

Whiting's Post Office
by
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Most people only know of the four seasons: Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, but there is another season that we are currently in and that is Tax Season. By April 15, 2005, all of your W2s and 1040s must be sent to the Internal Revenue Service Center. This day is by far one of the busiest days for the United States Post Office. Many offices stay open later on this day to accommodate the masses that flood into their local post offices. Today, people take the Post Office for granted. But, for Whiting's early pioneers it was the only source where you could get news from family and friends back in Europe.

In 1840 Chistof Schrage brought his family from Germany to Chicago. Fourteen years later, he purchased a plot of land in the vicinity of Front and 119th Street where he opened a general store. A trip to the store offered a chance to catch up on the local gossip and check the mail, it was kept in an old spool box located in one corner of the store. Christof served as the first postmaster until 1892, when his son Henry took over the position.

With the arrival of the Standard Oil Company in the late 1880s, the sheer volume of mail soon outgrew the spool box. So, in 1882 the post office was moved from Front Street west to 119th Pennsylvania Avenue. Cleveland was appointed postmaster but he resigned six weeks after Schrage served as



U. G. Swartz was appointed in 1896. Two years later Henry Schrage was again nabbed for the position as postmaster under President McKinley but he resigned in the midst of his term to accept a position with the Bank of Whiting. Charles Davidson took charge of the post office in February of 1901. The community was growing fast and expansion was increasing westward. In 1908, the post office was advanced from third to second class with receipts of \$8,000. The office was then moved to the 1900 block of New York Avenue.

On July 1, 1909, James Nedjl assumed responsibilities as postmaster. Nedjl was replaced by Judge George W. Jones in 1912. James Nedjl was instrumental in his effort of getting mail delivery started in the city of Whiting. According to *The Times*, "The name of Postmaster James Nedjl for this reason will go down in the history of Whiting." Nedjl was quoted, "... until there is free mail delivery, can the citizens realize that they are living in a city." On January 17, 1913, Whiting inaugurated its free delivery mail service. Johnston Knight, Ned Naef, and Arnold Odell were the first mail carriers in the City of Whiting. These men made three deliveries a day to the business district, as well as, a morning and afternoon delivery to the residential district. Postmaster Jones stated that mail would only be left at homes where there are mail boxes or slots in the resident's front door.

Assistant postmaster, Grace Flaughter, assumed responsibilities as postmaster, when George Jones passed away on July 6, 1919. She served at this capacity until 1920 when Fred Kennedy was

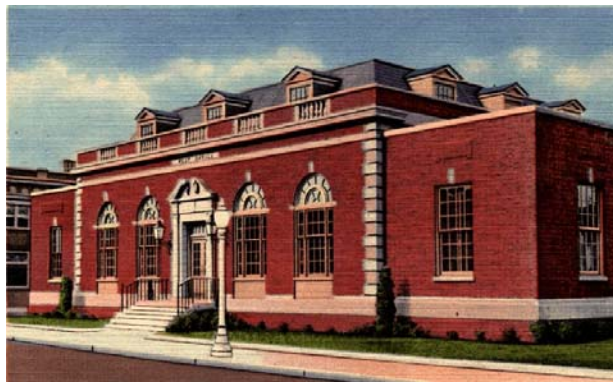
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appointed. Postmaster Kennedy received \$2,400 a year for his service as postmaster. In 1926 during Fred Kennedy's term as postmaster, there was further westward expansion and the post office headquarters was moved to the Conray building at the corner of Clark Street and Fischrupp Avenue. The lobby of the new office measured 32 by 13 feet, and the financial department was partitioned from the mailing room. The fast increasing population and postal business forced an increase in personnel to nine mail carriers, one parcel postman, and six clerks. The new location and postal facilities soon proved to be inadequate.

In April 1930, through the efforts of Allyn Bradley, Secretary Manager of the Whiting Robertsdale Chamber of Commerce, negotiations to secure a much needed Federal Building were begun. U.S. Representative Will Wood, Chairman of the Appropriations Committee gave favorable consideration. Two years later, the cornerstone of the new Federal Post Office was laid at the corner of New York Avenue and 119th Street. A year later the story and a half structure was built at a cost of \$91,500. Congressman William Schulte led the formal dedication, where both political and social dignitaries from all over the Calumet Region were on hand.

Urie J. Moore served as acting postmaster under President Herbert Hoover, but was replaced by Patrick Sullivan in 1933 during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential term. Judge Joseph Sullivan succeeded his father as postmaster in 1942 until December 31, 1947. At this time, he was succeeded by Stephen Grabovac, who served as interim postmaster until September 30, 1949. Helicopter air mail service began in

Chicago and Whiting. Grabovac was waiting use the roof of the post but in the meantime the Whiting Park parking lot strip. The new service delivery the following anywhere in the United any of the air stops radius received delivery



March of 1949 between At that time Postmaster for formal approval to office as a landing site, eastern end of the was used as a landing insured positive day of mail posted States. Mail posted at within a 500 mile the same day.

Levern Fortin became the first postmaster in Whiting selected from the ranks of postal employees under the Civil Service Regulations. He was appointed under President Truman on October 1, 1949. In 1950, the United States government ordered post offices across the nation to limit mail deliveries to once a day, in an attempt to reduce the post office's operating expenses. This mandate caused much hardship on the Whiting Post Office which had trouble handling the bulk of mail involved in servicing both Whiting and Robertsdale. To accommodate the excessive workload, Whiting was forced to make overtime payments to carriers. In addition, two Whiting High School seniors were excused from classes to help fill the demand. At this time, there was little interest in Whiting in working for the post office since industries in the area hired laborers at better than the average wage offered by the government service.

By the end of 1963, the total annual gross receipts at the Whiting post office had risen to \$245,000 and there were thirty seven postal employees. Over the years employees came and went but the service remained superior. In 1997, Helen Cunningham was hired as the new postmaster for the Whiting post office. Cunningham commented on the fact that in Whiting, mail carriers still used leather pouches mounted on a wheeled tripod. Postmaster Cunningham claimed, "As long as our employees are productive, why change?" Many changes in services have taken place in the Whiting post office over the years but one thing remained certain: No matter if it was raining, snowing,

sleeting, or hailing the mail still went through. To find out more about the Whiting post office stop by the Local History Room.