Uncle Sam's Strange Mail Carriers

BY GEORGE W. NORRIS



Filippino Mail Cart drawn by Water Buffalo

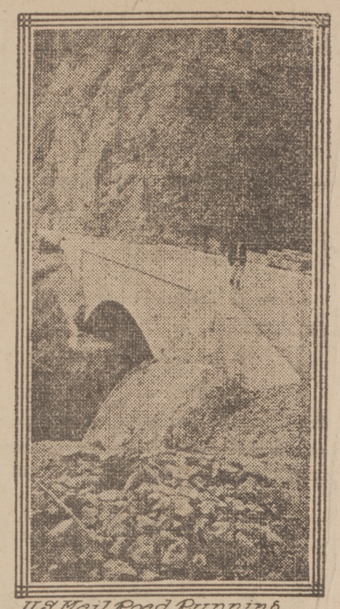


Mail Boat Hegg after a Rough Trip in Alaskan Waters



Launch used on Yukon River Alaska

Delivering Mail with Dog Teams, Interior of Alaska



U.S. Mail Road Running North from Manila

To the average reader the delivery of a letter through the United States mails pictures only the regular and neatly uniformed letter-carrier in shining brass buttons who trips politely up the front steps and hands in letters from all over the face of the earth. Yet the letter-carrier, if the most familiar method of receiving one's mail from the care of Uncle Sam, is only one of many schemes employed by the government for disposing of the millions of letters annually turned over to the post office department throughout the world.

For instance, Uncle Sam, aside from the city delivery of letters and the rural free delivery carriers, has regular contracts by which letters are delivered by steam launches, by sail boats and by teams of half-wild Alaskan dogs. In Porto Rico Uncle Sam has native letter-carriers who carry the United States mail on donkeys; in Samoa the relay runners carry the sacks on their browny shoulders as they race for hundreds of miles through the islands.

NATIVE FILIPINO RELAY RUNNERS

In the Philippines native runners thread the jungle, carrying letters from home to soldiers in far-away posts on the very outskirts of utter savagery. On the superb military and mail roads constructed by the United States War Department crude native carts creak their way for hundreds of miles, while in the primeval wilderness of the Filipino jungle strange native carts, with solid wheels sawn in a single piece from the round trunk of some gigantic Filipino tree, keep the mails moving toward the address, often penned in some refined drawing-room in a big American city.

Camels, aside from donkeys and big eight-horse teams are used to draw United States mail. In the Philippine archipelago the strangest of all the animals which pull the United States mail bags are found. They are the native Filipino water buffaloes. Strange animals are these, with uncanny humps on their backs, and long thick horns. They alone can be used so far in the islands as beasts of burden, as the rinderpest still continues to kill all oxen and similar animals imported from other countries.

The government has been for years trying to find some one method of making American cattle immune to the rinderpest, but so far without success. Therefore the water buffaloes continue to be all Uncle Sam can depend on the haul his mail sacks in the wilder sections of the land of the Filipino.

The handling of all mails in the Philippine Islands, curiously enough, has nothing to do with the post office department. It comes under the jurisdiction of the war department and incidentally the practical part of the managing is done by the bureau of insular affairs, at the head of which is Brigadier General Clarence Ransom Edwards, who, by the way, did some fine, soldierly fighting in the Philippines and knows personally the conditions in the islands and the needs of the population, both native and acquired.

The view shown of the Benguet mail and military road shows that great highway as it is wending north from Manila on its way into the recesses of the island and so to Luzon, where it strikes off into small native trails. Only native bearers can venture to endure the final journey to deliver mail to jungle points of the interior.

In such cases the mail carriers not only convey mail, but also provisions and other commodities. In many cases these carriers are the sole method of communicating with the outside world of civilization.

Despite the curious looking animals and quaint carts, the United States mail is just as sacred in character in the jungles of the Philippines as on Broadway, New York.

At first the natives continually attacked and robbed the mails, but the war department merely detached a few hard-riding, rapid-shooting American soldiers, and since then there has been no molesting the United States mail, in even the wildest sections of the islands.

QUEER CARRIERS IN HAWAII.

Over in the Hawaii Islands Uncle Sam has a letter carrier who uses a small gasoline launch just once a week so that the business men of Kawaihae, Lalamilo and Kiñolo Bay and Kailua can receive their mail and hear how things are progressing in the remainder of these United States and the rest of the world in general. These folk will be a week in learning whether a national election has gone one way or the other.

They were a week late in learning that President McKinley was shot and that Theodore Roosevelt had become president of the United States. This letter-carrier has only forty miles to cover, but the overland trails are so bad that it takes him over nine hours to make the forty miles. The carrier draws a salary of $1,100, but must pay all his own expenses, so the job is no sinecure.

Another Hawaiian letter-carrier has the job of getting the letters from Pahala to Volcano House. He makes the trip in about six hours. Last year he got $1,268.86, and doubtless is considered a rich man by the natives of the island.

There are only 17 mails a year at Pago Pago, Samoa and these come via Honolulu to San Francisco, a distance of over 5,000 miles. It is details of this sort which cast an educational light on the queer places, and the vast distances covered by Uncle Sam's letter-carriers throughout the world.

IN ICY ALASKA AND THE YUKON REGION.

The River Yukon is not much known to the casual traveler or to the ordinary citizen. Yet it is one of the great rivers of this continent, a river that vies with the Mississippi and Missouri in volume, and width, and is of vast length. On this mighty river for certain periods of the year the Northern Commercial Company delivers all the United States mail from the swift little launch, the "Messenger," with a speed of 15 knots. It is a mere shell and yet day after day it drives its way around the shifting ice blocks and through the thin skim of ice on the Yukon River on a 1,200-mile journey, and has never failed in the end to "deliver the letter" as per agreement.

But the photograph of the mail boat, Hegg, which takes the mail to the isolated point of Fort Seward, at Haines, Alaska, shows the most venturesome of all the water mail-carriers of Uncle Sam. The craft in the photo is shown loaded down with ice, which has accumulated aboard the vessel on one of her daring trips through the Arctic waters.

The little vessel carries practically nothing but the invaluable mail packages. She is swift and light, and her daring crew drive her through ice films and around huge blocks of ice that would deter any but the most hardy of Arctic mariners. Fort Seward lies just back of the Hegg, in the photograph, and this is probably the most northerly post office with regular deliveries in the whole world.

But while the water buffaloes of the Filipino, the donkeys of the Porto Rican and the ice-clad mail boat Hegg are picturesque, it is to the dog sledge teams that dare the icy trails of Alaska, laden with sacks marked U. S. M., that the palm for daring must be awarded. One of these trails—that from the post office at Barrow to Kotzebue by way of Point Hope—is so dangerous that only two trips a year by land are arranged for by the post office authorities, and only 150 pounds of mail matter of all classes can be delivered by the post office authorities.

It was only last January that George Blain, a halfbreed, used to the icy trail and wise in native tricks to maintain life and follow the right road during the Arctic winter nights, lost his way between Kotzebue and Council, two little Alaskan snow-bound villiages. For three days he wandered blindly with his half-maddened dogs dragging the little sledge on which the mail sacks were piled.

Finally, at Kotzebue Sound, he lost his way in a tremendous snow-storm and his hands and feet became frostbitten. When he staggered into Council, George Blain, United States letter-carrier, was violently insane, but he still guarded the precious sacks of letters. He had been four days making 12 miles, and he was so badly frostbitten that he lost both hands and nearly lost both feet.

His mind he lost entirely and there is no hope for the recovery of his reason, according to the physician at this outpost of civilization. Such are the meager details of this adventure of one of Uncle Sam's letter-carriers in the frozen North.

The dog sledges in an important section of the Yukon and Alaskan district form the only means of delivering mail from November until May. But Uncle Sam has arranged regular post offices, and once a month, or once a week, and in a few instances at least once a day, the barking dogs, half wolf in many instances, strong, powerful and wholly savage, pull on the little sledges piled high with mail sacks and the work of keeping Americans in touch with the world at large goes on despite death and suffering.

The dogs are usually harnessed tandem to the number of half a dozen. The sledges carry only the mail and the carrier must foot the whole distance.

On the sledge will be a few rations of dried meat and the snowshoes of the letter carrier. At stations placed at varying distances along the nearly obliterated trail in the deep snow, are log houses, where food and firewood are stored, and the letter-carrier usually stops here to eat, and if his schedule permits, he sleeps in these snow-bound huts.

But if the task of carrying mails to these out-of-the-way places of the earth is hazardous and expensive, the joy of the sojourners at distant points in seeing the familiar mail sacks, with the brand United States Mail on them, is pitiable to behold.

The bills for this work are very high, running up sometimes to $3 and $4 per mail package. But the citizens of these United States pay no bill so gladly as that of furnishing mail communication between the big centers of human life and the most isolated points, no matter what the cost or the hazard of maintaining the efficiency of the mail service.

KING EDWARB'S SISTER AN AUTHOR

In the British royal family the King's youngest sister, Princess Henry of Battenburg, is the only real literary member, and she is also quite a talented composer. Her Royal Highness has recently completed a history of the Isle of Wight, of which she is captain and governor, and it is to be published and sold for the benefit of the island.

Princess Henry's first published book was Princess Henry's rst published book was a translation of a German fairy tale, and her first musical composition was a song written to a lyric by Lord Beaconsfield, which was published in a girl's paper.

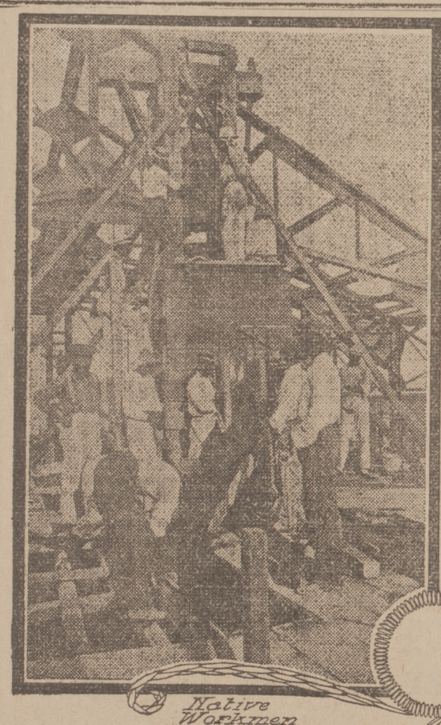
Her most ambitions effort, however, is her book on the mysteries of life and death, published in Germany under the title of "Trost im Teide," by B. von B. Although printed in English for private circulation, it has never been published in England or America.

It was written during the first year of the grief after the death of her husband, and contains passages which reveal a very fine character and quite exceptional powers of thought and expression.

The Princess' literary gifts are inherited by her daughter, the Queen of Spain, who wrote a short play in French for the members of the court at San Sebastian. Queen Victoria Eugenie has a considerable knowledge of dramatic technique, acquired in private theatricals at Carlsbrooke Castle, in which she used to take a prominent part every year before she was married to the King of Spain.

KINGSTON, THE ISLAND CITY RISING PHENIX LIKE FROM IT'S ASHES

BY DUDLEY C. PLUMMER



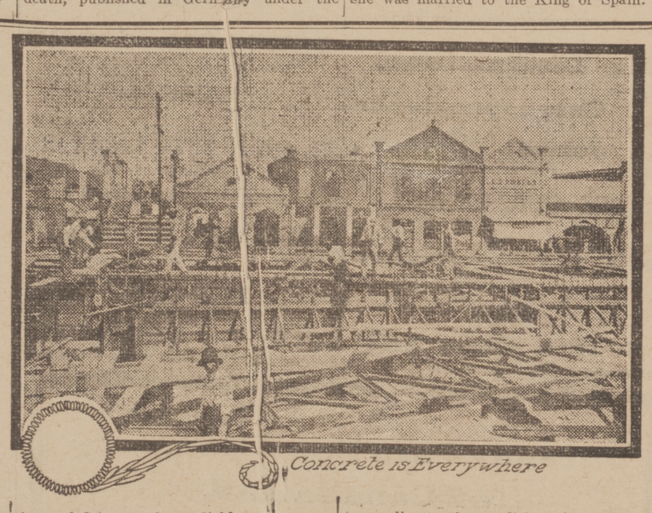
Native Workmen



An Unimproved Street



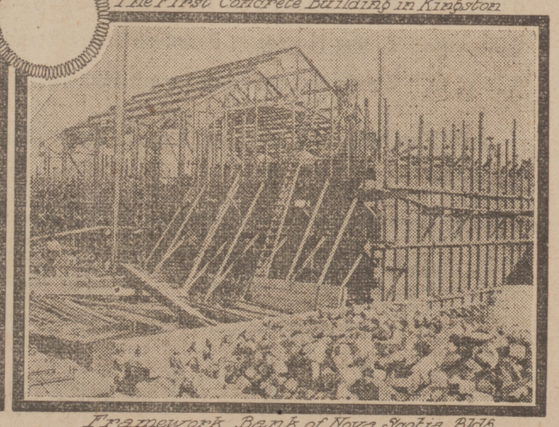
The First Concrete Building in Kingston



Concrete is Everywhere



Finished Block



Framework, Bank of Nova Scotia Bldg.

A LITTLE over 18 months ago Kingston, Jamaica, was a city of brick and mortar, an ugly, dingy city, characterized by its Spanish style of architecture, in strange contrast to the well laid out streets and the distinctly English manner of the town. The buildings not being uniform in architecture presented an ungraceful appearance. Two-storied houses alternated with one-story structures, and the general aspect of the town was far from pleasing to the eye.

Then came the earthquake at 3.30 o'clock on the afternoon of the 14th of January There was only a low grumbling of the earth to warn the citizens as the rippling earth caused to tumble in confusion the ancient brick and mortar buildings which, as they fell, killed 2,000 people and did damage to property to the extent of many millions of dollars. But like so many of the seeming catastrophies of this world, what seemed a great misfortune was in reality a blessing in disguise. That was a little over 18 months ago, and today the old order of things has changed making way for the new. The old order, dating back from the end of the eighteenth century, was brick and mortar; the new is steel-frame buildings reinforced with concrete, for Kingston and its inhabitants have learnt their costly lesson and are profiting thereby.

While the property loss was undoubtedly heavy and spelt ruin to many merchants, yet this loss would not have mattered so much if it had not been accompanied by the terrible loss of life. It is admitted that Jamaica is underpopulated; for this fertile island has only about 180 persons to the square mile. So when ruin overtook Kingston serious people looked not only on the financial loss, but also on the loss of population.

With the true spirit of determination the inhabitants of this, the most important town of the most important possession of the British dominions in the West Indies, have set about rebuilding the stricken city and to make it, as far as human power is able, earthquake and hurricane proof. Following the example of the people of San Francisco, to whom a like misfortune had come the year before, and on whose grit and energy the whole world had looked in admiration and applause, Kingstonians have put their whole soul into the task of reconstruction, and have been generously aided in this work by the British government. From the latter they have received nearly five millions of dollars, partly in the form of a loan, payments of which extend over a period of 20 years, and partly as a gift. For the administration and distribution of these funds two bodies were created, the Kingston Loan Board and the Assistance Committee. The latter has been violently attacked in the English and Jamaica press for pursuing a policy of "to him that hath shall be given, etc." This committee is decidedly unpopular.

If the citizens of the wrecked city were determined that it should rise Phoenix-like from its ashes, the government was equally determined that in its regeneration it should be beautiful and uniform. So the building authority was created. Before the disaster a man could build anyhow and anywhere, and in some cases buildings were put up which took in a portion of the streets. But the government stepped in, and with paternal interest (which of course, was resented) said: Build all you like, but I must have a say as to how and where you shall build. So now no building can be erected that does not come up to a certain standard, and the plans of which have not been submitted to the building authority.

The government, however, did not hamper or restrict building operations. To the contrary, it set a very good example. Soon after the quake the determination was reached on grounds of public safety to remove the excise warehouses with their contents, comprising from 3,000 to 6,000 casks of rum to the extreme west of the city, and the legislature appropriated $40,000 for constructing suitable fire and earthquakeproof stores, with adequate accommodation. Land was quickly acquired and the work is now well under way. This was not all, however, for the ruling authorities acquired land in the centre of the city and announced that they would erect public buildings on this land at a total cost of $500,000.

Once the possibilities of Kingston's reconstruction and the resultant trade were realized various American companies bestirred themselves to help the work along. One American company designed and erected the first steel frame building in Kingston. Their work was done for the Jamaica Tobacco Company, a branch of the American Tobacco Trust. Native artisans knew next to nothing about steel framing, so the company brought down its own workmen. The natives looked on in wonder at the incredible speed with which the steelwork was put together and filled it with concrete. Crowds of blacks gathered in the streets and stopped traffic as they gazed in amazement at a huge girder, with a man climbing to one end and being hoisted into position 100 feet above the street. They had never seen anything like it before.

Hardly had the burning debris cooled after the conflagration which completed the work of devastation begun by the earthquake than the officials of the Nova Scotia Bank had drawn up plans for the erection of a magnificent structure, to cost nearly one hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

This work is progressing rapidly and will be completed within a month or so. The building will be on the Spanish Colonnade style and will be the best bank building in the West Indies.

With the example of the bank and of other places before them the city went up for steel and concrete, and so great has been the demand that delays are being experienced in getting the iron work down. In order to aid in the reconstruction work the government waived the import duty on cement and placed it on the free list. The demand for this was enormous and shipload after shipload was brought down. Brick was discarded and now is not being used even in the erection of the meanest house.

When the earthquake passed over not a church in Kingston was left standing. There was something strange, something peculiar in the fact that of these edifices not one survived the thirty seconds of earthshaking. A story is told of an Anglican parson and a Roman Catholic priest the church of which denomination was completely demolished. Said the parson, "Your church has suffered most." "Yes," replied the priest, "God has been good to us. He has spared us the trouble and expense of pulling it down."

The first church to be restored was the Wesleyan Church Coke. Others are being gradually completed. The Roman Catholics have planned a mammoth cathedral, which will cost $75,000; work on the edifice has been commenced and is being pushed forward as rapidly as possible.

Another most important building operation is that connected with the new railway workships, which will cover nearly three acres of land in the western portion of the city. The site has been cleared and the entire steel structure will be imported from the United States.

Notwithstanding the fact that the rebuilding of Kingston is being accompanied mainly by British money, yet the trade has turned towards the United States. The fact that a British colony should use Britain's free gift and loan in order to import American materials might sound peculiar; but it must be remembered that the United States is the natural market for the West Indies. In a month orders are filled in the United States; it takes three months to get materials from England.

In the first days of reconstruction work was hampered owing to the uncertain quality of labor. Workmen, accustomed all their lives to follow a certain line of work, when suddenly changed to something altogether different, find themselves at a disadvantage, and the employers of such labor sometimes give way to sudden fits of pyrotechnical nature. So it was with the Jamacian artisan who had to face a sudden transition from bricks and mortar to steel and concrete. Owing to the defective system of training, for in Jamaica the apprenticeship system has fallen into disuse, and there are no industrial or technical scholars, the supply of first-class artisans was, at the best of times, deficient and unreliable.

At first contractors were chary about employing native labor on the important jobs, but this prejudice is now dying away. Quick to catch onto things and to grasp ideas, the native workmen have adapted themselves to the new conditions, so that the work of erecting steel frame buildings now comes naturally to them.

The insurance companies have greatly restricted rebuilding. On the receipt of the news of the fire following the earthquake the insurance companies repudiated all liability. "We won't pay," they said. They are now being made to pay through the law courts. The policyholders' committee said that he conflagration was caused by a fire which started before the earthquake and two juries at Mandeville and Montego Bay decided that it was so. The supreme court of Jamaica sustained the verdict of the juries, and Kingston went wild with delight when the news came that the final court of appeal, the judicial committee of the privy council, had decided in one case in favor of the policyholders. The other case will come on for hearing in October.

Notwithstanding all disadvantages, Kingston is being restored quickly and silently, and the day is not far off when all traces of the disastrous earthquake of January 14, 1907, will be obliterated, and the people, from improved conditions, will live with greater security.

WILL FRANCE ABOLISH DEATH PENALTY

The French government is considering the advisibility of adding a new punishment to its penal code, a punishment well known in this country—that of life imprisonment. Whether this will take the place of capital punishment or whether it will be an intermediary punishment between scaffold and hard labor is a question which Parliament must decde. At any rate it is fairly certain that the new form of punishment will be tried.

Two systems of life imprisonment are under inspection—the Italian and the Belgian. The French government, having compared them, has chosen the latter. The Italian system is founded on the principle that it is necessary to make the criminal suffer, and his life is made as unpleasant as possible. The Italian prison for those under a life sentence is at Volterra, near Florence. Each prisoner has three cells; one contains only a bed; in the second the prisoner can work, but he is only given a wooden plank to work with, no tools; the third is merely an airshaft. He is not allowed to see anybody, and he cannot receive letters nor read books. The jailer brings him his food twice a day.

The officials are pitiless in their refusal to ameliorate the condition of any of the prisoners.

The Italian deputy who assasinated the editor Sonzogno asked in vain for a pair of shoes to replace the wooden sabots which tortured his feet. A Milanese woman, who had lived her life in palaces, asked for a metal spoon to replace the wooden one she had been forced to eat with, but in spite of the fact that several noble families attempted to assist her the request was not granted. Naturally many of the criminals of Italy die mad; others are removed to asylums.

The system of Holland and Belgium, which the French government has decided to use, is entirely different. This system, like that in vogue in the United States, is based on the assumption that it is necessary to educate and reform the criminal to make a better man of him. This system has been in use in Belgium for forty years, and the death penalty is no longer employed there.

The criminal who is condemned to life imprisonment spends the first six years of his sentence in solitary confinement. He is then transferred to a larger cell, and works during the day with other men. During the first six years he never sees his fellow prisoners, but each day he receives visits from the overseer, the priest and the instructor, and often from the director of the prison, who visits twenty prisoners every day.

The prisoner works all the time, and he is allowed to sell his work. Some of the prisoners have amassed hundreds of dollars. In each cell there are two books, one on alcoholism and the other the Bible. In Holland the different religious faiths of the prisoners are observed, and each is allowed to have the special literature of his sect. Three times a day the doors of the cells are opened while prayer is read in the garden.

In Belgium at the end of 10 years the prisoner can choose between his cell and work in the common with other prisoners. Many of them choose the cell. Usually this system does not lead to madness, although there is occasionally a case of a man losing his mind.

In Holland, after the first few years, the prisoners enjoy much liberty and are even allowed to play cards. It is not likely that the system adopted in France will go so far.

MUCH IN LITTLE

A ready speaker will utter about 7,500 words an hour in making an address.

Some varieties of fish can stand any amount of cold without harm. Perch will live in ponds which are frozen practically solid in every hard winter. The whitefish of Canada, caught through holes in the ice, have been picked up frozen so stiff that they would break like brittle sticks, yet when carefully thawed out showed signs of life.