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Reminiscence of the Pony Express

What a strange history the postage stamp has had in the United States. If a record of all the bloody events, tragedies and delights this little invention has brought about could be condensed and written up, what interesting reading and how many volumes of such matter would be added to the libraries of the world. The great system of mail transportation of the ocean greyhounds, lightning expresses, pony, buckboard and runner mail carriers, can be traced indirectly back to the postage stamp. Not that the postage stamp is the cause of all these events, but it is part and parcel of each, and unquestionably the most adjunct of them all. The postage stamp and the mail are so intimately associated that it would be hard to separate them. Of course the mail system could go without postage stamps; yet something would have to take the place of the latter, and what, after all, would that be but a postage stamp under a new name? There are some readers of this paper who remember the time when this country was in the hands of the hostile Indians. No white people dared to make long journeys or to risk themselves far from the settlements unless unless under strong guard and well armed. Even in those dangerous days the buckboard mail—the true

advance guard of civilization—was in full operation, although surrounded with dangers scarcely dreamed of by people living east of the Mississippi river. It was a time of adventure and danger. A mail carrier, either mounted on a plains cayuse pony, or else driving a light buckboard (the lightest servicable vehicle extant), from the time he left the confines of civilization simply carried his life in his hands. Many a poor fellow has been killed of whom no trace has ever been found, and many a poor bruised, scalped body has been discovered weeks and months after he had met his fate, with the mail sacks cut open and the contents scattered to the winds. A curious post-office system was in vogue during those early days. Far out on the prairie, miles and miles from civilization, you might chance to see on the treeless plain a post with a dark object on top of it. Riding up to the object, it would develop into a prairie post-office. The prairie post-office consists of a single post stuck in the ground, surmounted by a rude wooden box, in which passers-by would drop letters for posting. The element of chance was very great in the possibility of such mail matter ever reaching its destination. The lonesome weather-beaten box contains about a dozen letters; many of them without envelopes and without postage prepaid, the majority of the lot having