

HISTORY OF LAWS  
RELATING TO THE POSTAL MONOPOLY  
OF THE UNITED STATES

POSTAL ACT OF 1845

**Act of March 3, 1845, Ch 43, 2 Stat. 732 (28th Congress, 2d Session)**

CHAP. XLIII.—*An Act to reduce the rates of postage, to limit the use and correct the abuse of the franking privilege, and for the prevention of frauds on the revenues of the Post Office Department.*

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That, from and after the first day of July next, members of Congress and delegates from Territories, may receive letters, not exceeding two ounces in weight, free of post- [2 Stat 733] age, during the recess of Congress, anything to the contrary in this act notwithstanding; and the same franking privilege which is granted by the act to the members of the two Houses of Congress, is hereby extended to the Vice President of the United States; and in lieu of the rates of postage now established by law, there shall be charged the following rates, viz: For every single letter, in manuscript, or paper of any kind by or upon which information shall be asked for or communicated in writing, or by marks and signs, conveyed in the mail, for any distance under 300 miles, five cents; and for any distance over 300 miles, ten cents: and for a double letter there shall be charged double these rates; and for a treble letter, treble these rates; and for a quadruple letter, quadruple these rates; and every letter or parcel not exceeding half an ounce in weight shall be deemed a single letter, and every additional weight of half an ounce, or additional weight of less than half an ounce, shall be charged with an additional single postage. And all drop letters, or letters placed in any post office, not for transmission by mail, but for delivery only, shall be charged with postage at the rate of two cents each. And all letters which shall hereafter be advertised as remaining over in any post office shall, when delivered out, be charged with the costs of advertising the same in addition to the regular postage, both to be accounted for as other postages now are.

SEC 2. ". *And be it further enacted,* That all newspapers of no greater size or superficies than nineteen hundred square inches may be transmitted through the mail by the editors or publishers thereof, to all subscribers or other persons within thirty miles of the city, town, or other place in which the paper is or may be printed, free of any charge for postage whatever; and all newspapers of and under the size aforesaid, which shall be conveyed in the mail any distance beyond thirty miles from the place at which the same may be printed, shall be subject to the rates of postage chargeable upon the same under the thirtieth section of the act of Congress approved the third of March, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five, entitled "An act to reduce into one the several acts for establishing and regulating the Post Office Department ;" and upon all newspapers of greater size or superficial extent than nineteen hundred square inches, there shall be charged and collected the same

rates of postage as are prescribed by this act to be charged on magazines and pamphlets.

SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted*, That all printed or lithographed circulars and handbills or advertisements, printed or lithographed on quarto post or single cap paper, or paper not larger than single cap, folded, directed, and unsealed, shall be charged with postage at the rate of two cents for each sheet, and no more, whatever be the distance the same may be sent; and all pamphlets, magazines, periodicals, and every other kind and description of printed or other matter, (except newspapers,) which shall be unconnected with any manuscript communication whatever, and which it is or may be lawful to transmit by the mail of the United States, shall be charged with postage at the rate of two and a half cents for each copy sent, of no greater weight than one ounce, and one cent additional shall be charged for each additional ounce of the weight of every such pamphlet, magazine, matter, or thing, which may be transmitted through the mail, whatever be the distance, the same may be transported; and any fractional excess of not less than one-half of an ounce, in the weight of any such matter or thing, above one or more ounces, shall be charged for as if said excess amounted to a full ounce.

SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General be and he is hereby, authorized, upon all mail routes over or upon which the amount of matter usually transported, or which may be offered or [2 Stat. 734] deposited in the post office or post offices for transportation, is or may become so great as to threaten materially to retard the progress or endanger the security of the letter mail, or to cause any considerable augmentation of the cost of transporting the whole mail at the present rate of speed, to provide for the separate and more secure conveyance of the letter mail, at a speed at least equal to that at which the mail is now transported over such route, taking care to allow in no case of any greater delay, in the transportation of the other matters and things to be transported in the mail on any such route, than may appear to be absolutely necessary, regard being had to the cost of expediting its transportation, and the means at his disposal or under his control for effecting the same.

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That the twenty-seventh section of the act of Congress entitled "An act to reduce into one the several acts for establishing and regulating the Post Office Department," approved and signed the third day of March, in the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five, and all other acts, and parts of acts granting and conferring upon any person whatsoever the right or privilege to receive and transmit through the mail, free of postage, letters, packets, newspapers, periodicals, or other matters, be, and the same are hereby, utterly abrogated, and repealed.

SEC. 6. *And be it further enacted*, That from and after the passage of this act, all officers of the Government of the United States, heretofore having the franking privilege, shall be authorized and required to keep an account of all postage charged to and payable by them, respectively, upon letters, packages, or other matters received through the mail, touching the duties or business of their respective offices; and said accounts for postage, upon being duly verified by said officers, respectively, shall be allowed and paid quarter yearly, out of the contingent fund of the bureau or department to which the officers aforesaid may respectively belong or be attached. And the three

Assistant Postmasters General shall be entitled to have remitted by the postmaster in Washington all postage charged upon letters, packages, or other matter, received by them, respectively, through the mail, touching the business of the Post Office Department or the particular branch of that business committed to them, respectively, and each of the said Assistant Postmasters General shall be, and hereby is, authorized to transmit through the mail, free of postage, any letters, packages, or other matters relating exclusively to his official duties, or to the business of the Post Office Department; but he shall, in every such case, endorse on the back of the letter or package so to be sent free of postage, over his own signature, the words " official business." And for any such endorsement falsely made, the person so offending shall forfeit and pay three hundred dollars. And the several deputy postmasters throughout the United States shall be authorized to charge, and have allowed to them in the settlement of their accounts with the Post Office Department all postage which they may have paid or had charged to them, respectively, for letters, packages, or other matters, received by them on the business of their respective offices or of the Post Office Department, upon a verification on oath of their accounts for the same, and the transmission of the charged letters as vouchers; and the said several deputy postmasters shall be, and hereby are, authorized to send through the mail, free of postage, all letters, and packages, which it may be their duty, or they may have occasion, to transmit to any person or place, and which shall relate exclusively to the business of their respective offices, or to the business of the Post Office Department, but in every such case, the deputy postmaster sending any such letter or package shall endorse thereon, over his own signature, the words "Post Office business." And for any and every such endorsement falsely made, the person making [2 Stat. 735] the same shall forfeit and pay three hundred dollars. And when the commissions of any postmaster amount to less than twenty-five dollars per annum, it shall be lawful for the Postmaster General to increase the rate of his commissions, provided that they do not exceed fifty per cent. On letter postage accruing at such office, and the Postmaster General is hereby required to cause accounts to be kept of the postage that would be chargeable at the rates prescribed in this act upon all matter passing free through the mail according to the provisions of this act; and the sums thus chargeable shall be paid to the Post Office Department from the contingent funds of the two Houses of Congress and of the other Departments of the Government for which such mail service may have been performed, and where there is no such fund, that they be paid out of the Treasury of the United States.

SEC. 7. *And be it further enacted,* That the act of Congress entitled "An act authorizing the Governors of the several States to transmit by mail certain books and documents," approved June the thirtieth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four, shall remain and continue in full force, any thing hereinbefore to the contrary notwithstanding; and the Members of Congress, the Delegates from Territories, the Secretary of the Senate, and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, shall be, and they are hereby, authorized to transmit, free of postage, to any post office within the United States, or the Territories thereof, any documents which have been or may be printed by order of either House of Congress, any thing in this law to the contrary notwithstanding.

SEC. 8. *And be it further enacted,* That each member of the Senate, each member of the house of Representatives, and each Delegate from a Territory of the United States, the Secretary of the Senate, and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, may, during each session of Congress, and

for a period of thirty days before the commencement and thirty days after the end of each and every session of Congress, send and receive through the mail, free of postage, any letter, newspaper, or packet, not exceeding two ounces in weight; and all postage charged upon any letters, packages, petitions, memorials, or other matters or things, received during any session of Congress, by any Senator, Member or Delegate of the House of Representatives, touching his official or legislative duties, by reason of any excess of weight, above two ounces, of the matter or thing so received, shall be paid out of the contingent fund of the House of which the person receiving the same may be a member. And they shall have the right to frank written letters from themselves during the whole year, as now authorized by law.

SEC. 9. *And be it further enacted*, That it shall not be lawful for any person or persons to establish any private express or expresses for the conveyance, nor in any manner to cause to be conveyed, or provide for the conveyance or transportation by regular trips, or at stated periods or intervals, from one city, town, or other place, to any other city, town, or place in the United States, between and from and to which cities, towns, or other places the United States mail is regularly transported, under the authority of the Post Office Department, of any letters, packets, or packages of letters, or other matter properly transmittable in the United States mail, except newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and periodicals; and each and every person offending against this provision, or aiding and assisting therein, or acting as such private express, shall, for each time any letter or letters, packet or packages, or other matter properly transmittable by mail, except newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, periodicals, shall or may be, by him, her, or them, or though his, her, or their means or instrumentality, in whole or in part, conveyed or transported, contrary to the true intent, spirit, and meaning of this section, forfeit and pay the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars. [2 Stat. 736]

SEC. 10. *And be it further enacted*, That it shall not be lawful for any stage-coach, railroad car, steamboat, packet boat, or other vehicle or vessel, nor any of the owners, managers, servants, or crews of either, which regularly performs trips at stated periods on a post route, or between two or more cities, towns, or other places, from one to the other of which the United States mail is regularly conveyed under the authority of the Post Office Department, to transport or convey, otherwise than in the mail, any letter or letters, packet or packages of letters, or other mailable matter whatsoever, except such as may have relation to some part of the cargo of such steamboat, packet boat, or other vessel, or to some article at the same time conveyed by the same stage-coach, railroad car, or other vehicle, and excepting also, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, and periodicals; and for every such offence, the owner or owners of the stage-coach, railroad car, steamboat, packet boat, or other vehicle or vessel, shall forfeit and pay the sum of one hundred dollars, and the driver, captain, conductor, or person having charge of any such stage-coach, railroad car, steamboat, packet boat, or other vehicle or vessel, at the time of the commission of any such offence, and who shall not at that time be the owner thereof, in whole nor in part, shall, in like manner, forfeit and pay, in every such case of offence, the sum of fifty dollars.

SEC. 11. *And be it further enacted*, That the owner or owners of every stage-coach, railroad car, steamboat, or other vehicle or vessel, which shall, with the knowledge or connivance of the

driver, conductor, captain, or other person having charge of any such stage-coach, railroad car, steamboat, or other vessel or vehicle, convey or transport any person or persons acting or employed as a private express for the conveyance of letters, packets, or packages of letters, or other mailable matter, and actually in possession of such mailable matter, for the purpose of transportation, contrary to the spirit, true intent, and meaning of the preceding sections of this law, shall be subject to the like fines and penalties as are hereinbefore provided and directed in the case of persons acting as such private expresses, and of persons employing the same; but nothing in this act contained shall be construed to prohibit the conveyance or transmission of letters, packets, or packages, or other matter, to any part of the United States, by private hands, no compensation being tendered or received therefor in any way, or by a special messenger employed only for the single particular occasion.

SEC. 12. *And be it further enacted*, That all persons whatsoever who shall, after the passage of this act, transmit by any private express, or other means by this act declared to be unlawful, any letter or letters, package or packages, or other mailable matter, excepting newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, and periodicals, or who shall place or cause to be deposited at any appointed place, for the purpose of being transported by such unlawful means, any matter or thing properly transmittable, by mail, excepting newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and periodicals, or who shall deliver any such matter, excepting newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and periodicals for transmission to any agent or agents of such unlawful expresses, shall, for each and every offence, forfeit and pay the sum of fifty dollars.

SEC. 13. *And be it further enacted*, That nothing in this act contained shall have the effect, or be construed to prohibit the conveyance or transportation of letters by steamboats, as authorized by the sixth section of the act entitled "An act to reduce into one the several acts for establishing and regulating the Post Office Department, approved the third of March, 1825." *Provided*, That the requirements of said sixth section of said act be strictly complied with, by the delivery, within the time specified by said act, of all [2 Stat. 737] letters so conveyed, not relating to the cargo, or some part thereof, to the postmaster or other authorized agent of the Post Office Department at the port or place to which said letters may be directed, or intended to be delivered over from said boat; and the postmaster or other agent of the Post Office Department shall charge and collect upon all letters or other mailable matter, so delivered to him, except newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, and periodicals, the same rates of postage as would have been charged upon said letters had they been transmitted by mail from the port of place at which they were placed on board the steamboat from which they were received; but it is hereby expressly provided, that all the pains and penalties provided by this act, for any violation of the provisions of the eleventh section of this act, shall attach in every case to any steamboat, or to the owners and persons having charge thereof, the captain or other person having charge of which shall not, as aforesaid, comply with the requirements of the sixth section of the said law of 1825. And no postmaster shall receive, to be conveyed by the mail, any packet which shall weigh more than three pounds.

SEC. 14. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General shall have power, and he is hereby authorized, to contract with the owners or commanders of any steamboat plying upon the Western or other waters of the United States, for the transportation of the mail for any length of time

or number of trips, less than the time for which contracts for transporting the mail of the United States are now usually made under existing laws, and without the previous advertisements now required before entering into such contracts, whenever in his opinion the public interest and convenience will be promoted thereby: *Provided*, That the price to be paid for such service shall in no case be greater than the average rate paid for transporting the mail upon the route he may so for a less time contract for the transportation of the mail upon.

SEC. 15. *And be it further enacted*, That "mailable matter," and "matter properly transmittable by mail," shall be deemed and taken to mean, all letters and newspapers, and all magazines and pamphlets periodically published, or which may be published in regular series or in successive numbers, under the same title, though at irregular intervals, and all other written or printed matter whereof each copy or number shall not exceed eight ounces in weight, except bank notes, sent in packages or bundles, without written letters accompanying them; but bound books, of any size, shall not be held to be included within the meaning of these terms. And any packet or packets, of whatever size or weight, being made up of any such mailable matter, shall subject all persons concerned in transporting the same to all the penalties of this law equally as if it or they were not so made up into a packet or packages. But nothing in this act contained shall be so construed as to prohibit any person whatsoever from transporting, or causing to be transported, over any mail route, or any road or way parallel thereto, any books, magazines, or pamphlets, or newspapers, not marked, directed, or intended for immediate distribution to subscribers or others, but intended for sale as merchandise, and transported in the usual mode of transporting merchandise over the particular route used, and sent or consigned to some bona fide dealer or agent for the sale thereof; nor shall any thing herein be construed to interfere with the right of any traveller to have and take with him or her, for his or her own use, any book, pamphlet, magazine or newspaper.

SEC. 16. *And be it further enacted*, That the term "newspaper," hereinbefore used, shall be, and the same is hereby defined to be, any printed publication, issued in numbers, consisting of not more than two [2 Stat. 738] sheets, and published at short stated intervals of not more than one month, conveying intelligence of passing events, and bona fide extras and supplements of any such publication. And nothing herein contained shall be so construed as to prevent the free exchange of newspapers between the publishers thereof, as provided for under the twenty-ninth section of the act entitled, "An act to reduce into one the several acts for establishing and regulating the Post Office Department, approved the third day of March, 1825."

SEC. 17. *And be it further enacted*, That all pecuniary penalties and forfeitures, incurred under this act, shall be one half the use of the person or persons informing and prosecuting the same, and the other half to the use of the United States and shall be paid over to the Postmaster General and accounted for by him as other moneys of the department; and all causes of action arising under this act, may be sued, and all offenders against this act may be prosecuted before the justices of the peace, magistrates, or other judicial courts of the several States and of the several Territories of the United States, they having competent jurisdiction, by the laws of such States or Territories, to the trial of claims and demands of as great value, and of the prosecutions, where the punishments are of as great extent; and such justices, magistrates, or judiciary, shall take cognizance thereto and proceed to

judgment and execution as in other cases.

SEC. 18. *And be it further enacted*, That it shall be the duty of the Postmaster General in all future lettings of contracts for the transportation of the mail, to let the same, in every case, to the lowest bidder, tendering sufficient guarantees for faithful performance, without other reference to the mode of such transportation than may be necessary to provide for the due celerity, certainty, and security of such transportation; nor shall any new contractor hereafter be required to purchase out, or take at a valuation, the stock or vehicles of any previous contractor for the same route And all advertisements made under the orders of the Postmaster General, in a newspaper or newspapers, of letters uncalled for in any post office, shall be inserted in the paper or papers, of the town or place where the office advertising may be situated, having the largest circulation, provided the editor or editors of such paper or papers shall agree to insert the same for a price not greater than that now fixed by law; and in case of question or dispute as to the amount of the circulation of any papers the editors of which may desire this advertising, it shall be the duty of the postmaster to receive evidence and decide upon the fact.

SEC. 19. *And it shall be further enacted*, That to insure, as far as may be practicable, an equal and just rate of compensation, according to the service performed, among the several railroad companies in the United States, for the transportation of the mail, it shall be the duty of the Postmaster General to arrange and divide the railroad routes, including those in which the service is partly by railroad and partly by steamboats, into three classes according to the size of the mails the speed with which they are conveyed, and the importance of the service; and it shall be lawful for him to contract for conveying the mail with any such railroad company, either with or without advertising for such contract: *Provided*, That, for the conveyance of the mail on any railroad of the first class, he shall not pay a higher rate of compensation than is now allowed by law; nor for carrying the mail on any railroad of the second class, a greater compensation than one hundred dollars per mile per annum; nor for carrying the mail on any railroad of the third class, a greater compensation than fifty dollars per mile annum. And in case the Postmaster General shall not be able to conclude a contract for carrying the mail on any of such railroad routes at a compensation not exceeding the aforesaid maximum rates, or for what he may deem a [2 Stat. 739] reasonable and fair compensation for the service to be performed, it shall be lawful for him to separate the letter mail from the residue of the mail and to contract, either with or without advertising, for conveying the letter mail over such route, by horse express or otherwise, at the greatest speed that can reasonably be obtained; and also to contract for carrying over such route the residue of the mail, in wagons or otherwise, at a slower rate of speed, *Provided*, That if one-half of the service, on any railroad, is required to be performed in the night season, it shall be lawful for the Postmaster General to pay twenty-five per cent in addition to the aforesaid maximum rates of allowance: *And provided further*, That if it shall be found necessary to convey over any railroad route more than two mails daily, it shall be lawful for the Postmaster General to pay such additional compensation as he may think just and reasonable, having reference to the service performed and the maximum rate of allowance established by this act.

SEC. 20. *And be it further enacted*, That all causes of action arising under this act may be sued, and all offenders against this act may be prosecuted, before any circuit or district court of the

United States, of the District of Columbia or of the Territories of the United States.

SEC. 21. And be it further enacted, That for the purpose of guarding against the possibility of any embarrassment in the operations of the Post Office Department consequent upon any deficiency of the revenues of said department which may be occasioned by the reduction of the rates of postage by this act made, there be, and hereby is, appropriated the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, to be paid out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, and to be placed to the credit of the Post Office Department in the Treasury of the United States, to be applied, under the direction of the Postmaster General, to supply any deficiency in the regular revenues from postage, in the same manner as the revenues of said department are now by law applied.

SEC. 22. *And be it further enacted*, That in case the amount of postages collected from the rates of postage prescribed by this act, with the annual appropriation from the treasury of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars herein granted, shall prove insufficient to defray the expense of the mail service throughout the United States to an extent equal to what is now enjoyed by the public, and also the expense of extending and enlarging the same in due proportion with the increase and expansion of the population, particularly in the new States and Territories, the deficiency that may so arise shall be paid out of any moneys in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated: *Provided*, That the amount of expenditure for the Post Office Department shall not in the entire aggregate, exclusive of salaries of officers, clerks, and messengers, of the General Post Office, and the contingent fund of the same, exceed the annual amount of four million five hundred thousand dollars.

SEC. 23. *And be it further enacted*, That nothing in this act contained shall be construed to repeal the laws heretofore enacted, granting the franking privilege to the President of the United States when in office, and to all ex-Presidents, and to the widows of the former Presidents Madison and Harrison.

APPROVED, March 3, 1845.