

Women of Postal Headquarters

Women have served as postmasters since the late 18th century. The first women known to have served at postal headquarters were appointed in July 1862, when Postmaster General Montgomery Blair hired ten women to work as clerks in the Dead Letter Office. A postal official later speculated that the hiring of women was prompted by the Civil War – out of necessity because so many male clerks left to enter the army, and out of charity because so many women lost husbands and sons who had been their sole means of support. Although the presence of women at headquarters was the exception rather than the rule, their work was exceptional enough to encourage further employment of women.

One of the first clerks, Mrs. Adeline K. Evans, worked for over 30 years in the Dead Letter Office. Another, Vinnie Ream, was later commissioned by Congress to sculpt a life-sized statue of Abraham Lincoln for the rotunda in the Capitol (see sidebar next page). Postmaster General Blair was reportedly pleased with the women's performance, complimenting them for their fidelity and care and for performing their duties more faithfully than the men. By October 1863 the number of women clerks in the Dead Letter Office had increased to 16 out of a total of 32 clerks. The women earned from \$400 to \$700 per year, on average about 35 percent less than their male counterparts. In 1865, 7 men and 38 women worked as clerks in the Dead Letter Office; each of the men earned \$900 annually and each of the women earned \$600 annually. An article in the February 18, 1869, issue of *The New York Times* discussed this income disparity.

Women are coming to be somewhat extensively employed as clerks and assistants in public offices . . . but . . . women must not make . . . the mistake of demanding *equal payment* with men . . . So long as their labor is *cheaper* than that of men, there will be a powerful reason for employment at all.

The same article noted that “the proper condition for a woman, in all civilized countries, is undoubtedly that of dependence upon somebody else for support.”

Then, in 1870, federal legislation authorized the heads of government departments

to appoint female clerks, who may be found to be competent and worthy, to any of the grades of clerkships known to the law, in the respective departments, with the compensation belonging to the class to which they may be appointed

In the 1870s, clerks at Post Office Department Headquarters were classed in the following categories: class four, class three, class two, class one, and female. Clerks in class one, the lowest category for males, earned \$1,200 annually; female clerks earned \$900 annually. In 1873, the wording of the federal law was refined to specify that women would receive equal pay for equal work, but in 1895 pioneering lawyer/women's rights activist Belva Lockwood noted that this law had never been generally enforced.

In the late 19th century, women gradually made inroads at Post Office Department Headquarters. They began to be employed outside of the Dead Letter Office and in positions of greater responsibility. Marshall Cushing, in his book *The Story of Our Post Office* (1893), states that women held “places where skill, diligence, and tact are required,” including such positions as translator in the foreign section of the Money Order Office; assistant to the statistician in the office of the Second Assistant Postmaster General; Chiefs of the Returning Division, Foreign Division, and Minor Division in the Dead Letter Office; and Assistant Chief of the Assorting Division of the Sixth Auditor's office. Still, Cushing notes that women were generally in subordinate positions and that men were often preferred as clerks “because it is not so easy to ask a woman to work after hours, or to go to another room of an errand; nor may one smoke in the same room.” While praising the women's work, his descriptions of some of the women reflect the paternalism of the era. Among the employees were “a gentle little woman,” “a tall, fine faced girl,” and “a bright little brunette.” He put the women on a pedestal and yet, simultaneously, put them in their place.

The women of the Department . . . are good and true . . . There is one, perhaps, who meddles in the politics of her division (or of the country), or causes comment at the seashore, or walks in the corridors and talks to men; but it is not one in a hundred, and all the rest work very demurely, purifying the rooms they work in, benefiting the men they work with by their presence simply. They are the kind of women a son or brother likes to respect and love.

By 1897, although women served in over 165 positions at headquarters, they were not yet on equal footing. As noted in the December 15, 1899, issue of *The New York Times*, Postmaster General Heath ordered that if a female clerk married a male clerk in the same office, "the woman's position should go to some one who had no means of support." This was a common sentiment throughout the government, as noted in an article in *The New York Times* on November 9, 1902.

Last year out of 10,291 persons . . . who received [government] appointments, only 783 were women . . . This discrimination against the women applicants . . . is not confined to any particular department . . . An official of one of the departments in talking about this movement against the appointment of women as clerks said: "It is in the interest of the service, and also the women themselves. Every time a woman is appointed to a clerkship in one of the departments she lessens the chance of marriage for herself and deprives some worthy man of the chance to take unto himself a wife and raise a family.

According to the 1906 *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, nearly 26 percent of the positions at headquarters were filled by women, with salaries ranging from \$240 to \$1,800. The report noted that on average the women earned about 10 to 40 percent less than the men but stated that the apparent discrimination was "in reality the result of the grade of work thus far assigned."

In July 1921, Postmaster General Will H. Hays selected Mrs. Mary K. Macarty as Assistant Superintendent of Foreign Mails. A press release announcing her appointment states that she was the only woman to hold "an official position in the Post Office Department [headquarters] for many years." Mrs. Macarty began her career as a clerk with the Department in 1900 at a salary of \$900 per year and advanced through the ranks. According to *The New York Times* on July 24, 1921:

Vinnie Ream, the "Prairie Cinderella"



Library of Congress

Vinnie Ream helped support her family by working as a clerk in the Dead Letter Office beginning in 1862, at the age of 15. Shortly thereafter she met the sculptor-in-residence at the U.S. Capitol and, inspired, picked up a piece of clay and created a medallion of an Indian chief's head. The sculpture so impressed those who saw it that she soon had a stream of congressmen and generals sitting for their likenesses.

Together, some of these men commissioned a bust of President Lincoln and convinced the president to sit for her, an untrained, 17-year old "little unknown sculptor." The President agreed when he learned she was a poor westerner of humble origins, much like he had been. The completed bust was so realistic that in 1866 it led to a congressional commission for a life-size statue of Lincoln, to be placed in the U.S. Capitol.

Almost overnight, Ream went from being a \$600 a year unknown postal clerk to being the recipient of a \$10,000 federal commission. At age 18, Ream was the youngest artist and the first woman ever to receive such an honor. The awarding of the commission sparked heated debate in Congress, not only because of Ream's age and gender, but because she had never before completed a full-size statue.

To transfer the clay model to marble she went with her parents to Europe, where she was welcomed by the leading artists of the day, was entertained by Liszt, and had an audience with the Pope. Her completed Lincoln statue was unveiled to great acclaim at the U.S. Capitol in 1871 in what Ream later called "the supreme moment" of her life.

Over the next decade she completed many other notable works, including a statue of Admiral Farragut located in Farragut Square in Washington, D.C. Marriage at the age of 30 largely ended Ream's career, as she deferred to her husband's wish that she quit work.

In a statement authorized by Postmaster General Hays it was said that she had a very fine record in the department and had been assigned to very important work for several years.

The *Times* went on to commiserate: "In spite of the importance of her new office, the salary is only \$2,000." (The average salary nationwide in 1921 was \$1,342 according to the *Historical Statistics of the United States*.)

In July 1922, Miss Juliette Ford was appointed Chief Clerk in the Division of Money Orders, at a salary of \$2,700. In April 1924, Miss Alice Mummenhoff was promoted to Private Secretary to Postmaster General Harry S. New at a salary of \$2,500. Her pay was raised to \$3,000 in July 1924.

By March 1923, 39 percent of the clerical positions at headquarters were filled by women, at an average salary of \$1,515.06.

On October 16, 1925, Alice B. Sanger was sworn in as one of two assistant chief clerks of the Post Office Department, the first woman to hold that position. The chief clerk reported directly to the Postmaster General and was responsible for the clerical force of the Department as well as a variety of budgetary, printing, and business correspondence duties. Two years later, she was placed in charge of the appointment division of the Post Office Department, becoming the first woman to gain that position. As appointment clerk, she reported directly to the Postmaster General and was responsible for keeping a roster of all 353,233 employees of the Department, all orders to do with appointments, promotions, removals, and resignations, and all communications about these matters. Alice B. Sanger is also remembered for having designed the first official flag used in the Post Office Department.

The 1950s saw more women moving into higher level positions. Within six months of becoming Postmaster General, Arthur E. Summerfield, who welcomed new ideas, appointed a woman with a doctorate in mathematics from Johns Hopkins University to study methods used to transport mail. In July 1953, Dr. Beatrice Aitchison of Washington, D.C., became the first woman in a postal policy level position when she was named Director of Transportation Research in the Department's Bureau of Transportation. Dr. Aitchison had assisted the

Alice B. Sanger, the "Betsy Ross of the Post Office"



Post Office Department

Alice B. Sanger had worked for Benjamin Harrison's law office in Indianapolis for about two years when he was elected President. She was invited to Washington, D.C., in March 1889 where she was appointed a clerk in newly-elected President Harrison's office, apparently one of the first women to serve other than a domestic role at the White House. She served for 5 ½ years in the Harrison and second Cleveland administrations.

On August 15, 1894, Alice B. Sanger became a clerk in the office of the Post Office Department's chief clerk.

A November 30, 1913, article in *The Washington Post* said of her after 19 years in that job

[She] is one of the busiest persons, be it man or woman, in the department. She has charge of all the miscellaneous work of that office, which includes editing the *Postal Guide*, distributing the advertising of the department among the various publications, attending to the contracts for cable and telegraph rates, indexing the annual report, making a digest of the *Congressional Record* each day, and keeping a file of all legislation affecting the department. She recently revised the index of the *Postal Laws and Regulations* so as to make it of some value to the student.

Early in 1921, at the beginning of his administration, Postmaster General Will H. Hays asked Sanger to study the flags of the members of the President's Cabinet and submit a recommendation of one suitable for the Postmaster General. She proposed a design with the seal of the Post Office Department in the center of a blue field and with four white stars in the corners. Sanger's design was accepted, made up by a Washington, D.C., firm of flag makers, and used on many occasions by Postmaster General Hays and subsequent Postmasters General.

She was very interested in the American flag and the flags of the various states. She amassed a collection of flags of each state in the Union, to display in the large interior space of the Post Office Department at 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C. The picture above, taken from the September 1923 supplement to the *Postal Guide*, shows Sanger on the left holding the Postmaster General's flag and on the right with some of the state flags.

Sanger was the personnel officer of the Post Office Department when she retired in 1934 after more than 40 years of service.

Office of Defense Transportation during World War II and assisted the Department of Defense after the war. Her work with the Post Office Department was to determine the most efficient and economical ways to transport mail.

She created a voluntary study group of Department officials, a first in its day. They met at night, made field trips, studied transportation texts, and wrote critiques on postal transportation. She encouraged personnel at headquarters and in the field to study and develop better transportation methods, a ripple effect that led to enormous savings and brought out "hidden talent" in the field, according to the *Christian Science Monitor* on February 24, 1961. In part because of her efforts, the Department experimented with "piggy-back" methods (containerization) in carrying mail going from New York to San Juan, Puerto Rico, via sea and land, and made changes to better integrate the use of railroads, highway post offices, and contract truck services in delivering mail.



Dr. Beatrice Aitchison

In 1961 Dr. Aitchison was among the first recipients of the Federal Women's Award, the highest honor bestowed upon women in civil service, in part for saving the Post Office Department millions of dollars in transportation costs. In 1970 she was the only woman among ten recipients, who included astronaut Neil Armstrong, to be honored with a Career Service Award by the National Civil Service League.

On September 1, 1957, a former Detroit policewoman and Michigan State Senator, Cora M. Brown, became the Department's Special Associate General Counsel. Postmaster General Summerfield said "the addition of this able woman lawyer will add strength to our legal staff" in the press release announcing her appointment.

Postmaster General Summerfield also appointed Mrs. Cecil Murray Harden, a former Congresswoman from Indiana, as the first Special Assistant to the Postmaster General for Women's Affairs in March 1959. Harden worked hard to increase the number of women employed by the Post Office Department and also led the "Women's Fight Against Obscenity in the U.S. Mails," traveling and talking extensively on this subject.

When she became Special Assistant, Harden found women employed mainly in smaller towns where "qualified men were not available" and decided to pay particular attention to seeing women employed in the 61 largest post offices, which employed 40 percent of all postal employees. Her efforts helped see the number of women employed in these offices increase from 8,071 early in 1959 to 13,242 by the end of 1960, a 64 percent increase. As the Post Office Department moved towards greater mechanization in sorting mail, Harden saw greater opportunities for women. She said tests showed their greater finger dexterity and patience in performing repetitive jobs would help them excel in working with mechanized sorters.

Two months before she left the Post Office Department in March 1961, she filed a report showing more women employees serving in supervisory, clerical, rural carrier, and custodial positions during her time in office. The number of female postmasters declined slightly during this period, to approximately 42 percent of all postmasters, and the number of city carriers and special delivery messengers remained the same.

By 1964, the Post Office Department had a "positive action plan" in effect to support Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination based on sex, race, color, religion, and national origin. Women were encouraged to apply for higher level positions, and headquarters began keeping and distributing lists showing female employees in each region.

More women also became postal "firsts" during the 1960s. Mrs. Reva Beck Bosone joined the Post Office Department in March 1961 as its first woman Judicial Officer. In 1948, she had gained distinction as the first woman elected to the United States Congress from her native state Utah.

Virginia Brizendine was appointed the Director of the Division of Philately in 1965 by Postmaster General John A. Gronouski. In 1966, Postmaster General Lawrence F. O'Brien gave her the Department's highest career service honor, the Distinguished Service Award, for "dedicated . . . work that has significantly improved the quality of the philatelic programs of the United States." She also received the Meritorious Service Award in 1968 before retiring in November 1969.

In June 1967, Mrs. Anne P. Flory became the third-highest ranking woman in the Post Office Department at that time (after Bosone and Aitchison) when she was appointed Director of the Compensation Division in the Bureau of Personnel.

After the United States Postal Service was created from the Post Office Department in the 1970s, women were increasingly promoted to managerial positions at headquarters. In June 1979, Nancy L. George became the Postal Service's first woman officer when she was appointed Assistant Postmaster General of the Employee Relations Department. She served in that position until being named Executive Assistant to the Postmaster General in 1985.

Since 1979, the following women have served as Assistant Postmasters General (APMGs).

Nancy L. George	APMG, Employee Relations Department
Jackie A. Strange	APMG, Procurement and Supply Department
Mary J. Layton	APMG, Public and Employee Communications Department
Karen T. Uemoto	APMG, Rates and Classification Department APMG, Technology Resource Department
Deborah K. Bowker	APMG, Communications Department
Sherry A. Cagnoli	APMG, Labor Relations
Patricia M. Gibert	APMG, Customer and Automation Service Department

Ann McK. Robinson served as the Executive Assistant to the Postmaster General from July 1983 until she was appointed Consumer Advocate in March 1985.

The person to reach the highest position ever held by a female postal employee is Jackie Strange, who became Deputy Postmaster General. She began working as a part-time postal employee in 1946 while she was a college student. She taught high school English and coached girls' basketball but continued to work at the college Post Office during the summers until she was offered a full-time postal position that "doubled my salary overnight." An article in the December 8, 1986, *Federal Times*, gave her views on women in the Postal Service.



Jackie Strange
Deputy Postmaster
General, 1985-1987

Women recognized then that we were trying to change the system, and I was willing to be a part of it. I helped change it . . . I devoted my energy more in a positive way than spending my time feeling like I was discriminated against. Instead I used my energy trying to serve as a role model for the younger women.

Jackie Strange's career spanned more than 40 years and included service as the first woman Regional Postmaster General (Southern Region) from 1983 to 1985 and as a loaned executive to the Australian Post. She received numerous awards of distinction, including the Postmaster General's Executive Special Achievement Award in 1981. Jackie Strange served as Deputy Postmaster General from 1985 until her retirement in 1987.

A reorganization of the Postal Service in 1992 changed the title of Assistant Postmaster General to Vice President. The following women (listed with their most recent title) have served as officers as of February 2011.

Kathleen Ainsworth	Vice President, Retail Operations
Mitzi Betman	Vice President, Corporate Communications
Anita J. Bizzoto	Chief Marketing Officer and Executive Vice President
Megan Brennan	Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President
Susan Brownell	Vice President, Supply Management
Veronica O. Collazo	Vice President, Diversity Development
Marie Therese Dominguez	Vice President, Government Relations and Public Policy
Mary S. Elcano	General Counsel and Executive Vice President, Human Resources

Jo Ann Feindt	Vice President, Area Operations (Great Lakes)
Nancy L. George	Vice President, Northeast Area Operations
Deborah Giannoni-Jackson	Vice President, Employee Resource Management
Mary Anne Gibbons	General Counsel and Executive Vice President
Patricia M. Gibert	Vice President, Retail, Consumers and Small Business
Joanne Giordano	Vice President, Public Affairs and Communications
Suzanne J. Henry	Vice President, Employee Relations
Delores Killette	Vice President and Consumer Advocate
Linda A. Kingsley	Vice President, Channel Access
Susan M. LaChance	Vice President, Consumer and Industry Affairs
Yvonne D. Maguire	Vice President, Employee Resource Management
Lynn Malcolm	Vice President, Controller
Suzanne F. Medvidovich	Senior Vice President, Human Resources
Pritha Mehra	Vice President, Mail Entry and Payment Technology
Donna M. Peak	Vice President, Finance, Controller
Susan Plonkey	Vice President, Sales
Michele C. Purton	Vice President, Treasurer
Diane M. Regan	Vice President, Operations Redesign
Maura Robinson	Vice President, Pricing
Kelly M. Sigmon	Vice President, Engineering Systems
Francia G. Smith	Vice President and Consumer Advocate
Gail G. Sonnenberg	Senior Vice President, Sales
Linda J. Welch	Vice President, Area Operations (Southwest)
Deborah K. Willhite	Senior Vice President, Government Relations and Public Policy

To date, ten women have served as Governors of the United States Postal Service. Frieda Waldman was the first woman elected an officer of the Board when she became vice chairman in 1984, and Norma Pace was elected as the first woman chairman of the Board of Governors in 1991.

Paula D. Hughes	1980-1983
Ruth O. Peters	1983-1988
Frieda Waldman	1984
Norma Pace	1987-1995
Susan E. Alvarado	1988-1997
LeGree S. Daniels	1990-2005
Ernesta Ballard	1997-2002
Carolyn Lewis Gallagher	2004-2010
Katherine C. Tobin	2006-2009
Ellen C. Williams	2006-to date

As of February 2011, two women – Megan Brennan and Mary Anne Gibbons – served on the Postal Service’s Executive Leadership Team, a decision-making body whose members serve as senior advisors to the Postmaster General.



Megan Brennan
Chief Operating Officer and
Executive Vice President



Mary Anne Gibbons
General Counsel and Executive
Vice President