

Audrey RODRIGUEZ, “19th-c. postal infrastructures in Bordeaux” (“Les infrastructures postales et la ville de Bordeaux au XIX^e siècle”), master’s thesis in contemporary history directed by Pascal Griset, Bordeaux 3, 1998.c

This thesis is a study of postal infrastructures in Bordeaux from 1790 to 1914. Postal infrastructures include all works and operations that constitute the foundation and implantation of various postal services, from physical organs such as post offices and mailboxes to the means of transportation used for routing the mail.

Two main questions problematized our topic of research: how did these infrastructures integrate themselves into the urban environment and ongoing activities in Bordeaux? Were these infrastructures able to adapt to circumstances and technological changes, especially in transportation?

The number of post offices in France had multiplied from 1790 to 1914: many new post offices were created, following the expansion of the surface area of the city. The Hôtel des Postes on the rue Porte Dijeaux was built within the city limits of consolidated dwellings.

The construction of the Bastide office symbolizes the expansion of the city after the right bank of the Garonne had been annexed. Finally, it was the creation of auxiliary offices, in particular near the beltway of broad boulevards around the city, which provided a response to the new urban geography. This statement also applies to the expanded installation of mailboxes.

The technical progress that was made in transportation techniques was a favorable influence on reducing the amount of time required to carry the mail, whether this was done by post-coach, railroad, or tramway in cities. These innovations responded to urgent needs, where increased rapidity was expected everywhere and always by a national Post Office that sought to decrease the time it took to move the mail.

The combined actions of the postal administration and the township of Bordeaux were instrumental in affecting the evolution of these infrastructures. The intervention of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce, as well as railroad and tramway companies was an offshoot of this collaboration, not to mention courier services.

We have been able to examine the complexity and duality of these business relationships, especially during the conflict between the post office and the city over the financing of offices in the 1890s; the city refused on principle to submit to the almighty power of the Post Office that managed the geographic distribution of post offices from Paris. Collaboration between these two entities, however, was often effective, in particular when it concerned the authorization of mail carriers to use the tramway on their rounds in 1905.

Finally we were able to measure the extent of the development of postal infrastructures. Despite all these changes, we do not discuss the modernization of these infrastructures, a notion that implies that whatever had become outmoded was replaced by modern, up to date installations. Post office environments remained unhealthy and cramped until just before 1914.

A variety of different sources were used to research this thesis, mainly the collections of departmental and municipal archives, especially the archival collection of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bordeaux, but also the national archives, and the library of the Musée de la Poste in Paris. The breadth of our research enabled us to refine our study of the participants

in a chapter of local postal history and avoid a dichotomized perspective of these agents of change with the municipality on one side and the postal administration on the other.

In addition, the bibliography gave us a better understanding of the city of Bordeaux during the 20th century, since we wanted to give readers a sense of the setting in which the people of Bordeaux lived, where these postal infrastructures evolved. Bibliographical references allowed us better to understand the technical changes in methods of transportation whose repercussions were crucial to reducing the time it took to transport the mail.

Finally we use cartography studies throughout the thesis to heighten the reader's visual sense of the magnitude of these changes.

We end by appealing to the Comité pour l'histoire de la Poste's call to develop the academic study of postal history, to make innovations in the search for new postal problematics, and to disseminate these studies in order to give postal history the intellectual and cultural dimensions it so well deserves.