

# IOWA HISTORY



*(Courtesy Library of Congress)*  
Council Bluffs, Iowa, 1916

## Rain and Snow Won't Stop the Mail

Maybe rain and snow won't stop the mail; but thieves will...

People who were waiting for articles sent through the U.S. Mail via Council Bluffs in the fall of 1922 may have had a long wait for those items. There was a gang of mail thieves operating in the city at the time. And they were making away with valuable items that passed through Council Bluffs in the post office and on rail cars. But the thieves were not a roving band of bandits—they were employees of the post office!

One postal clerk had already been charged in September for stealing money from letters. He was convicted and sent to prison for two years. He implicated other employees in the scheme.

Forty employees had been suspended and were expected to face prosecution for offenses against the postal laws. Postal inspectors believed that “despite increasing difficulties,” they would apprehend at least ten more clerks.

In October confessions were obtained from 25 postal employees who were suspected of involvement in the crime. Warrants for the arrest of additional railway mail clerks were expected to be issued. Through the confessions the post office department inspectors learned of a long list of thefts from the mails at the Union Pacific Terminal in Council Bluffs. Valuable articles such as watches, revolvers, silk materials, fountain pens, and radios had been stolen. Eight postal clerks admitted to stealing articles of minor value—cigars, pencils and candy.

Those who had been arrested were bound over to a federal grand jury under bonds ranging from \$250 to \$1,500. It was reported that all surrendered voluntarily. Most pleaded guilty to the charges; but three pleaded not guilty.

The top floor of the federal building in the city was crowded with friends and relatives of the men charged and a large group of interested citizens were there to witness the events. It was the talk of the city—as the thieves came from all parts of the city. The widespread thefts had caused “great excitement.”

Ultimately 50 of the 90 men employed at the Union Pacific transfer terminal were implicated in the scheme. Postal authorities from Washington, DC, estimated the cost of the stolen items to be \$50,000. The majority of the men were new employees and their ages ranged from 19 to 32 years. Most were in their early 20s. Most admitted that the thefts of articles were from “broken packages” according to those who confessed.

The arrests came about as a result of a two-month long investigation by federal inspectors from Rochester, New York, and Kansas City, Missouri.

Source

“Arraign 24 Clerks for Mail Thefts,” *New York Times*, Oct 21, 1922.

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