

Hawaiian Post Office

The first mention of a postal system in Hawaii was an enactment of the Legislature (4th Article, Second Act) on April 27, 1846, relating to the handling of inter-island mails. It was entitled "An Act to Organize the Executive Departments of the Hawaiian Islands," and stated:

"The collector general of customs and the collectors of the respective ports of entry and departure...shall be, ex-officio post masters, and entitled to receive and open, at their respective ports, the mail bags hereinafter specified. The minister of the interior shall appoint some trustworthy and discreet person, residing conveniently, on each of the islands where no port of entry and departure is established...to be the post master thereof."

The act further provided for furnishing leather postal bags, setting up schedules for closing of mails, and posting of lists of mail received by the postmaster.

With the United States Post Office initiating a regular mail service by steamship between the east coast and California and Oregon, and a subsequent treaty between the U.S. and Hawaii (ratified August 9, 1850) in which an article provided for the safe transmission of the mails between the two countries, the Hawaiian government decided that the 1846 statute governing internal correspondence was insufficient to handle foreign mails. The Privy Council, therefore, passed a decree on December 20, 1850, and the 1851 Legislature enacted a law that established a Post Office in Honolulu (temporarily in the Polynesian Office). The Council appointed a Postmaster, Henry M. Whitney, and set up rates for remuneration to ships' captains for carrying the mails.

Inter-island mails were handled free of charge until 1859. One of the early controversies of the Post Office was the question of initiating postal fees for inter-island mail. Postmaster Whitney represented the view that mails should be kept free as native correspondence was steadily on the increase and initiating charges would exclude a large share of these native letter writers. The Minister of the Interior (1854 Report, p.7) agreed, and added that it was important to encourage native correspondence as it contributed "in some degree to the advancement of the nation in civilization." The next postmaster, J. Jackson, argued that the present system requiring ships to carry inter-island mails without compensation resulted in non-punctual delivery and questionable safety of the mails. suggest adopting a small inter-island postage fee, with the revenue derived to go to the vessels carrying the mail. The legislature (Civil Code 1859) amended the acts of the Post Office and adopted postal rates for inter-island mail effective August 1, 1859. The Minister of the Interior Report of 1860, notes that despite mail charges correspondence between native Hawaiians did not stop. (p.2)

The first postage stamps were the "Missionaries" issued October 1, 1851. A great problem in the 1850's and 1860's was the frequent lack of stamps - post offices would run out (because they failed to order enough or to reorder soon enough), and the mail carriers often had difficulty giving change because of the lack of coins.

The legislature in 1854, passed an act "authorizing the appointment of mail carriers in the remote districts of the Kingdom." They neglected to provide appropriations to carry out the law, instead stating that the islands could use any surplus money from the police appropriation to implement the act. The only island with a surplus was Hawaii, and they set up a mail route from Kawaihae to Hilo through Hamakua in 1854.

In that same year, the Post Office was moved to Honolulu House. In 1870, the Post Office building at Merchant and Bethel streets was built and the post office remained there until May 1, 1922, when it relocated to the King and Richard street site in the newly constructed Federal Building.

Initially, the mails were forwarded between the United States and Hawaii, and between the islands, by sailing vessels. These trips, dependent on the inconsistencies of weather, caused many scheduling problems and resulted in irregular handling of mail. By 1862, the introduction of steam communication between the islands facilitated the movement of inter-island mails and improved the transmittal of mails between the U.S. and Hawaii by rendering "their conveyance by sailing vessels more regular." (Minister of Interior Report, 1862, p.12) "The installation of a subsidized line of mail steamers in 1867 probably furnished the impetus for the drawing up of the first formal postal treaty (May 4, 1870) between the Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States." (Hawaii, Its Stamps and Postal History, p.81) The treaty went into operation on July 1, 1870, and remained in effect until Hawaii became a member of the Universal Postal Union, January 1, 1882.

Within the islands, the number of mail carriers and mail routes increased. A passage in the 1884 Report of the Postmaster General describes the mail carriers and their work in an appeal for increased salaries.

"These men are all native Hawaiians, and as they have to be regular in their service, starting promptly in all kinds of weather, and must own relays of horses or mules, to be always ready in serviceable condition, they are justly entitled to what they are paid. Some of them have been in this service for fifteen or twenty years, and have seen the mails increase from a small number of letters and papers weekly, that hardly filled a pair of saddle bags, to eight or ten heavy sacks, requiring sometimes two extra pack animals to carry them over the rough mountains and through deep gulches and streams. On all the routes they leave and collect correspondence at the numerous houses and villages scattered near the road, and have become a great public convenience, indispensable for properly distributing the twenty thousand Hawaiian and foreign papers which our publishers and newsdealers claim that they issue every week."
(p.6)

The introduction of steam vessels, making possible regular mail service between the islands, can account for part of the increase in internal mails. Another part can be attributed to the increase in daily, weekly and monthly publications. "When it is remembered that all island subscribers to these publications are entitled by law to receive their papers through the domestic mails free of postage, one cause of the increased use of mails will be discovered." (Report of the Postmaster General, 1884, p.13)

The 1882 Legislature enacted a law to authorize the Postmaster General to establish domestic and foreign Postal Money Order systems, and by May 1883, a domestic money order business had begun. International money orders between the U.S. and Hawaii date from January 1, 1884. (Minister of Interior Report, 1884, p.33)

A few years later, on July 1, 1887, the Post Office opened a Hawaiian Postal Savings Bank.

"The Hawaiian Postal Savings Bank was opened...as a branch of this bureau, and has proved a remarkable success, all classes availing themselves of its advantages. The principal post offices throughout the islands have been constituted branches of the bank service and have proved a convenience to country residents and have turned in a quite a large aggregate of deposits." (Minister of Interior Report, 1888, p.88)

By 1897, the postal system had grown so large that it was no longer possible to close down the Honolulu Post Office in order to handle incoming overseas mail.

"Formerly everything was on the occasions in question subordinated to the handling of mails, but the community has long since outgrown the village style where that sort of thing was tolerable... The time has surely arrived...when every branch of the Postal Bureau should be completely segregated, having its staff confined strictly to its own peculiar duties." (Report of the Postmater General, 1897, p.3-4)

With annexation and the Organic Act, the postal service of Hawaii was superseded by that of the United State, taking effect June 14, 1900.

The Incoming Correspondence to the Postmaster General constitutes a major portion of records of the Post Office Department. This correspondence, usually from the district postmasters to the Postmaster General, includes accounts and business reports, requests for stamps, and complaints about mail routes, shipping, missing mails, and lost keys for mailbags. Another important record source, the Postmaster General letterbooks, detail the workings of the post office, both internally and internationally, from 1856 to 1901.

Following is a list of the records in the Postmaster General files, as well as a list of postmasters through annexation.

Postmaster Generals

H.M. Whitney (December 22, 1850 - July 1, 1856)
J. Jackson (July 1, 1856 - August 14, 1859) (Jackson died August 14, 1859)
A.K. Clarke (August 27, 1859 - June 30, 1863)
David Kalakaua (June 30, 1863 - March 18, 1865)
A.P. Brickwood (March 18, 1865 - July 20, 1881)
John M. Kapena (July 20, 1881 - February 13, 1883)
H.M. Whitney (February 16, 1883 - April 15, 1886)
J.L. Kaulukou (April 15, 1886 - July 31, 1886)
Luther Aholo (July 31, 1886 - October 15, 1886)
F. Wundenberg (October 15, 1886 - May 2, 1891)
Walter Hill (May 2, 1891 - April 1, 1893)
Jos. M. Oat (April 1, 1893 - April 30, 1905)

POSTMASTER GENERAL

- Box HPO-1 Money Orders: Forms
- HPO-1 Post Office: Forms
- HPO-1 Post Office Repairs: Receipts, 1865-1866
- HPO-1 Postal Savings Bank
Forms
Hookena Post Office Deposit Ledger. 1888-1898.
Pass Books
Rules and Regulations
Miscellaneous
- HPO-27 Index to Accounts
Incoming Correspondence. n.d., 1864-1870, 1878-1881, 1884, 1886-1901.
- HPO-1 thru 17 Incoming Correspondence, Foreign Postmasters. 1886-1891.
- HPO-17 HPO-28 & 29 Separated fragile letters
Forwarding Requests. n.d., 1880-1898.
- HPO-17 thru 19 Postmasters Requests for Stamps. 1868, 1878-1880.
- HPO-19 Claims for Advertised Letters. 1886-1898.
- HPO-19 Miscellaneous
- HPO-20 thru 26 Universal Postal Union. Incoming Letters. 1878-1896 (French)
- HPO-26 Luther Severance. Postmaster, Island of Hawaii. Incoming Correspondence.
n.d., 1870-1871, 1873-1883.

Postmaster General Letter Books

- HPO vol 1 July 31, 1856 - March 6, 1862. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 2 May 1862 - October 10, 1868. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 3 October 28, 1868 - July 7, 1881. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 4 November 12, 1883 - July 30, 1885. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 5 July 31, 1885 - August 23, 1886. Domestic.
- HPO vol 6 August 24, 1886 - November 29, 1887. Domestic.
- HPO vol 7 December 3, 1887 - March 31, 1888. Domestic.
- HPO vol 8 April 2, 1888 - November 8, 1888. Domestic.
- HPO vol 9 November 9, 1888 - September 16, 1889. Domestic.
- HPO vol 10 September 16, 1889 - January 6, 1891. Domestic.
- HPO vol 11 January 8, 1891 - December 2, 1893. Domestic.
- HPO vol 12 December 3, 1893 - January 6, 1898. Domestic.
- HPO vol 13 April 5, 1892 - January 24, 1893. Domestic.
- HPO vol 14 April 6, 1893 - August 30, 1894. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 15 August 30, 1894 - March 20, 1895. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 16 March 20, 1895 - January 14, 1896. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 17 January 14, 1896 - August 17, 1897. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 18 August 17, 1897 - July 5, 1898. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 19 July 5, 1898 - June 26, 1899. Domestic and Foreign.
- HPO vol 20 June 27, 1899 - April 17, 1901. Domestic and Foreign.

HPO vol 21 July 22, 1885 - October 18, 1893. Foreign.
HPO vol 22 October 21, 1893 - May 19, 1900. Foreign.
HPO vol 23 June 8, 1896 - February 10, 1898. Money Order Department.
HPO vol 24 September 23, 1898 - September 11, 1901. Money Order Department.
HPO vol 25 November 1, 1893 - October 21, 1895. Letters Received (information about).
HPO vol 26 October 26, 1895 - November 16, 1900. Letters Received (information about).
HPO vol 27 December 16, 1898 - September 24, 1900. Postal Savings Bank. (outgoing letters and Statements of Certificates).
HPO vol 28 September 20, 1900 - June 29, 1901. Postal Savings Bank. (Statements of Certificates).
HPO vol 29 December 20, 1879 - May 25, 1883. Universal Postal Union. (Incoming letters - copies, translations).
HPO vol 30 March 10, 1888 - June 15, 1900. Universal Postal Union. (Outgoing Letters).

CASH BOOKS (Daily Balance/Revenues & Expenditures)

HPO vol 31 1. January 1, 1869 - November 2, 1872
HPO vol 32 2. October 3, 1873 - September 30, 1876
HPO vol 33 3. October 3, 1876 - January 31, 1877
HPO vol 34 4. February 1, 1877 - April 2, 1880
HPO vol 35 5. April 2, 1880 - May 7, 1881
HPO vol 36 6. April 19, 1881 - December 30, 1882
HPO vol 37 7. January 2, 1883 - December 31, 1883
HPO vol 38 8. April 1, 1885 - January 2, 1886
HPO vol 39 9. April 1, 1886 - March 31, 1887 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 40 10. April 1, 1887 - March 31, 1888 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 41 11. April 1, 1886 - March 31, 1888
HPO vol 42 12. April 2, 1888 - March 31, 1890
HPO vol 43 13. April 2, 1888 - March 31, 1890 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 44 14. April 1, 1890 - March 31, 1892
HPO vol 45 15. April 1, 1890 - March 31, 1892 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 46 16. April 1, 1892 - March 31, 1894
HPO vol 47 17. April 1, 1892 - October 18, 1893 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 48 18. October 18, 1893 - October 24, 1896 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 49 19. November 2, 1896 - July 20, 1898 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 50 20. April 2, 1894 - May 31, 1896
HPO vol 51 21. June 1, 1896 - September 30, 1898
HPO vol 52 22. April 2, 1894 - December 31, 1895 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 53 23. January 2, 1896 - November 30, 1897 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 54 24. December 1, 1897 - March 31, 1899 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 55 25. October 1, 1898 - December 30, 1899
HPO vol 56 26. April 1, 1899 - September 30, 1900 (Rough Cash Book)
HPO vol 57 27. January - September 1900

JOURNALS (Monthly Accounting - Revenues & Expenditures
- Sales Designated by Individual Post Office)

HPO vol 58	28. January 1858 - June 1864
HPO vol 59	29. July 1864 - March 1868
HPO vol 60	30. April 1868 - April 1870
HPO vol 61	31. July 1864 - January 1870 (Rough Journal)
HPO vol 62	32. May 1870 - December 1871 (Rough Journal)
HPO vol 63	33. May 1870 - April 1874
HPO vol 64	34. April 1874 - March 1880
HPO vol 65	35. April 1880 - March 1881
HPO vol 66	36. April 1881 - September 1884
HPO vol 67	37. April 1884 - June 1886
HPO vol 68	38. April 1886 - March 1888
HPO vol 69	39. April 1888 - March 1890
HPO vol 70	40. April 1890 - March 1892
HPO vol 71	41. April 1892 - March 1894
HPO vol 72	42. April 1894 - February 1899
HPO vol 73	43. February 1899 - December 1899
HPO vol 74	44. January - September 1900

LEDGER BOOKS (Balance of Income Against Expenses -- by category of expenses and income, ie. appropriations, salary, mail carriage, stamp sales, box rents, money order expenses...)

HPO vol 75	45. January 30, 1858 - July 1864
HPO vol 76	46. July 1864 - April 1870
HPO vol 77	47. May 1870 - October 1871
HPO vol 78	48. April 1874 - March 1880
HPO vol 79	49. April 1880 - March 1881
HPO vol 80	50. April 1881 - March 1886 (includes a few entries for April 1887)
HPO vol 81	51. April 1886 - March 1888
HPO vol 82	52. April 1888 - March 1890
HPO vol 83	53. April 1890 - March 1892
HPO vol 84	54. April 1892 - March 1894
HPO vol 85	55. April 1894 - December 1897
HPO vol 86	56. January 1898 - December 1899
HPO vol 87	57. January - August 1900
HPO vol 88	58. Ledger Book. April 1886 - September 1898. Monthly balances for ledger book categories above. ("Trial Balance")
HPO vol 89	59. Ledger Book. September 1898 - August 1900. Monthly balances for ledger book categories above. ("Trial Balance")

DEPOSIT LEDGERS - HAWAIIAN POSTAL SAVINGS BANK

HPO vol 90	60. Account No. 1 - 2002	July 1, 1886 - 1893
HPO vol 91	61. Account No. 1 - 2000	1893 - 1897
HPO vol 92	62. Account No. 2001 - 4000	August 17, 1888 - 1889
HPO vol 93	63. Account No. 2001 - 4000	January 1893 - 1897
HPO vol 94	64. Account No. 4001 - 6000	December 26, 1889 - 1897
HPO vol 95	65. Account No. 6001 - 8000	April 21, 1891 - 1897
HPO vol 96	66. Account No. 8001 - 10,000	October 1, 1895 - 1900

- HPO vol 97 67. Account No. 10,001 - 12,000 August 17, 1896 - 1900
 HPO vol 98 68. Account No. 12,001 - 14,000 December 22, 1896 - 1900
 HPO vol 99 69. Account No. 14,001 - 15,266 June 15, 1897 - 1900
 HPO vol 100 70. Hawaiian Postal Savings Bank. Cash Book. January 3, 1898 -
 September 30, 1899. Balance by name and nationality.

MISCELLANEOUS POST OFFICE BOOKS

- HPO vol 101 71. Universal Postal Union Convention, Paris. 1878. Union Postale
 Universelle. Convention De Paris. Juin 1878. Paris. Imprimerie
 Nationale. 1878.
- HPO vol 102 72. General Post Office. Letters Received and Forwarded. April 1870 -
 March 1887. (by biennial period)
- HPO vol 103 73. Post Office. Record of Dispatch of Daily Mail. September 1881 -
 December 1885. (Primarily mail received) Includes (in Hawaiian)
 a report on the distribution of lands in the ahupuaa of Moanalua,
 Oahu (p.3-5, 108-127). Includes names of people who lease, farm,
 caretake, exchange, etc...lands of the Konohiki for the period
 approximately 1875-1880.
- HPO vol 104 74. Post Office. Daily Record. Mails Received. January 1882 - July
 1885. (also includes dispatched mail for April 1886 - August 1886)
- HPO vol 105 75. Statistical Record. Mails received and dispatched. April 1886 -
 March 1888.
- HPO vol 106 76. Foreign Mail Dispatched. March 1894 - June 1900. (Lists:
 Name, destination, cost)
- HPO vol 107 77. Postage Sales. October 1, 1859 - March 31, 1870. (By name of
 person sold to - alphabetical index)
- HPO vol 108 78. Tax Letters (balance only). February 28 - July 31, 1898.
 (By post office, all islands)
- HPO vol 109 79. Foreign & Domestic Money Orders & Fees. January 1, 1885 -
 December 31, 1887. Chronological order.
- HPO vol 110 80. Foreign & Domestic Money Orders & Fees. January 1, 1885 -
 March 31, 1888. By post office.
- HPO vol 111 81. Domestic Money Orders. Island of Hawaii. April 1, 1890 -
 March 15, 1892. By issuing post office.
- HPO vol 112 82. Foreign Stamp Orders. August 1893 - June 1900. (Includes name
 and amount received)
- HPO vol 113 83. Domestic Stamp Orders. April 1880 - March 1881. By post office.
- HPO vol 114 84. Foreign Parcel Post (Statement of Imports). January 1898 -
 February 1899. (Includes: name, contents, value, and duty)
- HPO vol 115 85. Foreign Parcel Post (Statement of Imports). February 1899 -
 December 1899. (Includes: name, contents, value, and duty)
- HPO vol 116 86. Parcel Post Arrivals by Name of Steamer. August 15, 1899 -
 November 26, 1899. (Includes name of addressee)
- HPO vol 117 87. Parcel Post Arrivals by Name of Steamer. November 28, 1899 -
 April 14, 1900. (Includes name of addressee)
- HPO vol 118 88. Money Order Forms. Great Britan, #41,001 - 42,000 (blank from 41,235)
 Norway, #716 - 725 (blank)
 Canada, #901 - 915 (blank)
- HPO vol 119 89. Post Office Supplies Ledger. Island of Hawaii. July 4, 1895 -
 July 1897. By post office.
- HPO vol 120 Stamp Journal, October, 1883 - March, 1886

See also: Interior Department - Postmaster General. 1850 - 1887,
 M-378 Hawaii Postal Service Scrapbooks (2 Vols.)