
William Goddard, Printer and Founder of the American Post Office

Maryland Journal and the Baltimore Advertiser, at the moderate price of ten shillings current money per annum . . .”⁴ After several delays in establishing a special post between Baltimore and Philadelphia to carry news and in getting subscribers, the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* at last appeared on August 20, 1773. His ill health caused the publication of the paper to be irregular. But in February, 1774, his sister, Mary Katherine, relieved him of the responsibilities of printing it. A year later his name was removed from the imprint and did not reappear there until nine years later, but doubtless he greatly influenced its policies. After leaving it in the competent hands of his sister, he turned his attention to developing an efficient post between Baltimore and Philadelphia and ultimately to establishing the “Continental Post Office.”

It is only recently that Goddard’s contribution to the American postal system has been realized.⁵ By winning over the leaders in the colonies to his “Plan for establishing a New American Post Office,” he organized single-handed a complete system of post routes and post offices, the competition of which forced the discontinuance of the British postal system. The Continental Congress took the first step in assuming control of Goddard’s postal system when, on May 29, 1775, a committee with Franklin at its head was appointed to work out the organization of an independent postal establishment. On July 26, 1775, Congress took over the postal system which at that time, through Goddard’s enterprise and personal industry, was operating from New Hampshire to Georgia. With the usual impersonal neglect of legislative bodies, Congress made no provision for reimbursing those who had contributed the capital in establishing postmasters and hiring riders for Goddard’s system, and he received no compensation for his services other than the position of Surveyor of the Post Office for a year. Franklin was made Postmaster General, his son-in-law, Richard Bache, became Comptroller, and when Franklin went to France in the following year, Bache was promoted to the position of Postmaster General. Goddard doubtless felt that he was badly treated when he was offered only the choice of becoming postmaster at Baltimore or Norfolk, or of being Surveyor to

⁴ *Maryland Gazette*, October 20, 1772.

⁵ Wesley E. Rich wrote as his doctoral dissertation in 1917 *The History of the United States Post Office to the Year 1829*. His death in 1918 came before he had an opportunity to make a comprehensive investigation of the post office, but in 1924 his thesis was published in the *Harvard Economic Studies*, Vol. XXVII. In the meantime, Dr. Lawrence C. Wroth, in investigating Goddard’s career as a printer, came upon and gave the first full discussion of the important, and until that time, neglected portion of his life as organizer of the postal system that was later taken over by Congress and exists today as the United States Post Office.