

2d CONGRESS.]

No. 5.

[2d SESSION.]

TAX ON MAIL STAGES IN NEW JERSEY.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, ON THE 11TH OF FEBRUARY, 1793.

GENERAL POST OFFICE, *February 9, 1793.*

SIR:

The present contractor for carrying the mail between Philadelphia and New York has handed to me a law of the State of New Jersey, passed the 24th of November, 1786, entitled "An act for raising a revenue from certain stages, ferries, and taverns," by which the proprietors of each line of stages are subjected to an annual tax of *four hundred dollars*. There are now three lines, which together pay the State of New Jersey twelve hundred dollars a year for licence to run a stage wagon from Trenton ferry to Paulus Hook. The present contractor contemplates the setting up another line of light stages, in which he would carry the mail, with only four passengers, for which he will be liable to the like exaction of four hundred dollars, annually, for a licence, though the despatch requisite for the mail will only oblige him to carry it on horseback for about seven months out of seventeen during which his contract will continue. But, as his stages will run parts of two years, he will be obliged to pay eight hundred dollars, during the term of his contract, unless the Government of the United States can give him relief.

If the sums exacted from the proprietors of the stages were expended in extraordinary reparations of the road, no passengers would complain of paying enhanced prices for safer and easier seats in the stages; but such an appropriation is not even thought of; the avowed design is to increase the revenues of that State. And thus, the citizens of the United States have to purchase permission to travel on the highways of New Jersey. At the same time, it is remarkable that the express object of one section of the act is, "to prevent imposition on travellers." By a reasonable computation, the annual expense of transporting the mail six times a week between Philadelphia and New York, on horseback, would be two thousand four hundred dollars. But the contractor has engaged for that sum to carry it for one year and five months, being the period from the first of January, to the expiration of the present Post Office law. He was induced to propose such moderate terms, because he intended to erect a line of stages, and hoped to be relieved from the imposition before mentioned. The terms offered by some other proprietors of stages were as high as four thousand, and four thousand eight hundred dollars.

As the annual expense of carrying this mail on horseback would be two thousand four hundred dollars, and the present contractor will carry it one year and five months for the same sum, there will arise on this single contract, a saving to the United States of one thousand dollars from the partial carriage of it in stages: for the contractor must have added this sum to his terms to defray the actual expense of carrying this mail entirely on horseback. But, if no relief can be given in the premises, the United States must henceforward pay to New Jersey an annual tribute of four hundred dollars, or any higher sum, if pleased to impose it, for permission to transport the mail through that State in stage wagons. And, from the example of New Jersey, they may ere long become tributary to all the States, from Virginia to New Hampshire inclusively: for so far the mail is carried in stage wagons. Having represented this tax, what I conceive it to be, an unwarrantable imposition, it is proper to add, that, from the information I have received, it originated in the voluntary offer of the proprietors of the two lines of stages then running, who designed thereby to make a monopoly of the business.

The exclusive privilege of running stages in Maryland and Virginia yet continues in the persons to whom it was formerly granted, and the expense of carrying the mail is thereby enhanced. A person well acquainted with the business and the profits, assured me that, for the exclusive privilege of running stages on the main post road between the Susquehannah and the Potomac, he would undertake to carry the public mail gratis.

The subject of this letter appeared to me of such importance to the public as to merit the attention of the General Legislature, to whom I wish to introduce it, by presenting it, in the first instance, to the House of Representatives, before whom I pray you to lay it.

TIMOTHY PICKERING.

The SPEAKER of the House of Representatives of the United States.

3d CONGRESS.]

No. 6.

[2d SESSION.]

EXECUTION OF THE POST OFFICE LAW.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, ON THE 23D OF DECEMBER, 1794.

Mr. GREENUP made the following report:

The committee appointed to inquire how far the Post Office law has been carried into effect have received from the office of the Postmaster General satisfactory information on the subject referred to, which they beg leave to report to the House, accompanying this report.

GENERAL POST OFFICE, PHILADELPHIA, *December 20, 1794.*

SIR:

In the absence of the Postmaster General, I have received your letter of the 16th instant, enclosing a resolution of the House of Representatives appointing a committee to inquire how far the Post Office law has been carried into execution, and requesting such information as may enable the committee to report to the House on the subject.

Agreeably to your request, I inform you that, as soon after the Post Office law was passed as the information necessary to enable the Postmaster General to advertise for proposals could possibly be obtained, he published his advertisements, and that, on or before the 1st of October last, proposals were received, and contracts made for the carriage of the mails, on most of the post roads designated in the law.

In some cases, proposals that were received were so high that the Postmaster General deemed it his duty not to accept them until he had endeavored to obtain lower ones, and, in other cases, no proposals were received within the time limited by the advertisements, which necessarily protracted the business; but contracts are now obtained for all the roads, except from Baltimore to Yorktown, from Smithfield to Hicks Ford, and from Cheraw Court House to Georgetown.

No proposals were made in time for the carriage of the mail from Baltimore to Yorktown, and none have since been received that could with propriety be accepted. The lowest proposal that was received for the carriage of the mail from Smithfield to Hicks Ford, was considered extravagantly dear, and no others have since been obtained.

Alexander Martin made proposals for the carriage of the mail from Cheraw Court House to Georgetown, which were accepted, and a contract was sent to him to execute, which he, from sickness, declined; but another proposal for that mail, much lower than Mr. Martin's, has since been obtained, and I presume the carriage of it will very soon commence.

The Postmaster General made a contract with Thomas Sumpter Jr. on the 1st of September last, for the carriage of the mails from Cheraw Court House to Augusta, and from Camden to Charleston, which was to commence on the 1st of October following, and it was supposed to have commenced, until the 4th of November, when I received information that no provision had been made for the execution of it. Immediately on receiving this information I made inquiry respecting the cause of the delay, and it appeared from Mr. Sumpter, who was at that time in Philadelphia, that sickness had prevented his return to South Carolina, and that the delay was probably caused by the failure of his letters to his father and his agent, requesting them to provide for the contract.

As soon as I received information of the delay, I wrote to the Postmaster at Cheraw by the mail, and by water to the Postmasters at Charleston and Statesburgh, to send the mails by express, until permanent arrangements could be made; but, before the receipt of my letters, General Sumpter had commenced the execution of his son's contract. It is to be lamented that an interruption for several weeks took place, and that the mails are not now carried with that regularity and despatch required by the contract. Mr. Sumpter is now on his return home, and has given me the strongest assurances that his contract shall be fully executed immediately on his arrival.

The failure in the execution of Mr. Sumpter's contract was not to have been suspected, because of the known ability of himself and father to perform it, and especially as they had horses and riders then employed in carrying mails on the same roads, except the small distance from Camden to Cheraw Court House.

I am, sir, with respect, your humble servant,

CHARLES BURRALL, *Assistant Postmaster General.*

ABRAHAM BALDWIN, Esq.

4th CONGRESS.]

No. 7.

[1st Session.]

REVISION OF THE POST OFFICE LAW.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON THE 4th OF APRIL, 1796.

Mr. THATCHER, from the committee appointed to inquire if any, and what, alterations are necessary to be made in the act, entitled "An act to establish the Post Office and post roads within the United States," reported:

That the Deputy Postmasters have generally represented to the Postmaster General that their commissions are inadequate to the time and services required of them, in attending upon the duties of their offices; that several, in the course of the last year, have resigned their appointments, assigning, as a reason, the insufficiency of their compensations, while many others are induced to hold their appointments in expectation that the law will be amended, so as to afford them something adequate to their trouble.

It is, therefore, the opinion of the committee, that there ought to be a moderate advance in the commissions of the Deputy Postmasters, to give them satisfaction, and secure to the Department faithful officers.

The extension of post roads through the United States, that has taken place at different times, since the organization of the Government, and the great increase of Post Offices, have so accumulated the business of the General Post Office, that from the utmost exertion of the clerks allowed to the Postmaster General, it is not in his power to bring up the business, so as to render his accounts to the treasury in proper time. The committee are of opinion that provision ought to be made by law for an additional clerk in the General Post Office.

It is also the opinion of the committee, that the privilege of franking letters ought to be extended to the accountant of the Department of War.

The committee can see no good reason, but many inconveniences, arising out of the clause in the law aforesaid, which restrains the privilege of franking letters, in the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, to letters and packets not exceeding two ounces in weight. They are, therefore, of opinion, that clause in the nineteenth section of the said act ought to be repealed, and the privilege ought to extend to all letters or packets, to or from any member of the Senate or House of Representatives, not exceeding four ounces in weight.

In obedience to the resolution of this House of the fourth of March, directing the committee to inquire and report whether any, and what, impediments exist in the regular transportation of the mail through the Southern States, the committee beg leave to state to this House, that, from the best information they can get upon the subject of the resolution, they are led to believe the mail was carried with great despatch and regularity through those States, during the summer and fall, while the state of the roads admitted it, but that many failures have occurred in the course of the winter, which was uncommonly wet and open, and very unfavorable for travelling in the Southern States. The communication by post has, notwithstanding, been preserved under many embarrassing circumstances, with a degree of regularity, that could not have been effected without great exertions on the part of the contractors: And the transportation of the mails being conducted under similar arrangements, if the roads were equally good through all the States, there is no doubt but the general intercourse with them would be nearly the same, as to regularity and despatch. The special impediments that caused some interruption, during the winter, to the transportation of the mail through the Southern States, appear to the committee to have been the bad state of the roads, and the impassability of rivers at times of high freshets, and not owing to any misconduct on the part of the contractors.

The committee beg leave further to inform the House that there are great and frequent complaints, especially from the Southern States, that the transportation of newspapers is much interrupted, and sometimes, for many weeks, none are received by subscribers, though it has been ascertained that they were put into the mail portmanteau at the seat of Government, or other post towns, where they were printed.

The committee have been anxious to investigate the true causes of this failure, and submit the following, as what appear to them probable, and the most operative in producing the evil complained of:

First. Many of the printers being desirous to get their papers to their customers by the first mail that starts from the place where they are printed, do not take any pains, and, possibly, sometimes the mail sets off so soon after the papers are struck off from the press, that they have not time to dry them; consequently, they are thrown into the portmanteaus in a state of moisture that more than doubles the natural weight of the paper when dry. This wet situation of the papers makes them liable also to be easily torn and destroyed by the motion, among the bundles and packages, arising from the carriage or horse that transports them. And sometimes, in travelling from one office to another, whole bundles, as well as single papers, are so worn and defaced, that it is impossible to ascertain to whom, or to what office they are directed, or to read their contents. But the evil does not rest on these papers only; they sometimes make up a great proportion of the whole, and communicate their moisture to the few that were dried when put into the portmanteaus; whereby the whole becomes a wet mass, and the latter are equally sub-