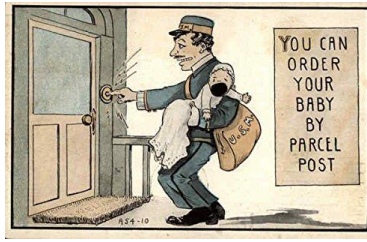


## **BABIES BY PARCEL POST 1913-1915**



## **YOUR CHILD IS IN THE MAIL**

On January 1, 1913, the U. S. Postal Service introduced a Parcel Post service where Americans could send packages weighing up to eleven pounds, which provided a boon as farmers, manufacturers, and retailers could now ship their products directly to consumers' homes.

The new service took right off – almost two million packages were shipped the first week of operations alone. The initial regulations allowed shipping of live bees and bugs, but no rules about children. The mail carrier was crucial to communities – a touchstone with family and friends far away. The question of shipping babies popped up almost immediately. Just seventeen days after its inauguration, Postmaster General Frank H. Hitchcock responded that since babies did not fall into the category of live bees or bugs, they could not be shipped.

A Fort McPherson, Georgia man wanted to have a baby he wanted to adopt shipped to him from Pennsylvania but was denied. Nonetheless, on January 17th, rural route carrier Vernon Lytle delivered eight-month-old James Beagle, weighing 10¾ pounds, from his parents in Glen Este, Ohio, to his grandmother a mile away in Batavia, becoming the first baby delivered by parcel post.

On January 27th, J. W. Savis of Pine Hollow, Pennsylvania entrusted his daughter to rural carrier James Byerly to deliver her safely to Clay Hollow for 45 cents. On February 3rd, a two-year-old boy was shipped by his grandmother from Stratford, Oklahoma to his aunt in Wellington, Kansas. He wore a tag around his neck with eighteen cents of postage affixed. A request to transport a child from Twin Falls, Idaho to Stratford was denied by the local postmaster. Soon the age limit was raised to six years old and weight limit to fifty pounds.

In March 1914, May Pierstorff of Grangeville, Idaho wanted to visit her grandparents in Lewiston 75 miles away, so her parents found the postal rate for a 48.5-pound “package” was only 53 cents (for mailing chickens). They bought 53 stamps and attached them to her coat, shipping her as a “baby chick”. Her story was the subject of a 1997 book “Mailing May” by Michael Tunnell.

The longest trip was six-year-old Edna Neff, who traveled 720 miles from her mother's home in Pensacola, Florida to her father's home in Christiansburg, Virginia. It was arranged by a probation officer charged with overseeing the child's custody between her separated parents. Her trip cost fifteen cents, but the act was met with public criticism instead of whimsical amusement.

The last child mailed was in September 1915 when Celina Smith of Jackson, Kentucky fell ill. Anxious to see her daughter Maud, Smith had the three-year-old shipped home from her grandparents' where she had been staying. Louisville postal officials caught wind of this clear breach of rules and regulations but the Caney postmaster had personally delivered the child to the rail depot. Whatever the punishment was, it was the final case of “child mail”.

Around 1916, the practice of mailing babies altogether ceased. Congress finally passed a law in June 1920 making it a federal crime to mail humans, regardless of weight. As late as 1920 the Postmaster General was still rejecting applications to mail children.

In some ways, Americans trusted their postman with their lives – and their babies. They knew their children weren't just handled by a stranger because they personally knew the mail carriers. There are no records of any mailed children suffering damage during the transit or not arriving on time.