

## Owney, The Railway Mail Dog

Visitors to the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. are taken by surprise to see an exhibit of a stuffed dog in the building. Most stop to read the accompanying explanation to learn why this particular dog is part of postal history. The dog's name is Owney and here is his story.

Owney was a stray mutt who wandered into the Albany, New York Post Office in 1888 and took up residence on a pile of mailbags where he contentedly slept. Owney was attracted to the texture and scent of the mailbags. Mail workers soon adopted the stray and gave him a home. Owney eagerly followed the mailbags when they were placed on outbound mail trains running through the state and eventually coast to coast. Owney traveled freely to cities and towns, guarding the mail pouches and soon befriending mail workers wherever he went. He created quite a following and soon his adventures were recounted in the many local newspapers along the rail line. Postal clerks along the mail routes recorded his many travel destinations by attaching bagging tags to his collar and later they fitted Owney with a leather jacket to hold the growing number of tags.

Over the course of his life Owney collected over 1,000 tags to mark all the towns he visited.

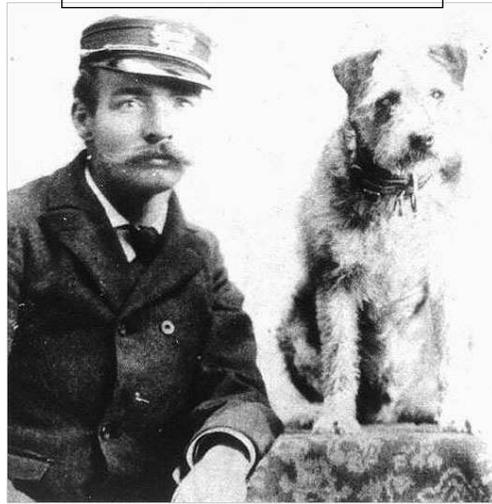
He became a national and international celebrity. In 1895, Owney made an around-the-world trip, traveling with mailbags in trains and steamships to Asia and across Europe before returning to Albany. Mail clerks considered Owney a good luck charm. Accidents were frequent occurrences in the Railway Mail Service but trains with Owney never had an accident.

Postmaster General John Wanamaker was one Owney's biggest fans. It was Wanamaker who had the leather jacket fashioned to hold the dogs ever-growing number of tags. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle once reported that the dog carried so many tags that ... "when he jogs along, they jingle like bells on a junk wagon."

In June of 1897, in poor health, Owney took his last trip on an Ohio-bound train. A newspaper report noted that Owney became ill tempered, attacked a postal clerk and a gunshot wound ended Owney's life. The dog was so beloved that the Railway Mail Service collected enough money to have Owney preserved by a taxidermist. He was displayed with his medals and tags at the U.S. Government Building Postal Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

Owney is currently on permanent display at the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

Owney and an Albany, New York letter carrier



[http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/2c1f\\_owney.html](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/2c1f_owney.html)