

DEAR FRIENDS

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Greetings:

Benjamin Franklin has an eminent place in American History. We will learn more about his role in our founding years as the bicentennial pageantry unfolds. Not generally known is his urging a union of the colonies as far back as 1754. Among his deeds are the founding of public libraries and experiments in electricity. He urged prudence in expenditure of money and always had an eye for attractive ladies. He was deputy postmaster for the colonies from 1753 to 1774. After the Revolutionary War, in 1784, an area of western North Carolina, now eastern Tennessee, was formed into a state called Franklin. It did not last, being dissolved in 1788. The word "franklin" is old English and means a landowner of medium sized holdings.

But to return to Benj Franklin's tenure as deputy postmaster. It was one of the longer ones in postal history. Those were tough days for delivering the mail - to cope with heat and cold and gloom of night, yet render swift, unflinching service. Horsemen raced on nearly impassable roads. The mail went thru, uncluttered by mechanical monstrosities and phalanxes of clerks and officials. Don't undervalue this colonial postal service. Recall the vital role of the Committees of Correspondence whose letters it handled. Research doesn't indicate that Benj received any subsidies during his long career.

After Christmas 1975, another increase in postal rates is scheduled to go into effect. The price of a postage stamp may not seem the most pressing item to be concerned about. More serious misfunctions and corruptions press on our daily lives. Yet isn't postal service waste and inefficiency typical of all our bureaucratic messes? Shall we continue to accept this with equanimity, resignation, uncritical of the cost?

If I can judge from what history tells us of this venerable man, Benj Franklin would flatly disapprove of the increase. If only because it will guarantee nothing - not that service will improve, not that it will pay its way, not that it won't be back again - and soon - for another raise, subsidy, handout.

If I can judge etc, Benj Franklin would kick out the incompetents. He would not be deterred by congressional pressure or sloppy, sleepy postal unions. He would attack the decay that pervades the postal service and undermines the morale of its employees. What to do? Benj Franklin would not hesitate to try alternatives. He was for experiments, invention, innovation. This quality made him great and revered. It helped the little fledgling nation to prevail in its struggle against enemies and obstacles. It took a breed of men.

Shall the postal service continue as a public or quasi-public function? Shall it remain on huge musclebound monopoly? Can it be run by individual contracts? By interlinked independent units? If inefficient operation leads it into insolvency, shall it be permitted to go bankrupt, so that the deadwood may be cleared, so that the way be opened for improved operations?

Benj Franklin would rescind the increase in postal rates. 13¢ for a letter! The number 13 itself is an affront to the number of original colonies. The present postal administration should be required to hold the present rates. Failing this, to get off their duffs to let others make an honest try. If none can, let the postal service go into bankruptcy. Faced with this, instead of another dollop of subsidy mush, the postal service may find it can perform as Benj Franklin would approve.

— Joseph Zashin

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PROTEST THE INCREASE IN POSTAL RATES. PROTEST TO CONGRESS.