

Handling Tons of Mail Daily in and Out of the Omaha Postoffice



MAIL FROM STATION A GOING TO MAIN OFFICE.

FORTY-SEVEN and a half tons of mail matter is the daily stunt of the Omaha postoffice, and of this nine tons is furnished by the newspapers. The rest of the vast weight is made up of letters, circulars, postal cards, packages and other articles mailable and sent through Uncle Sam's hands for delivery. The gathering of this mail, its proper sorting and bundling and its final transportation through the streets to the depots, where it goes aboard the trains, is the daily activity of a small army of men and horses. The letter carrier, on his rounds of delivery and collection, is a familiar figure, but less is known of the men who work at the postoffice and those who merely handle the big pouches and bags between postoffice and trains.

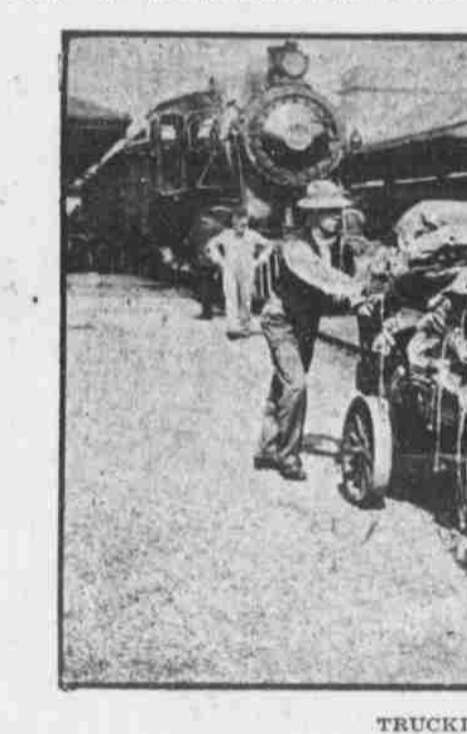
An average of 50,000 pounds of mail comes into Omaha daily and an average of 45,000 pounds is sent out. This means about 120 locked pouches and 500 tied sacks of incoming mail, and nearly that many going out. Eight big wagons of the most approved type ply between the railroad stations and the postoffice, making about eight trips each per day and hauling an average of about 1,800 pounds per trip. Twelve teams are used in this branch of the service, for the work is hard and the horses cannot stand the strain of the rush, so extra teams have to be kept on hand to allow the needed rest. On six of the trips made each day the wagons carry loads averaging 2,500 pounds. In addition to the wagon service the street cars carry a great deal of mail back and forth between the postoffice and the railway stations and all of the mail between the main office and the several branches of the city is handled on the street cars. Three transfer clerks are employed at the Burlington station, five at the Union Pacific station and only one at the Webster street station, where the work is light. These men have to hustle the mail matter from the wagons to the cars and back, and keep track of the various shipments at the depots. Their hours are broken, by reason of the fact that the mail trains run at all sorts of times, and they must be on hand when the train is there. Up town the work is more regularly done, for it is all scheduled and the collections and deliveries are made at stated periods, unless the arrival of the mails from out of town is greatly deranged by interruptions of the train schedules.

Gathering the Mails.

One of the large wagons is exclusively devoted to gathering bulky quantities of mail from the big office buildings, wholesale and jobbing houses of the city, making five trips daily, or telephone if there should happen to be a reference call for the wagon from establishments sending out large quantities of circulars, catalogues or packages.

All mails are received at the Seventeenth street front of the postoffice building. They are quickly unloaded from the wagons, weighed, if necessary, and then hurried into the main distributing room in the center of the main floor of the building and

distributed. All letter mail is first run through the automatic cancelling machines which note the hour of arrival. The process of distribution employs seventy-one clerks. The pouches and the sacks are opened and the contents thrown upon the distributing tables, where they are deftly and rapidly handled by the distributing clerks. There are ten letter cases, and five newspaper and package cases. The compartments of these cases are numbered for the convenience of the letter carriers, and the carriers collect the mail from these compartments and re-throw the mail into other cases for the convenience in city delivery. Between 47,000 and 50,000 pieces of letter mail are thrown daily. Eighteen of the distributing clerks throw the mail for the carriers' boxes. Three others are employed in other departments of the distribution. All packages of mail coming from



TRUCKING THE SACKS AT STATION.

the mail pouches are tagged, indicating the lines and offices from which they come. Three cancelling machines and one back-cancelling machine are used, working automatically and driven by electric power furnished by the dynamo in the basement of the big building.

Keeping Track of Addresses.

Between sixty and seventy local changes of address are daily turned in by the carriers, and carefully tabulated, to be looked after with extreme care during the distribution process. These changes are first written on slips, the former and new address, and are turned over to the directory clerk, who is provided with sections of specially bound city directories, which are interbound with blank leaves, and the new address there recorded. These sectional directories also include all new addresses. If a letter cannot be delivered by the letter carrier it is brought back to the office and an effort is made to find the correct ad-



LOADING THE FAST MAIL FOR THE WEST.

dress in the sectional directory. If the address cannot be found there, the letter or paper is sent to the general delivery window, where inquiry should be made for all expected and undelivered letters. Letters are held one week before being advertised, and are held two weeks after advertising, and are then sent either to the dead letter office or returned to writer if such request is made on the envelope. Newspapers are held four weeks, and if not called for in that time the publisher is notified.

Nine special delivery boys are employed at the Omaha office. Special delivery letters or packages are delivered to any point in the city covered by the postal service, for 10 cents, between the hours of 7 a. m. and 10 a. m. All special deliveries are made as readily of drop letters and drop packages as of regularly received mails from abroad. All special deliveries are made within five minutes from the time the letter or package is received in the office. With drop letters a special box or receptacle is provided at the east corridor adjoining the places where all letters are deposited for mailing, below the box windows, and above it is an electric button that should be pressed when a special delivery letter or package is placed therein.

Caring for the Letters.

All first-class matter, letters, is forwarded as long as there is a place on the letter to write an address. Even should first-class matter lack the sufficient postage, though it must have at least one 2-cent stamp on it, it is forwarded to its destination and the deficient postage collected

expeditiously. All this must be thought out on the instant.

Mounts into Millions.
The number of letters sent out from the Omaha postoffice as indicated by the cancelling machines from October 3, 1904, to May 23, 1905, was 16,982,800. This amount does not include third-class matter, which is composed largely of circulars. The number of pouches sent out from the Omaha postoffice per day is about 150, and of tie sacks 450. All of the second and third-class matter, like the first-class matter, is made up in the office. But this does not include the publishers' mails, which amounts to 500 sacks of mail per day. The approximate amount of newspaper and magazine mail handled by the Omaha postoffice is nine tons each day, or over 1,123,240 pounds in the last two months. The third-class mail, circulars, catalogues, etc., sent out is also enormous. Omaha also does a very large mail order business from its various department stores and in sending out samples of merchandise from the wholesale and jobbing houses. All mails outgoing are weighed at the postoffice, and they are conveyed to the depots by identically the same means as they are brought from the depots.

When the Mails Come.
The principal mails arrive in the morning, and the greater amount of mail business is done in the fall than at any other period of the year. During the holidays for a few days comes the greatest rush in mails.

Five main deliveries in the business portion of the city are made daily, four in the next adjoining districts, three in the next adjoining districts, two in the residence districts and one in the suburban or extreme districts. The earliest delivery by carrier is at 7:30 a. m. and the next at 8 a. m.

There are thirty-two persons employed in the receiving department and twenty persons in the outgoing department.

Sending Out Mail.

The mail dispatching process is equally interesting with the receiving of mails, but is much heavier work. Very much more mail is sent out from Omaha than

is received. All outgoing mails are thrown at the office up to a late moment as the departure of the trains will allow. The mail that cannot be made up for the route packages is pouched and sent to the railway postal cars and there thrown by the railway postal clerks. The same system, only far more intricate, prevails in the postoffice as in the postal railway cars in the matter of throwing mail. The main point always to be held in view is to get the letter to its destination in the quickest time possible. Hence a letter may be routed half way across the state of Iowa to reach Missouri Valley or Sioux City, preferable to waiting for the particular train to that point, should the letter be deposited for mailing to late to catch the first direct train. The letter may have to be switched through half a dozen postal railway cars over as many different lines to reach its destination by connecting lines, before it could have reached there by the regular train. It is just such little cases that are constantly coming up in the big postoffices and require the utmost care to meet the emergency. The postal distributing clerk in the postoffice must be equally as accurate as the postal railway clerk in throwing his mail. In the big offices like the Omaha office he has less time and more mail to throw, and adds from that he must keep a host of railway systems in his head, as well as the locations of a thousand postoffices, and must decide which train and what line that office is on, and what combination of trains will dispatch the mail most

expeditiously. All this must be thought out on the instant.

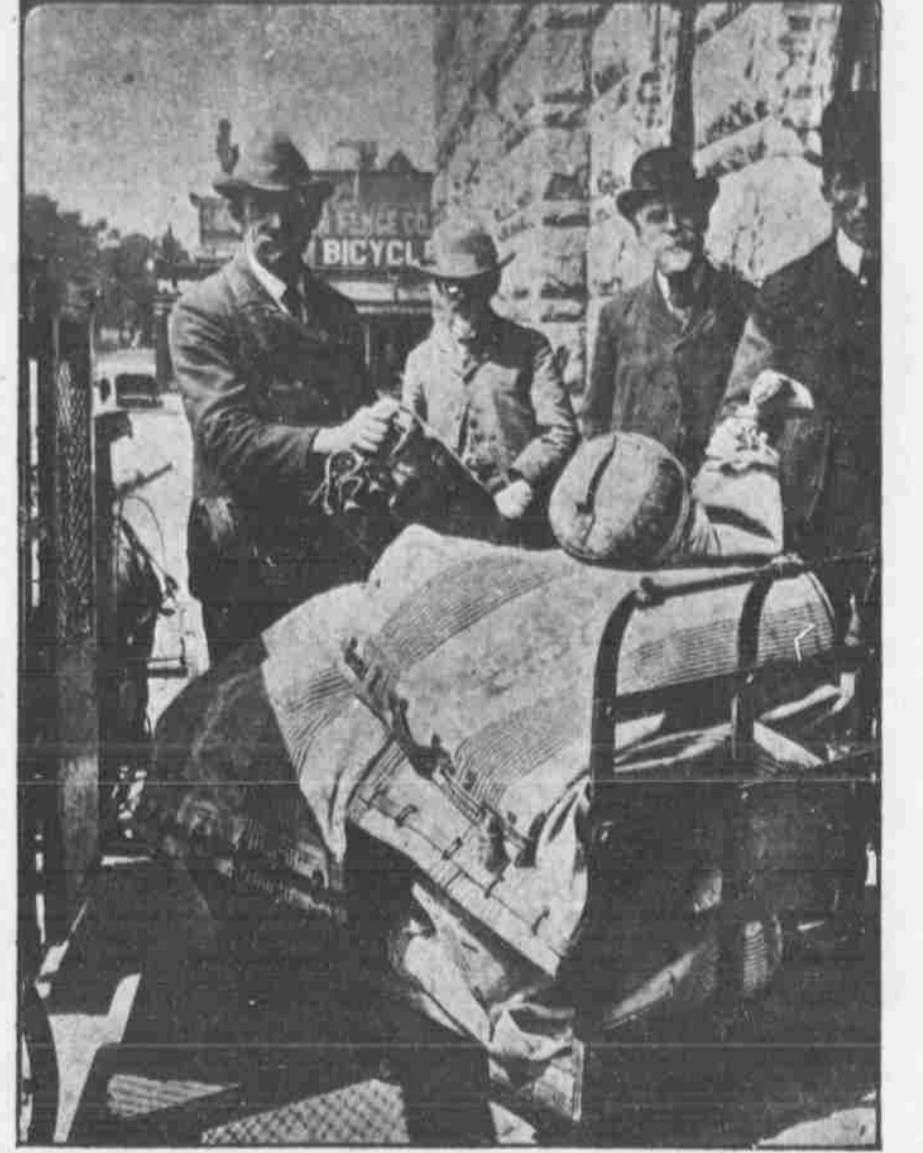
Valuables in the Mails.
Not the least interesting departments of the postoffice at Omaha are the money order and registry divisions. The public is beginning to learn that the money order system is about the only absolutely safe way of transmitting money. The govern-

ment is responsible for every dollar it receives for transmission. The little stub receipt that the transmitter receives when sending away money by the money order system is good evidence in law of a payment made on the date the order was bought, even though the order should be stolen or lost. If lost, a new order can be obtained. If subsequently forged before being received by the party to whom it was sent, the forgery can be traced with almost unerring accuracy to its perpetrator, and then the government knows just what to do with him.

Next to the money order system, the registry system is the safest way for the transmission of money, although the Postoffice department tries to discourage the transmission of money by registered mail. A registered letter, whatever its contents, or a registered package, is pretty sure to reach its destination, and if it is trifled with en route, the trifle can be easily detected. All registered matter made up in any one postoffice for another postoffice is included in a separate package for each office, and can be only opened by the postmaster of the receiving office. All registered through pouches are red-striped sacks, securely locked with a rotary lock. Each lock is numbered, on the outside and inside. The outside number is permanently stamped on the lock, which in through pouches is enamelled in red, while the inside or rotary number is variable, and changes every time the key is inserted in the lock or the lock opened. A record must be made of the opening number by whoever opens it. When the pouch is started

from Omaha with its registered package a record is made of the number of the lock and its inside starting number, and this bill of record is sent to the office of destination. Hence, if the lock has been trifled with the fault can be detected and located. The way registered pouches are provided with blue enamelled locks, which are kept track of in identically the same way. The time was when no registered mail was sent at night through the postal railway office, because of the temptation offered to susceptible clerks. This rotary lock system has been the means of reducing the temptation to rifle the registered pouches to a minimum and so the pouches are sent as readily at night now as in the day runs.

A registered letter can be delivered only to the party to whom it is addressed or upon his written order. Identification is also required of all persons inquiring for



LOADING REGISTERED MAIL AT POSTOFFICE.

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intendant of wagon deliveries, M. Menegen.

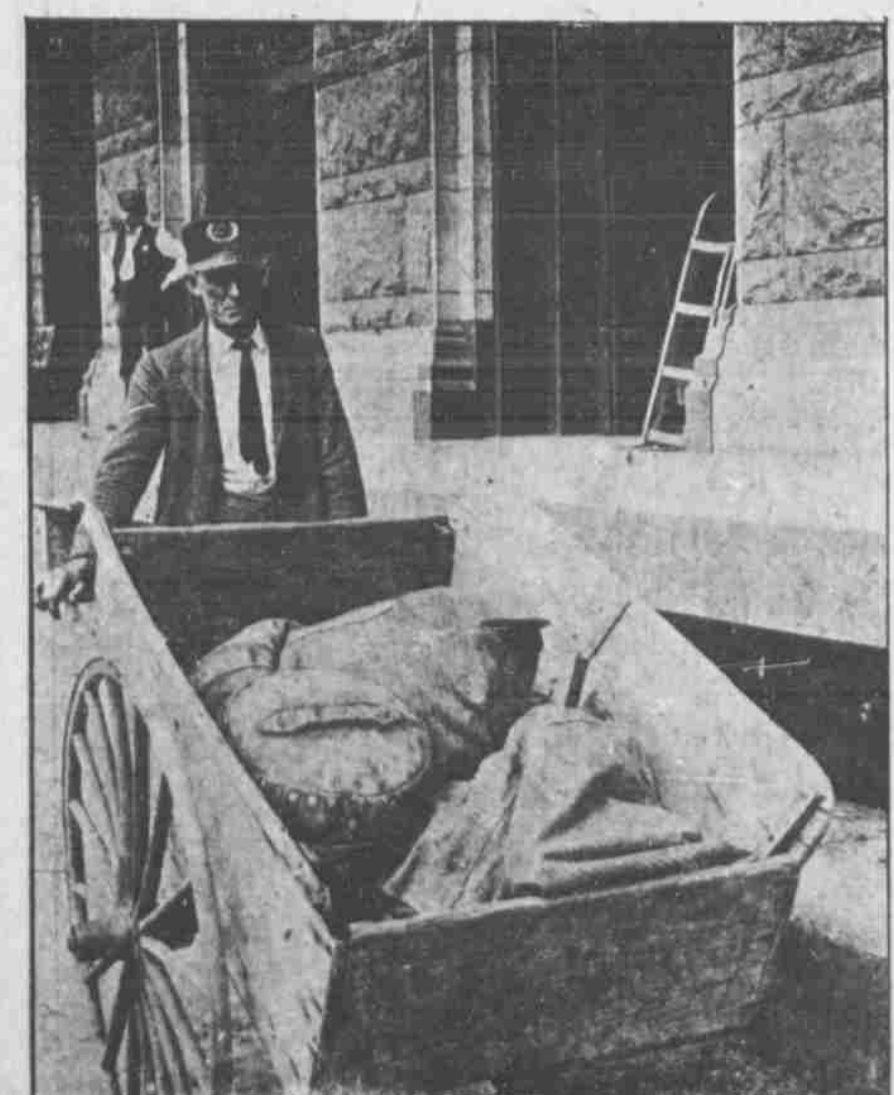
Two hundred and twenty-five persons are employed in and about the postoffice in the handling and delivery of the city mails. These represent about 1,000 people dependent upon them. There are ninety-six letter carriers, thirteen substitute carriers, nine special delivery clerks, 103 office clerks and four substitute clerks. In addition to these 233 clerks, 147 postal railway clerks have their headquarters in Omaha. One hundred and seventy railway postal clerks are paid from the Omaha office and 802 rural free delivery carriers, which make the total monthly payroll of moneys paid out at the office over \$50,000.

The Postoffice department is disposed to discourage the use of postoffice boxes, as it is the desire of the government to make the delivery of mails to the public as free as possible.

Sale of Stamps.
The standing and classification of a postoffice is graded according to the number of stamps sold by the office. The heaviest postage stamp patron of the Omaha office is the Woodmen of the World office, which last year purchased \$20,000 worth of stamps. The next heaviest patrons are the Union Pacific and Burlington railways. One Omaha firm recently sent to Des Moines and bought \$1,000 worth of stamps that could have as well been bought here. Another firm sends to New York and has at intervals 150,000 circulars printed there, has them stamped there and directed there, and then they are sent to Omaha for delivery through the Omaha office. It would take one man over a week to handle these circulars in the office, and they come here in wagonloads. A number of the local department stores that recently received remittances in stamps bought elsewhere have instructed their customers that they will not take more than 25 cents in stamps on any one remittance. Were all these stamps bought here in Omaha, the standing of the office would be enhanced and the wages of the employees increased accordingly.

Convenience and Comfort.
Every possible convenience is provided in the Omaha postoffice for the comfort of its employees. Rest rooms are provided for the clerks, carriers and all attaches of the office. Each has a locker in the rest and "swing" rooms, and toilet and bath rooms are also provided. A special series of rooms are arranged for the women clerks, with luncheon attachment, all of which are nicely and comfortably furnished. In the basement are storage rooms for money order blanks, and stubs which are kept for five years before being destroyed.

There are three or four watch rooms in the building for the convenience of postoffice inspectors who may have occasion to oversee the transactions in any of the work rooms that need inspection without the knowledge of the occupants. In the main work room is a circular watch tower for a like purpose. No one knows when an inspector may be in these watch rooms or tower, as they alone, with the postmaster, have the keys to the rooms.



ON THE ROAD TO THE STREET CAR.



WAGONS LINED UP AT POSTOFFICE.



WEIGHING THE OUTGOING MAIL.