

Frédéric DESROCHES, “The evolution and extension of the postal network in the Côte-d’Or 1815-1848” (“Evolution et extension du réseau postal en Côte-d’Or 1815-1848”), master’s thesis in contemporary history directed by Thomas Bouchet, University of Bourgogne, 2000, 200 p.

The study of the postal network in the Côte-d’Or requires a multifaceted approach to the material in order to understand the issues surrounding the changes that were made to the network. From 1815 to 1848 various participants were involved in this postal enterprise that saw significant reversals of fortune during that time. Since a purely chronological approach is relatively complicated, a thematic study offers the dimension of an economic and political understanding of these changes. Besides the agents who saw to it that the network ran smoothly, numerous other factors contributed over time to changes in the major and secondary connecting links, stopping points, and connections in the network.

Although the letter mail is the main subject of this study, some time must also be devoted to the equestrian mail since the two institutions still complemented each other until the appearance of the railroad.

The specific organization of the mail coaches perfectly illustrates the closeness of this association. Significant improvements at the national and departmental level were made to these vehicles that were primarily responsible for transporting letters over long distances before gradually including well-to-do passengers. The primary characteristic of these vehicles was their sustained speed that was protected by public authorities in order to ensure rapid connections between the capital and other points in the country. Because it could be dangerous to other vehicles and pedestrians, there were occasional protests made against this speed, but it was only made possible by successive technical innovations and the development of vehicles that were specifically adapted to different road surfaces. This feature became problematic in the early days of the First Empire whose aggressive external politics did considerable damage to the work of the Ancien Régime and especially to the Estates of Burgundy that had gained remarkable autonomy in this area in the 18th century. The sustainability of certain portions of road that were deemed worrisome soon led the postal administration to review the layout of post-coach lines so as to ensure the velocity and promptness of its vehicles, qualities it prided itself on.

The proposal of new and different itineraries exacerbated rivalries and passions between towns and local politicians in the department. The two pre-existing lines during our period (the Paris-Lyon and Paris-Besançon lines) were the object of political and economic concerns. The layout of routes was important at the national level for the celerity with which letters were routed, but the coach also represented an economic shot in the arm on the local level through the various ancillary services that attached themselves to it (inns, blacksmiths, leatherworkers). The re-opening of the Paris-Lyon line through the southern tip of the Côte-d’Or in 1836-37 rekindled the old tensions between Autun and Arnay-le-Duc dating from 1786. By the same token, the option of rerouting the Paris-Besançon line away from Dijon and through its bordering departments aroused the indignation of its mayor and rich citizens who used the coach regularly. The greatest problem for the postal administration was how to reconcile national interests with departmental needs and constraints. There were no easy answers but the results seem relatively efficient and coherent. The re-opening of the Paris-Lyon line in 1835, the re-routing of the Paris-Besançon line through the north of the department in 1847, and the opening of a new connecting link between Paris and Geneva via Dijon in 1844 did much to improve national service

considerably, while preserving the role of the former capital of the Estates of Burgundy and granting the Côte-d'Or three mail-coach lines equally dispersed throughout the department. The new implementations became more rational as they detached themselves from local demands in favor of a more balanced network (for instance, the transfer of the post-station from Rouvray to Sainte-Magnance in 1841). In 1848 seventeen postal offices had a direct link with Paris and the major cities of France twice a day, whereas in 1815 only eight offices could boast of having such an advantage.

Although the improvements and extensions of post-coach links are apparent, it is more difficult to judge these innovations at the level of departmental links. A study of the couriers who were responsible for routing the mail between post offices is largely hampered by the lack of primary source material. Only those businesses that also handled the transportation of passengers were the object of specific prefectural inquiries from 1827-28 onward; these inquiries enable us partially to examine these businesses that were mainly centered in and around Dijon. The effort of installing post offices at pre-existing links and the high cost of transportation charged by these businesses limited the creation of new connecting links. However, this does not mean that the postal administration did not sanction any improvements. The changes that were made responded to specific and time-honored economic needs, such as the importance of communications and the underground construction site for the canal between Burgundy and Pouilly. The strong use of the horse instead of pedestrian couriers and the creation of daily connections in 1828 contributed to significant improvement in the velocity of routing mail between post offices. Here the use of postal routes and their relay stations became essential, once again emphasizing the symbiotic relationship of the letter and equestrian mail. Although the post-coaches were the original catalyst for the most important changes, courier service (which was largely made up of business ventures providing public transportation) also contributed to the increased density of postal routes.

Other factors that were specific to the Côte-d'Or played a prominent role. The completion of the canal de Bourgogne in 1832 was decisive in opening up the network of roads in the southern part of the department in the regions of Pouilly-en-Auxois and Saint-Jean-de-Losne. This drew attention to the unbalance with the north in the regions of Montigny-sur-Aube, Recey-sur-Ource and Grancey-le-Château: these areas had to wait until 1847 before being opened up when the Paris-Besançon line was launched.

Modes of routing the mail were changing and becoming more modernized, but the distribution of the mail was still one of the main dilemmas of the postal network. Still reserved for a small number of users during the Restoration, the majority of the French population was excluded from the general mail circuit. Administrative footers only fulfilled the needs of agents of the State and the municipalities that employed them. From 1815 to 1830 their status and management was left to local public authorities, leaving large gaps in the distribution network. The slowness of the routing of the mail that was so often lamented was largely due to the incoherence of regulations and the limited attempts to remedy this situation by prefects and sub-prefects. The vote of 3 June 1829 to set up home delivery of the mail represented the impact of the modernization of the postal service, its infrastructures, and distribution staff on the Côte-d'Or as well as the rest of the country.

Post offices opened between 1815 and 1829 were rare; only five offices are recorded in departmental archives for the period, with some uncertainty about the longevity of a few of them that seem to have been at least temporarily closed. Improvements were sorely limited until 1830; it was not until home service was set up followed by daily delivery that that postal network became denser in any serious way. One important detail concerning the discrepancy between the only three offices opened between 18130 and 1839 versus twelve for the period 1840-1848 suggests that the postal service was slowly adapting to the home delivery and daily service established in 1832. The study of post offices and their dates of their establishment reveals a clear-cut difference between the periods 1815-29 and 1830-4 ; besides the number of new offices opened, there was a remarkable change in the role itself of the postal administration. The years 1815-1829 suffer from a lack of source material that would allow us to explain the diversity in creating new post offices more formally, but the decisive influence of local political figures (especially for the Epoisses office) is nonetheless perceivable.

The modernization of the postal network brought with it the inevitable issue of distributing private letters to the home. This led the administration to hire a new staff that was better suited than the former foot messengers. Although mail deliverers were employed by the city of Dijon from 1776 onward (there were three in 1815, five in 1835 and up to nine in 1845), there was no rural service until 1 April 1830. Having risen to the rank of civil servant rural mail carriers were strictly monitored and contributed to the integration of the countryside into the postal network by offering a service that had hitherto been reserved only for the inhabitants of large cities. The regular installation of mailboxes in all municipalities - even in important hamlets in 1840 - and the establishment of daily service in 1832 completed an already efficient postal ensemble. As usual, flaws were criticized, if we are to take the word of some municipalities who protested the repartitioning of some towns to other offices. Some of these communities were detached from their former postal district and thus were subject to the rural tithe or *décime*. In most cases and despite some financial inconvenience, however, the changes that were made corresponded to a better use of time and space and paved the way toward regular and uniform daily service. It is difficult to establish the pace at which these spatial and temporal changes were actually accomplished in the Côte-d'Or because there are so few archives and material is dispersed over a period of twelve years. The vitality of the communities that was sparked by specific industries (for instance, lumber in the Châtillon area and cement works) or the presence of ports on the Burgundy canal, as well as the presence of State-level civil servants whose correspondence was vital to the government more reliably explain the expansion of daily mail service to the entire department. Although the relatively high cost of such a national undertaking together with a lack of sufficient credit required some local offices to arrange alternating rounds for their rural mail carriers (in the Semur-en-Auxois district and the Dijon office), the Côte-d'Or was one of the first departments in Burgundy to enjoy uniform daily mail delivery from 1847 onward.

The postal network in the Cote-d'Or that was begun during the Empire and the Restoration reached its preeminent stature during the July Monarchy. Its operations were assured by a postal administration that gradually distanced itself from local concerns, aligning itself more with national policy, although the department remained a preponderant limitation. The evolution of these structures that were often related to the highway network during the Republic and at the advent of the railroad is a topic for further investigation.