Why the U.S. Ended Sunday Mail in 1912

Rebecca Brenner Graham, PhD

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- Alliance between Sundayists and labor activists, which, in combination with federal fiscal retrenchment, legitimized concept that there would be one day each week where the post offices would close.
- Nineteenth-century public discussions of universal equality and religious freedom rang hollow in practice.
Sundayists Movement and Statute for Compensatory Time

- Alliance among Christian reform groups at the end of the nineteenth century
- 1911 statute for compensatory time helped spark a conversation between Grandfield and the local postmasters across the country

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
First Assistant Postmaster General C. F. Grandfield’s Questionnaire, August 1911

- How many clerks versus carriers worked each Sunday? For how many hours did they work? How many mail collections took place, and how many carriers per collection?
- “Could collections be curtailed or discontinued without inconvenience?”
- How many hours is the general delivery window open? How much compensatory time during the week do Sunday laborers receive?
- “Do the patrons as a whole approve of your present arrangements for Sunday service?”
- “Is it possible to still further reduce the amount of Sunday labor?”
Postmasters Confront Labor Issues

• Allocation of labor between clerks and carriers
• Despite widespread interest in reducing hours, some postal workers still wanted more hours to earn more pay
• Labor issues shaped postal operations and became intertwined with Sunday mail debates.
Postmasters That Were Sundayists

- While no postal employees considered ending Wednesday mail or even Saturday mail, they discussed ending Sunday mail because of the Christian Sabbath.
- While postmasters in predominantly Christian areas seemed more likely to support ending Sunday mail, let’s be careful not to overstate postal employees’ support for Sundayism.
Over clinker covered roads, through deep gulches and ravines: Hawai‘i

American imperialism in Hawai‘i serves as a crucial context for Grandfield’s correspondence with Honolulu.

Through issuing and accepting Special Delivery Stamps, the Postmaster of Honolulu enabled the Post Office to facilitate commerce seven days a week.

Mail was important for business, which was important for the imperialists’ economy on a colonized island.

Neither a state nor a territory yet making the workings of an American imperial state through the Post Office including Sunday mail delivery increasingly transparent.
“In all, thirty-seven million eight hundred and seventy-eight thousand dollars: Provided, that hereafter post offices of the first and second classes shall not be open on Sundays for the purpose of delivering mail to the general public, but this provision shall not prevent the prompt delivery of special delivery mail.”

Reflected problems as locally specific as distributing work evenly between clerks and carriers and as broad as a distinctly political-economic moral nationalism

Not without exceptions

Marked a key victory for Sundayism, though broader Christian nationalist movements would continue