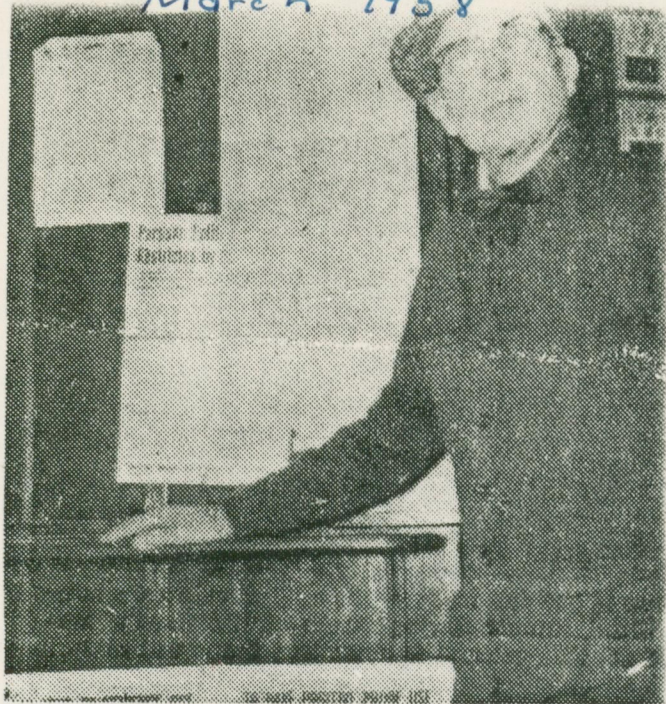


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FOR THE LAST TIME—Frank L. Gerrish, closes the door of the Post Office at South Gouldsboro for the last time as postmaster. Gerrish, who held the office for 34 years retired February 28. (Crane photo)

South Gouldsboro Postmaster Retires After 34 Years Duty

By JONAS CRANE

SOUTH GOULDSBORO, March 5—Some people might think that being a postmaster in a small town would be rather dull. Frank L. Gerrish, who has been postmaster in South Gouldsboro for 34 years, does not agree with that kind of thinking.

"I was always interested in the mail," he declared. "As a school-boy I got a big kick out of reading about the Pony Express Riders who carried the mails from St. Joseph, Mo., to California. When I grew older and saw local mailmen getting their teams through big snow banks in the winter I realized they had the same spirit as the pony riders."

When Gerrish started as postmaster in March of 1924 the mails were carried in horse drawn vehicles. Snow plows were just coming into use and most of them were not very effective. Consequently, several men went along with the plow to shovel it out if it got stuck in the deeper snow banks. This cavalcade moving just ahead of the mailman gave a dramatic flourish to the business.

about 300 table dressed birds yearly and delivered most of them parcel post. He had customers over New England and also in New York and Maryland. They came to Maine summers and left orders for their Thanksgiving birds which they left at the end of their vacation.

Money Orders Good

Money orders are big business in most country post offices, as people use them to pay bills, send for mail order items and even for banking money. The money order system was established in 1864, about nine years after the system for registering the mails was established. The first post office in the United States was established in Massachusetts in 1639; more than a half century passed before an organized system to establish post offices over the United States was in operation.

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Column 3

In those days the volume of mail was much smaller than it is today. Gerrish estimates that his outgoing mail has increased nearly three times in volume. This was due partly to the fact that an insurance agency and a sardine factory were established in his district and partly to the fact that post card mailing has increased. "At one time most people mailed cards only at Christmas," Gerrish observes, "but today they send them for birthdays, convalescence, and many other occasions."

Wife Took Over

Gerrish has kept his post office in three different buildings. He rented his first place which was destroyed by fire in 1930. Then he moved to temporary quarters where he stayed until his present building which is a combination of Post office and variety store. In 1942 he was badly injured in an automobile accident and his wife, Lydia, acted as postmaster for about one year until he recovered.

During his many years as a postmaster Gerrish has always enjoyed his work. "My patrons have always been very reasonable," he declares. "About the only complaint I have ever had have come when an anxious parent didn't get his package from a mail order house in time for Christmas; or an oldster's check was a few days late."

A country post office gets a wide variety of items in the mail. Fishermen order engine parts, twine and rope and housewives buy many items from mail order houses. The mail also includes a lot of livestock including bees, chickens, ducks and turkeys. Gerrish ran a turkey business as a sideline for about 10 years starting in 1940. During that time he sold

Column 4

The first post office system was not operated by the government but was granted under a patent to Thomas Neale February 1692 to be run as a private enterprise. Gerrish, had made a hobby of postal history and he pointed out that this early system, was not a profitable venture. Receipts, even as today, did not cover expenses, and in 1707 the government took over the operation. Benjamin Franklin became deputy postmaster in 1737 and postmaster general in 1753. Apparently he had a flair for managing the mail for under his administration it turned in a substantial profit.

First Air Mail

Gerrish marks 1918 when the first regular air mail service was established as an important year in the system. That was a long step forward from the early Colonial period when mail between colonies was entrusted to a merchant or traveller who happened along. During that period local mail was carried by special messengers but distant mail was given to any one who would transport it.

Gerrish also thinks that the advent of parcel post in 1912 was another big step in the service. Prior to that date, fourth class mail constituted only about 5 per cent of the total weight of the mails. In a short time more than 60 per cent of the mail was under fourth class units.

Gerrish retired as postmaster on Feb. 28 of this year. Although he is looking forward to many enjoyable trips visiting his children and grandchildren he thinks there will be times when he will miss the many pleasant contacts he made as postmaster.

"I'll miss hearing the boys deer hunting in the fall and the meeting in the spring," he declares. "Most of all I'll miss feeling of having a part in Christmas plans of my patrons."

Cont'd. on Col. #3