



# UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®

URNS

50



## REMEMBERING POSTAL SERVICE DAY 1971



Top: Castlewood, VA, celebrated Postal Service Day

Above: A first-day cancellation of the new USPS stamp on July 1, 1971

**L**ast year marked the 50th anniversary of the Great Postal Strike: On March 18, 1970, letter carriers—starting in New York, but ultimately extending to cities nationwide—walked off the job and onto the picket lines. The successful wildcat strike resulted in the establishment both of collective bargaining for letter carriers and of the United States Postal Service. (For more on the strike, see the March 2020 edition of *The Postal Record*).

But when the strike ended on March 25, 1970, that kicked off a long and difficult process for the Post Office Department to become the Postal Service, and for NALC and the other postal unions to negotiate the first contract with the new organization. Both storylines collided 50 years ago this month.

### NATIONAL POSTAL SERVICE DAY

On Aug. 12, 1970, President Richard Nixon signed the Postal Reorganization Act into law, which would transform the Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service. While parts of the law would go into effect

months earlier, it would become fully effective on July 1, 1971.

Nixon declared that the date would be commemorated as National Postal Service Day “to give recognition to the contributions made through the years by the men and women of the Post Office who have served the Nation so faithfully and to mark the inauguration of the United States Postal Service,” he stated in Proclamation 4061.

Postmaster General Winton Blount, who was to continue on as the chief executive of the new organization, made June 21-27 Postal Clean-Up Week “to present our very best image to our customers,” he told the *Postal Bulletin*.

As part of the transformation, USPS got a new logo, replacing the Pony Express rider that had been used for decades. The new eagle logo was chosen because eagles are powerful, stately, determined and already a symbol of the United States.

USPS mailed a leaflet with mailing tips and announcements about the July 1 activities to homes throughout the country. It also distributed souvenir envelopes, which could be used for an 8-cent stamp featuring the new eagle logo, which would be released that day. Breaking a tradition of releasing stamps



only in a single city on the first day, the stamps were available at every post office, so anyone could get his or her stamp canceled with the July 1 date.

While postal headquarters marked the day with an official ceremony featuring PMG Blount and the new Board of Governors, local post offices held festivities “from helicopter delivery of mail at Glen Falls, New York, to Miss ZIPs in hot pants in Louisville, Kentucky,” *The Postal Leader* reported. (Reflecting the times, Miss ZIPs were women in blue miniskirts and beauty contestant-style red and white “Miss ZIP” sashes, who answered customer questions, provided mailing tips and sold stamps in post office lobbies.)

The most common local events involved tours, flag-raising ceremonies, live music, and coffee and donuts. USPS sent post offices photography exhibits called “These are the people who are the U.S. Postal Service” featuring employees at work, and the 11-minute film, “More and Louder.” The film included man-on-the-street interviews about the public perception of the Postal Service, showed postal workers on the job, and featured an animated “history of the U.S. Mail from Colonial America to the Moon.”

In New York City, on the very steps in front of the Main Post Office where letter carriers had walked the picket lines the year before, the New York Post Office Band performed while employees distributed “seemingly limitless quantities” of the souvenir envelopes, *The New York Times* reported. Regional Postmaster General Harold Larsen, speaking at the celebration pointed to the change from the old to the new with the Postal Service’s new logo: “Today we lose our horse and rider,

but we are gaining the eagle as a symbol more in keeping with the times.”

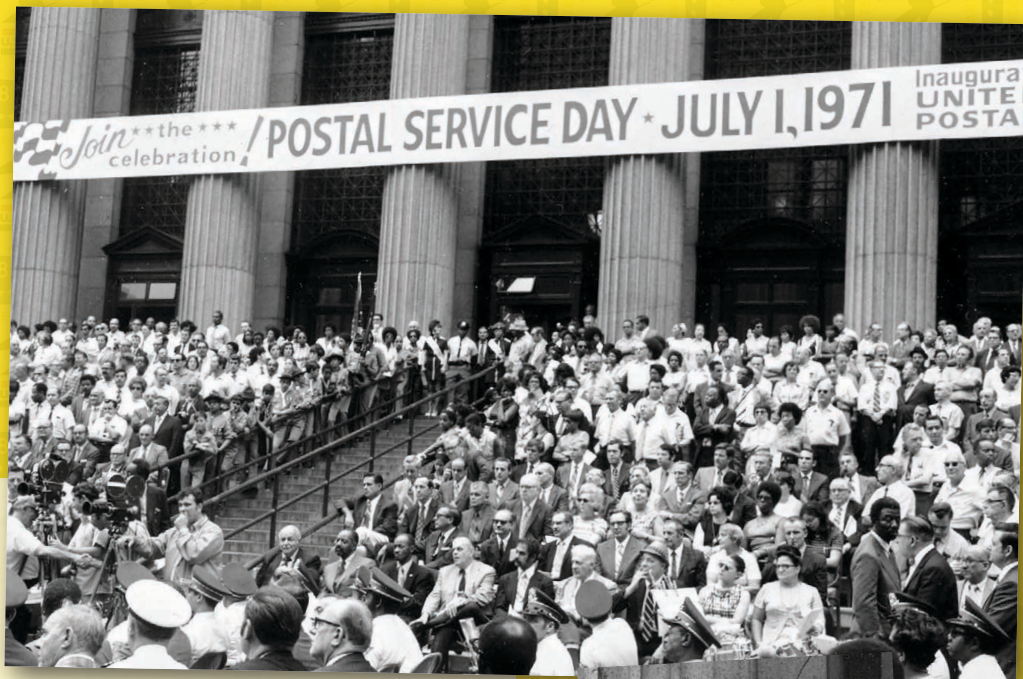
### ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS

Even as the pomp and circumstance for National Postal Service Day was being held, letter carriers and other postal employees were still fighting for their first national agreement with the Postal Service. Negotiations had begun on Jan. 20, 1971, between the Post Office Department and the Council of American Postal Employees (CAPE), the coalition of 650,000 postal workers who were members of the seven exclusive postal unions

In the July 1971 edition of *The Postal Record*, NALC President James Rademacher announced that CAPE had filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board against the Post Office Department for refusing to negotiate in good faith, and vowed to do so against USPS when it came into being on July 1. The charges ranged from management’s refusal to make any specific proposals on wages to its forcing the unions to bargain together in perpetuity.

“We welcome the United States Postal Service with muted voices and with minds charged with suspicion,” Rademacher wrote. “We have not entirely given up on the modified Corporation idea but a great deal of the original enthusiasm for the new concept has already gone down the drain.”

The day before July 1, in New York, where the wildcat strike leaders distrusted both the Post Office and the



Top: The crowd for Postal Service Day in New York City

Above: Miss ZIPs wore sashes that read “Miss USPS” for the day’s events.



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The Dante, VA, post office featured the photo display from postal headquarters.

national union leaders, 12,000 postal workers in the city rallied in support of “a no contract—no work” position.

Despite the animosity on both sides as the July 18 deadline for negotiations passed and the parties moved to take their cases to arbitration, an agreement was struck on July 20.

“For the first time in history,” Rademacher wrote in the August 1971 edition of *The Postal Record*, “unions representing postal workers actually negotiated a settlement.”

There was much for letter carriers to like about the new agreement. The new contract provided wage increases and a cost-of-living adjustment—the first ever for postal employees—as well as a “no lay-off” clause that prohibited the Postal Service from laying off carriers and other bargaining-unit employees “on an involuntary basis.” This contract also saw the establishment of the grievance-arbitration procedure, which allowed stewards to force managers to abide by the contract.

Still, some carriers criticized the

agreement’s failure both to improve fringe benefits and to preserve strict craft lines between carrier and clerk duties. In addition, the wide disciplinary powers granted management were soundly attacked.

One New York rank-and-file letter carrier said that the contract had given unbridled authority to the new budget-conscious postal management, and that the new contract would lead to “increased supervision and harassment of letter carriers; arbitrary discipline; increased productivity with no benefits; reductions in personnel; elimination of carrier assignments; accelerated changes and additions to letter carriers’ routes; deteriorating service which would bring unfair criticism from the patrons to the letter carrier; and an overall and large-scale problem of low morale.”

The agreement was not sent to the membership for ratification; the Executive Council agreed to it without input from the membership. In October, the rank-and-filers held a conference, where they made it one of their central issues that all nationally negotiated collective-bargaining agreements would have to be submitted to the membership for ratification. By the time the second agreement was negotiated in 1973, the Executive Council voluntarily sent it to the membership for ratification, and this process became part of the *NALC Constitution* at the 1974 national convention.

And so, 1971 was a time of transition for the Postal Service and for the collective-bargaining process. While it wasn’t always a smooth transition for the Postal Service or for NALC, from these beginnings letter carriers have negotiated, arbitrated and ratified their own national contracts. Much like National Postal Service Day in 1971, that is something worth celebrating. **PR**



President Richard Nixon (seated) signed the Postal Reorganization Act, creating the United States Postal Service.