

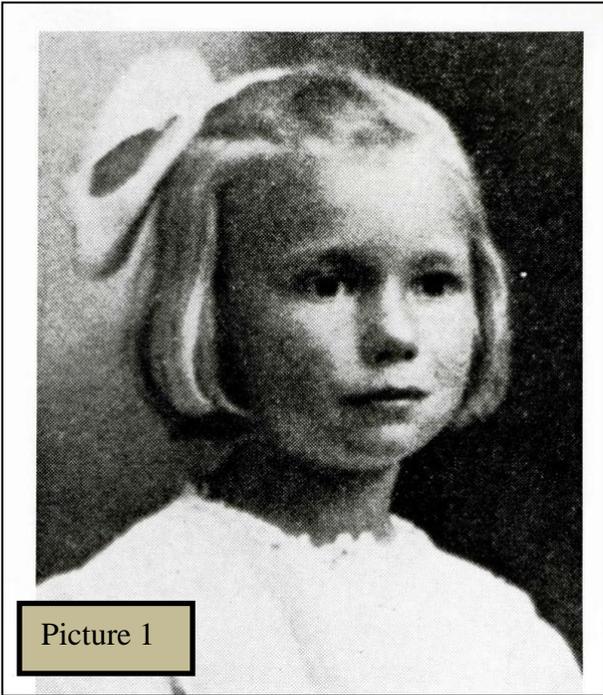
The Cover Story

by Newton Kulp

Have you ever wished you didn't have to travel with your child (or grandchild)? If you lived in the United States in 1913 or 1914 you had an alternative. Send him or her by mail! You could use the U.S. Parcel Post Service which began on January 1, 1913. Regulations stated that a package could not weigh more than 50 pounds and not much else. The initial regulations included a provision that allowed shipping of live bees and bugs, but no rules allowing or against shipping of children. The rest of this article details several incidents of mailing children. Other occurrences have been found, but the authenticity of some are questionable.

The first documented incident of a child being "mailed" was on January 17, 1913 when the Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Beauge of Glen Este, OH mailed their son to his grandmother, Mrs. Louis Beague in Batavia, OH. The Rural Free Delivery carrier Vernon Lytle (author's note – last name also found spelled Little) transported the child about one mile for a fee of 15 cents (they even insured the child for \$50). On January 27, 1913 Mr. & Mrs. J.W. Savis of Pine Hollow, PA entrusted their daughter to rural carrier James Byerly out of Sharpsville, PA. He delivered her safely that afternoon to relatives in Clay Hollow. It cost 45 cents to send their daughter.

On February 19, 1914 another documented incident happened in the northwest. May Pierstorff, **[Picture 1]** a five-year-old of Graneville, ID was able to visit her grandparents in Lewiston, ID, about 73 miles. Since she was 48½ pounds – just short of the 50 pound limit –her parents were able to use the parcel post system. She was sent through a train's mail compartment with 53 cents of stamps attached to her jacket.



In the January 17, 1913 issue of the Richmond VA Times-Dispatch newspaper the above article appeared detailing an inquiry from the postmaster in Ft. McPherson, Ga asking then Postmaster General Hitchcock for clarification on how to mail a baby or sending children through the mails. A summary of the reply is "As babies, in the opinion of the Postmaster General, do not fall within the category of bees and bugs, the only live things that may be transported by mail, the Postmaster General is apprehensive that he may not be of assistance to his correspondent since no references to human beings is found."

Shortly after the above Idaho trip and the above inquiry, the new Postmaster General Burluson issued directions to the nation's postmasters that all human beings were barred from being sent via parcel post or any other means within the jurisdiction of the Postal Department.

As with many laws, policies or directives, this one was broken a mere month later. Rural carrier B.H. Knepper in Maryland carried a 14-pound baby from its grandmother's home near Clear Spring to the mother's house in Indian Springs, twelve miles away.

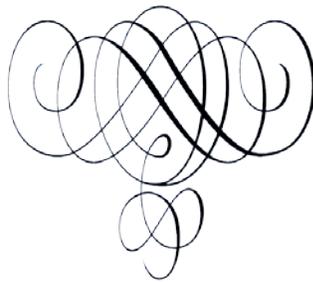
A year later, the longest documented trip by a child "mailed" through parcel post was made by six-year-old Edna Neff. She traveled from her mother's home in Pensacola, FL, to her father's home in Christainburg, VA. There is little information on the specifics of Edna's trip, which was made by railway mail train other than her weight, recorded as just under the 50-pound limit resulting in a trip cost 15 cents in parcel post stamps.

The year of 1915 was a banner year for mailing children. Unburdened by regulations now on the books against mailing children, two more trips were made after Edna's that year. In March rural carrier Charles Hayes of Tarkin, MO carried Mr. and Mrs. Albert Combs' daughter Helen by parcel post for 10-cents. Hayes delivered Helen to her grandmother, Mrs. C.H. Combs, whose home was also on his route. That September, three-year-old Maud Smith made her parcel post journey when she traveled from her grandparents' home to her mother's, Mrs. Celina Smith of Jackson, KY. A local newspaper noted that this particular trip was being investigated by the postal officials. Superintendent John Clark of the Cincinnati division of the Railway Mail Service asked the Caney, Kentucky postmaster to explain why he allowed the child onto the train as parcel post in clear violation of postal rules. Perhaps it was the public notice of the investigation, but for whatever reason, it appears to have been the final case of "child mail."

It wasn't until early in 1920 when Congress finally got into the act. They passed a law that took effect in June of 1920 that made it a Federal crime to mail humans, regardless of weight. Among the items that you can still mail, if you follow the detailed regulations, are baby alligators, live scorpions, tiny quantities of cyanide and deceased human beings in the form of cremated ashes.

Writers Note: Several attempts were made to find the actual postal bulletins concerning this topic using the digitized US Postal Bulletins and PL&Rs 1880-2013 but the various search criteria used always timed out before any information was found.

The photograph below is from the Smithsonian Institution Collection: National Postal Museum, Curatorial Photographic Collection – photographer unknown. This image is not only a part of a collection of Smithsonian photographs on Flickr, but is the most popular photograph from the Institution in that collection.



This "baby in the mail" fun photograph takes the idea a step farther by having the baby be the letter carrier.

It is believed that neither of the above two photographs were of a real incident. They seem to be simply vintage cute posed humor shots.