



**EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY**

APS UNIT 28

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RMS OPERATED FULTON CHAIN MAIL BOAT

By Gerald F. Wiley

The Inlet & Old Forge R.P.O., located aboard the mail boat running between Old Forge in Herkimer County and Inlet in Hamilton County, was initiated in 1901 with the assistance of ex-president Benjamin Harrison to furnish mail service to the cottages and hotels along the Fulton Chain of Lakes. Harrison vacationed in the area and realized the need for such a service. Although R.P.O. means Railway Post Office, those located on boats were also under the jurisdiction of the Railway Mail Service (RMS).

An excellent history of the operation can be found in *HeartWood, The Adirondack Homestead Life of W. Donald Burnap*, as told to Marylee Armour, printed by the Brown Newspapers, Baldwinsville, NY, 1988. (WWW.POLLYWOOD.ORG/HEARTWOOD) Burnap was captain of the mail boat from 1929 to 1975. According to Burnap, the mail boat made four trips daily:

TRIP 1 — Old Forge to Inlet — morning

TRIP 2 — Inlet to Old Forge — morning — return trip

TRIP 3 — Old Forge to Inlet — afternoon

TRIP 4 — Inlet to Old Forge — afternoon — return trip

At various times through the years the Inlet & Old Forge postmarks included or sometimes omitted the trip numbers, the time of day, or even the year date. I have a card with TR6 (Trip 6) in the August 28, 1932 postmark. This would indicate either a third round trip on that day or an error by the mail clerk who prepared the cancel. As is true with most postal history collecting, more research is needed.

After the onboard post office was discontinued in 1955, the operator, under Post Office Department contract, continued to deliver and pick up mail from the hotels and cottages between Inlet and Old Forge. The mail then was processed by the Old Forge post office.