

A MEMORIAL TO CONGRESS

FROM THE

Railway Postal Clerks.

*To the Honorable Senators and Representatives in
Congress Assembled:*

The undersigned was appointed the representative of the Railway Postal Clerks of the United States to *Memorialize* your honorable body in their behalf, and present for your consideration the reasons why they beg an increase of salary.

After mature deliberation they have caused a bill to be introduced (H. R. 6459) which, if passed, will forever settle the question of allowance to them as a class, and in furtherance of that object, I beg the privilege of stating most briefly a few cogent reasons why their bill should receive your sanction.

First. The railway postal clerks have been working for the same salary for fourteen years, which, as a matter of fact, is less than was paid them two years previously. It was fixed in 1874 at \$1,400, \$1,200, and \$1,000, for the three grades then in existence. In 1876 the clerks in the higher class had their salaries reduced to \$1,300, while those in the next grade were cut down to \$1,150 a year, being a loss of \$50.

The reason assigned by Postmaster-General KEY for these reductions was that the *appropriation for the railway mail service for that year was almost exhausted, and that unless the salaries were reduced, a large number of clerks would have to be dismissed, SO OF THE TWO EVILS HE CHOSE THE FORMER.*

It was claimed by the Post-Office Department that if the men would suffer the reduction in their salaries for that year (1876) that it would not only be restored in 1877, but that the losses sustained would be repaid to them, WHICH HAS NOT BEEN DONE UP TO THIS TIME, and no attempt has ever been made by the Department to do so. The clerks have made one or two efforts, but never with success.

They feel, therefore, that they have been treated unjustly and harshly by the Government, not only in the refusal to pay them the salaries designated by Congress in 1874, but also in not granting them a compensation commensurate with their increased duties and responsibilities. The number of post-offices have more than doubled since that time and also the revenues and business of the Department, and they feel that if they were worth \$1,400, \$1,200, and \$1,000 sixteen years ago, that their services ought to be of far more value to the public and the Government in 1890. This is a self-evident proposition and needs no argument to prove its truth.

Second. The duties of a postal clerk are of a very dangerous and responsible character and the person appointed to such position, who would succeed in it, must be of peculiar mould. He must be strong mentally, physically, and morally. All of those elements must enter into his character or he can not render satisfaction. The drudgery of the service is most severe and the demands made upon the physical powers are almost beyond human calculation. It may seem a pleasant and agreeable business to be floundering around in one end of a postal car, with hands full of mail matter, making distribution of it between knocks and jars and jerks, and noise and dust and cinders, with the mind so occupied in its mental operations that no notice is taken of the disagreeable sur-

roundings, but there is a question as to its pleasing attractions. These men carry in their minds the names of from three to fifteen thousand post-offices, according to the lines they run on, and they must not only know in what State they are in, but their *exact location*, and the shortest and quickest route by which to send the mail belonging to them. We often hear of "the sacredness of the seal," how fragile our letters, how easily broken asunder! Inclosed only in a covering of paper that a babe could easily destroy, and yet how rare it is their seals are broken and their contents appropriated. There is no position in all the world where the opportunities for robbery are so plentiful as on a postal car, and yet how seldom it is that a postal clerk is charged with crime.

To be a good postal clerk, then, a man must be perfect in physical organization, in mental acquirements, and in moral qualities. They must all unite, and we claim that as the public interests demand that that class of men be employed, the compensation allowed by the Government must be of such a character as to induce them to enter the service.

Third. The dangers of the service should commend the clerks to your attention. During the last fiscal year 10 were killed outright, 95 were seriously injured, and 40 slightly hurt. But these figures are cold and unfeeling, and do not fully represent the dangers and perils of the men for whom I speak. Ten men were suddenly and in a most terrible manner blotted out of existence, and when I think of the tragic, the awful manner of their taking off, I shudder at the thought and wonder how it is that men can be found who are brave enough to enter upon such a profession and make it a life business. What death could possibly be more sickening or more painful than to be crushed or mangled in a railroad wreck? Why, to be hanged by the neck until dead with the rope of a hangman would be many times more preferable, and yet these men are meeting such endings of their existence every year. But while we think of the 10 who were killed, let us not forget the 95 who were seriously injured. Some lost one part of their body, and some another. Limbs were crushed out of shape; eyes were knocked out; ears were torn off; hands and arms were mashed into sickening shapes; bones were broken, joints were dislocated, and faces were scarred into perpetual disfigurement, so that while they did not die at the time of the wreck, they are stranded on life's shore with a weight of woe that entitles them to your kindest sympathy and attention. The last annual report of the Postmaster General contains eighteen and a half closely printed pages of the casualties from July 1, 1888, to June 30, 1889, and a perusal of those pages will quickly convince the most skeptical of the dreadful uncertainty of the life of a postal clerk. Here were 10 men who gave up their lives in the discharge of their duty, and 95 others who were horribly hurt, so much so that several of them were never able to re-enter the service, and yet when their lives went out their pay ceased.

Indeed, the life of a postal clerk is so perilous that but few insurance companies will receive them as risks, while those who take them will not issue a policy but for \$3,000, and at a rate of 50 per cent. higher than is charged the general public. The Traveler's, of Hartford, will not even issue them an *accident policy* for more than \$3,000, while their rate is as before stated, 50 per cent. higher than is charged the public at large.

It is an absolute necessity for these men to keep up their insurance, and it is one of the *burdens* thrown upon them that should be remedied by the Government by increasing their compensation. In order to make anything like suitable provision for their families in case of accident or death, they are compelled to carry insurance aggregating from \$6,000 to \$10,000, and that one item creates an expense of from \$50 to \$150 a year, according to the amount borne. This is a heavy tax, but it is one that can not be omitted or ignored.

Fourth. The *sickness* of a postal clerk is another of the terrible drawbacks and heavy weights he is compelled to bear, for when he fails to report

for duty, *that moment his pay ceases*. He may have become enfeebled on account of his hard and difficult labors, or the seeds of disease may have come to him by his extreme exposure to wind and weather while on his car, but, no matter what the cause of his absence from duty, *the day he fails to take his run his salary is cut off*. One week, even, cuts deeply into his slender resources, but when it runs into months, as it often does, *he is left in absolute want*. There is no provision made for his absence from duty except in case of accident or injury received while in its discharge, but if he should be killed outright, *there is no redress for his family*. The losses sustained by clerks when sick are many, and yet they have no remedy. It is an unjust discrimination against them, for if any of the employes in the General Post Office become incapacitated for work on account of sickness, there is no diminution in their compensation, and the same holds good in the post-offices of the country.

Fifth. The expenses of a postal clerk during the year when away from home consume a large part of his income. Beds and meals are to be paid for out of his own pocket, and the most rigid economy will not let him off under \$100 a year, while the average is estimated to be \$150. With many clerks, in order to live within their salary, they are compelled to carry lunch-baskets when away from home and subsist *entirely* upon cold meals. This is not conducive to health or to the good of the service, and justice to the public at large, which is interested in the perfection of the railway mail service, demands that the clerks be paid sufficiently to enable them to indulge in warm, fresh food when on duty, so as to sustain their physical powers, and thus enable them to render such service to the Government as will best promote the interests of the public good. These men are not in the employ of the Post Office Department exclusively, *but of the people*.

In a letter just received from an old postal clerk, under date of February 26th, he asks:

"But how is the postal clerk's widow to be provided for when death robs her and her family of their only support? And still there is a condition worse than death. It is when the clerk becomes a physical and mental wreck, when the wife not only loses her support, but her husband. But he becomes a burden to an already over-burdened family. I have been in the service twenty-eight years, and have been in several bad accidents, but by taking *exceptionally* good care of myself I am still on deck. I am away from home thirty-six hours, two nights and one day. I get a good place to sleep, for a man in this business must have *sleep and rest*, and I take my meals in a lunch basket and eat in my car, and the reason I do it is because two years ago the salary on our line was reduced from \$1,300 (in my case) to \$1,000, and I soon found that I could not procure *medical attendance for our sick, bury our dead, support the living, and be honest with myself and my God, and spend \$1.00 when my income was but 75 cents*, and so I commenced economy on myself. I feel that I have served my day and generation well, and that I deserve better treatment."

One of the best postal clerks in the service resigned on February 21st. He had been in its employ for a quarter of a century between Washington and New York, and after denying himself and his family even of the commonest luxuries of life, he closed his official career as poor as the day he entered upon it, and had it not been that he was blessed with a kind and provident son upon whom he threw himself in his old age, he would have had no home but the poor-house nor no grave except in Potter's Field.

These are not exceptional cases, but the service is full of them, and their needs make a strong *appeal* to your honorable body for a just and adequate compensation.

Therefore, in summing up the reasons why the railway postal clerks should receive compensation according to HOUSE BILL 6459, we may say—

Because of the difficult and responsible duties they are called upon to perform;

Because of the dangers to life and limb to which they are subjected every time they go out upon the road;

Because of the extraordinary expense to which they are subjected while out upon their runs;

Because of the inroads upon their salaries during sickness or when compelled to remain off duty;

Because of the heavy expense they are compelled to meet in the matter of life and accident insurance;

Because they have not had their compensation increased over that provided in 1874;

Because they have not even been paid what the law permits them to receive since 1876;

Because untold hundreds are performing duties of clerks of higher grades and yet receive the salary allotted to those of the lower, and are virtually being robbed by the Government of money which they have honorably earned in the discharge of the great trust committed to their charge; and, lastly,

Because all the eleven Division Superintendents of the railway mail service of the United States met in Washington during September last, and in a conference of ten days, along with other questions that came up for discussion, that of an increased allowance to postal clerks was one that received careful consideration, and the decision arrived at was in exact conformity with House Bill 6459.

Now these men *know* what the compensation of postal clerks should be, for they are all old and experienced officers, and their recommendations should have been accepted by Mr. Wanamaker.

FIXING SALARIES.

The postal clerks also ask you to *fix their salaries by law*, and they desire Congress to be the judge as what they ought to receive, and not the Postmaster General. It gives one person too much power over 6,000 employes, for he is thereby enabled to carry out personal purposes at the expense of the Government. As the law is now, a postal clerk may be promoted or he may be lowered in his rank at the will and caprice of the General Superintendent of the Railway Mail Service, as was the case recited above where an old and trusted man had been suddenly and without warning reduced from the fifth to the third class, while his salary fell with it from \$1,300 to \$1,000 a year, and in order to make the fact more impressive, we give his name, J. H. Pitney, of the Boston and Troy line.

The postal clerks, too, are the only class of men in the employ of the Government *whose compensation is not absolutely fixed by law*. The letter-carriers, post-office clerks, the soldiers and sailors, Members of Congress the Diplomatic Corps, and from the President to the humblest scrubber of the floors of the Post-Office building, all have *stated, fixed amounts of compensation*, and there is no just reason why these men should be so discriminated against.

But the most cogent reason of all why the Postmaster-General should be dispossessed of the power to change the compensation of the men is found in the incident related as having occurred in 1876, when General Key reduced their salaries and never restored them. *The wrong was committed and never redressed*. Why should postal clerks be called upon to make up the deficiencies of the Post-Office Department *when the appropriations run low*. It is no fault of theirs that they become exhausted. That had no hand in fixing the amount of the appropriation for the service, and if General Key had not had the power to reduce their salaries the men would not have been robbed of their slender earnings.

House Bill 6459 settles all of these questions, and we beg that it may receive your support.

I have the honor to be, yours, respectfully,

JOHN H. PATTERSON,
Editor United States Mail.

WASHINGTON, March 1st, 1890.