



Pneumatic Tube Mail Delivery Systems in the United States

By Douglas Files

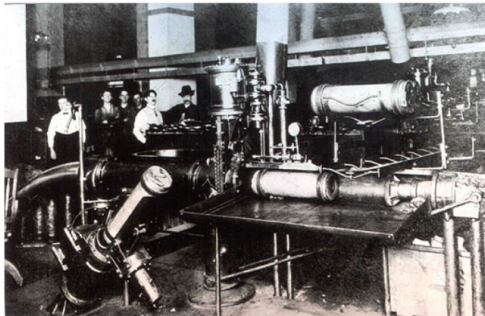
If your collection includes any big city covers from the early 1900s, they may have travelled through an underground pneumatic tube system. These systems were installed in large metropolitan areas such as Chicago, St. Louis and New York City.

Though expensive, the systems were efficient and at one point Postmaster General Charles Emory Smith predicted that mail would be delivered to every home in America by a pneumatic tube. As of 2025, however, the author's mail is still being delivered above ground by a human mail carrier.

In its day the pneumatic tube system was considered innovative. Newspapers lauded the fast service as being similar to "mail shot from guns".

How did these systems begin? Only two years after the end of the Civil War the editor of Scientific American magazine, Alfred Ely Beach, recommend-

ed that a subway be built in New York City. Trains at that time used steam engines but engineers suspected that in an underground environment the steam and smoke would be irritating to passengers. Thus Beach suggested air power as a form of subway locomotion. The New York City



Pneumatic tubes in a post office basement
Image from <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/customers-and-communities-serving-the-cities-city-free-delivery/pneumatic-tube-mail>

council voted against Mr. Beach's idea, however. Instead of a subway system, Beach then applied for a license to construct a small pneumatic tube system in New York. This smaller plan was approved. Once he began building the pneumatic tube, Beach lobbied the state legislature for permission to "enlarge" the system. His plan all along had been to build a pneumatic subway system for passengers. In order to meet the original intent of the city leaders for a small pneumatic system, however, Beach also built a pneumatic tube system to transport mail. This small system was able to transport

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Meetings / Activities

Meetings are held on 1st and 3rd Mondays (adjusted for holidays) at Christ Church 3440 Shroyer Rd Kettering OH 45429

For the Zoom invitation and link, please email daytonstampclub@gmail.com

Member's Socializing and Silent Auctions begin at 7:00 PM - Club Meeting & Programs begin at 7:30 PM Board Meetings begin at 7:00 PM.

March

3/1-2. McKinley Stamp Club Show of Canton, St. George Serbian Social Hall, 4667 Applegate St. NW. Canton
3/3 Member Bourse & Club Open House - Buy, Sell, Trade

3/8 Saturday Ohio Precancel Club Meeting Hosted by Dayton Stamp Club 9am-2pm All members welcome to buy, sell, trade, and talk about precancels

3/10 Board Meeting

3/14-16 Garfield-Perry March Party, Garfield-Perry Stamp Club, Best Western Plus, 15471 Royalton Rd., Strongsville.

3/17 *****SILENT AUCTION 7-7:20PM*****
Team Stamp Quiz Competition

3/29-30 MSDA Columbus Stamp Show, Westgate Park Shelterhouse, 3271 Wicklow Rd. Columbus.

APRIL

4/7 My Biggest Stamp Mess with Photo - Member Participation 4-6 Minutes

4/14 Board Meeting

4/21 **AUCTION #3 - Regular Member Auction**

MAY

5/2-3 Ohio Precancel Club (OPC) SPRING Gathering. McKinley Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie 2370, 5024 Monticello Ave NW, Canton HRS: Fr9am-9p Sat9am-3pm. Bill Latchie 740-260-2891 or Marty Adams.

5/5 Rattlesnake Island Post DSC Member Speaker - Jack Matheney

5/12 Board Meeting

5/19 *****SILENT AUCTION 7-7:20PM*****
Red, White, and Blue item from your

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DSC NEWSLETTER

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mail through 8-inch pipes at up to 60 miles an hour.

It turned out that Beach's pneumatic subway for passengers was not practical and it only transported a small number of people a short distance before being closed. But the pneumatic mail system showed promise. Simultaneously London and Paris were developing similar systems for mail, except they used 2-inch pipes so they could only carry a small amount of mail at a time. The Parisian system was successful but it was used mostly just for special delivery mail. With 269 miles of tubes, it operated continuously until it was phased out in 1887.

The U.S. postmaster general's reports in 1889-1891 mentioned research the post office department had made into pneumatic tube mail systems. In 1892 Congress authorized \$10,000.00 to investigate further. A contract was let to the Pneumatic Transit Company of New Jersey. They agreed to build all tubes, power, receiving and sending stations at no cost to the government, with the hope that the future might bring more lucrative contracts.

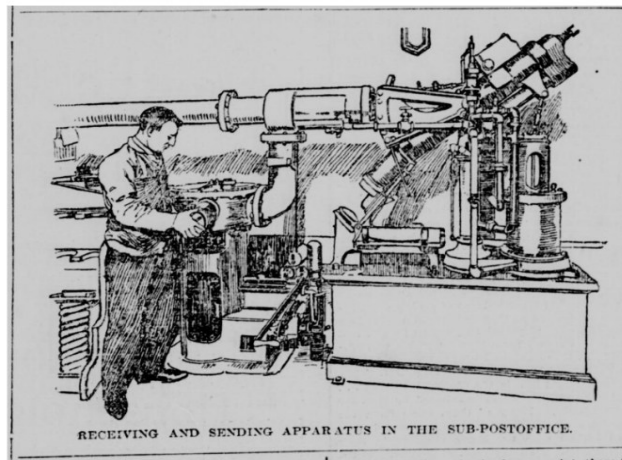
A test system was installed in 1893 in Philadel-

phia, Pennsylvania between the main post office and the East Chester satellite post office (just over a half mile). Trials were successful and the government agreed to lease the system.

Four years later a similar system was installed in New York City, and tube systems eventually operated in Boston, Chicago and St. Louis as well as New York and Philadelphia. The New York system was the largest and we will use it as an example. In the summer of 1898 pneumatic tube mail service began between 23 Manhattan post offices and Brooklyn. In order to move the mail in this way the tubes had to traverse the Brooklyn Bridge and this was considered a great feat of engineering. The New York system was built by the New York Mail and Newspaper Transportation Company and it eventually consisted of 55 miles of tubing. By contrast Boston's system

had 13 miles of tubing, and Chicago and Philadelphia had 20 miles each.

In a pneumatic system mail was placed into a cylinder called a "carrier" at the beginning post office and it was moved by pushing air behind it. Most carriers spun around in greased cast-iron tubes and moved forward at about 30 miles an hour. The tube systems in the U.S. had a diameter of 8 to 8.5 inches and could transport about 5 carriers a minute. About 20,000 pieces of mail



Pneumatic tube machinery at a satellite post office Image by New-York Tribune - New-York tribune., April 11, 1897, p. 25, Public Domain <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29141387>

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moved each day through the system in New York.

The New York system had 95,000 carriers in circulation and each carrier was 24 inches long, 7 inches wide and weighed 21 pounds. About 600 letters fit into one carrier. The system could potentially be operated at up to 100 miles an hour, but this speed tended to damage the pipes and carriers. Maintenance costs were lower when speeds were limited to 30 miles per hour. Also, slower speeds made receiving carriers at the other end much more civilized. That is, this made sure they did not rocket out of the pipe at the receiving post office. Nonetheless the operators of the system were called

"rocketeers" and 136 of them worked at the various New York locations.

All the pneumatic tube systems in the U.S. were leased by the Post Office Department since postal executives preferred not to own any systems. Pneumatic tubes continued

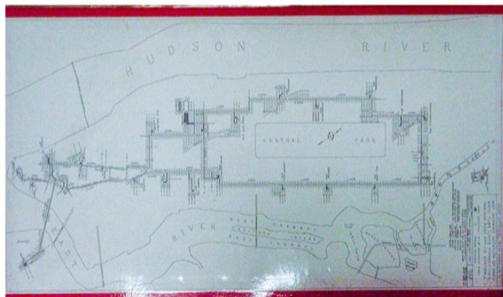
to operate in large cities for many decades. In the 1950s it is estimated that 55% of New York's mail passed through the pneumatic tube system before arriving at its destination. The underground system was considered particularly useful in wintertime when mail could travel without facing obstacles from snow and ice. During the



A pneumatic tube mail canister. Image from the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/customers-and-communities-serving-the-cities-city-free-delivery/pneumatic-tube-mail>

New York blizzard of 1947 the pneumatic tube system was able to move mail throughout the incident.

Since pneumatic systems were expensive, government figures and the press often advocated ceasing to use them. In the 1907 Postmaster General Report postal inspectors recommended ending the service on the basis that the huge expense was not worth the money.



Pneumatic Tube Mail system map of New York City from November 1937 Image from the Na-

Due to the location of the tubes in large cities, however, it was downtown businesses and large commercial enterprises

which benefitted the most from fast, reliable mail delivery. President Wilson vetoed the funding for the pneumatic

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Collection

Member Participation 4-6 minutes

JUNE

6/2 >>Club CASH Auction PREVIEW 7:00-7:25PM<< International Baseball DSC Member Speaker - Joe Shearer
6/9 Board Meeting
6/16 AUCTION #4 - Club CASH Auction

JULY

7/7 German Influence on Airmail to South America DSC Member Speaker - Jeff Fisher
7/14 Board Meeting
7/21 6:30PM Picnic at Church Picnic Shelter

AUGUST

Aug 1&2—Greater Cincinnati Philatelic Society Bourse CINPEX 2025, Friday and Saturday Hrs: noon to 6pm and 10am to 4pm. United Methodist Church in Monfort Heights, 3682 West Fork Rd. Cincinnati 45247.

8/4 My Other Hobby - Member Participation - 4-6 minutes

8/11 Board Meeting AIRPEX Preview
8/18 Panel of DSC Members Discuss What and Why They Collect Foreign Stamps by DSC Member Carol Costa
Aug 22-23 (Fri-Sat) **AIRPEX @ IBEW Hall (F:12-6pm; Sa:10am-4pm)**

SEPTEMBER

9/1 No Meeting Labor Day Holiday - Church Closed
9/8 Board Meeting AIRPEX Review
9/15 AUCTION #5 - Regular Member Auction
9/29* 5th Monday Stamp/Cover That Illustrates an Item on My Bucket List (or would, if I had a one) Member Participation - 4-6 minutes

OCTOBER

10/6 >>Club CASH Auction PREVIEW 7:00-7:25PM<< Mineral & Fossil Stamps DSC Member Speaker - Greg Brown and Pat Westby
10/13 Board Meeting

10/20 AUCTION #6 - Club CASH Auction

NOVEMBER

(Continued on page 5)

March Dayton Stamp Club Meetings

March 3 — Club Meeting **Members Bourse & Club Open House— Buy, Sell, Trade**

March 8 Saturday— Ohio Precancel Club Meeting

9 am —2 pm

March 10 — Board Meeting

March 17 — ***SILENT AUCTION 7-7:20PM*** and Team Stamp Quiz Competition

A Special Offer from the Bermuda Collectors Society

The APS is pleased to announce that the [Bermuda Collectors Society](http://bermudacollectorsociety.com) has extended a generous offer to all current APS members: you can claim a **free Digital Subscription** to the Bermuda Collectors Society for the remainder of 2025 when you **sign up before April 30, 2025**.



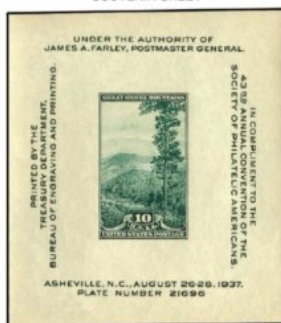
BERMUDA
COLLECTORS SOCIETY

Joining is easy — simply email hello@bermudacollectorsociety.com noting your interest in the offer and including your APS number, and you're all set.

If you collect Bermuda currently or want to get started, then this great little group comprised of just over 100 interested and engaged members from all around the world is for you!

For more information: bermudacollectorsociety.com/

SOCIETY OF PHILATELIC AMERICANS ISSUE
SOUVENIR SHEET



A Devoted Philatelist Who WAS President of the U.S.

One of the best known American stamp collectors of the 20th Century was the 32nd President of the United States. The video tells the story of Roosevelt, the philatelist, who enjoyed his hobby, as well as Roosevelt the President, who had a very direct effect on U.S. philately and stamp production.

To view the video go to

the following website address:
stampaware.weebly.com/



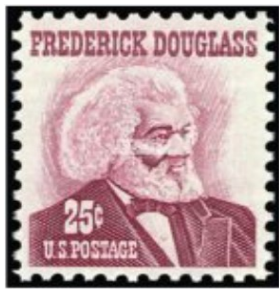
MARCH 8 Saturday

Ohio Precancel Club Meeting

9 am to 2 pm

Hosted by Dayton Stamp Club

All members welcome to buy, sell, trade, and talk about PRECANCELS!



US 25c 1967 Frederick Douglass
Scott # 1290

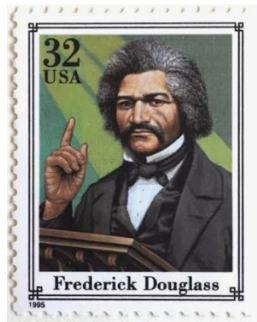
Our Composite Nationality Friday, March 25, 1870

Renowned orator Frederick Douglass spoke to an audience at the Lancaster Courthouse on Friday evening, March 25, 1870. The subject of Mr. Douglass' speech was Our Composite Nationality. Summarizing the speech, The Frederick Douglass Anthology reports, "Arguing in favor of immigration from East Asia and beyond, Douglass claimed that American composite nationality requires acceptance of common humanity and equality. As calls for Chinese exclusion intensified, he put forth a vision for America as a unique exemplar of multiracial, multiethnic nationality."

On March 22, The Lancaster Intelligencer reported "Tickets of admission to the Lecture to be delivered in the Court House, on Friday evening, by this noted colored orator, are selling rapidly. His subject, 'Our Composite Nationality', will doubtless be listened to by a large audience." In an item following up on the lecture the following Wednesday, the *Intelligencer* reported, "One of the finest audiences we have ever seen in Lancaster was the one that greeted Fred. Douglass at his lecture on Friday evening. The large room was well-filled by an attentive and appreciative audience. The lecture was able and interesting, and won for the "American citizen of African descent" the favorable comment of all." — Scott Ney (*Veranda Chronicles*, Philatelic Society of Lancaster County, February 2025, Vol.88, No. 2 page 12.)



US Forever 2024 Frederick
Douglass Scott # 5841



US 32c 1995 Frederick
Douglass. Scott# # 2975h

Meetings / Activities

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11/3 *****SILENT AUCTION 7:00-7:20PM***** Round-Table Discussions on Buying & Selling via APS, eBay, & HipStamp
11/10 Board Meeting Set 2025 calendar & budget review
11/17 Club Election for 2025 & How to Evaluate (or Research) a US Cover DSC Member Speakers - Dennis Callison & Doug File
DECEMBER
12/1 HolidayPEX Party Starts at 6:30 pm
pm at Church Dinner Party at Church
12/8** 2nd Monday **AUCTION #7 - Auction** - Type TBD
12/15** 3rd Monday Board Meeting
Revised: 3/1/2025

DAYTON STAMP CLUB

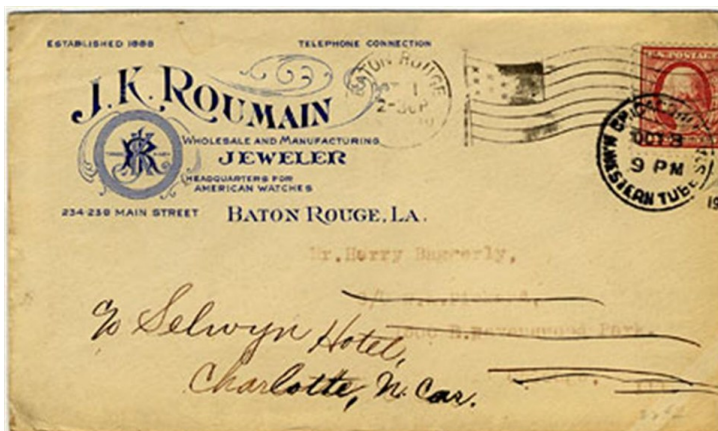
REQUESTS:

- **NEW Members WELCOME**
- **MORE Newsletter ARTICLES**
- **ADDITIONAL Auction ITEMS**

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systems in most cities. New York businesses had a more efficient system and strong lobbyists, however, and New York continued to run its system until the 1950s.

Overall, pneumatic tube systems were an efficient way to move mail in large cities but the costs were high as well. Thus there were frequent concerns about cost-effectiveness. When the systems appeared shiny and new in the 1800s the costs seemed to justify the expense.



But once the novelty of the systems wore off, they seemed more like a drag on post office finances. Additionally, as the 20 th century progressed and more and more mail needed to be moved, the usefulness of pneumatic mail systems suffered. The story of these systems holds interest for stamp collectors

and it is an intriguing part of postal history. Check out the pneumatic tube mail website at <https://pneumatic.tube/>.

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March New Stamps



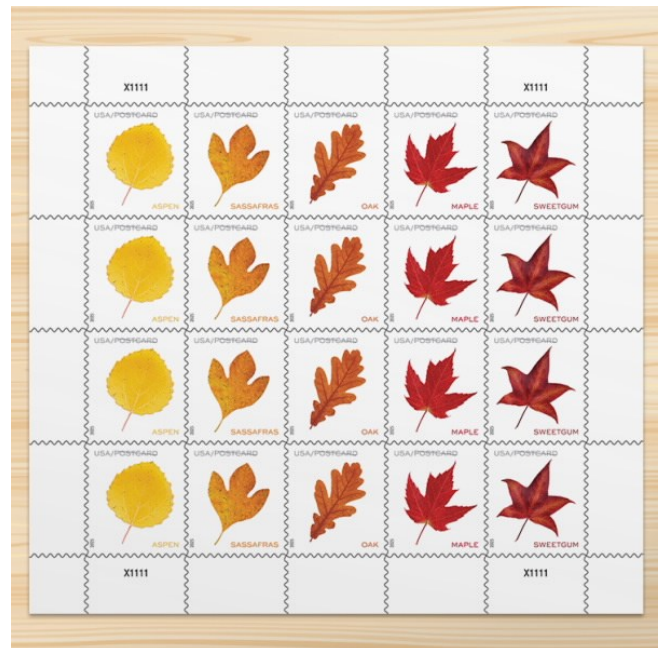
March 13

Freshwater Fishing Lures Stamps
Forever (73c),
Sheet of 20 in 5
designs



March 14

Vibrant Leaves Postcard
Stamps, (56c) Sheet of 20
in 5 Designs



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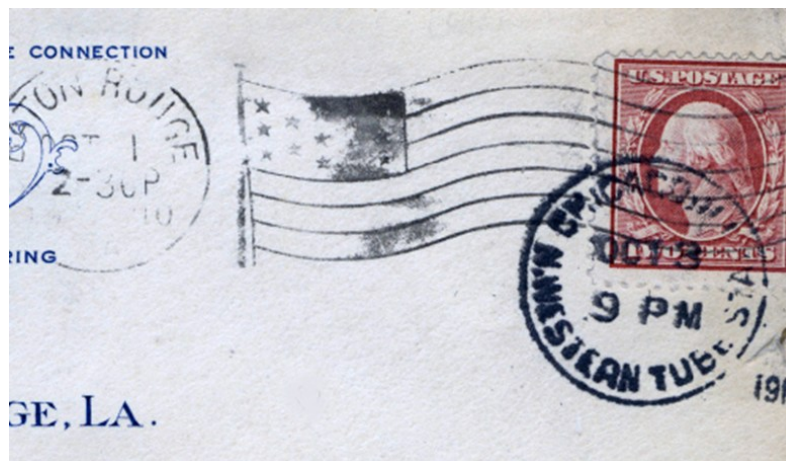
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