



**U.S. Department of Justice**  
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**NEWS RELEASE**

United States Attorney Glenn T. Suddaby and Jane Hughes, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Area Office of the United States Postal Service, Office of the Inspector General, announced today that a Watertown, New York postal employee, charged with theft of mail, appeared before a federal magistrate for his initial appearance. The federal indictment, returned on July 11, 2007, charges that on December 29, 2006, DONALD G. RING III, 36, a Highway Contract Route driver for the United States Postal Service, stole and removed mail entrusted to him. RING appeared today before United States Magistrate David E. Peebles, who ordered that he be released on his own recognizance pending trial.

The indictment charges that on December 29, 2006, Donald Ring III, a contract driver and employee of the United States Postal Service, removed a package which had been entrusted to him and which he was to have delivered to the Post Office in Alexandria Bay, New York. The package contained artifacts made by the Iroquois tribal nation, each over one-hundred years old. Among the items removed were two circa 1830's "false face" masks – one blue and one red – sacred to the

Iroquois people and used in their religious ceremonies. Also lost were eight colorful, beaded picture frames, several of which displayed antique black and white portrait photographs.

The Iroquois nation artifacts were in a private English collection where they were located by an individual in Alexandria Bay who specializes in repatriating such items. The English collector did not charge any fee for the artifacts, while the Alexandria Bay resident paid the necessary postage. The items were shipped from England by International Express Mail, but the package was not insured. The Alexandria Bay resident had hoped to organize a public ceremony to mark the return of these items to the Iroquois.

After the package failed to arrive, the Postal Service received formal and informal inquiries as to its whereabouts. The matter was referred to the Syracuse office of the United States Postal Service, Office of the Inspector General, which initiated an investigation. The investigation focused on Ring, a contract Postal driver whose daily delivery route included the missing package's shipping address.

Ring eventually admitted to Special Agents of Postal OIG that he had taken the package, removing it from the other mail which he was to deliver, claiming that the package had been damaged beyond repair by loose equipment in his truck which fell on it, crushing it and tearing it open. Ring advised that he could see the items inside had been badly damaged. Ring claimed he was afraid of losing his job over the incident, so he brought the items back to his house and burned them in his back-yard burn pit. However, Postal OIG Special Agents subsequently searched Ring's burn pit for the artifacts or any traces of the artifacts without success. Ring advised that he had no idea of the identity or significance of the objects he destroyed, stating he felt sick when he learned what the package had contained.

Jane Hughes, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Area Office of the OIG, said, “Theft of mail by a postal employee or a contractor is a serious crime. Those employees and contractors are given a special trust to properly handle mail that comes into their possession. The sacred Native American artifacts that were removed from the mail are a serious violation of that trust. When even one postal employee or contractor betrays that trust, it is vigorously investigated by Special Agents of the Postal Services’s Office of Inspector General.”

The case was investigated by United States Postal Service, Office of the Inspector General, Syracuse Field Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Carl G. Eurenus, who can be reached at 448-0672.

The charges are merely accusations and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.