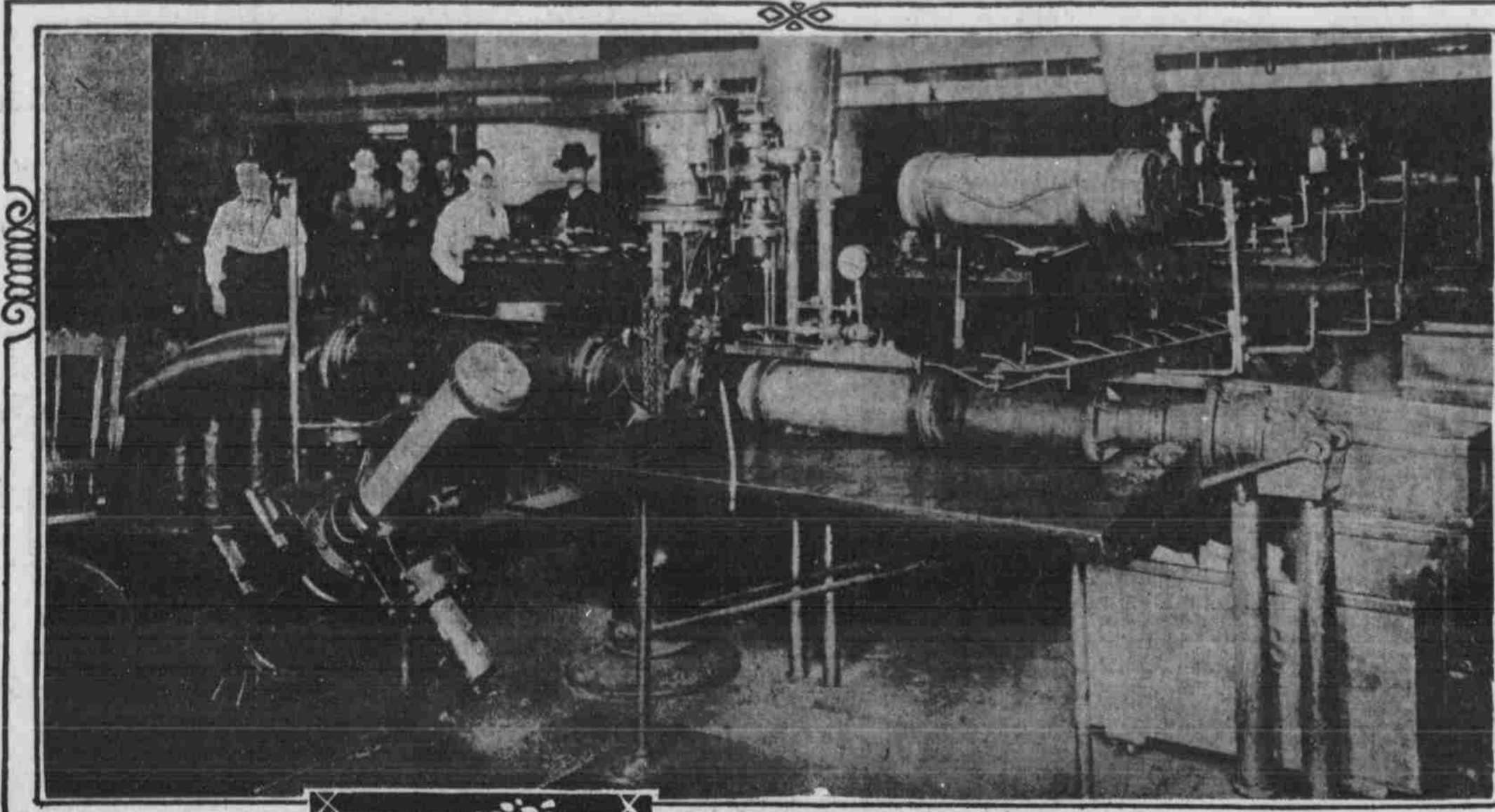


# Uncle Sam is Planning Improvement in Letter Delivery



Pneumatic Tube Room at Chicago

(Copyright, 1911, by Frank G. Carpenter)

WASHINGTON, D. C.—(Special Correspondence to The Bee.)—He manages a business which costs more than \$200,000,000 a year. His corps of employees is three times as many as the United States army. His annual transactions include the handling of fourteen thousand million articles, and his men go back and forth over routes, which if placed end to end would reach almost twice as far as from here to the moon. Their travels in the space of one year in the United States alone are five times as great as the distance between the earth and the sun, and their communications reach to every spot on the face of the globe.

This man is unknown to many of you, but by proxy he calls at your front door every morning, and for from 1 to 5 cents he will carry your words to any place on this great round world. His name is Frank Hitchcock; his title is postmaster general; and his business is the management of Uncle Sam's mails.

Suppose we become better acquainted. We shall call at the slate-colored Postoffice department which stands on Pennsylvania avenue between the White House and the capitol, for it is there he has his headquarters. It is 5 o'clock in the evening and the rank and file of the clerks have all left. The big building is quiet, except in the rooms of the chief, where the work may go on far into the night. The postmaster general is one of the men who do things. He is wrapped up in his great undertaking, and the hours pass unheeded when he strives for results. Just now he has big matters on hand and midnight will come before his light will go out. He is a dynamo in breeches and he works like a dynamo. When the current is on the sparks fly and when off the machinery stops, and the living dynamo goes to bed and sleeps like a baby. During my talk with the postmaster general today I asked him if he could leave his work in the office. He replied that he never carried his troubles outside. Said he:

"That is my only salvation. I do the thing that is nearest me and I always do the best that I can. I try to be honest, and I think I may say that I am not afraid to do what to me seems to be right."

The above I believe to be the keynote of the life of Frank Hitchcock, and backed by his business ability it is the secret of his success as postmaster general. He is spoken of as a shrewd politician, but he objects to this reputation, saying that he entered politics only at the solicitation of his friends to accomplish an end, and that when that end was obtained he left it for good. His actions in the Postoffice department are a proof of this statement. He has fought the magazines and the railways, and has even waved the red flag of defiance at the mad bull of congress, and that solely for the good of the mails and the people.

### Running Uncle Sam's Mails at a Profit.

During my talk with the postmaster general I referred to these fights and his efforts to cut down the deficit which has now been wiped out. I then asked as to whether he believed the Postoffice department could continue to be run at a profit.

"I do not think we want to do that," replied Mr. Hitchcock. "Uncle Sam's business is not to make money, but to give back to the people in excellent service the worth of every dollar they spend. That is what we hope for the postoffice. I would not want a surplus, except to extend the work of bettering the mails and of increasing their value to all the people. As the department pays better, we shall reduce our postage, and give additional facilities of various kinds to those we have now."

"As to running Uncle Sam's mails at a profit, however, this is the first time it has been done within several generations, and I believe we shall continue to make the ends meet. When this service was established it was self-supporting, and it continued so for the first thirty years, or along to about the time of John Quincy Adams. After that it began to be run at a loss. Every year or so there was a deficit. This at first was only a few million dollars, and it attracted but little attention. Lately, however, the loss has leaped to upward of ten millions, and when we took charge here in 1909 we found that the deficit was over seventeen millions. Last year we cut that down eleven millions, and along in December it was almost wiped out. Since then we have been doing better and better, and we have now crossed the line; we have turned three millions into the treasury, and are spending much less than we make."

### Hopes to Avoid Backward Step.

"But will this last?" I asked. "I hope so. The gain has been made notwithstanding that the business of the postoffices has been running at a lower rate than in the past. If we should have a panic and a period of hard times, which I do not expect, there might be such a falling off in



One of the New Steel Postal Cars

receipts as to put us behind. But if not, I expect to keep on paying our way."

"But has not this cutting down the expense curtailed the service?"

"No, indeed," was the reply. "We have reduced the deficit by extending the service, and that along profitable lines. During the last two years we have added more than 3,000 new postoffices, and have established more than 2,000 new rural delivery routes, of an aggregate distance of more than 50,000 miles, or enough to reach twice around the world. We have increased our force of employees by between 8,000 and 9,000 and have put on the railway service about 800 more men than we had in the past."

"We have extended the salary list and raised the rate of compensation in many cases. The annual amount paid for salaries has been increased by about \$12,900,000, and the average salary of the postoffice clerk has gone up from \$979 to \$1,051. There has been an increase in the wages of the letter carriers, and also of the rural delivery men."

"We have also improved the city postoffices, and have given them 1,800 more clerks, and at the same time have put on 1,000 more letter carriers. You cannot reduce the expenses of a business like this by cutting down the force of employees. The postmasters general of the past tried that and failed. The trouble is the moment you lessen the force you reduce the efficiency. The wheels of the machinery become clogged, the mails pile up and complaints flow in. It takes a lot of time to answer the complaints and to so rearrange the service as to make it efficient again. As a result the loss is greater than ever."

### Modern Business Methods for the Postoffice.

"No," continued the postmaster general. "The wiping out of the deficit has been due more than anything else to the introduction of modern business methods into the service. We have cut out the waste wherever possible, have adopted all sorts of labor-saving devices and have tried to improve the efficiency of the clerks. You see we have 325,000 employees, and most of them are high-priced men. We have many here who are receiving \$1,000 and \$1,300 and upward a year. They are good men, but we have to handle them properly to get their greatest efficiency."

"We have done this in the city postoffices by introducing traveling belts, overhead carriers and other machines to carry the mail matter from place to place in the offices. The letters are faced up by machinery and the stamps canceled at the rate of 30,000 an hour. The mail comes from the cars, and after it enters the postoffice it goes almost without stopping to the letter carrier who is to deliver it."

"It is the same with other things. We are saving on freight by cutting down the weight of the mail bags. We are saving in the rural delivery by studying the country for ourselves and putting the routes where they will serve the most people instead of allowing a congressman to locate them for political purposes. When we establish a new carrier delivery we make the town where it goes give us the best arrangements for handling the mail. We insist on their improving the streets, and that every house shall have its own letter box for receiving its mail. In this way the postman drops in his letters without stopping and ringing the bell. I expect to see the time come when that will be required in all of the cities."

### Railway Mail Service Greatly Improved.

"We have also improved the railway mail service," continued Mr. Hitchcock. "It used to be a sort of an

independent bureau, which did not work in harmony with the rest of the service. We have made it a closer part of the whole organization, and the railway mail clerks do what they can to aid the postoffices and to hurry the mails. We have also better arrangements for getting the bags off the cars."

### Making Each Postmaster Help.

"You speak of the harmony of the service, Mr. Postmaster General. Is it well organized?"

"It is rapidly becoming so. We are unifying it and getting better work out of the individual than ever before. When I came into this office I wrote thousands of letters to each of the city postmasters announcing our plans for improving the service and asking him to do all he could in the work of reform, in cutting the expenses, and at the same time of improving the mails. I urged him to think for himself and do what he could to help the department along. As a result of this the letters began to come in by the bushels. There were so many that they kept my secretaries busy, and I could only look at the most important of them. They brought about the saving of a vast deal of money, and at the same time made the men feel that they were a part of the government and that it was their duty to do all they could to help in the work. We have now a good esprit de corps among our employees and I expect this to grow as time goes on."

### Civil Service for Postmasters.

"I should like to see the entire postal service taken out of politics," continued Mr. Hitchcock. "This changing postmasters at every administration disorganizes the business and causes the loss of millions of dollars. We have to train the new postmasters, and, being appointed through political influence, they do not feel their responsibility to the department. They are often inefficient, and the principle is a bad one. I would have all the presidential postmasters in the classified service, and would have the only reason for changes be the good of the service. I would send the best postmasters to the more responsible places, and would have a system by which the postoffice clerks could rise from grade to grade and finally become postmasters. I would not make the selection altogether a matter of geography, as it is now, but would put the men in the places where their past work has shown they would do the most good."

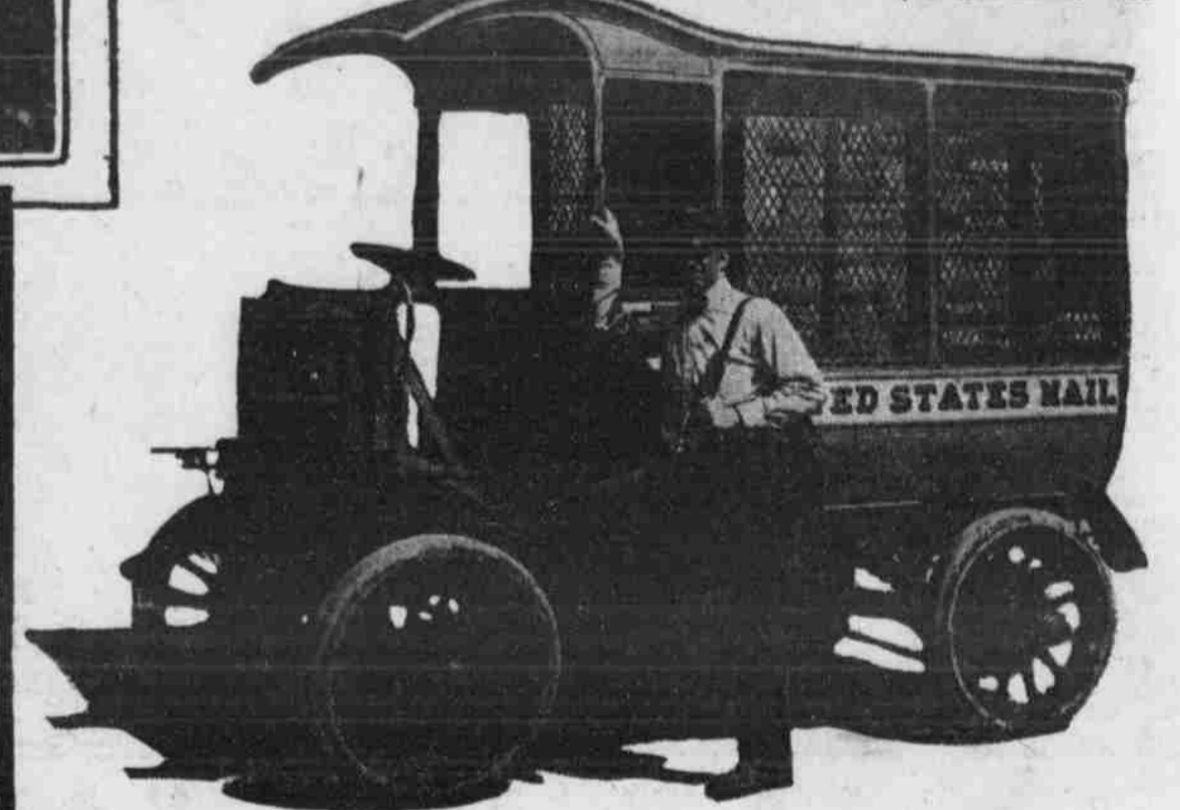
### One-Cent Letter Postage.

"Will we ever be able to send letters at a 1-cent rate, Mr. Postmaster General?" I asked.

"Yes, we could do that now if the advertising parts of the magazines paid their share toward carrying the mails. We do not want to increase the rate on the literary features of the magazine, but we do feel that the advertisements should pay as much as other matter of the same commercial character. As it is now, we are carrying these magazines at a cost of more than 5 cents a pound, and we receive from them only 1 cent a pound. We lost over \$64,000,000 on our magazine transportations last year. This is all wrong. It was never intended by those who made the law that advertisements should be carried at such rates and at such cost. Indeed, it was specifically prohibited, but the abuse has gradually crept in and we are now annually handling 350,000 tons of such matter at this great loss. It constitutes 63 per cent of our home mail, and yet it brings in only 5 per cent of the revenue. The loss exceeds the profit on all other classes of mail. It is



POSTMASTER GENERAL HITCHCOCK



"We expect to increase the automobile feature of the service"

liver the mail more expeditiously and in the end more economically."

### Running Down the Rascals.

"Tell me something of your crusade against the fraudulent use of the mails?"

"That is a big story in itself," replied the postmaster general. "In brief, we believe that we have saved the people many millions of dollars by exposing the frauds which have been carried on through the mails and by detecting and punishing the swindlers. We have already sent many of these rascals to the penitentiary and among them are some millionaires. We had a millionaire passing through Washington a few days ago on his way to the state prison of Georgia where he is to serve for a term of three years. We have an excellent man at the head of this business and have already exposed more than 400 cases, representing swindling operations that have filched from the pockets of unsuspecting people more than \$100,000,000. We intend to go on with this, and we shall make it as dangerous as counterfeiting. We are also punishing the men who have been transferring stamps from one postoffice to another to pad the receipts and thereby raise the rank and pay of the office."

### Postal Savings.

"What are you doing as to the postal savings banks?"

"We are organizing them now at the rate of fifty a week, and I believe they will rapidly extend to every part of the country. We have been moving carefully in order to not excite hostility and to allow the people and bankers to see that such savings will be for the good of themselves and the country. At the beginning we had an appropriation of only \$100,000, and with that we started forty-eight banks. You see it takes a good clerk to handle this business, and I wrote to each postoffice where we introduced the system to put the best man it had in charge and to have him devote himself almost entirely to it. As a result we have had no trouble whatever. The last of last December we had \$75,000 on deposit, and we now have \$300,000."

The banks are taking especially well in the mining towns of the far west; they are patronized largely by the foreigners and they will keep millions of dollars from going abroad; they will also bring many millions that are now hoarded into circulation, and will do an incalculable good to the country. We have some new arrangements concerning them, which are not used in Europe or anywhere else; one of these is the certificate of deposit instead of the bank book, and others are things especially adapted to our needs."

### Mr. Hitchcock's Work as Postmaster General.

In closing my interview I congratulated the postmaster general on the wonderful success he has had in this great office, where so many business men have failed. In connection with this he said:

"I am proud of what has been done since I became postmaster general, but I can see that I have had exceptional advantages over most of the men who held this place in the past. You see, I came up, as it were, from the ranks. I had been connected with the machinery of the office when I was first assistant postmaster general and had frequently taken charge of the whole business as acting postmaster general. During that time I had more leisure than now, and I came to know the leaks and disadvantages of the system and had an opportunity to make plans for its improvement. After my appointment these plans came into action. I did not try to change the system, but only to cut out the red tape and to remedy such parts of it as were possible, at the same time introducing such business methods as would better it. I feel that we have done something in that we have wiped out the deficit, and in that we have improved the service in many ways. But this is only the beginning. There are many other things we might do and you may look forward to better and better mails for the future."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.