stamps are small. The designs should be colorful and clear so that they look eye-catching when reduced to stamp size.

**Variations:**
- Hold a contest for the “Best Pooch Postage” to be judged by the local postmaster. The winning design could be scanned in and printed on real postage, sticky labels, a special t-shirt or other prize item.
  - Real postage: [Zazzle or stamps.com link]
  - Stickers and t-shirts: [café press or something]
- Display the stamp designs at the post office, school, or community center. Take a photo of the participants in front of the display.
Materials: Pooch Postage

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Materials: Pooch Postage

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**TAIL-WAGGIN’ TALES (READ ALOUD)**

**Summary:** In this activity, an adult reads one of Owney’s books aloud, incorporating sound, action, and imagination. Kids enjoy the story while helping to act it out.

**Why:** This activity proves books aren’t boring. An active read-aloud is a fun way to explain Owney’s story while encouraging kids to consider some big questions and connections.

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**You’ll need:**
- A book about Owney
- Seating, such as chairs or a quilt
- Optional: select props such as a mail bag, dog toy, Owney’s tags, etc

**Recommended age group** – 4 and up

**Preparation:** Read the book. Identify opportunities for active moments, questions, and sound effects. Flag these spots with a post-it note. If the activity threatens to take too long, identify parts of the book that you can skip.

**Here’s what to do:** Gather children around you. Set the scene by inviting them to imagine they have four paws, two floppy ears, a tail, and fur! Read the book using the active moments you prepared. Conclude the read-aloud with a round of applause.

**Examples of active moments in the Owney read-aloud:**

- **Use your five senses** to explore the pictures. Make the sound of a train whistling. Imagine how heavy the bags of mail were. Imagine sleeping on a bag of mail.
- **Ask questions.** “How do you think Owney feels right now? How can you tell he is happy?” “The clerks just discovered a dog sleeping in their post office. What do you think will happen next?” “What would you do if you were Owney?”
- **Make connections.** Owney may have traveled the world, but he may have also come to your state or seen sites familiar to the children. “Has anyone seen a train before or ridden in a train?” “Has anyone ever been to a post office?” “Does our town have train tracks?”
**Owney’s Find It (Scavenger Hunt)**

**Summary:** If your Owney celebration takes place at a post office, stamp club meeting, train station, or other space related to Owney’s story, you might consider encouraging participants to explore and become more familiar with the place. Owney was familiar with post offices, train stations, and many cities across the country. The “Find It” activity helps families explore and find connections to Owney’s story. If your celebration takes place at a train station, the “Our Story” activity guide created by the National Museum of American History is highly recommended.

**Why:** Visiting a place connected with Owney’s story helps kids make connections between history and their own lives and communities.

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**You’ll need:**
- Print outs of the “Find It,” one per participant (or one per family group)
- Pencils for participants to write or draw their answers. Participants can also skip writing or drawing what they found and just put a check mark next to each item as they locate it.
- Optional: a prize for participants who complete their “Find It”
- Please note: The “Find It” could take place almost anywhere. Ensure that he following items are findable in the space: Three postage stamps, someone with an O in their name, something medal, a four-legged animal (this could be a photo or toy dog), one type of transportation, one place to put mail, the name of a city or state.

**Recommended age group** – 6 and up

**Help Owney Find These Things!**
Three postage stamps

Someone with an O in their name

Something metal

One four-legged animal

One type of transportation

One place to put mail

The name of a city or state

Other Ideas for Celebrating Owney

Smithsonian National Postal Museum
**Did Owney visit our state?** Owney traveled very widely but didn’t go everywhere. Click here to see a map of the places Owney visited. If Owney did visit your state, ask state archives, historical societies, and museums if they have records of his visit or images of the state in the year Owney visited. If he didn’t visit your state, ask kids to imagine what he would have seen if he had. Using the list of Owney’s visits, consider creating a “Where in the World is Owney” trivia game in which you give clues about the state until kids guess it!

**Hold an Owney Look-A-Like Contest:** Invite families to submit photos of their dog in print, by email, or through a photo-sharing site such as Flickr or Facebook.

**Present Owney’s Story:** Sharing Owney’s story with a stamp club, classroom, or other group? Download the presentation offered by the Postal Museum to share Owney’s story in words and pictures.

**Talk like a Mail Slinger:** Railway Mail clerks worked quickly in tight teams to sort huge amounts of mail as they zipped down the tracks. Like other groups of people who do specialized work (such as football players and stamp collectors), they developed a special lingo. See a list of slang words and definitions here. Hold a trivia game to challenge participants to guess the meanings of these words or play a matching game to match words with their definitions.

**Enjoy a Railroad Sing-Along:** Great songs have been written about trains and railroad life. Print the song lyrics, distribute them, and invite participants to join you in singing “Chattanooga Choo Choo” or “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad.” The “Our Story” activities created by the National Museum of American History include lyrics and directions for download here.

**Show Film Clips:** Videos are available at www.YouTube.com/SmithsonianNPM You can show clips of The Great Train Robbery or interviews with Railway Post Office Clerks. Watching a “mail on the fly” exchange shows how speedy and efficient the Railway Mail Service was. Another resource is Constant Motion: The Job of the Railway Postal Clerks, a 30 minute documentary produced by WEIU TV in cooperation with Dr. Cindy Rich, of Eastern Illinois University’s Department of Education and Professional Studies. The program tells the story through first person accounts, the life and times of the men who worked as Railway Postal Clerks.

**Invite a Local Model Train Club:** Clubs around the country enjoy setting up model train displays at events. If your local area has a club, invite them to present a layout at your Owney celebration.

**Tooting Train Whistles:** Train whistles were probably a familiar sound for Owney. Train whistles communicate messages between trains and prevent wrecks. Use the “Toot Your Own Train Whistle” handout to teach visitors train whistle patterns and what they mean. Plastic train-shaped whistles make this activity lots of fun.
A dash means a long tone
A dot means a short tone

Toot your own train whistle!