

The line of undistinguished representatives of the British post office in America came to an end in 1753, when Benjamin Franklin was made deputy postmaster general, jointly with William Hunter of Virginia.

Franklin, besides being a man of eminent practical ability, brought to his task a large experience in post office affairs. He had been postmaster of Philadelphia for fifteen years prior to his appointment to the deputyship; and for some time before had acted as post office controller, his duty being to visit and instruct the postmasters throughout the country.

At the time Franklin and Hunter entered upon their office they found little to encourage them. The couriers who conveyed the mails were much slower than most other travellers on the same roads. It took six weeks to make the trip from Philadelphia to Boston and back, and during the three winter months, the trips were made only once a fortnight.

The new deputies so reorganized the service that the trips were made weekly throughout the year, and they shortened the time by one-half; and many other improvements were made.¹ For a time the expenditure of the post office largely outran the revenue. But the usual rewards of additional facilities to the public followed.

In 1757, when the outlay had reached its highest point, and the public response to the increased facilities was still but feeble, the post office was over £900 in debt to the deputy postmasters general. Three years later this debt was entirely cleared off, and the operations showed a surplus of £278. In 1761 the surplus reached the amount of £494, and this sum was transmitted to the general post office in London.

The receipt of this first remittance was the occasion of much satisfaction to the postmasters general. For a generation the post office in America had been nearly forgotten. Since 1721, it had cost the home office nothing for its maintenance, and for long before that time it had yielded nothing to the treasury, and so it had been allowed to plod along unregarded.

A remittance from this source was quite unexpected, and one can imagine the pleasure with which the entry was made in the treasury book, and the words added "this is the first remittance ever made of its kind."² But though the first, it was by no means

¹ "The Ledger-Book of Benjamin Franklin," in the Boston Public Library.

² G.P.O., *Treasury Letter-Book*, 1760-1761, p. 96.