

SIX-CENT STAMP BEST BARGAIN IN THE WORLD

"It's still one of the best bargains in the world."

That's what Postmaster Paul Buck said today about the six-cent stamp, and he recounted some interesting facts and figures from postal history to back up his claim.

Even though the five-cent letter rate has suffered the same fate as the nickel cigar, first-class postage is cheaper today than it was in many bygone areas when a few pennies meant much more than they do today, Postmaster Buck said.

In 1816, for instance, a single sheet letter cost six cents for delivery up to 30 miles. More sheets and more miles cost more money. A letter going 400 miles cost 25 cents per sheet.

In those days the recipient had to pay the postage, not the sender. And if the letter was actually delivered to the recipient, rather than picked up at the Post Office, there was an extra charge that was kept by the carrier.

It wasn't until 1855 that the sender was required to pay in advance for mail, Postmaster Buck said.

Uniform rates regardless of distance and free city delivery were written into the postal law books in 1863. When distance was dropped as a factor in computing rates, so was the practice of charging per sheet. The basic unit for letter postage became a half ounce in 1863. The basic unit of one ounce that still prevails today went into effect in 1885.

Turning to more recent history, Postmaster Buck pointed out that the 100 per cent increase — from 3 to 6 cents — in first-class postal rates since 1932 compares very favorably with gen-

eral increases in prices and wages.

General consumer prices have gone up about 200 per cent since 1932 and the average hourly earnings of manufacturing workers have risen by about 550 per cent, Postmaster Buck said.

"Back in 1947 the letter rate was still three cents and everyone agreed that it was a really good deal. Since then family income has gone up about 175 per cent while the cost of mailing a letter has increased 100 per cent. If letter postage was worth three cents in the 1940's, in terms of today's dollar its worth is more than six cents."

Postmaster Buck estimated that the increase in postal charges that went into effect January 7 will add only \$2.25 a year to the \$16 the average household spent on postal services under the old rates.

Despite the great distances many letters must travel in the United States, our postal rates are lower than in most other major countries, particularly when based on ability to pay, Postmaster Buck declared. He said the average American worker earns the price of a six-cent stamp in 1.8 minutes. It takes the average British worker 2.5 minutes to earn letter postage, the West German worker 2.7 minutes and the French worker 5.6 minutes.

Postmaster Buck said the higher postal rates mean that a greater share of the cost of running the Postal Service will be borne by the users of the mails rather than the taxpayer.

"The costs of running the Postal Service must be paid," he explained. "What isn't paid by mail users in postage is paid from general tax revenues. The

approximately \$900 million in additional revenue the new rates will bring in will shift that much of the burden of paying for the Postal Service from the taxpayer to the mail users.

"Certainly it's only fair that the people who use the Postal Service pay the lion's share of its operating costs."

Postmaster Buck delved into history for one more comment on the new postal rates.

"Actually," he said, "with the six-cent stamp we are returning to the postal rate charged when New York was called New Amsterdam and was a Dutch colony. Then the postage rate was 'three stivers of wampum' — the equivalent of about 6 cents."

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