History of the U.S. Postal Service Timeline

1639   First post office in America opened in Boston, Massachusetts.

1775   Benjamin Franklin named the first U.S. postmaster general.

1788   The Constitution gives Congress the right to establish post offices and post roads.

The first postal rates are set. The cost for sending a letter to a destination within 450 miles is 25¢.

1832   First delivery of mail by railroad.

1847   The first postage stamps are printed: 5¢ for a Ben Franklin and 10¢ for a George Washington.

1860   The Pony Express begins carrying mail across the West.

1863   New postage rates are introduced, based on weight instead of distance.

1896   Rural Free Delivery begins. People living in rural areas no longer have to travel to a post office to pick up their mail.

1912   Parcel Post (package delivery) begins.

1950   Automatic letter sorters and facer-cancellers introduced.

1963   ZIP (Zoning Improvement Plan) codes are introduced. Before this innovation, each complete address had to be read during sorting.

1983   First barcodes printed on envelopes for more efficient mail sorting.

1993   National Postal Museum opens in Washington, DC.