

**Yasmine CHANDAVOINE, “Postmasters in the Pays de Rennes, 1738-1790” (“Les maîtres de poste dans le Pays de Rennes (1738-1790)”, master’s thesis in modern history directed by Antoine, Rennes 2, 2002, 137 p.**

The last province of the kingdom to receive the service of the equestrian mail in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Brittany was at the heart of many issues and conflicts of the times. The Estates of Brittany displayed a strong willingness to defend their local rights, while the crown hoped to extend its political hold through the local intendant. It is easy to understand that there was an unstable working relationship between the crown and this new institution in light of these conflicts. Although the Estates originally resisted the call for their financial participation, they later accepted it, if we are to believe the increase in their contribution to the payment of postmasters’ allowances until the end of the century, Their reluctance was in no way based on any doubt of the usefulness of this service which they deemed it necessary, but rather because they feared it strengthened the role of the intendant in their province. Postal routes were one way in which the king’s power controlled the Breton province. They were also key to military defense strategies and played a part in opening up Brittany from its economic isolation. The new regional institution might have encountered difficulties in providing for all the new post-stations that were proposed; but even if some relay stations remained empty for the first few months after being set up, they soon found buyers

The profile and criteria for selecting postmasters established by the postal administration were in line with those for other provinces. Candidates had to have the financial means necessary for acquiring horses, working space, fodder, and staff. Most Breton postmasters were already living at inns, a type of accommodation that met the postmaster’s necessary material requirements. There was one aspect that distinguishes postmasters in Brittany from those in other provinces. No exemption from the *taille*, a tax imposed on commoners, meant that manual laborers were not attracted to the position here as they were elsewhere. To compensate for the imposed tax, they received a financial allowance from the Etats de Bretagne. Nevertheless, their situation was still less advantageous than that of postmasters who belonged to the Estates in other provinces where allowances were higher. Women had also entered this profession, especially after the death of their husbands. Although the administration’s requirements for the selection of their candidates seem homogeneous, disparities from place to place seem to increase during the period in question. Some got rich after setting up their relay station on highly traveled roads, while others lived modestly. Their situation also depended on variances in the weather that could lead to higher prices for fodder and put some postmasters in the poor house. The degree of success in this profession was so varied that it seemed to depend largely on one’s good or bad fortune. Postmasters were not organized in any sort of trade guild and there was no relationship of solidarity among them.

Since postmasters were considered as a uniform class, the privileges granted them by the postal administration were the same for everyone. Postmasters were protected by the crown and, in return, promised to execute the duties of their institution faithfully. Beside their privileges, the administration took the postmaster’s side in disputes with postal customers and local inhabitants, provided that the postmaster had behaved correctly. This support would explain the postmasters’ general manner vis-à-vis administrative and judicial procedures, such as reports and inquests. Their privileged status was a source of jealousy on the part of local inhabitants who mainly lived

in rural parishes. Postmasters met with strong opposition when they set up shop, before being gradually accepted by the locals and appreciated for the boost they gave to the economic life in the village and their socializing skills. Travelers tended to associate postmasters with the rural population, especially when they behaved coolly toward these guests.