

Jean LESTRILLE, “The development of postal infrastructures in the Gironde 1914-1945: public service at the regional level” (“Le développement des infrastructures postales en Gironde de 1914 à 1945 : service public et territoire”), master’s thesis in contemporary history directed by Christophe Bouneau, Bordeaux 3, 2002, 181 p.

The First World War was the source of fundamental changes that transformed the organization and composition of the French postal network. The four long years of war were painfully hard on the Gironde region. Although far from the front, it suffered from a lack of financial assets, a scarcity of manpower, and a dearth of materials. Some solutions were presented, whether they endured or not (especially in the area of personnel), to mitigate these problems, but difficulties persisted. The development of the network was put off until a later date, and no real growth was experienced during the war.

After the first global conflict had ended, the French postal system tended to its wounds. The years immediately following the war (1918-1922) were a period of mild recovery that set the foundation for the boom in the 1920s. The postal system in the Gironde expanded exponentially and the number of post offices increased five-fold. Since volume had been gained, the post office sought to emphasize the quality of service. The postal network in the Gironde bid farewell to the 1920s after nearly ten years of growth and entered the 1930s in a new phase of political, economic, and social turmoil that was hostile to the postal administration.

The new decade was time for perfecting the postal network in the Gironde. The recession that had struck France re-introduced the post office’s financial problems that would last until beyond the Second World War. Postal politics cannot be quantitatively compared with those of the 1920s, so the amount of new postal infrastructures seems to have become somewhat exhausted. The departmental management of the Gironde was in an ongoing dialogue with the local political and economic authorities and always stressed the establishment of new post offices in rural areas, emphasizing improvements to the structure of the network in order to attain a level of postal service that was nearly perfect. With the PAR, the post office reaffirmed its mandate to serve the public by reaching out to it. The way the network itself worked was the object of changes requested by the municipalities of the Gironde, but the overall situation was positive. Despite the crisis situation, the network would enjoy a period of stability in its operations that was interrupted when France entered the war.

The postal network in the Gironde was paralyzed for the entirety of World War II when quantitative and qualitative development came to a halt. This “odd” war was characterized by the movements of staff and postal services throughout the country, leading to the disorganization of the administration. After the Armistice, the occupying forces laid down the law when it came to the transmission of correspondence: they organized services for the censorship and monitoring of letters, set the demarcation line, and underwent several shortages that affected operations and were detrimental to revenue. Only ten months after the liberation and the new destruction that came in its wake did the postal situation once again become somewhat normal.