

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-

ject to be defaced and destroyed with the others, though, perhaps, in a less degree. That the wetness of the papers, when put into the portmanteaus, is a cause of the failure complained of, is corroborated by this circumstance, that such papers more frequently fail of reaching their subscribers than those that are dried when put into the mail.

Secondly. All the papers and packages directed to distant customers, and to be left at different offices and places, are put loose into the portmanteau with others, for subscribers less distant, and as often as the mail is opened the newspapers are all thrown together out of the portmanteaus, in order to find the individual paper or package to be left at such office or place. At such times, there is good reason to suppose papers and small packages are taken away by persons present at opening the portmanteau, to whom they are not directed, but without the knowledge or privity of the Postmasters, or carriers of the mail. Sometimes, also, it may be presumed, single papers and small bundles are unintentionally omitted to be put into the portmanteau again, after they had been turned out, for the purpose of selecting such as are to be left at that particular place.

The committee are, therefore, of opinion, that some further provision ought to be made by law to secure a more certain transmission of newspapers through the United States.

5th CONGRESS.]

No. 8.

[3d SESSION.

## ALTERATIONS PROPOSED TO THE POST OFFICE LAWS.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 8, 1799.

GENERAL POST OFFICE, *Philadelphia, January 8, 1799.*

SIR: In compliance with the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 14th of June last, I have the honor to lay before them—

First. The draught of an act for establishing the Post Office, with a report explanatory of the alteration of the former acts upon that subject, and of the amendments now offered, with a view of rendering the system more complete.

Secondly. The draught of an act relative to the post roads, in which the establishment of several new post roads, and the alteration and discontinuance of others, is proposed, with remarks on a number of petitions, and a relation of the motives for the establishment of the new roads, and the discontinuance or alteration of others.

And lastly. A report on the petition of Ezekiel Williams.

The regulations relative to the General Post Office and the establishment of post roads have hitherto been comprehended in one act, but no advantage is derived from the connexion of them; the latter is subject to frequent increase and alteration, is very lengthy, and is of no use to any part of the Department, other than the General Post Office, while the former affects every person employed in it, and ought to be furnished them as little encumbered as possible. On that account, I have deemed it most useful to present the business to Congress in separate acts.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, sir, your obedient servant,

JOSEPH HABERSHAM, *Postmaster General.*

The Honorable the SPEAKER of the House of Representatives.

*Remarks respectfully submitted to Congress, by the Postmaster General, on the project of "An act to establish the Post Office of the United States," made out conformably to a resolution of the House of Representatives, passed the 14th of March, 1798.*

The first section proposes that the Post Office shall be under the direction of a Postmaster General, and points out some of his principal duties. Among other things, it authorizes him to appoint an assistant, a solicitor, a first clerk, a book keeper, and such other clerks as may be found necessary to enable him to perform the duties required of him in the General Post Office.

It has often been imagined that the duties of the Postmaster General were very trifling and simple, even so much so, that some have considered it rather a sinecure, than an office of business; it is presumed that mistake has chiefly arisen from not duly attending to the subject, and, from that cause, such a very small allotment of services as has been hitherto provided was made for the performance of its duties. In other countries, it has been considered an object of more importance, and its execution has been more liberally provided for. The Post Office of Great Britain is now under the direction of two Postmasters General, a secretary, a surveyor, and a comptroller, besides the necessary clerks; the letter office of London is in some measure connected with it, but it is managed by head clerks, and a great number of ordinary clerks. That office superintends the other General Post Offices in Scotland, Ireland, and the provinces; exclusive of that superintendence, it is supposed, from the best information that can be obtained, that its duties are not so great as those of the General Post Office; here, the post roads there not comprehending half so many miles, and the Post Offices not being two-thirds so numerous, as those in this country. The Post Office in Scotland (under the British Post Office) is managed by a Postmaster General, a secretary, a solicitor, and an accountant, besides clerks; the post roads in Scotland hardly extend two thousand miles, and there are only one hundred and eighty Post Offices. If experience has shown the Governments of those countries that such an arrangement is there necessary to the due execution of the business of the General Post Office, it is believed that no one can suppose that the General Post Office here, which superintends nearly seven hundred Post Offices, and the transportation of the mail over post roads that extend more than sixteen thousand miles, can be easily or duly managed by one Postmaster General, an assistant, and the help he can obtain from an allowance too scanty for the employment of four good clerks. The most material parts of the duty have indeed been performed so as to keep the business in motion, but it is believed that all the smaller duties have not been properly performed since the first extension of the post roads under the present form of Government. On the first establishment of the General Post Office, under the former constitution, a Postmaster General and an assistant were provided for its superintendence; then, and for many years afterwards, the whole number of Post Offices did not amount to sixty, and the post roads did not extend two thousand miles: one clerk was then also employed. With only the additional aid of three clerks, the same provision has been continued to this time, although the duties have been gradually increased to more than seven fold.

These circumstances are mentioned, that the alteration might not appear extravagant; the Postmaster General has no disposition to enjoy the emolument the office affords him without rendering his constant services, and no wish to add the least unnecessary expense. It appears to him that additional provision is absolutely necessary in the present state of the office, and that there will be constant employ for all those who are proposed.

In a business so diffusive as the services to be performed in the General Post Office, it is not easy to detail the particulars. The transportation of the mail over post roads that extend sixteen thousand miles, which have many