

# *A History of the* Wenham Post Office

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Jack E. Hauck



Wenham's first dedicated Post Office was built in 1943.  
Photo, Salem News

# Post Office

There has been mail delivery in Wenham almost from the beginning of the town, in 1643. Most mail was between the colonists and relatives and friends in England.

To handle colonial mail, a postal service was started in 1639. The General Court of Massachusetts appointed the Richard Fairbanks' tavern, in Boston, as the official repository of mail brought from or sent overseas.<sup>6</sup>

"For preventing the miscarriage of letters; & it is ordered, that notice bee given that Richard Fairbanks, his house in Boston, is the place appointed for all letters which are brought from beyond the seas, or are to be sent thither, are to bee brought into; and hee is to take care that they bee delivered or sent according to their directions; and hee is allowed for every such letter 1 penny."<sup>8</sup>

At first, the mail was brought to the villages from Boston by dispatch riders or by people, including merchants, making the trip. These people also would bring mail to the Fairbanks house.

Up to the early 19th century, envelopes were not used. A letter was simply a folded sheet of paper, with the address placed on the outside of the folded sheet that was sealed with wax.<sup>7</sup> Some people impressed a personal seal into the wax, but most simply used a blob of candle wax.

The sender took his or her letter to the local mail drop to send it. The receiver had to go to their local mail drop. Often a public house (*tavern*) was the mail drop. It had a table, called the post table.

In effect, the tavern keeper was a de facto postmaster. Taverns were convenient places for a mail drop. Travelers regularly stopped at them.

There were no stamps. Those receiving the mail were asked to pay for the delivery. The cost for receiving a letter was based on the number of sheets and distance traveled. It was not unusual for letters to be refused by recipients, because the large amount for delivering it was deemed too much.<sup>7</sup>

The General Court's law for "preventing the miscarriage of letters ..." likely pertained to people reading letters sent to others. Wax seals often were broke during transit.

### **17<sup>th</sup> century**

Wenham's first known mail delivery location was at the 1643 William Fiske public house. It was on the corner of what today are Arbor St. and Main St., and now known as the car-barn lot. It was on the Salem to Ipswich Highway (*today Main St.*).<sup>2</sup>

In 1654, when William Fiske died, his brother, Phineas, sold the tavern to Samuel Foster, who became the postmaster.<sup>11</sup>

In 1674, a second John Fiske lived in Wenham. Commonly known as "John, the Constable," to distinguish him from Rev. John Fiske. He ran the tavern on the corner of Main and Arbor streets.<sup>11</sup> Mail continued to be received and sent from his tavern.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony did not have a postmaster until 1685, when Edward Randolph was appointed, by King James II. However, his authority had little effect on the delivery of mail to and from the small and remote village of Wenham. In 1689, with King James II being deposed, Randolph also was deposed.

### **18<sup>th</sup> century**

In 1708, Wenham town records show that Joseph Dodge was licensed to operate the town's public house.<sup>12</sup> As was the case with his predecessors, Dodge acted as the town's postmaster.

In 1710, the first stage coaches began running through Wenham. They traveled between Boston and Newburyport.<sup>13</sup> As a stagecoach approached the tavern, the driver would blow a horn, letting people know that the coach was arriving.

In 1711, Queen Anne established General Post Offices in the colonies, and appointed John Hamilton, son of Andrew, to manage the postal service. He served until 1721, and was followed by other appointees of the British government.<sup>6</sup>

In 1753, Benjamin Franklin, who was the Joint Postmaster General of the colonies for the Crown Post (*the colonial mail system*) in 1753, established the first postal rate chart. It was based on distance and weight. Also, under Franklin, better, more direct routes were set up between the colonies and milestones were placed on the main roads.<sup>6</sup> Wenham still has three of these milestones.

In the 1770s, as tensions grew between the colonies and Britain, William Goddard established an independent American post office.<sup>6</sup> This was brought about by the Crown Post delaying or destroying newspapers and opening private mail to thwart communications among the colonies.

In 1775, Benjamin Franklin was appointed chairman of a Committee of Investigation to establish a postal system. The report of the Committee, providing for the appointment of a postmaster general for the 13 American colonies, was considered by the Continental Congress on July 25 and 26. On Jul. 26, 1775, Franklin was appointed Postmaster General, the first appointed under the Continental Congress.<sup>6</sup>

The Congressional Post operated until 1782, when the Articles of Confederation were passed.<sup>6</sup>

Article IX of the Articles of Confederation gave Congress "The sole and exclusive right and power . . . establishing and regulating post offices from one State to another . . . and exacting such postage on papers passing through the same as may be requisite to defray the expenses of the said office . . . ." <sup>6</sup>

Following the adoption of the Constitution in May 1789, the Act of Sep. 22, 1789, temporarily established a post office and created the Office of the Postmaster General. On September 26, 1789, George Washington appointed Samuel Osgood of Massachusetts as the first Postmaster General, under the Constitution. Ironically, a picture of Osgood has never appeared on a stamp.

At that time there were 75 post offices and about 2,000 miles of post roads, although as late as 1780 the postal staff consisted only of a Postmaster General, a Secretary/Comptroller, three surveyors, one Inspector of Dead Letters, and 26 post riders.<sup>6</sup>

In 1792, Congress established the U.S. Post Office Dept., giving congress primary control of postal policies and routes. The law forbade the opening of letters by anyone other than the recipient.

Citizens of a community who desired a new post office generally submitted a request to the Post Office Dept., giving reasons why the town should have a post office, how many people would be served, and a name for the town's post office. Other considerations were: how close existing post offices were, relative costs, including the expected expense for transporting mail to the new office.<sup>6</sup>

Wenham did not have, as yet, an official post office.

From 1792 to 1798, Col. Paul Porter ran the Wenham tavern,<sup>1</sup> and unofficially served as the town's Postmaster. In the War of 1812, Col. Porter commanded what was then known as the Ipswich regiment of militia.

Prior to 1845, hand-made envelopes were all that were available for use, both commercial and domestic. In 1845, Edwin Hill and Warren de la Rue were granted a British patent for the first envelope-making machine.

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century

On Apr. 21, 1809, Wenham had its first official Postmaster: Thomas Barnes, who was a shoemaker. The post office often was kept as a sideline to the Postmaster's primary occupation. Barnes was nominated by the Wenham selectmen and appointed by the Postmaster General, Gideon Granger. The post office was at the tavern, on the corner of Main and Arbor streets. Barnes was the Postmaster until Jul. 5, 1812.<sup>18</sup>

The Postmaster had to keep the post office open during normal business hours. If mail was delivered on a Sunday, the Postmaster had to wait until it church services ended before opening the office for an hour. This practice kept church members from leaving the service to rush to the post office when they heard the mail wagon driver blowing a horn as the wagon came into town. The Postmaster General refused to stop mail coaches from running on Sundays, stating this would delay the mail too much.<sup>16</sup>

The second Postmaster was Uzziel Dodge, a blacksmith, who lived at what is now known as the Claflin-Richards house. Dodge was nominated by Barnes and the selectmen. Dodge did not own the tavern, but used it for the delivery and sending of mail. Dodge was the Postmaster from Jul. 6, 1812 to Mar. 19, 1818.<sup>18</sup>

Squire John Thorne Dodge, son of Capt. Richard Dodge, acquired the tavern and served as Wenham's 2nd Postmaster, from Mar. 20, 1818 to Aug. 18, 1830.<sup>18</sup>

In 1825, during Dodge's term as Wenham's Postmaster, the Post Office Dept. established a Dead Letter Office. When a recipient did not pay for the delivery of a letter, the "dead letters" were returned to the sender's post office.<sup>35</sup>

The next Wenham Postmaster, the 3rd, was Ezra Lummus. Like his predecessors, he owned a tavern, the Lummus' Tavern, on the corner of Main Street and Larch Row (*today 180 Main St.*). Lummus was the Postmaster from Aug. 19, 1830 to Mar. 23, 1837. The taproom served as the post office, until the property was sold. Never again would Wenham's post office be in a tavern.<sup>18</sup>

This was assured when, in 1842, the townspeople voted on "the propriety and expediency of allowing the sale in intoxicating liquors, within limits of the town." There were only three yeas, and 54 nays.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in 1836, the Postmaster was required to live in the delivery area of his post office. Since 1971, postmasters have been selected through the merit system. <sup>16</sup>

On Mar. 24, 1837, Adoniram J. Dodge became Wenham's 4<sup>th</sup> Postmaster, a position he would hold until Jun. 24, 1846. <sup>18</sup> Dodge was a blacksmith and his wheelwright shop, today 172 Main St., became the post office. <sup>18</sup> The wheelwright shop next became the Wenham District Library.

The 3 Dodges, Uzziel, John Thorne and Adoniram were Wenham's Postmasters for a total of 27 years.

In 1842, a private mail carrier service in New York City, the City Despatch Post, did away with the pay-on-receipt mail system. The company introduced the first adhesive postage stamp ever produced in the western hemisphere. People using the company had to use its stamps. The 3¢ stamp had a rather rough drawing of George Washington and was printed on sheets of 42 images. <sup>17</sup>

Independent mail carriers were not uncommon. Each had its own postal rates.

Congress, on Mar. 3, 1845 (*effective Jul. 1, 1845*), established uniform postal rates throughout the nation: 5¢ for a letter weighing less than an ounce and traveling less than 300 miles, the 10¢ for delivery to a location more than 300 miles, or a letter weighing more than an ounce. <sup>20</sup>

John Augustus Putnam became the next Wenham Postmaster, the 5<sup>th</sup>, on Jun. 25, 1846. The post office was at his store on a dead-end street on the Tilton property. Today, this is Monument Street. Putnam's store was about where the Wenham Tea House now stands. The store was built in 1845. John Putnam was the Wenham Postmaster until Aug. 2, 1854. <sup>18</sup>

It did not take long for the U. S. Post Office to see the potential of the stamp introduced by City Despatch. The first stamp issued by the U.S. Post Office was offered for sale on Jul. 1, 1847, in New York City, with Boston receiving stamps the following day and other cities thereafter.

There were two stamps: a 5¢, reddish-brown stamp depicting Benjamin Franklin; and a 10¢ stamp, in black, with a drawing of George Washington. Both were printed on adhesive backed sheets (*called covers*). As with all U.S. stamps until 1857, they were imperforate, and had to be cut from a sheet. <sup>14</sup>



First U. S. stamp, Jul. 1, 1847, had image of Benjamin Franklin, the first Postmaster General.

There was not a 2¢ stamp, which was the rate for letters that were dropped off (*mailed from*) and picked up at the same Post Office.<sup>14</sup>

The law made illegal the use of postage stamps not authorized by the Postmaster General, thus ending the sale of stamps by private carriers.

Senders still could request that recipients pay for or refuse the delivery of a letter.

By 1851, the U.S. Postal Service had become so profitable that Congress was able to reduce the common rate to 3¢ (*which remained unchanged for over 30 years*). This rate, however, only applied to prepaid mail: a letter sent without a stamp still cost the recipient 5¢.<sup>16</sup>

Benjamin Clayton Putnam, on Aug. 3, 1854, succeeded his cousin John Augustus Putnam as Wenham's 6<sup>th</sup> Postmaster. The post office remained at the Putnam store. Benjamin Putnam remained the Wenham Postmaster until Apr. 24, 1862.<sup>18</sup> In 1853, Putnam was Wenham's representative in the state legislature.

In 1855, the U. S. Postal Service made prepayment of postage compulsory, but a stamp was not necessary.<sup>36</sup>

Following Benjamin Putnam, Wenham's 7<sup>th</sup> Postmaster, on Apr. 25, 1862, was Nathaniel S. Gould. He became Benjamin Putnam's partner in 1860. Putnam sold the business to Gould, in 1862. The post office was at Gould's store, the former Putnam store.<sup>18</sup>

The Civil War greatly increased the amount of mail, in the North. During the war, about 1.75 billion 3¢-stamps were printed.<sup>29</sup> With Camp Lander being in Wenham, the amount of mail coming to and being sent from the town was quite high.

A Cleveland postal employee, Joseph W. Briggs, began the first home mail delivery, in 1863. Reportedly, Briggs came up with the idea during the previous winter, when he saw women waiting in the cold for letters from Civil War soldiers. He and other postal employees delivered mail to homes. That same year, home delivery spread to 49 northern offices.<sup>19</sup>

Briggs, at the request of the federal government, went to Washington and helped create a national home mail delivery system. At first, only cities with a minimum population of 20,000 had home delivery service. In 1887, the threshold dropped to cities with a population of at least 10,000 or with postal revenues of at least \$10,000.<sup>19</sup> Wenham with a population of about 1,000 was well below the threshold for having home delivery of mail.

In 1864, post offices were divided into 4 classes. The designation was set by the office's receipts and mail volume.<sup>39</sup> Wenham's post office was 4<sup>th</sup> class.

The next Wenham Postmaster, the 8<sup>th</sup>, on Jun. 26, 1866, was Elisha P. Chapman. He and William W, Fowler bought the Gould store and, thus, the post office remained at the former Putnam store.<sup>18</sup>

On Jan. 16, 1867, having bought out Chapman, William Fowler became Wenham's 9th Postmaster. He held this position until Sep. 18, 1870.<sup>18</sup>

The Wenham post office remained at the old Putnam store, until May 23, 1870. On that day, fire destroyed the building, as well as other buildings on the site, including a small barn and connecting shed, a small house, a large barn and other out buildings.<sup>21</sup> The post office was there for 24 years.

The post office was moved to the Henry Hobbs harness shop, on the path behind the recently erected Civil War monument.



Hobbs harness shop was post office in 1870. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

On Sep. 19, 1870, Henry Hobbs became the 10<sup>th</sup> Wenham Postmaster. The post office, for the next 6 months, was in his harness shop.<sup>18</sup> In March 1871, Hobbs moved the post office to the Union Block building, on the corner of Main Street and Friend Court. It was more convenient for people to post and obtain mail. Hobbs was the Postmaster until Sep. 25, 1878.

John W. Curtis, who was the Assistant Postmaster to Henry Hobbs, became the 11<sup>th</sup> Postmaster on Sep. 25, 1878. He was the Postmaster until Nov. 4, 1880, at the Union Block building.<sup>18</sup>

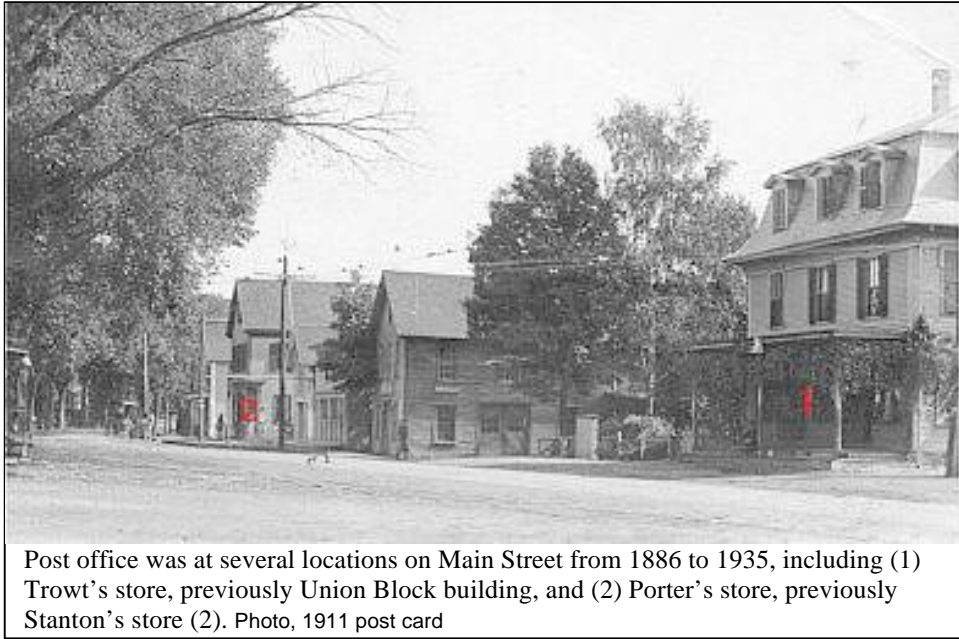
In 1873, the U. S. Post Office introduced the first pre-stamped "penny postcards." Again, it is not known when the Wenham post began handling post cards, but it likely was soon after 1873.

The U. S. Post Office allowed no one else to print postcards, until May 19, 1898. Congress passed the Private Mailing Card Act that allowed private companies to print postcards; however, they could not call them "postcards." They had pictures on one side and were known as "souvenir cards," and had to be labeled "Private Mailing Cards." The Private Mailing Card Act was rescinded on Dec. 24, 1901: private companies could use the word "postcard," but users only could write on the front of the postcard. On Mar. 1, 1907 the Post Office allowed people to write on the address side of a postcard.<sup>37</sup>

In 1880, the Union Block, which had become vacant except for the post office, was sold. Andrew D. and William F. Trowt bought the property and opened a grocery store.<sup>1</sup>

Andrew Trowt, a veteran of the Civil War, became Wenham's 12<sup>th</sup> Postmaster, on Nov. 5, 1880. The post office was at the store he and his brother owned, the former Union Block building. Andrew Trowt was the Postmaster until Dec. 22, 1885.<sup>18</sup>





On Dec. 23, 1885, Wenham had its first woman Postmaster, Katie Kavanagh.<sup>18</sup> Postmistress" is not used because the "master" component of "Postmaster" refers to a person of authority and not gender.

The post office, for one month, was at the Benjamin C. Putnam house on Arbor Street. He had been the Postmaster in 1854.<sup>18</sup>

In February 1886, the post office was transferred to the Brown brother's store on Main St. (*now 149 Main St.*)<sup>18</sup> After Katie died in later 1885, Ed Kavanagh, became Acting Postmaster.

Later that year, on Nov. 26, 1886, Fred Stanton was named the 15th Postmaster. Once again, the post office was at the Trowt store. Stanton, who worked at the store, was the Postmaster until Apr. 6, 1897.<sup>5</sup>

By the late 1800s, stamp collecting had become a major hobby. Philatelists were always eager to purchase newly issued stamps. This did not go unnoticed by the U. S. Post Office.

In 1893 the post office issued the first commemorative stamps. The stamps were issued to commemorate the World Columbian Exposition held in Chicago, from May 1 to October 30, 1893. The stamps celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World. The series consisted of 15 stamps with face values ranging from 1¢ to \$5.<sup>38</sup>

The printing of commemorative postage stamps was not warmly received by philatelists. They complained about the high cost of stamps. A Society for the Suppression of Speculative Stamps was formed in 1895. The organization soon faded away. Today, The early commemoratives are highly prized by collectors.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to an end, only cities and large towns had home delivery of mail.

However, in 1896, free delivery came to farmers and other rural residents. It all began with an experiment, in West Virginia, to investigate rural home mail delivery. Because of its success, other rural areas began to receive the RFD service as well, and by 1897 U.S. postal employees covered 1,843 miles of rural routes.<sup>22</sup>

In 1898, the U. S. Post Office announced that any group of farmers could have RFD by sending a petition, along with a description of their community and roads, to their congressman.<sup>30</sup>

In 1900, Salem began a RFD route that traversed the town, as well as the western part of Wenham, and ended in East Danvers at the Beverly line. There was one trip a day and the route was 24 miles. Francis W. Fisher, a Civil War veteran, was the first carrier, but the work was too much for him. Daniel W. Lovejoy, another veteran of Civil War, replaced Fisher.<sup>24</sup>

He began with handling 2,500 pieces a month. In RFD, the resident placed a regulation box for the carrier, using a horse and wagon, to deliver the mail. The carrier was not obliged to leave his wagon unless he had a special delivery or register letter to deliver. He had stamps, and stamped paper and could give money orders and register receipts.<sup>24</sup>

## 20<sup>th</sup> century

Andrew D. Trowt again was the Wenham Postmaster, starting Apr. 7, 1897, a position he would hold until Aug. 14, 1912. The post office was at the Trowt store.<sup>3</sup>

William (*Billy*) P. Porter was appointed Wenham's 17<sup>th</sup> Postmaster on Sep. 10, 1912. The 4<sup>th</sup>-class post office was at his store, which formerly was owned by Fred Stanton (*today 152 Main St.*). Billy Porter had a small grocery store, on one side of the building, and the post office on the other.<sup>3</sup>

As a 4th-class post office, the Post Office Dept only supplied Porter with an 8-oz. balance scale, plain facing slips for identifying the destinations of bundles of mail, canceling ink, a stamp pad, and a marking device. Porter had to supply twine and wrapping paper and also a partition with a window.<sup>39</sup>

From Aug. 15, 1912 until Dec. 11, 1928, Carrie Underhill was the Acting Postmaster, at Billy Porter's store.<sup>3</sup>

World War 1 again brought a lot of activity to the Wenham post office: 79 men from the town served their country during this War-to-End-All-Wars.

In 1917, the domestic postage rate rose to 3¢, probably due to World War 1. It dropped back to 2¢ in 1919 -- the last time it would be reduced.<sup>40</sup>



In 1943, a new post office building was built next to the fire house on Main St. Photo Beverly Times

In 1916, after a study showed letter carriers were losing nearly two hours daily waiting for patrons to come to the door to get their mail, the Post Office Dept. mandated that all households have a mailbox or letter slot in order to receive mail.<sup>39</sup> Businesses sold mailboxes of all shapes, sizes, colors and functionality. The Post Office Department quickly issued a list of standards for residential mailboxes.

Wenham, however, still did not have a large enough population to qualify for home delivery.

On Dec. 12, 1928, Ethel V. Cook became the 18<sup>th</sup> Wenham Postmaster. The post office remained at Billy Porter's store. Cook was the Postmaster until Jul. 21, 1935.<sup>3</sup> She served during the country's great depression.

Frank J. Lucey replaced Cook as Postmaster, on Jul. 22, 1935. Two years later, on May 1, 1937, Billy Porter's store and the post office burned, destroying much of the mail; however the morning mail, from the South Hamilton Post Office, had not arrived.<sup>3</sup>

A temporary post office was set up next door, in the legion hall and former fire engine house.

In 1935, Frank J. Lucey became Wenham's Postmaster, the 19<sup>th</sup>.

In 1938, the Wenham post office participated in celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of air mail service. The U.S. Post Office Air Mail began, on May 15, 1918. It is not known when the Wenham post office began offering air mail service.

From Pearl Harbor Day, Dec. 7, 1941, the volume of mail increased by thousands. In addition to handling mail to and from those in the military, the Wenham post office managed the large number of correspondence for the town's war bond sales. Beginning early in April 1942, Wenham's bond sales were in the highest ratings of per capita sales in the State.<sup>41</sup>

Another factor contributing to the post office being very active was the mailing of a newsletter to those in the military and their letters to the newsletter staff. The 4-page newsletter, "Wanderings," with home town news went out every other month until the end of the war. The mailing list went to well over 200.<sup>41</sup>

In 1943, the post office moved from the legion building to a new post office building, built next door. Postmaster Frank J. Lucey owned the building and leased it to the Post Office Dept.<sup>28</sup>

The Wenham post office always has been rented. Despite the American flags flying outside all U. S. post offices, the Postal Service rents most of its locations. In 2012, there were 32,741 post offices in the United States, of which nearly 90% are rented.<sup>46</sup>

The post office was a place where all mail was sent and picked up. As mail volume increased, the post office added boxes in which incoming mail was placed. People would sort through the box to see if they had a letter. Next, the post office began offering individual open compartments, called call boxes. Next, there were compartments with locked doors, for which individuals had a key. This service remains today.

In 1950, during Lucey's term of being the Postmaster, the post office reduced mail delivery from twice to once a day

Lucey was Wenham's Postmaster until Oct. 30, 1955. His 20 years were the longest any Postmaster served Wenham.

Robert Caves became Wenham's Acting Postmaster. On Mar. 14, 1957, Caves became the 20th Postmaster, a position he held until Nov. 25, 1971. A WW2 veteran, Caves lived on Cherry St. After the war, he worked for the town helping to install the water system.<sup>9</sup>

That same year, 1957, the town considered building a combination library and post office on the old car-barn lot. The building envisioned was a colonial type structure that would harmonize with the surrounding buildings. The front of the building, facing Main Street, was to be the library. The post office portion, behind the library, was to face onto a parking area. The total cost for the library and post office building was to be about \$103,000.<sup>18</sup>

The plan was not approved by the town.

Two years later, Anthony Patti wanted to build a post office building on his property, on the corner of Main Street and Patti Lane. The U. S. Post Office Dept. would lease the building for ten years. The location was in residential zone, even though the Chopstick Restaurant would be next door.<sup>27</sup>



Post office has boxes for people preferring no to have their mail delivered to their home or business.  
Photo J. Hauck, 2012

Wenham selectmen, planning board and finance and advisory board opposed building the Patti post office on basis that it would adversely affect the "historical integrity" of the area.<sup>26</sup> The Patti petition was denied.

Another petition, by William J. Laws, called for building the post office on the corner of Main St. and Friend Ct.<sup>26</sup>

Both plans called for a single story structure with a flat roof and constructed of cinder block faced with red bricks.

The selectmen also objected to Laws' proposal.

They planned to seize the Laws' property by eminent domain and build a structure that would house the fire department, the police department, a library and the post office. Their efforts were thwarted.<sup>26</sup>

On Jan. 17, 1961, during Caves' time as Postmaster, today's post office building, at 146 Main St., opened. It was built by William Laws. He leased the building to the U. S. Post Office.<sup>15</sup>

It's called the Wenham post office; however, many people living in North Beverly use it. It is more convenient than the Beverly post office.

During the time Caves was Wenham's Postmaster, on Jul. 1, 1963, the U. S. Post Office introduced 5-digit postal ZIP codes. ZIP is an acronym for Zone Improvement Program.

The first digit designates a broad geographical area of the United States, ranging from zero for the Northeast to nine for the far West. The next 2 digits pinpoint population concentrations and those sectional centers accessible to common transportation networks. The final 2 digits designate small post offices or postal zones in larger zoned cities.<sup>23</sup>

Wenham's ZIP code became 01984.

Use of the new code was not mandatory at first for anyone, but, in 1967, the Post Office required mailers of second- and third-class bulk mail to pre-sort by ZIP Code.<sup>23</sup>

In 1983, in order to reduce the number of times a piece of mail was handled, the U. S. Post Office began testing a ZIP+4 code program. Barcode sorters now put mail in sequence for delivery.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1970, for the first time, U.S. postal workers went on strike. It lasted 2-weeks. Pres. Richard Nixon called out the armed forces and the National Guard to distribute the mail. The strike closed down the mail system, stopping the delivery of pension and welfare checks, tax refunds, and census forms.<sup>42</sup>

A result of the strike was the 1970 Postal Reorganization Act. The Act abolished the U. S. Post-Office Dept, and created the U. S. Postal Service, an independent agency, with an official monopoly on mail delivery. The act gave workers collective bargaining rights, but not the right to strike.<sup>42</sup>

On Nov. 26, 1971, Charles J. Valcour, Jr., became the Officer in Charge of the Wenham post office, the first OIC at the Wenham post office. A temporary assignment, the OIC acts as the postmaster. Six months later, on May 27, 1972, Valcour became Wenham's 21st Postmaster.<sup>44</sup>

Previously, Valcour worked at South Postal Annex in Boston and Lynnfield. A WW2 veteran, he lived in Woburn, until he was appointed as Wenham's Postmaster. He moved to Bruce Lane.<sup>9</sup>

Prior to 1971, it was required that postmasters live in the delivery area of their post office. Since then, postmasters have been selected through the merit system.

Valcour retired on Aug. 29, 1985, after 26 years of postal service.

1972 was a significant year for the Wenham post office.

That year, the post office was upgraded from a 3<sup>rd</sup>- to a 1<sup>st</sup>-class post office. With this change, home delivery of mail began for the entire town, including West Wenham, thus ending RFD delivery.<sup>9</sup>

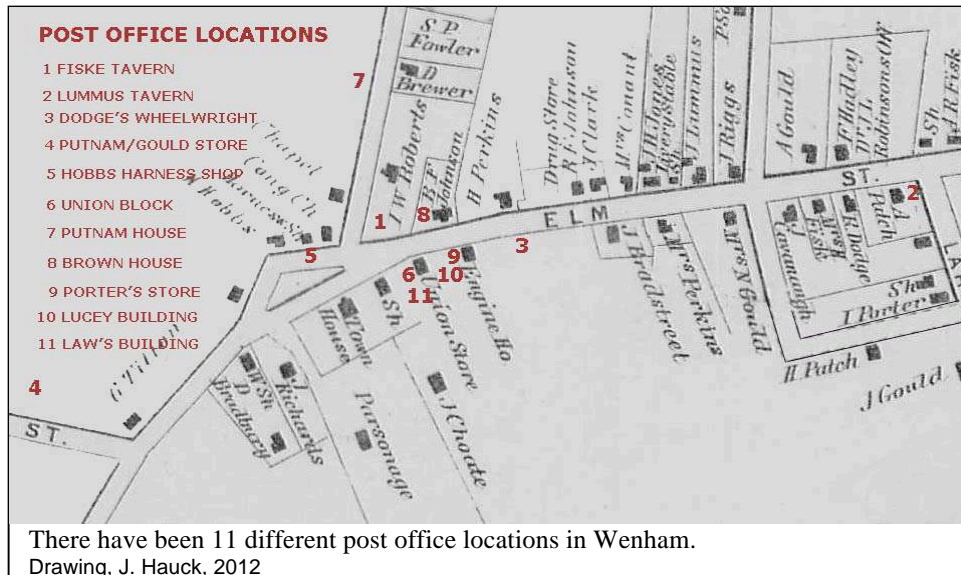
Postmen did not walk their routes, but drove a truck. All houses were required to have a regulation mail box alongside the street.

The mail truck was a Jeep Dispatcher. The Jeep Dispatcher, or DJ, was a two-wheel-drive variant of the CJ series. It was produced from 1955 to 1984.

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Current post office, built in 1960, is located at about the same site on Main Street as the previous post office built in 1943. Photo J. Hauck 2011.



In 1972, post offices began offering passport service.<sup>6</sup> Just before Don Luxton retired as Wenham's Postmaster, 1999, the Wenham post office began offering passports.<sup>9</sup>

Early in 1985, the U.S. Post Office Service considered closing the Wenham and Hamilton offices and consolidating both at the South Hamilton office. The post office was not closed, but its mail handling reduced, as was the number of employees.<sup>43</sup>

On Jan. 1, 1986, Donald F. Luxton was appointed the 22nd Postmaster in Wenham, by the Middlesex-Essex Sectional Center of the U. S. Postal Service. He had been working at the office for the previous 11 years. During the 9 months prior to his appointment, there had been 3 acting postmasters, the last of whom was Stephanie Gagnon.<sup>9</sup>



When Don Luxton became Postmaster, the office had 7 employees and the postmaster. When he left in 2000, the Wenham post office was down to 3 employees.<sup>10</sup>

After Luxton retired, Susan S. Nichols became the officer-in-charge at the post office, a position she held for about 3 mos. Nichols came from Boxford. After leaving Wenham, she became the Postmaster in Byfield, MA.

## 21st century

The first Wenham Postmaster, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was Mary Ring: she took over on Nov. 11, 2000. Before becoming postmaster, Ring worked as a clerk for 8 yrs. She previously worked as a postal carrier in Merrimac and Topsfield. <sup>47</sup>

Mary knew her customers by name and made "Customer Appreciation Day" a tribute to everyone that came to the post office.



Customer service center at Wenham Post Office.  
Photo J. Hauck 2012

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wenham post office, in 2009, went unnoticed.

During Ring's tenure as Wenham's 23<sup>rd</sup> Postmaster, the building and property were sold. In 2004, Mulberry Chapman Realty, Beverly, purchased the property and post office building, from FP Associates. In 2012, the building and property were acquired by Steve Archer, who owns Keller Williams Realty Co. <sup>45</sup>

The year before the new owner, on Mar. 28, 2011, Mary Ring retired from the Wenham post office.

Next, the Wenham post office once again had an officer-in-charge: Carleen A. Robidoux. She came from the Rockport post office, and became the OIC on Mar. 29, 2011. <sup>34</sup>

On Jul. 30, 2011, John E. Martin became Wenham's next Postmaster. However, he stayed for only about 2 weeks and then went on a detail in Boston in Labor Relations for the USPS. <sup>34</sup>

## The Future

Change has been constant at the Wenham post office.

The Wenham post office has been at 11 different locations. It has been at taverns, a dry-goods store, a harness shop, a general store, and a former fire station.

On place it has never been is a drive-through. A few towns and cities have drive-through post offices. There's one in Brewer, ME.

It is not likely that the Wenham post office will move from its current site.

But, how long will Wenham have a post office?



According to the Annual Reports of the Post Master General, post office mail volume, from 1950 to 2000 steadily increased, reaching 103.5 billion pieces, at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since then, mail volume has plummeted, sinking to 78.5 billion pieces in 2010.<sup>33</sup>

The future of the post office service, in small towns such as Wenham, is unsure. The postal service is examining what its customers need and how best to effectively and economically provide these service.

The latest news from the Post Office Service is that Saturday delivery of mail will end in August 2013.

Already, other venues provide postal services.

Stamps and mail supplies are available at grocery stores, drug stores, office supply stores, self-service kiosks at malls, and ATMs.

Recently, the postal service asked lawmakers for permission to cut Saturday mail delivery.

One thing that hasn't been cut is the cost of stamps.

In 2013, postage for a 1<sup>st</sup>-class 1-oz. letter is 46¢; it was 45¢. Each additional ounce costs an extra 20¢.

That 1¢ increase amounts to a 2.2% increase.

Our government limits the Postal Service to hike the price of stamps enough to keep up with inflation. The Postal Service is not going to keep going by selling 1<sup>st</sup> class stamps.

Based on inflation, the 1847 Ben Franklin 5¢ stamp today would cost \$1.47.

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## Wenham Post Offices

Years	Location	Comments
1643-1830	Fiske Public House Corner Main St. & Arbor St.	Several subsequent owners.
1830-1835	Lummus' Tavern Corner Main St. & Larch Row	Tavern closed.
1837-1846	Dodge's Wheelwright Today, 172 Main St.	The shop next was the town library.
1846-1870	Putnam/Gould/Chapman/Fowler Store, Today, 4 Monument St.	Destroyed by fire.
1870	Hobbs' Harness Shop Today, 137 Main St.	For only 6 mos.
1870-1880	Union Block Building Today, 144 Main St.	Became Trowt's store in 1880.
1880-1885	Trowt Store Today, 144 Main St.	first police station was here
1885	Benjamin Putnam House Today, 4 Arbor St.	For only 1 mo.
1885	Proctor K. Brown House 149 Main St.	For 9 mos.
1886-1912	Trowt Store Today, 144 Main St.	Taken down in 1955.
1912-1937	Billy Porter Store Today, 152 Main St.	Former Stanton store. Destroyed by fire.
1937-	Enon Building Today, 150 Main St.	Now part of the Wenham Museum building.
1943-1961	Lucey Building Today, 150 Main St.	Built in 1943.
1961	William J. Laws Building 146 Main St.	Built in 1961. Several subsequent owners.

## Wenham Post Office Officers

	Name	Title	Appointed	Office Location
1	Thomas Barnes	Postmaster	10/01/1809	Tavern at Main & Arbor
2	Uzziel Dodge	Postmaster	07/06/1812	Tavern at Main & Arbor
3	John T. Dodge	Postmaster	03/20/1818	Tavern at Main & Arbor
4	Ezra Lummus	Postmaster	08/19/1830	Tavern at Main & Larch
5	Adoniram J. Dodge	Postmaster	03/24/1837	Blacksmith shop, 172 Main
6	John A. Putnam	Postmaster	06/25/1846	Putnam's store, 4 Monument St.
7	Benjamin C. Putnam	Postmaster	08/03/1854	Putnam's store, 4 Monument St.
8	Nathaniel S. Gould	Postmaster	04/25/1862	Gould's store, 4 Monument St.
9	Elisha P. Chapman	Postmaster	06/26/1866	Chapman's store, 4 Monument St.
10	William W. Fowler	Postmaster	01/16/1867	Fowler's store, 4 Monument St.
11	Henry Hobbs	Postmaster	09/19/1870	Hobbs Harness Shop, (Now 137 Main St.)
12	John W. Curtis	Postmaster	09/25/1878	Union Block Bldg., (Now 146 Main St.)
13	Andrew D. Trowt	Postmaster	11/05/1880	Trowt's store, (Now 144 Main St.)
14	Katie M. Kavanagh	Postmaster	12/23/1885	Trowt's store, (Now 144 Main St.)
15	Fred P. Stanton	Postmaster	11/26/1886	Trowt's store, (Now 144 Main St.)
16	Andrew D. Trowt	Postmaster	04/07/1897	Trowt's store, (Now 144 Main St.)
17	William P. Porter	Postmaster	08/15/1912	Porter's store, (Now 152 Main St.)
	Carrie C. Underhill	Acting Postmaster	07/26/1928	Porter's store, (Now 152 Main St.)
18	Miss Ethel V. Cook	Postmaster	12/12/1928	Porter's store, (Now 152 Main St.)
19	Frank J. Lucey	Postmaster	07/22/1935	Porter's store, (Now 152 Main St.)
	Robert S. Caves	Acting Postmaster	10/31/1955	152 Main St.
20	Robert S. Caves	Postmaster	03/14/1957	152 Main St.
	Charles J. Valcour Jr.	Officer- In-Charge	11/26/1971	146 Main St.
21	Charles J. Valcour Jr.	Postmaster	05/27/1972	146 Main St.
	Stephanie Gagnon	Officer- In-Charge	08/30/1985	146 Main St.
	Robert C. Spinney	Officer- In-Charge	12/27/1985	146 Main St.
22	Donald F. Luxton	Postmaster	01/18/1986	146 Main St.
	Susan S. Nichols	Officer- In-Charge	05/25/2000	146 Main St.
	Mary D. Ring	Officer- In-Charge	09/08/2000	146 Main St.
23	Mary D. Ring	Postmaster	11/18/2000	146 Main St.
	Carleen A. Robidoux	Officer- In-Charge	03/29/2011	146 Main St.
24	John E. Martin	Postmaster	07/30/2011	146 Main St.