

HISTORY OF THE POST OFFICE IN BRITISH NORTH AMERICA

CHAPTER I

Beginnings of postal service in former American colonies.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN relates that when the news reached America in 1763 that peace had been concluded between England and France, he made preparations to visit Canada, for the purpose of extending to it the postal service of the North American colonies, and that the joy bells were still ringing when he left Philadelphia on his journey northward. Franklin has universal fame as a philosopher and statesman, but is perhaps less widely known as one of the deputies of the postmaster general of England. He had, however, a long and useful connection with the post office a quarter of a century before this time. He was appointed postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737,¹ and for many years combined the duties of this office with that of newspaper publisher. He became deputy postmaster general in 1753.² Canada had been in the hands of the British since 1760, and until a regular system of government was established in 1764, its affairs were administered by a military council, which among other matters provided a rudimentary postal service. The merchants of Quebec were desirous of a regular post office; and, owing to Franklin's promptness, the post office was the first of the institutions of government which was placed on a settled footing after Canada became a British province.

On arriving at Quebec, Franklin opened a post office there with subordinate offices at Three Rivers and Montreal,³ and established a monthly service between the Canadian post offices and New York, arranging the trips so that the courier should make as close connection as possible with the packet boats which sailed monthly each way between New York and Falmouth, England.

The postal system into which Canada was thus incorporated was of vast extent. It stretched from the river St. Lawrence to Florida. New York was its pivotal point, the mail couriers running

¹ Parton, *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, I. 240.

² *Ibid.*, p. 330.

³ G.P.O., *Treasury Letter-Book*, 1760-1771, p. 95.