

PMGs

The notorious

After nearly five years on the job, Postmaster General (PMG) Louis DeJoy resigned on March 24. Deputy PMG Douglas Tulino was appointed acting PMG while the Postal Board of Governors searches for a new one.

As the Postal Service seeks a successor for DeJoy, *The Postal Record* takes a look back at some of the most notable (and sometimes notorious) PMGs among the 75 previous occupants of the job, including how they affected the postal system and its workers—for better or worse.

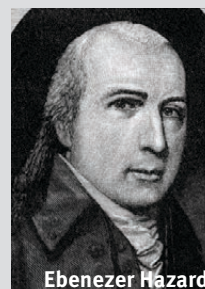
The job of PMG was created as the nation was forming. The first PMG, Benjamin Franklin, was appointed by the Second Continental Congress in 1775

during the Revolutionary War. Congress knew that a universal communications network was key to uniting the vast emerging nation.

Franklin's postal career had begun decades earlier, in 1737, when he was named postmaster of Philadelphia, a job he had obtained by virtue of running a print shop. In 1753, he became postmaster general of America, the British colonial title for the overseer of postal delivery in the 13 colonies. He made many improvements to postal roads, along

with expanding service. King George III dismissed Franklin in 1774 because of his growing sympathy for the independence movement. After Congress convened and gave him the job again

in 1775, Franklin served for a little more than a year before his son-in-law, Richard Bache, replaced him.



Ebenezer Hazard

The next PMG, Ebenezer Hazard, served until he earned the ire of George Washington, who saw Hazard's withdrawal of newspaper circulation by post as a threat to free speech just as the

U.S. Constitution was under debate. "It is extremely to be lamented that a new arrangement in the Post Office, unfavorable to the circulation of intelligence, should have taken place at the instant when the momentous question of a general government was to come before the People," Washington wrote in a letter to John Jay, who, like Ben Franklin, was one of the country's Founding Fathers. Shortly after the Constitution was ratified and Washington was elected the first president, he dumped Hazard.



Gideon Granger

Thomas Jefferson, who was a political rival to Washington, appointed Gideon Granger as PMG shortly after Jefferson took office as president in 1801. Granger stayed through

Jefferson's two terms and into James Madison's, becoming the longest-serving PMG in history when he left in 1814. (The shortest tenure was that of Horatio King, who held the job only 21 days in 1861.)



Benjamin Franklin

William Barry



The Post Office Department became a Cabinet-level agency in 1829, and President Andrew Jackson appointed William Barry to the role. Barry's other claim to fame is being the only member of Jackson's Cabinet not to resign in the wake of the Petticoat

Affair, which involved the social ostracizing of the secretary of war's wife by Cabinet members and their wives, and which even led Vice President John C. Calhoun to resign from office.

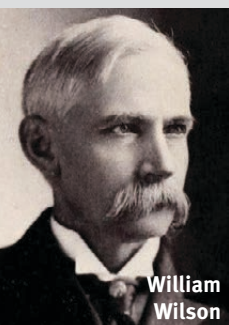
As the nation grew, so did the Post Office. As in other industries, growth and innovation led to the rise of the labor movement, and NALC was founded in August of 1889. John Wanamaker was at the helm of the Post Office at the time.



Wanamaker was the first of several PMGs who presided over a policy of resisting NALC and other postal unions,

trying to curtail their influence in Congress and sidestepping laws that benefited postal employees.

In 1895, PMG William Wilson moved to stop postal employees from lobbying Congress. Since postal unions did not have collective-bargaining rights, the only way at the time for postal employees to advocate for pay increases or other benefits was to appeal to Congress. Wilson issued a harsh "gag rule" on postal employees:



Hereafter no Postmaster, Post-office Clerk, Letter Carrier, Railway Postal Clerk, or other postal employee, shall visit Washington, whether on leave with or without pay, for the purpose of influencing legislation before Congress.

Violators could be fired.

Wilson's gag order was difficult to enforce and largely ignored. President Theodore Roosevelt, however, imposed a similar order on all federal workers when he took office in 1901. It was one in a series of restrictions on postal workers' democratic rights that NALC and other unions would struggle with over the following decade.

Congress passed several laws overturning gag rules and bolstering workers' rights in 1912, but the struggle began anew when Albert S. Burleson ascended to the post of PMG the following year. Burleson was strongly anti-union and intended to run the Post Office at a profit at the expense of its workers.

Burleson refused to meet with union leaders, called for the dissolution of postal unions, and refused to grant leave without pay for union leaders—Edward Gainor, NALC president at the time, was forced to resign from his job as a letter carrier to continue his union duties. Burleson advocated for repealing the 1912 laws protecting workers' rights to lobby Congress and tried to stop pay increases despite a rapid rise in the cost of living during World War I. He managed to exclude postal employees from a pay raise enacted for other federal workers and opposed the creation of pensions for retired postal employees.

But Burleson was too late—the laws protecting letter carriers' access to Congress protected their right to lobby to overrule him. NALC sprang into action, fighting his draconian rule on Capitol



Albert S. Burleson

Hill. NALC won new pay increases (and laws that prevented Burleson from using shady ways to avoid paying them), and most notably helped to pass the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA), which provides workers' compensation benefits for employees injured or killed on the job.

Burleson's policies led to extremes. In one tragic incident, a postmaster in West Virginia, following the PMG's standing order, fired an aging letter carrier who was slowing down on his route. Enraged, the other 25 carriers in his station resigned—but were all arrested and jailed for striking even though they had simply left their jobs permanently. They were all fined, save one who hanged himself in jail.

But the conflicts with Burleson, who left office in 1921 when President Wilson's tenure ended, only energized NALC and its activism. Slowly but surely, the union won victories for letter carriers over the following decades.

The next president, Warren G. Harding, appointed Will H. Hays as PMG. Four days after taking office, Hays signaled that he would be the polar opposite of Burleson by issuing a proclamation that included these words:

Every effort shall be exercised to humanize the ... [Post Office Department]. Labor is not a commodity ... There are 300,000 employees. They have the brain[s] and they have the hand[s] to do the job well; and they shall have the heart to do it as well.

A week later, Hays invited postal union leaders for discussions and



Will H. Hays

promised an open-door policy. Though collective bargaining was a long way away, Hays developed a close relationship with the unions and established a council of union representatives to open discussions on work conditions and other issues.

Hays left office after only a year to become the first chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. To thank him, NALC named him an honorary lifetime member. Though Hays's tenure was short, his legacy endured, setting the tone for mutual respect between the upper ranks of the Post Office and its workers, and boosting the confidence of the unions.

Nevertheless, the stubborn problem of low pay remained. NALC struggled to convince Congress to boost pay, with modest success, until the following two decades, when the Great Depression brought furloughs and World War II diverted attention from postal workers' needs.

The end of the war brought new hope—but that was quickly dashed. President Harry Truman appointed Jesse



Jesse Donaldson

Donaldson as PMG in 1947. Donaldson had risen in the ranks and had once carried mail, so NALC had high hopes. Instead, Donaldson meekly accepted budget cuts and then, on April 18, 1950, issued a shocking order to save money. In those days, carriers often did two rounds on their routes to deliver mail twice a day. Donaldson's order reduced residential mail delivery to once a day and severely curtailed many other services.

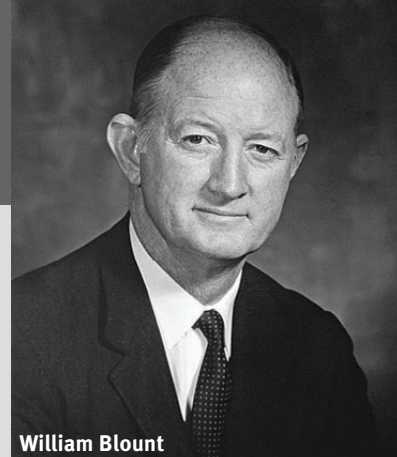
The order had the effect of eliminating an office break for carriers, forcing them to stay out all day and eat lunch on the street, with only 30 minutes provided for a lunch break. Carriers bitterly protested the change but could not convince Donaldson or Congress to overturn it. The standard of only one delivery per day, as every carrier knows, continues to this day.

In 1953, the new president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, replaced Donaldson with businessman Arthur E. Summerfield as PMG. Eisenhower had raised the hopes of letter carriers during the presidential campaign of 1952, promising when he spoke at the NALC convention in New York City that year to be fair and listen to carriers' concerns.

Summerfield rapidly modernized the Post Office, but his plans didn't



Arthur E. Summerfield



William Blount

include taking care of its employees. The businessman pushed to keep letter carrier pay as low as he could. The union battled Summerfield in Congress and won the passage of some modest pay increases—only to see Eisenhower veto them.

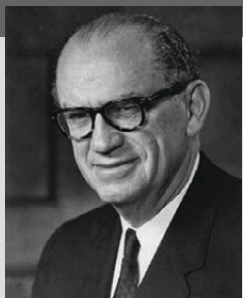
President John F. Kennedy brought some progress to the process by issuing orders that granted rights to federal unions, including the right to bargain for a contract on certain issues. It was a precursor to full collective-bargaining rights that were on the horizon.

Still, the cycle of struggle and disappointment over pay dragged on until it reached a boiling point in 1970. Most letter carriers know of, or even remember, the Great Postal Strike that began with New York's Branch 36. The strike not only brought immediate improvements in pay, but also led to the right of collective bargaining by NALC and other postal unions, while also moving Congress to enact a fundamental reorganization of the Post Office Department. The new entity would become today's U.S. Postal Service, a self-funding agency with a Postal Board of Governors (BOG) to oversee it—and to choose the PMG.

The PMG at the helm during the strike, William Blount, would be the last chosen under the old system of appointment by the president and the last to be a member of a president's Cabinet. The new system was professionalized, with PMGs intended to be selected more like corporate CEOs than for their political connections. Some would be career postal employees who worked their way to the top.

The first PMG chosen by the BOG, Ted Klassen, became the first to negotiate contracts with NALC and the other unions that now had the right to bargain for wages and working conditions.

Ted Klassen



Klassen, who had no college degree, had started his career as a messenger for the American Can Company and rose to become its CEO. He was deputy PMG when the board chose him to head the new Postal Service. Negotiating the contracts went smoothly, though Klassen later ruffled feathers with job cuts.

One of the most prominent PMGs chosen from the ranks of corporate America was Marvin Runyon, a former auto industry executive who served from 1992 to 1998. Runyon, who already had the nickname “Carvin’ Marvin” from his previous jobs, started by eliminating many postal management jobs, but hired new letter carriers and other craft workers to make USPS the largest civilian employer in the country, boosting its workforce from 730,000 to 765,000.

Jack Potter, son of a letter carrier, started his own USPS career as a clerk in New York City, moving up in the ranks to PMG in 2001. Potter offered up the idea of dropping Saturday delivery. Potter also confronted an unexpected crisis when anthrax spores were sent through the mailstream to members of Congress, killing two postal employees in Washington, DC, and requiring new procedures for handling mail there. He left in 2010.

After a long career in postal management that began after he was hired as a clerk, Patrick Donahoe was chosen as PMG in 2011. Donahoe pushed for cutting a day of delivery, citing the hole in the postal budget caused by the congressional mandate to pre-fund retiree health care benefits, and the

failure of Congress to fix that problem. He didn’t wait for permission: In early 2013, Donahoe announced that USPS would stop delivering on Saturdays, despite the fact that he didn’t have the authority. Every year during the budget cycle, Congress routinely included a requirement in an appropriations bill that the agency deliver six days a week. NALC and other stakeholders pushed back against Donahoe’s decision, and he backed down nine weeks later.

Donahoe’s successor, Megan Brennan, was the first woman to hold the job. She served from 2015 until 2020, when DeJoy replaced her. Brennan also rose through the ranks of USPS—she started her career as a letter carrier.

DeJoy came from a business background in logistics and oversaw USPS as it faced the challenges of delivering the mail during the COVID-19 pandemic—including trying to keep employees safe, confronting the changed nature of deliveries as carriers brought essential items so residents could shelter safely at home, and overseeing the delivery of ballots during the 2020 presidential and congressional elections with the dramatic rise in voting by mail. He was halfway through his 10-year Delivering for America plan when he was pressured to step down so the administration could promote a candidate more in line with its priorities.

The Board of Governors has announced its hiring of advisory firm Egon Zehnder to lead the search for the 76th PMG. “The firm will work closely with the Governors to identify, evaluate, and select a forward-looking and

effective leader to guide the Postal Service into its next chapter,” the BOG said in a press release.

All of which leads us to the present moment.

As NALC President Brian L. Renfroe stated, “The USPS Board of Governors’ search for a new leader of the agency comes at a critical time for letter carriers and everyone who depends on our service. The next postmaster general must continue modernizing and investing in USPS infrastructure while maintaining quality universal service funded by postage, not taxpayer dollars. They must value and empower the 640,000 Postal Service employees, more than 73,000 of whom are veterans, who serve the American people. They must work in good faith with NALC, our sister unions and other stakeholders to get necessary retirement fund investment and accounting policy changes done in Congress. Finally, the next postmaster general must fundamentally believe in the agency as a public service and be committed to guaranteeing the universal service Americans rely on.

“NALC urges the board to seek out a candidate who meets these criteria. The future of the Postal Service is on the line, and choosing someone with innovative ideas and appreciation for our constitutionally mandated service is essential. NALC stands ready to work with whoever the board selects as the next postmaster general. We will fight like hell to ensure that our members’ perspectives and experiences are considered when the next postmaster general makes decisions that affect letter carriers’ working lives.” **PR**

John E. “Jack” Potter



Patrick Donahoe



Marvin Runyon



Megan Brennan



Louis DeJoy