



Celebrating 125 years

TAKE A LOOK AT THE FRONT cover of this edition of *The Postal Record*. Check out the text in the upper left-hand corner.

You'll see that it reads "December 2012 • Vol. 125/No. 12."

And if you remember that the NALC was founded Aug. 29, 1889, you'll realize that the numbers don't add up properly—our union is just over 123 years old, not 125.

You would be correct. *The Postal Record* is, in fact, older than the NALC, and this year marks its 125th year.

The magazine you're holding is the oldest labor union journal in the United States.

"*The Postal Record* provides a tangible testament to the notion that communication helps bring people together," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "For 125 years, not only has our magazine kept this

union's members informed and in touch, it also has helped document our craft's history and triumphs."

Origins

Editions from *The Postal Record's* first volume in 1887 sadly were not preserved, but flipping through the earliest available issue—Vol. 2, No. 1, from November 1888—it seems that the magazine, published then by Boston's Alvin G. Brown & Co., was destined to become more than just a journal for an audience of postal workers.

"*The Postal Record* will publish everything of possible interest to postal employees, and will, as in the past, advocate justice and fairness to these faithful servants of the American public," editor Thomas M. Upp wrote in November 1888, adding that the magazine was meant to provide "Entertainment and Promotion of Fraternity" among Post Office Department employees.

The following summer, an association of letter carriers from Milwaukee called for a national meeting of carriers, with the aim of trying to form a national organization. The gathering was timed to coincide with the annual reunion of the Grand Army of the Republic—an association of Union Army veterans—so letter carriers who also happened to be veterans could take advantage of the reduced fares train companies offered to veterans.

The October 1889 *Postal Record* covered this historic occasion, noting that



The cover of the January 1956 issue of *The Postal Record* features two carriers in front of NALC Headquarters in Washington, DC.

on Aug. 29, “(a) resolution was offered to form a National Association of Letter Carriers, and after some discussion, it was adopted unanimously.

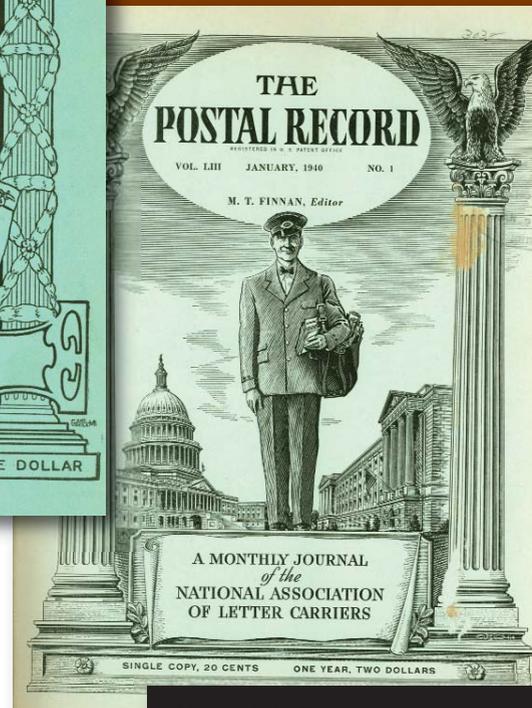
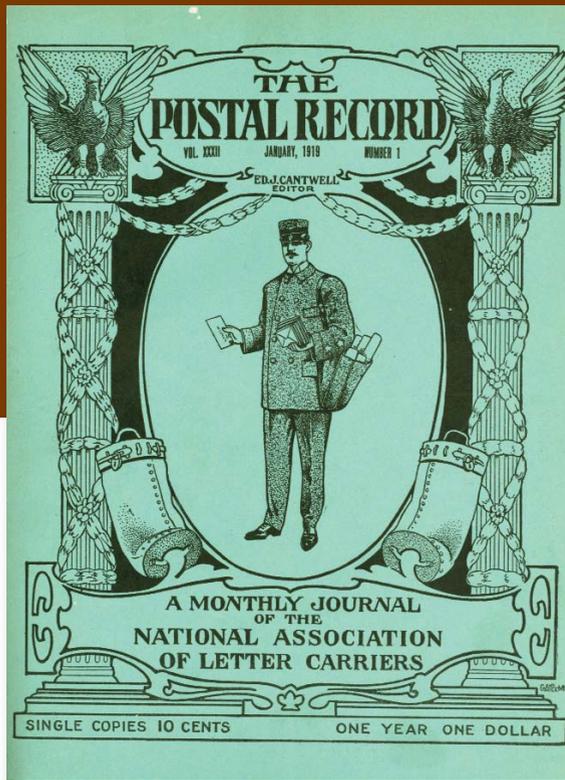
“*The Postal Record* wishes the new organization abundant success, tenders its hearty support and opens its columns to the full discussion of the objects to be attained.”

Two years later, NALC Secretary John F. Victory personally bought *The Postal Record* from Brown & Co. and served as the fledgling journal’s editor while working to build up its subscription base. Then in 1893, the NALC Convention in Kansas City, MO, authorized the national union to fully take over ownership and production of the six-year-old magazine.

Growth

One of the enduring legacies of *The Postal Record* has been its commitment to providing in-depth coverage of events of special interest to letter carriers. This was especially crucial in the many years the magazine existed before the Internet was invented, let alone before access to it became commonplace.

For example, a reader scanning the pages of any copy of the magazine from the early 20th century likely would have found several pages of that edition filled with a transcript of congressional debate on some bill of special carrier concern before the Senate or House of Representatives. These were the days before collective bargaining—the rightly termed days of “collective begging”—which meant that all postal workers were forced to lobby Congress for pay raises as well as changes in working conditions, such as reductions in work hours. And the best way for NALC members to find out just how hard their elected representatives were working on their behalf in Washington was to read up on congressional proceedings.



Nowadays, with these documents readily available through the Internet, the magazine’s pages are freed up for more detailed reporting and analysis of news that interests letter carriers. That leaves plenty of ink devoted to our ongoing struggles to preserve the pay, benefits and working conditions the union has worked so hard to achieve for more than 123 years.

“I think that one reason the magazine has endured has to do with the nature of our union’s membership,” President Rolando said. “All of us do just one job: We carry the mail and we have a single employer. Most other union publications must cater to the various crafts represented by those organizations—they are forced to try to be all things to all members.

“But with *The Postal Record*, every single page is relevant to all letter carriers, active and retired alike.”

For its first 16 years, *The Postal Record* looked and felt like just about any other “serious” journal of its time, sporting a drab front cover listing that edition’s contents. But in 1907, the magazine broke out of that mold and began to reflect its true letter carrier pedigree, beginning with the introduction of “Raffles,” the nickname given to the sketch of a “typical” turn-of-the-century carrier. “Raffles” endured as *The Postal Record*’s “spokesmodel” for 31 years, until he was replaced in 1938 by a more modern-looking sketch—the

Above, left: For many years, an illustration of a letter carrier (nicknamed “Raffles”) ran on the cover of *The Postal Record*.

Above: That illustration was followed by another (nicknamed “Son of Raffles”).

THE POSTAL RECORD,

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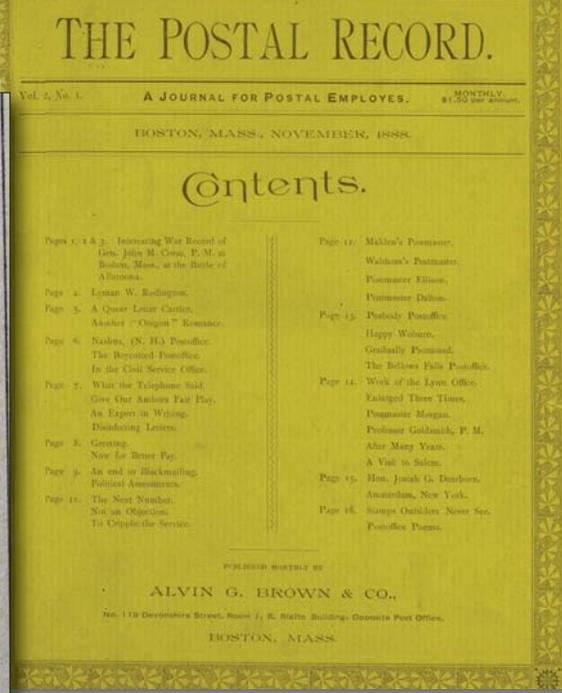
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Above and above right: Before the magazine was purchased by the union, it was published by Alvin G. Brown & Company.



appropriately nicknamed "Son of Raf-fles." By 1942, cover photos of letter carriers at work or of scenes from around the country became *The Postal Record* norm.

Chronicle

While the struggle to improve the pay, benefits and working conditions of letter carriers has been a common thread running through *The Postal Record's* history, individual editions also provide the reader with a snapshot of what was going on in the world outside the post office at a particular point in time.

When the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917, for example, NALC President Edward Gainor used the pages of the magazine to connect letter carriers to their role in the war effort. Eighteen years later, mandatory rationing to support America's armed forces during World War II forced NALC to postpone its 1945 convention, and union President William Doherty leaned heavily on

The Postal Record to keep members informed about the union's goings-on in the convention's absence—not to mention the NALC's scramble to put together a national convention as soon as possible once the war ended in August of that year.

In 1970, the magazine found itself in the unusual position of having to report on the news of March's Great Postal Strike from the perspective of the union's involvement in it as well as the news media's coverage of it. James Rademacher was the leader of the national union then, and at a ceremony held in Washington in May 2011 to honor his 75 years of NALC membership, the president emeritus marveled at how much had changed in *The Postal Record* operations since he was president.

"I remember laying it out myself, on the conference table in my office on the eighth floor," Rademacher recalled. And in fact, that strategy for producing the magazine endured into the first several years of President Vincent Sombrotto's presidency. In 1984, however, Sombrotto relinquished hands-on control of *The Postal Record* production and hired a small staff of communications professionals to take over writing, editing and laying out the magazine. The president of the union, however, retains the title of *The Postal Record* editor-in-chief and, as the NALC's top letter carrier representative, has the ultimate say on what appears in print.

Evolution

"Even in the Age of the Internet, *The Postal Record* remains a vital and healthy

component of how this great, democratic union communicates with its members and how members communicate with one another,” President Rolando said, noting how the Branch Items, State Summaries and Retiree Reports sections provide members an opportunity to speak their minds on a variety of issues.

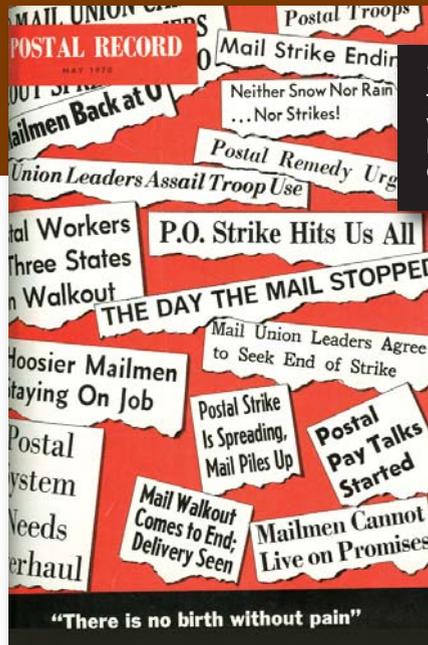
Each month’s edition is a window into the various challenges letter carriers face from one post office to the next; at the same time, the magazine continues to help national leaders rally the rank and file around causes important to all active and retired members.

“We strive to represent various points of view in *The Postal Record*,” Rolando said. “A lot of what appears in its pages comes directly from members,” whether in the form of story tips or through reports of letter carrier achievements and heroism.

While the magazine’s mission has remained constant since 1887, *The Postal Record* has managed to keep up with the changing times and styles. Updated several times over the last 125 years, the last overhaul of the magazine’s look-and-feel was in 2002, when technological improvements at last made a full-color magazine cost-effective.

And starting next month, *The Postal Record* will “evolve” once again. The familiar content will remain the same—feature stories, officers’ columns, and so on—but members should notice a subtle implementation of a vibrant new color scheme accompanied by a more modern-looking typography.

“This is just the latest step in our ongoing embrace of technology,” Rolando said. “This union has never shied away from the challenges brought about by improvements in communications. Instead, we’ve always met those challenges head-on and have looked for ways to exploit new technology for our benefit, from the telegraph to the telephone to the fax machine to the Internet.”



The Postal Record allows members to voice their concerns, even when they may disagree with prevailing policy. One example was the May 1970 issue of *The Postal Record*, which dealt with the Great Postal Strike.

One thing will never change, and that’s the process of printing a magazine and sending it through the mail to arrive at your door.

“Sometimes, letter carriers report seeing the magazine buried in bundles of mail and destined for delivery to their fellow members a day or two before the magazine gets delivered to their own homes,” Rolando said. “And that’s what helps make *The Postal Record* unique and special to the NALC—it takes advantage of what we do best—we deliver.” ✉

Where does *The Postal Record* go?

A free subscription to home delivery of *The Postal Record* is a benefit of NALC membership. But that wasn’t always the case.

Through May 1942, the magazine was distributed to members via “club bundle.” Stacks of magazines were delivered to union halls and post office work rooms and left for members to take.

That changed thanks to a resolution passed by the Los Angeles Convention of 1941, which concluded that it would be “a decided advantage to have *The Postal Record* mailed to a member’s residence, thereby giving it wider circulation among members’ families and their friends.”

These days, copies of the magazine also land on the desks of important decision-makers on Capitol Hill and throughout the international labor movement. And anyone in the world with web access can download select feature stories and columns posted to nalc.org in PDF format.