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100th Anniversary of the San Francisco Earthquake: Special Edition

April 26, 1906

Hon. George B. Cortelyou,
Postmaster General,
Washington, D.C.

SIR:

I have to inform you that on the morning of April 18th, 1906, the City of San Francisco was visited by a severe earthquake, which in itself did untold damage in the entire or partial destruction of the business blocks and homes of this City. Immediately after the shock, I visited the Main Post Office and found the building considerably damaged. Mission Street on the South had dropped several feet from its original level, and the tracks upon which the mail is transported from the Main Office to the Ferry were rendered unfit for use. I found the clerks of the night shift on duty and willing to continue work. Superintendent of Construction, J. W. Roberts, who has been in charge of the construction of the building, was on the ground immediately and upon a rough estimate figured the damage at from three hundred to four hundred thousand dollars.

As a result of the earthquake, several fires were started in the Southern portion of the City and owing to a lack of water supply, many of the mains having been broken, this part of the City was soon in flames. The fire rapidly approached the vicinity of the Post Office, and threatened its entire destruction. I am pleased to report, however, that through the heroic efforts of some nine or ten of the employees of the Postal and Custodian service, the building was saved from the flames and its contents practically left intact.

About eight o'clock in the morning, the fire broke out in the northern portion of the city, and together with that at the Southern end

town raged for nearly three days, entirely destroying the wholesale and retail district of the City, together with a large portion of the residence district. As soon as the fire was under control and it was possible to visit the burnt district, all the heads of Departments and as many of the clerks as could report for duty assembled at the Post Office ready for work. The fire was practically under control at 4:30 A.M. of the 20th inst. and business was resumed in the post office at 9 A.M. of the same day.

Upon a hasty survey of the situation, it was discovered that about twelve square miles of the densely populated territory of the City had been burned. Many of the clerks at the burnt stations were assigned to duty at the Main Office and at the Stations still standing. A general delivery was immediately inaugurated at the main post office for Stations K and B, the latter of which was first believed to have been destroyed, but was later found to be intact. As parts of the districts of Stations C and E were still standing, new locations for these stations were immediately found. Station C, formerly at the corner of 20th and Mission Streets, is now located on Mission Street between 22nd and 23rd Streets. Station E, formerly on Townsend Street, between Third and Fourth Streets, is now located at 19th and Kentucky Streets. A general delivery was immediately begun at the stations still standing, and on Saturday carrier delivery was inaugurated at those stations.

The following is a list of the regular stations, and their conditions at the present time:

Station A, formerly located at the corner of Polk and Sacramento Streets, was destroyed by fire. This station is now located on Fillmore Street near Sacramento, and three clerks are now employed there in the handling of mail only.

No Money Order or Registry business is being done. There were formerly employed at this station four clerks and twenty-five carriers.

Station B, formerly at 410 Jackson Street in the heart of the business district, stands in the midst of ruins, uninjured, and is doing business. Nine clerks and twenty-three carriers are employed there, and a general delivery is being made from that station.

Station C, formerly located at the corner of 20th and Mission Streets, was destroyed by fire, and is now temporarily located on Mission Street between 22nd and 23rd Streets. The original force of four clerks and twenty-one carriers has been increased by the addition of two clerks.

Ferry Station is uninjured and is now doing business with twelve clerks and seventeen carriers.

Station E was formerly located on Townsend Street between Third and Fourth Streets and was destroyed by fire. This station is now temporarily located at 19th and Kentucky Streets. The regular force of two clerks and eleven carriers is now employed in the temporary quarters.

Station F, located at 2505 Sacramento Street, was uninjured. Besides the regular force of three clerks and twenty-five carriers, eight additional clerks are now employed at this station.

Station G, located at 17th and Castro Streets was uninjured. The regular force of two clerks and nine carriers are now employed there.

Station H, located at Hayes and Laguna Streets, is uninjured. The regular force of two clerks and eleven carriers has been increased by the addition of two clerks.

Station J. is located at Masonic Avenue near Haight Street and is uninjured. The regular force of two clerks and thirteen carriers are

employed there. In order to assist this Station, which is located near Golden Gate Park, the temporary home of many of the refugees, a station has been established at the Young Men's Hebrew Association near Fell and Stanyan Streets. No business other than the handling of mail is conducted at this temporary station.

Station K was formerly located at the northwest corner of New Montgomery and Mission Streets and was entirely destroyed by fire. The work of this station is now being conducted at the Main Office. There were formerly employed there fifteen clerks and forty-six carriers.

Station L, located at Ocean View, is still standing, and business is being conducted there by the regular force of one clerk and one carrier.

Station M, located at Clement and 6th Avenue, is still standing. The regular force of one clerk and twelve carriers has been increased by the addition of three clerks.

Station O, formerly located in the Emporium, Market between Fourth and Fifth Streets, was destroyed by fire. This station was not a carrier station.

Station 36, formerly located in the Mills Building, Montgomery Street between Bush and Pine Streets, was destroyed by fire. This station was not a carrier station.

Presidio Station, located in the Army Post of that name, is still intact. In addition to the regular force, there are now employed there two additional clerks. There are no carriers located at this Station, but a general delivery has been and is being conducted there.

It is believed at this time that the entire stock of these stations was saved from the fire, with the possible exception of Station 36, where some five or six thousand dollars in stock and money order funds was placed

in a vault which is not believed to have been fire proof. It is also believed that most of the mail matter at these stations was saved. In many cases it was deposited in the bank vaults in the immediate vicinity, and as these vaults will not be opened for at least thirty days, it will be impossible to ascertain our loss in that regard until such time has elapsed.

The following sub-stations were burned:

4, Merchants Exchange Building; 25, Sutter near Taylor; 22, Third and Bryant; 51, first and Folsom; 46, Pacific Ave. and Leavenworth; 24, Larkin near Geary; 50, Polk near Sutter; 13, Mission near 14th; 53, Eddy and Polk; 9, Montgomery near Broadway; 21, Powell and Post; 33, Market near Sixth; 47, Market and Jones; 48, Sutter between Kearny and Grant Avenue; 49, Eddy and Taylor; 42, Geary and Octavia, 28, Union and Hyde; 12, 1097 Washington Street; 14, 2000 Market Street; 29, 639 McAllister Street; 52, Hayes and Franklin.

The stock and books of many of these stations were saved and are now being brought to the main office by the clerks in charge and checked up. In others, the stock and books are supposed to be in fire proof vaults.

This office immediately began receiving and dispatching mails regularly, and yesterday, the 25th inst., opened up to the public the money order and registry divisions and the general delivery section of the City Division. The money order division is issuing and paying money orders and receiving and counting remittances. All remittances in checks and drafts are being returned with arrequest for cash remittances. International exchange work is being disposed of as rapidly as possible and it is believed that within a few days the Money Order Division will again be in its normal condition.

All registered mail was held until the 22nd inst. in the Oakland Post Office for safety, and a portion thereof was worked there by clerks of this office on the 20th and 21st inst. The balance of the registered mail was brought to this office on the 22nd inst. and is being worked as rapidly as possible. An attempt has been made for several days to make a general delivery of registered matter through the carriers at the main office, as the corridor adjacent to the registry division was in such a condition that it could not be opened to the public. However, I am pleased to report that the regular windows of the Registry Division have been opened this morning for general delivery, and that regular dispatches of registered mail are to-day being made to stations for the resumption of carrier delivery. At the present time, all registered mail is up and this Division is in good condition.

Stamp stock was sent to all Stations and has been on sale there since Monday, the 23rd inst. The regular sale of stamps was resumed at the main office on Wednesday, the 25th inst.

A large number of people, estimated at probably 300,000, fled from the City during and immediately after the fire and sought refuge in the Cities of Oakland, Alameda and Berkeley. Of this number probably 200,000 have remained for several days in the last named Cities, and as a result thereof, the amount of mail handled has been enormous. The congestion in Oakland was so great that it was found necessary to transfer twelve clerks from this office to the Oakland office, together with four collectors. It has been discovered that several of the clerks of this office residing in Oakland, Berkeley and Alameda have gone to work at those points. The exact number is not known at this time.

The only serious interruption in our work since the morning of Friday,

the 20th inst. arose when, by order of the municipal authorities, the ruins in the vicinity of the main office were dynamited in order to throw down walls that were deemed dangerous to life. Many parts of the building appeared to be dangerous, and under such circumstances, it was necessary at 10 o'clock on that day, to order the clerks from the building with instructions to report the following morning. Vigorous protest was made against the continuation of this dynamiting, but without avail. As a result of the same, the post office building was damaged in the additional amount of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000), as estimated by Mr. Roberts, Superintendent of Construction. However, on Tuesday morning, the 24th inst. this work was being done so far away from the building that it was deemed safe to order the men back to work, and since this time there has been no interruption in the handling of the mail. In fact, a considerable amount of unworked mail is now being sent from Oakland to be worked in this office.

The military authorities, under command of General Funston, have cooperated with us in every possible way. By their orders, wagons were immediately impressed into service for transporting the mails between the main office and the ferry, and between the main office and the various stations still standing. We have been liberally furnished with supplies and assisted in many other ways by the Army. Regular messenger service has now been established and the impressing of men into service by the military authorities has ceased.

The telegraphic service of both the Western Union Telegraph Company and the Postal Telegraph Company has been so badly crippled that it was found necessary for them to seek relief through the postal service.

Yesterday afternoon, upwards of ten thousand telegrams were deposited in this office for delivery. During the height of the distress, such mail was received in this office without being properly prepaid in stamps. A feeling of humanity necessitated their receipt and handling, but I have stopped the wholesale receipt of such matter and have issued instructions and published in the newspapers the information that all mail matter must be properly stamped. The paralyzed condition of the telegraphic service will account for the apparent failure on my part to keep your Hon. Department informed of conditions existing here during the terrible calamity.

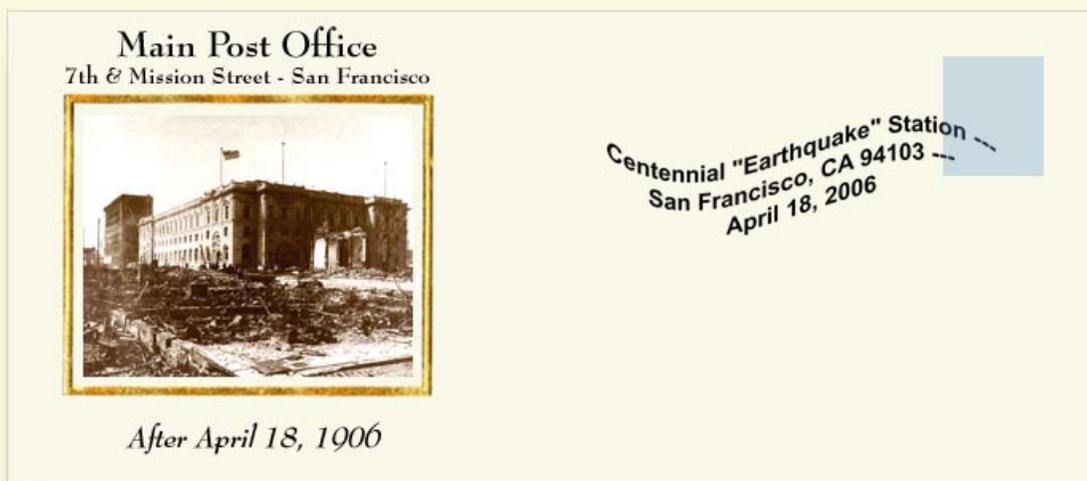
Your telegram authorizing me to expend not to exceed five thousand dollars has been received, and with this fund available, I believe that I shall be able to meet all present necessities. At the present time, only one clerk is known to have lost his life, while many others have been more or less injured. It will be some time before I shall be able to furnish any reliable information in this regard, as I have estimated that about fifty clerks and carriers have so far failed to report. I am making as rapidly as possible a record of the time of the employees of this office.

I beg herewith to enclose map of this City showing the burned district. Within this district, practically the only buildings that were left fit for use were the Federal buildings. None of them were burned, and the damage done resulted from the earthquake and the dynamiting. As soon as more detailed information is at hand, I shall make a more complete report.

In conclusion, permit me to state that the Postal Service as a means of communication among hundreds of thousands of distressed people was, I believe, an untold blessing.

Respectfully
Arthur G. Fisk
Postmaster

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In support of the 100th Centennial of the San Francisco Earthquake, the San Francisco District is offering a limited quantity of a special cachet commemorating the historic event.

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