

Excerpt from the Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States, 1891

RURAL FREE DELIVERY.

Three of Many Letters Urging Rural Free Delivery.

We suffer very great inconveniences from lack of postal service. I reside 6 or 8 miles from the village of Peekskill, the latter being but 41 miles from New York, the nearest post-office being more than 2 miles away and only three mails a week; so we can not receive a Sunday paper until the following Tuesday night, and it is a source of great inconvenience to go to 2 miles, no matter what the weather, "to find out whether there is mail or not," and very often having to wait an hour or two for the one-horse mail wagon, that has to cover 50 miles in the day, and the driver to do errands and transact all kinds of business for every one along the route. Another thing is, should you receive a letter Tuesday night that required an answer it lies in the post-office until the following Thursday, or if received Saturday an answer can not be forwarded until Tuesday, and all this inconvenience in mail facilities within 50 miles of New York.

In England it has for some time been an accomplished fact, showing that it can be done under conditions there. Then, why not here? Increasing the means of communication throughout country districts by free delivery of the mails will make country homes pleasanter; will save many steps and much time; will enable farmers to keep better posted in buying and selling, and in a general way will aid in detection of crime; will do for country districts what rapid transit does for cities – equalizing values in a measure, for nearness to the post-office is a valuable consideration; will open the way to make the proposed postal telegraph a success by furnishing a cheap way to deliver messages sent from distant points; will enable the Government to perfect a system of weather forecasts and warnings of storms and frosts; will remove a grave hindrance to the business of summer boarding in retired localities; will enable the city business man of some classes to keep track of his business by means of daily reports while he is recuperating health and strength; will increase the receipts of third and fourth class post-offices many fold; will tend to break up the conservative spirit and foster a progressive one; will give impetus to inventions for mechanical carriers for small parcels by means of trolley wires and the electric motor, and perhaps aid in solving problems of value; finally, it will be doing justice to a class who bear unequal shares in the burdens of taxation in support of the Government of which this is a part.

To say that I rejoice to see your inaugurate this free-delivery system in the country districts is merely, in a feeble way, to echo the voice of hundreds of farmers and newspapers... There is no

question that your plan, once established, would be a great factor to keep the young folks on the farm, to keep them from joining the great army of the unemployed in the cities; to take away the loneliness of farm life; to teach farmers that merchants, corporations, railroad companies, and big bugs are not forever, in some mysterious way, getting up some plan of oppression for them, or are ready to devour them. It will make their homes more sociable; give them, during the winter months, a chance for self-education and means of social intercourse; it will give their city friends a better opportunity to visit them, by announcing their intended coming so that they can meet them at the train. It will bring the farmers into contact with the basis of supply. They can send away and get their goods cheaper. It will make country life more sought after, and our cities, already overcrowded, less desired by the coming generations who are now filling our streets with malcontents. Our fields will be better tilled and farmers, what they ought to be, the most cultivated of men.