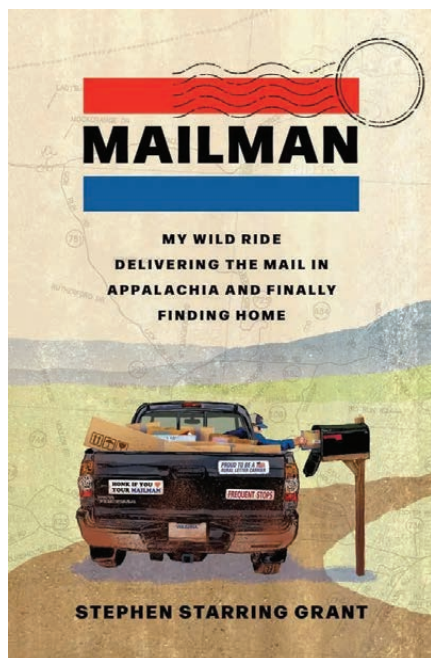


Carriers and the mail make news online



Mail-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.

Letter carrier writes memoir

This summer Stephen Starring Grant released a memoir—*Mailman: My Wild Ride Delivering the Mail in Appalachia and Finally Finding Home* about his experience as a rural letter carrier and life in general.

In March 2020, when he was 50 years old, Grant was laid off from his job as a marketing and consumer strategy consultant in New York City. Only a few months earlier, he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

"My cancer was as benign as cancer gets," Grant wrote in the first chapter of his memoir. "But what had seemed manageable—treatable—now loomed as an existential issue. I was about to become one of the undoctored in America while I knowingly carried a disease that could kill me.

Looking for health insurance, he found himself back in his hometown of Blacksburg, VA, delivering mail as a rural carrier associate.

His late-in-life career switch led him to become a source of support for his customers, tackle new challenges and find purpose in doing small things for his community. His memoir provides a glimpse into the work letter carriers do for their communities and explores the idea of home.

His time driving and delivering gave him ample time to think.

As he says in one part of the memoir, his time as a letter carrier emphasized to him that "our job is to love and protect each other ... and that when we are alone, we are still together, joined by ideas, history, correspondence, chicken feed, and refrigerators. Out of many, one."

His book is the No. 1 best seller on Amazon in the Sociology of Rural Areas category and has received high praise from well-known authors and publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Atlantic*.

Jonathan Safran Foer, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Everything is Illuminated*, said, "'Mailman' pulses with humor and the beauty of simple, everyday courage. In the heart of a small mountain town, Steve Grant's route as a rural mail carrier becomes a journey of personal redemption, of finding purpose and dignity."

Another *New York Times* bestselling author, David Von Drehle—who wrote *The Book of Charlie*, called the book "a love song to America's least understood treasure. I will never take my mail carrier for granted again."

USPS celebrates 250 years of history with new stamps

The founding of the postal system was in 1775, prior to even the signing of the U.S. Constitution. To celebrate its 250th anniversary, USPS unveiled two stamps on July 23.

"For the United States Postal Service, today is a milestone 250 years in the making," Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer David Steiner said at the ceremony. "These stamps will serve as a window into our shared history. They represent enduring values that I—and every American—can learn from: perseverance, trust and imagination. As we unveil these stamps today, I ask all



The 250 Years of Delivering stamps

of you to use the mail to stay connected, especially when we feel ourselves starting to drift apart.”

In a time when the main form of virtual communication was by mail, the postal system was key for the United States in gaining independence.

The Forever stamps come in two new designs. For the first, award-winning cartoonist Chris Ware designed a 20-stamp pane, titled “250 Years of Delivering.” The stamps depict a letter carrier’s route across the four seasons while incorporating postal icons and tools.

The other shows Benjamin Franklin, the first postmaster general, depicted in an old stamp style in blue. Franklin was one of the most frequently used figures on USPS stamps, appearing on more than 100 stamps in the 178-year history of American stamps.

TikToker shares grandparents’ love story fueled by letters

Crew Doyle and his father found more than 150 letters exchanged by Doyle’s grandparents, Bill and Helen, during World War II. Bill was in the Navy and Helen was in the Red Cross. They were stationed on a small island in the Pacific when they first met on a blind date. It went well and they promised each other that they would meet again *mañana* (tomorrow) but were forced apart when Helen was unexpectedly shipped out the next day as part of her Red Cross duties. Through their correspondence, they fell in love.

Deciding to share his grandparents’ story, in January, Doyle started reading one letter every few days on his TikTok account.

Despite their lack of an in-person relationship, the pair consistently wrote about their love and longing for *mañana*. In a time when there wasn’t video calling and long-distance phone calls were difficult and expensive, Bill

and Helen still found a way to date long distance.

After exchanging dozens of letters, they began a virtual coffee hour. Although they were thousands of miles apart, at the same time each day they wrote to each other and enjoyed coffee.

In one letter Helen said, “To know you are thinking of me is all the happiness I need.”

After exchanging almost 100 letters, Bill wrote, “Life together, of course, means marriage. I don’t intend to propose by letter. I wanna put the question to you while you are actually in my arms, darling, and if you should accept, I should be the happiest man in the world.”

His grandparents have since died but had a 50-year marriage. Doyle continues to share the letters with his more than 638,000 followers. At the end of May, he purchased a scanner, which he is using to digitize their letters.

To immortalize their love, Doyle created *Mañana: A Pacific Romance*, a coffee table book that compiles letters, photos and transcriptions of their letters.

New York letter carrier retires after 36 years of service

Scott Simas, a Brooklyn, NY Branch 41 letter carrier, delivered his final letter on May 24. He started his postal career in 1989, and while working at a post office he met his wife, Gina, a window clerk at the time.

All but three of his 36 years were spent on a single route.

“I was always asked, ‘Why not get an easier route?’” Simas told the *Staten Island Advance*. “But it was the people who made it easy for me to stay. [They] made it so that this wasn’t just work for me.”

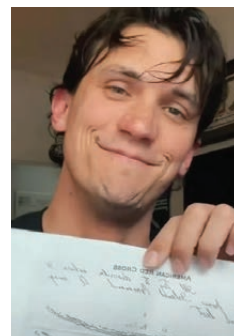
His customers shared that Simas would always go the extra mile when he delivered mail. He rang their door-



Crew Doyle (r) has been sharing his grandparents’ (above) love story through letters on TikTok.

Below: Scott Simas’s customers threw him a retirement party to say thanks.

Photo by Kayla Simas for the *Advance/SILive.com*

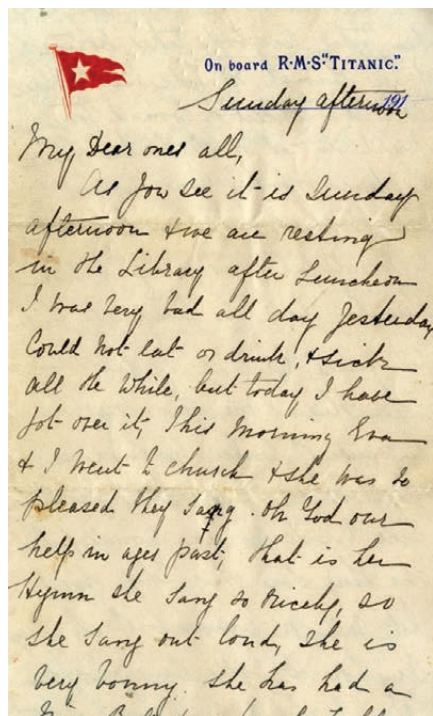


Carriers and the mail make news (continued)



Annalee Beck shows off the artwork for her Alaska stamp.

Colonel Archibald Gracie's letter from the Titanic sold at auction for \$399,000.



bells and placed mail inside elderly customer's homes.

"Scott's not only our mailman, but a great friend," Debbie Parisi, one of his customers, told the publication. "I always looked forward to talking to him when he came. We'll miss him very much."

As a tribute to his time as a letter carrier, his children made a video that featured his customers wishing him well. One of his customers coordinated a small celebration with balloons and cake, during which people from the neighborhood came together to commemorate his time as their letter carrier.

Artist showcases her take on state stamps in weekly series

About six months ago, starting with her home state of Idaho, Annalee Beck began a series on her TikTok account (@annaleebeckart) where she creates a stamp using paper, watercolor and gouache (a type of water-based paint). Each stamp features the state flower and something unique to that state. The price marked on each stamp represents the order that each one became a state.

She painted a potato for Idaho, a car for Michigan because it's home to Detroit, the automobile capital of the world, and maple syrup for Vermont. Beck plans to continue to paint one state a week until she completes all 50.

Her videos have garnered the attention of more than 49,000 viewers and show the process of painting and cutting the paper into the stamp shape from the background to the fine details of the stamp.

When Beck isn't putting her own take on state postage stamps, she likes to paint other postage stamps frequently—including of fruit, vegetables, animals, pie and various other motifs.

Titanic passenger's letter sells for \$399,000

On April 10, 1912, Colonel Archibald Gracie boarded the *Titanic* for a trans-Atlantic voyage. As he was settling in, he sent a letter to a friend. The letter contained his first impressions of the ship: "It is a fine ship, but I shall await my journey's end before I pass judgment on her."

His hesitance to pass judgment until the end of the journey ended up being warranted. On April 14, the ship sank, and Gracie was one of the 706 survivors of the 2,240 total passengers. A year later he wrote a book, *The Truth About the Titanic*, about his experience.

In his book, he wrote about how he had helped women and children onto the lifeboats and how, after space ran out, he had helped the crew retrieve collapsible boats. As Gracie went under the waves, he was able to make it onto an upside-down collapsible lifeboat. He was rescued by a ship and made his way to New York City, where he quickly started writing his book.

The letter was postmarked that day in what is now Cobh, Ireland, and also in London on April 12. It features the logo of the company that owned the *Titanic*, White Star Line, along with the words "On board RMS Titanic."

This is the only letter in existence from Gracie while he was on the ship, according to the auction house. The auction was held by Henry Aldridge and Son in Wiltshire, England, where it was sold on April 26 for \$399,000.

Successful artist and father by day, postal worker by night

Kermit Oliver told journalist Jason Sheeler of the *Texas Standard* that he didn't believe he could make a living as an artist. Despite that statement, he has forged a successful career as



One of Kermit Oliver's Hermès scarves

an artist, designing scarves for French fashion house Hermès and selling paintings for up to \$150,000.

Seeking a stable career he knew would support his family, Oliver worked for the Postal Service as a mail sorter in Waco, TX, from 1984 until his retirement in 2013. He often worked the midnight shift, giving him time throughout the day to focus on his family, as well as his art.

"So it [painting] was always [a] role that took [the] position after my family life," he told the *Texas Standard* in 2021.

Although his chosen occupation wasn't directly correlated to what he studied in school—fine arts and art education—he still managed to find art in mail sorting.

"European countries used art on their stamps. And I was seeing works I couldn't imagine," he said. "I would go where they would sweep up on the floor, I would go through there and pick up stamps. I have books of stamps from European countries of paintings and things that I couldn't imagine ever seeing."

From the year his postal career began until 2004, Oliver designed 17 scarves for Hermès. The carrés, as they are known, are high-quality silk scarves, featuring intricate designs and hand-rolled edges that can sell for as much as \$1,000 and sometimes more. Oliver was the only U.S. artist to design for the French luxury fashion house.

His designs were unique because he traded the motifs and details typically included in Parisian scarves for ones

that represented his life in Texas, incorporating local flora and fauna.

All of Oliver's 17 scarf designs and a selection of his original paintings were recently displayed at an

exhibit at the Bryan Museum in Texas, which is home to one of the world's largest collections of artifacts and artworks related to the American West.

Students still anticipate mailed college acceptance letters

Before the internet, the college admissions process was done by mail. High school seniors frequently checked their mailboxes nervously awaiting universities' decisions.

As was illustrated in a 2003 episode of "Gilmore Girls," main character Rory repeatedly and anxiously checked her mail for what she called "the big one." This referred to the thick envelope sent to high school students when they were accepted into colleges and universities, as opposed to the small one, indicating rejection.

Though most universities now notify their incoming class of their application status via online portal or email, some schools still use the time-honored tradition of the mail to inform students of their accepted, denied or waitlisted status or use a combination of physical and virtual methods.

Since 2019, McDaniel College in Maryland has sent an envelope that appears even bigger than Rory Gilmore's. Included in it is an acceptance letter, confetti, balloons, keyboard stickers and blank thank-you cards.

"We are proud of our mailed acceptance packet," Jill Centofanti, the college's admissions dean, told USPS Link. "We hear from students who have been admitted and who ultimately choose us—as well as some who may

not choose us—how impactful it was and how much they appreciated how it was personalized and stood out to them."

A recent graduate of Northeastern University in Boston, Jamira Collins, told the Link that she had gone through the application process during the COVID-19 pandemic, so she appreciated the connection that her mailed acceptances gave her to the universities that sent them. She even scrapbooked her mailed acceptance letters.

"I remember looking forward to the physical letters in the mail, and I still have every one of them," she said. "I appreciated the online portal messages, too, but a letter is more exciting."



Who lives in a pineapple under the sea and is now on a stamp?

On Aug. 1, the Postal Service released a pane of 16 "SpongeBob SquarePants" stamps with two designs. The TV show's first episode came out in 1999. It featured a sponge man who "lives in a pineapple under the sea" in the town of Bikini Bottom.

The idea for the cartoon stemmed from marine biologist and animator Stephen Hillenburg's two passions. By the early 2000s SpongeBob became a cultural fixture and by 2004 the first SpongeBob movie came out in theaters. The show continues to release new seasons, with its newest airing on June 27. **PR**