

# Carriers and the mail make news online

**M**ail-centered stories frequently appear on social media and online news sites. The following are a few that have come to NALC's attention recently. If you find a story you'd like us to consider featuring, send it to postalrecord@nalc.org.

## From pen pals to married couple

Alena and Chad were teenagers in 1986 when they began writing to each other. Chad was living in England while Alena was living in Singapore, about 7,000 miles apart from each other. They were connected through the International Youth Service, which was the world's biggest pen pal communications service before it closed in 2008.

They continued to write to each other and eventually sent more than 100 tape recordings of themselves chatting as well. They kept corresponding for seven years until Alena reached the age of 23 and decided she wanted to visit Chad.

Chad told Good News Network that when he saw Alena for the first time, he thought to himself, "Wow, is she my pen pal?"

Alena spent 19 days in the United Kingdom, and during that time they

realized that they had a stronger connection than friendship. Once Alena returned home, the couple began calling each other on the phone nearly every day, which added up to monthly phone bills of £350 and £450 each.

The year after Alena's initial visit, Chad traveled to Singapore to see Alena. During the trip, Chad proposed.

"My parents were not accepting," Alena told the website. "I realized that we have so much history together and I couldn't just let it go."

Despite Alena's parents initially disapproving, the pair got married and are still happily married with three adult children.

## Art of letter writing revived by *New Yorker* writer

Speaking of pen pals, *New Yorker* writer Rachel Syme is working to bring back the practice by creating Penpalooza, a pen pal exchange service with thousands of users.

Writing letters has always been something she loved to do. Her loneliness when she first moved to New York City at the age of 22 prompted Syme to

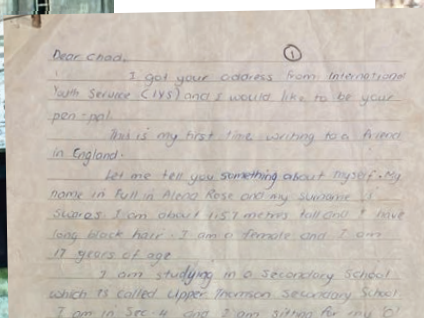
write letters to her college friends.

"I've always craved mail from people," she told *Vanity Fair*. "I always asked friends to write me, and then if I ever went abroad somewhere, I would send postcards back. I

mean, I was very much into the physical marking of something with mail."

Feeling restless and bored at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, Syme wrote letters to friends and family. Then, expanding her recipient list, Syme posted on social media asking the public to become her pen pals. A surprising 15,000 people agreed. More than four years later, her fingers are stained from ink and she continues to correspond with her pen pals globally.

She expanded her efforts by starting a pen pal exchange service, Penpalooza, which was done by using a gift-exchange site. The initial pen pal exchange had about 10,000 people involved, so Syme has continued by periodically putting out more calls for pen pals.



Left: Chad and Alena  
Above: Alena's first letter to Chad in 1986  
Right: An older photo of Chad and Alena





This experience has led Syme to write her book, *Syme's Letter Writer*, jokingly named after the strict letter-writing guide from 1867, *Frost's Original Letter Writer*.

"There's something about that kind of connection that a letter provides," she said. "It's private and it's safe, and it feels like everybody is in on the joke and is signed up for the same thing."



Residents along his route celebrate John Beckett's retirement in March.

## Letter carrier celebrated for four decades of service

**John Beckett** of Branch 60 in Stamford, CT, started delivering letters in 1985 and retired at the end of March.

Beckett, who grew to appreciate his time at the Postal Service, told New Canaanite, "They put a roof over my head, food on the table, I've raised the family, and I've met people that I never would have met if I hadn't done this job."

Although he delivered a few routes throughout his time as a carrier, he served on his last route for 13 years. On his last day, customers left notes and balloons on their mailboxes thanking Beckett for his service to the community.

One of his customers, Jeanne Disturco, told the website that Beckett "feels like he's part of the family, part of the community. We're really going to miss him."

Although he spent 40 years walking virtually every day, he doesn't plan to stop after retirement. He and his wife had plans to fly to Portugal to walk the Camino de Santiago for 13 days, ending in Spain.

## Italy honors luxury brand with postage stamp

The Italian Ministry of Enterprises issued a postage stamp on April 4 that honors 100 years of Fendi, an Italian luxury fashion brand that was founded in Rome in 1925. The Fendi stamp is part of a series of stamps that spotlight Italian brands on their centenaries for the impact they have had on both Italy's economy and culture.

The stamp uses Fendi's signature yellow color for the wording and the iconic "FF" monogrammed brown and black background. The design was created by Karl Lagerfeld, the artistic director of the fashion house from 1965 until his death in 2019. Although Lagerfeld is said to have produced it in just five seconds, the design has shaped the brand to this day. Underneath "FENDI" is the numeral "1" and the infinity symbol—∞—which is a nod to the brand's long endurance now and in the future.

The collectable Fendi stamps can be purchased as part of a four-flap and a philatelic A4 folder. The folder contains a block of four stamps, a stamped and canceled philatelic postcard, a first-day envelope and a philatelic card.

## Washington letter up for sale

For an estimated \$150,000, you can be the owner of a rare letter written by the first president of the United States, in which George Washington expresses his faith in the American Revolution.

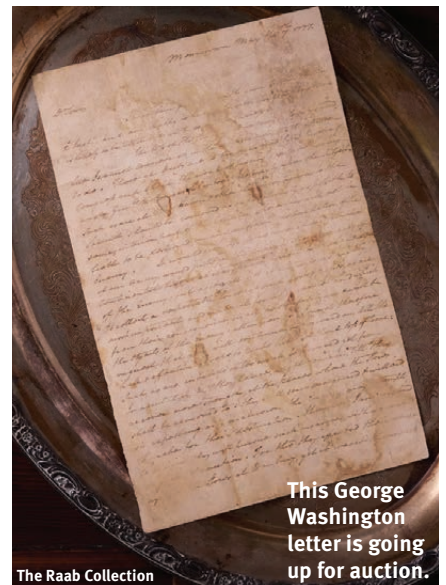
Nathan Raab is the president of the firm selling the letter. In a statement, he called the letter "a truly remarkable find and an evocative piece of our national history."

It is believed that the signed letter was dictated and sent to an aide at his field headquarters in Morristown, NJ, about 250 years ago. The letter may bear a fingerprint from Washington himself.

The letter is a reply to a wary subordinate who had informed Washington that a crucial supply depot in Danbury, CT, had been raided by the British, leaving thousands of barrels of oats, flour, beef, wheat and corn destroyed, according to *Smithsonian Magazine*.

Washington's reply was optimistic, focusing on what could be done, not on the devastation that had occurred. He ordered other depots to be moved even farther inland and ordered counterattacks by citizen militias.

"The loss of the flour at Danbury is to be regretted," Washington wrote in the letter, "but I cannot consider it in the important light you seem to do." **PR**



This George Washington letter is going up for auction.

The Raab Collection