

Delphine BERQUE, “Letter Mail in Paris. Staff and Organization 1738-1750” (“La Poste aux lettres à Paris. Personnel et organisation, 1738-1750”), master’s thesis in modern history directed by Jean-François Dubost, Paris 12 / Val-de-Marne, 2005, 142 p.

In the 18th century the letter mail was a regular public service responsible for the collection, routing, and distribution of correspondence. Its administration contributed to the creation of the modern French state.

Between the years 1738 and 1750 the postal headquarters was located on the rue des Poulies in Paris. This office managed the postal tax farm for all of France. Intricately organized, the letter mail employed a large staff administered by the *surintendant général des Postes* who served as a liaison between the king, Louis XV, and the administrators of the Ferme des Postes, which was entrusted to bidders who purchased its contracts from the crown. Between 1738 and 1750 the postal tax farm was directed by the Grimod and Thiroux families.

The hôtel des Postes in Paris was the most important postal office, since it handled everything that was sent through the mail.

Mail in Paris was routed through many different offices and passed between many sets of hands. Couriers who transported mail from the provinces to Paris or vice versa used horses that were rented from the post-stations of the equestrian mail. Tax officials imposed their taxes on the mail as it arrived at the hôtel des Postes.

Sending offices sorted incoming mail and prepared outgoing mail for departure, and also processed special mailings like registered parcels or pre-paid parcels; distributors and mail carriers in distribution offices managed the distribution of mail in Paris and its environs. Assistants were responsible for collecting customers’ mail from the mailboxes located throughout the city and carrying it to the hôtel des Postes where it was sent on to its destination; money-sending offices managed mailings that included coins and bank notes while accounting offices were responsible for tracking the accounts of post office managers as well as handling refused letters or those lacking sufficient funds that could not be delivered. Finally there were correspondence offices that managed business relations between French and foreign post offices and most likely were entrusted with the forwarding of orders. The censorship office or cabinet noir (that did not officially exist) was responsible for the surveillance of any suspicious correspondence and reported it to the crown. There was also a doorman who watched over his co-workers and kept the administrators apprized of their activities.

According to source material, the Parisian letter mail service was organized along these lines in the mid-18th century.