

Postmaster Who, Hays Says, "Bats 1,000"

By THOMAS J. MALONE



"Humanizing" the post office. Minneapolis carriers on rural routes weigh babies on the parcel post scales.

among the men to cut prices by ordering groceries and other commodities in quantity.

Mr. Purdy hadn't been on the job long before Minneapolis began to take notice. He seemed to have the idea that there was more to it than relaying things back and forth in routine manner. He began to speed up service and go after business—actually to drum up business for the post office. This leads directly to his efforts to have patrons regard the post office as a "flesh and blood" institution. When Postmaster-General Hays announced his desire to "humanize" the Post Office Department, he found that "Ed" Purdy was several laps ahead of him. This last summer, mail carriers on the motor trucks making the Lake Minnetonka routes, out from Minneapolis, weighed babies on the parcel post scales for mothers all along their lines—all free and on Uncle Sam. Talk about making the post office human—those rural carriers were the very latest in social workers, each man a whole infant welfare society by himself!

Post office employes divulge that all through the Wilson Administration Mr. Purdy was yearning to push a humanizing idea of his own, but felt he had better hold back. However, when Will Hays came out with the word that Pollyanna was the patron saint of the department, he cut loose. They sort mail to music in the Minneapolis office now, at night. A phonograph has been installed on the mailing floor, and the men

bring their favorite records. Music has been found to soothe the savage breast of the night mail clerk. It smooths things out, too, and, if fast, speeds up the work.

One of the major factors contributing to the high rating of the Minneapolis office has been its "Mail Early" campaign. This was begun six years ago and has been continued without let-up. Mr. Purdy set out to impress on business men the importance of getting their outgoing mail in the boxes or the post office direct just as soon as it could be got off the desk. Most of the business houses are trained now.

The campaign had to disabuse many folks of that strange notion that there is nothing more to be done, once they drop a letter into the corner box or through the slot at the post office—that it goes at once to New York or Tenstrike by some sort of legerdemain, mysteriously avoiding the collecting, facing, canceling, distributing, bundling, pouching and conveying to train, not to mention as many more processes in between, that befall all letters.

Placards in black, white and red, printed in big letters that can be read across the street, have been placed on the mail trucks to preach the "Mail Early" gospel. These "slogans"—Purdy's war cries—are carried on both sides of the wire top of every motor car in the service. One in use today reads:

Catch That Train
MAIL EARLY
And Get The Order

There are 22 cars carrying such reminders. On some the bottom line of the foregoing wording is made to read "And Save A Day's Delay." The Civic and Commerce Association, the big public affairs body in Minneapolis, was enlisted and it promoted a slogan-writing contest in the high schools to push a good thing along.

So well did the youngsters do that Postmaster Purdy used their best offerings on his trucks, such ones as "The Early Mail Catches The Early Train," "The Early Train Catches The Early Order" and "A Steady Stream Causes No Flood—Mail Early."

Besides, he sent out letters to the business houses urging them to systematize their office work and mail their letters in time to give him a chance to get them on the earliest possible trains. Now he is putting out a printed schedule that is hung up in offices, showing the hours when mail trains leave Minneapolis, the territory served, the time to the minute

when mail should be in the main post office—not merely in street boxes or branch stations—to catch those trains, and giving the number of hours delay if the desired train is missed. It even gives the time on the road for mail to main points in all directions.

That sort of thing jolts the business man into using the mails right.

The current schedule starts off with this advice: "Mail should be signed twice a day, at noon and evening, and all unimportant matter should be withheld from the mails after 4 p. m. and deposited next morning. Allow one hour and 30 minutes between departure time of trains and deposit of letter in main post office, and two hours when mailed during the rush period from 6 to 8 p. m."

That is plain and definite. Business folk appreciate that kind of help. The schedule is kept up to date.

Mr. Purdy is always looking for talent among his men. He has more than 1,100 on the pay roll, and when he finds any one with some special hobby or training, he is as proud as a boy with a split finger. Take those signs on the motor trucks—all painted up in shipshape style by a mail clerk who used to be a sign painter. There's the printed schedule card about train and mailing times—set up by a young fellow who draws pay as a clerk but who is a skilled printer.

Over in the garage he found a repair man who used to be a watchmaker, and now that man is keeping the cyclometers trued up on the cars and making hair springs forget that weather, warm or cold, affects them. In the mailing division he found a clerk who had been taking pictures for years, and that clerk has become the "official photographer" of the post office. When the postmaster wants to show up something new, like the phonograph rite, he has some one to help him without going outside the family.

As will have been gathered, Mr. Purdy believes in signs and reminders. Scattered through the main post office are placards on the walls where the men can't avoid seeing them as they work, or else letters marked on the plaster. Here is a specimen. It answers the question in John Jones' mind whether he gets any consideration from Uncle Sam:

"Every Letter Is Important To Some One—Hasten Dispatch By Accurate And Speedy Handling."

And here is another that has the right ring:

"Don't Sidestep; Accept The Blame When It's On Us And Profit By Mistakes."

Indicative of forethought, there is a standing order in the Minneapolis post office to look out for and sort immediately circular notices of sales and meetings, and also price lists, quotations and so forth. That means that in Minneapolis a postcard about a meet-

ing of the Lincoln Club doesn't reach one the day after the meeting.

Then there is the producer-to-consumer, farm-to-city service by parcel post, one phase of which has already been mentioned. Bulletins are posted in the post office corridors from day to day, giving addresses of farmers who have butter, eggs, honey, berries in season and what not else to sell, with prices quoted. In Minneapolis, one does not have to be a traveling salesman or a railroader to buy stuff fresh from the farm and beat a few cents off the price. "Just let your Uncle Sam carry that egg case or that crate of blueberries for you."

In a word, the postmaster at Minneapolis and his 1,100 and more assistants have a passion for service, a consuming desire to put in their best licks for every man, woman and child who uses the mails, whether sending a picture postcard or expecting a poultry catalog, a case of honey or a favorite magazine. And as for the human note, one should see the faces of the clerks at the general delivery windows register regret when a person fails to find a letter on call!



EDWARD A. PURDY,
Postmaster at Minneapolis



A phonograph is the latest "humanizer" introduced in the mailing division of the Minneapolis post office.

POSTMASTER-GENERAL HAYS has said of Edward A. Purdy, postmaster at Minneapolis, that as a postmaster he has "a batting average of 1,000," and has intimated that Mr. Purdy's is the best conducted post office in the United States. That is a challenge to inquiry. What kind of a post office is the most efficient one, and how does Mr. Purdy do it?

"We have tried to make the Minneapolis post office serve the public as promptly as possible and in as many ways as possible," Mr. Purdy said, in an effort to explain. He had just returned from Washington, where he had spent several weeks, at the invitation of Mr. Hays, telling the latter and his department chiefs about it—not all about it, for he is to return to the capital for further conference. "Yes, we think we have a good post office. Most of the credit is due to the whole-hearted, faithful work of the clerks, carriers and other employes.

"It has been our aim to speed up collections and deliveries and to find new ways of making the post office useful. In the speeding up purpose, we have conducted an educational campaign among the business men for mailing early and often. This met with quick and cordial response. We are getting mail into the post office with such time margins for catching trains that the percentage of hold-overs is very low.

"One of the things we are rather proud of is the way handling of the Christmas rush has been worked out. There is now no congestion of Christmas mail in the Minneapolis post office at any time. Collections and deliveries are made with a dispatch equal to normal service. Every letter and parcel received Christmas day is delivered that day. The biggest factor in this solution has been our use of the public schools. Last year we established postal stations during the rush in more than 30 schools, and we will use many more this year."

Like use of public school buildings during the Christmas mail season is to be recommended for adoption in other large cities this year, according to word from Washington.

"Our parcel post suburban and lake district distributing system is something we don't mind talking about," Mr. Purdy went on, "as it was the first of its kind to be developed. It has come to be a consolidated delivery system for Minneapolis merchants and a return service for truck gardeners and for persons who move out from the city in the spring and back to it in the fall. It has saved thousands of dollars to the merchants and likewise to the other groups. This is a seasonal service, running from the middle of May to the first of October. It is conducted at a profit to the post office."

This is another service into which, it is understood, other cities will be invited to look.

"We seek variety in kinds of service," continued Mr. Purdy. "We even weigh babies for mothers in the country who want to know whether their offspring are progressing properly. What we've done is only a beginning. The possibilities are endless."

When Mr. Purdy left his desk as a magazine editor to take Federal office seven years ago, he began a study of the men under him. If they were happy in their work, he knew his problems would largely be solved. Convinced that he had to have those men with him, legs and hands, brains and hearts, he based operations on an old maxim.

With the coming of his first Christmas rush, he opened a lunch room in the post office, where overburdened clerks and carriers could get hot coffee, sandwiches and pie at any time in the 24 hours. That lunch room worked wonders. It was an innovation that "went strong" with the force.

The Purdy administration has been marked by attention to the interests, the comforts and conveniences of the force. From the lunch room incident, other things grew. For instance, he got behind a movement