

THE RURAL LETTER CARRIER

Some Glimpses of the Life and Service From the Standpoint of One Who is Engaged in the Business.

The story appearing below was written for the Columbia State by William L. Taylor, rural delivery carrier on Laurens route No. 2.

The rural letter carrier is a traveler, but not a tourist. He can see "sights" and never leave the domain of his little circumscribed realm or circuit.

Had carrier No. 2, from the Laurens postoffice, started on a journey around the world when he was appointed to this position 39 months ago and traveled the same distance that he has covered in this time on his route, only 1-10th of the trip would now be in front of him. In other words, he has traveled approximately 22,500 miles in a little over three years, and he has never been farther than nine miles from the local postoffice—with the mail carrier's outfit he uses.

In covering this distance only one permanent relay of horses has been employed. The first one, already with three years' service in this line to his credit, was driven two-thirds of the distance, or time, if you please, when he was relieved by the second animal pressed into the work. A mail carrier is in position to appreciate a good horse and he soon discovers defects, if any there be, for the daily trips on the average road in this county, in all conditions of weather, is a test and strain that tries the best of them. But to revert to horse No. 1. He was what might be termed a "specialty." This means, in his case, that he would work to nothing but a buggy, a single buggy at that. But he did this well, and but for his somewhat advanced age he would yet be the property of carrier No. 2. He was well trained in the service for he could and did, as regularly as the day's rounds were made, maintain an unvarying schedule, barring accidents; he knew all the regular stops and at each of these, unless guided straight ahead, always drew up with convenient and remarkable precision.

And what of the carrier himself? After an experience running through four summers and three winters, braving the elements peculiar to the seasons in this section; encountering floods, freezes, rainstorms, dust and mud; undergoing the discomforts of winter and sweltering through the heat of summer, William L. Taylor, carrier No. 2, as he is officially known, deposes and says that the job involves a physical test not to be obtained in any other school, perhaps. It is open air, country life all right, from six to seven hours per day. Monotonous? Yes and no. But it is no more so than any other regular employment in which one is interested. Driving over the same old road every 24 hours, always in the same direction; seeing the same people, houses, farms day in and day out; beholding at long intervals unchanging and unchanging landscapes; collecting and distributing daily about the same amount of mail matter; looking only to the end of the month or pay day, is one picture that can be drawn, a view admittedly not especially attractive. Just so with many other occupations and vocations.

Now turn this little picture to the wall and follow, if you please, carrier No. 2 as he goes forth in the morning, fairly well equipped, with 20 to 40 pounds of mail matter carefully routed and conveniently placed in a regulation rural delivery satchel, to be distributed to 125 to 150 patrons, white and colored. It is a fine day (and there are more of these than the other kind), the weather is bracing and invigorating. The rate of travel is about four miles an hour. The distribution of the day's assortment of mail begins as does the collection from patrons' boxes of all out-going matter. The budget for distribution may consist of daily, semi-weekly and weekly newspapers, monthly periodicals of many kinds, registered letters, first and second class letters, special delivery letters, and packages of various sizes up to four pounds. This simple transaction proceeds until the circuit is completed, interspersed with the writing of an occasional money order or registration receipt, making necessary change, selling postal supplies and so on.

But this is not all by any means that attaches to the day's journey. Witness, if you will, the glee little Patty exhibits as she meets the carrier at papa's box and receives a beautiful postcard, may be, from one of her dear city or country cousins; then note her older sister as she timidly presents to the carrier a neatly wrapped package, with the caution "Don't crush" written thereon, and inquires what the postage is. Next, Farmer A is at his box waiting for a special letter, an important business letter. He is in a hurry but he stops to express gratification, inquires after the health of the carrier and that of his family, not merely as a matter of form but in sincere regard for and interest in his mail carrier. Likewise the occasion presents itself for a greeting in kind by the carrier. Thus

these little exchanges go on around the circuit. But before the trip is finished it will be an "off day" if the carrier is not provided with some reasonable refreshments, choice fruits or vegetables, or presented with a collection of fine roses for the carrier's little girls who are personally known to many of the patrons' girls and boys. These incidents and courtesies banish all thoughts of "monotony" and lend to the day's round many of the elements of human interest and kindness not to be experienced in some other more pretentious vocations. Harvest time is on and the fields of rapidly opening cotton, corn about ready to be gathered, great rows of stacks of freshly mowed hay, with here and there a "pooper" patch, new turnips growing—all this appeals to one who sees it daily, pleases and interests him as it does every one else. The bright skies of today dispel the recollection of yesterday's experience plodding along under lowering clouds and frequent showers; the landscapes enchant as never before and all nature conspires to make the journey delightful and inspiring. Finally, the carrier can take pride in the fact that he has discharged his duties faithfully; he has carried to its destination a letter pertaining to business, missives of love and affection, tidings of joy and sorrow; papers containing full and thrilling accounts of current events; periodicals on farming, cattle raising, gardening and domestic life. These things the rural resident enjoyed before free delivery was established, but in a limited measure, and they were not delivered at his door every day in the week. So the carrier, backed by "Uncle Sam" is doing something. If he gets tired of the job he can resign today; another man is ready to supply the vacancy at the same price.

Laurens route No. 2 traverses two townships, in part, Laurens and Scauffletown. The route is officially 26 miles in length. On it reside about 140 families, nearly 60 per cent of them being colored. In round numbers 50,000 pieces of mail matter are handled on this route annually. The money order and register business compares favorably with other routes. The receipts grow steadily and the circulation of newspapers is noticeably larger from month to month. There are a number of the best farmers the county affords residing on No. 2. Sixty per cent of the white residents are land owners, while less than 4 per cent of the negroes hold a title deed to any real estate. But practically every colored farmer has a buggy and one or more dogs. One of these fellows has a new rubber tired vehicle which he shelters on the front porch of his dwelling. The average colored farmer is optimistic if nothing more. He is making a fine crop; going to "pay out" and have money in the "bank." But there is one thing he is doing well, on No. 2 he is sending his children to school every day that the school in his district runs, no matter what the season is or how pressing the farm work may be. In a general way the same can be said of the white citizens in this particular instance, but nothing less is expected as they have many advantages. There are a half dozen schools for each race patronized by the people on this route. The facilities are reasonably satisfactory, the only drawback being the abbreviated school term. As to the churches they are very well divided and conveniently located along the way.

Strange as it may appear there is not a physician or a minister located on the entire route. There are, however, two county officers, Coroner R. O. Hairston and Magistrate J. W. Dorman of Scauffletown. And another thing. Probably the largest landowner in the county, Martin B. Poole, nominally resides on No. 2. His realty possessions aggregate 5,000 acres, stretching from Enoree cotton mills to Tylersville and from Enoree river to the Spartanburg railroad, a distance of several miles. He is a veteran of the Confederate army and on his premises live two ex-Confederate soldiers who receive a pension from the state. There are only two more survivors of the Lost Cause listed as patrons of the route served by carrier No. 2. A newly made mound at old Bethany church marks the resting place of Veteran J. Warren Blakely, whose familiar personality and many acts of kindness will be missed by this same carrier.

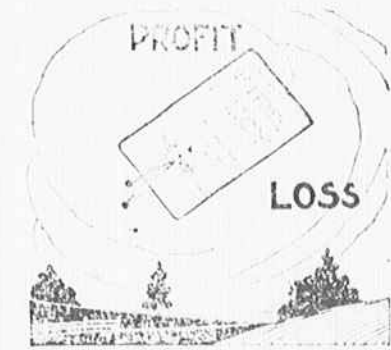
That the patrons of route 2 fully appreciate the service is indicated by such expressions as "I would move on another route if this one should be discontinued." "Do not see how we could get along without it, nor how the service could be improved unless we were given two instead of one mail a day." "Would be willing to pay a reasonable amount each year for the service could not get along without it now." These are extracts from comments made by three patrons

relative to the benefits, convenience, etc., of the free delivery service on R. F. D. No. 2. Many others of a like tenor could be quoted.

The public roads—the roads traveled by the rural route fellows—constitute a big question, and it is impracticable to discuss it here. Suffice it to say, that the carrier can do much in building up a sentiment among his patrons for improved highways, but the trouble in this county as in other "mountain" does not do the work. The system of road working—but carrier 2 has no disposition to bring an indictment against the plan, the agency of it or the executor of the system in Laurens. There will be a change; it must come to pass. Better roads means to the carrier a saving of horse flesh, buggy wear and tear, and to him more comfortable and expeditious trips.

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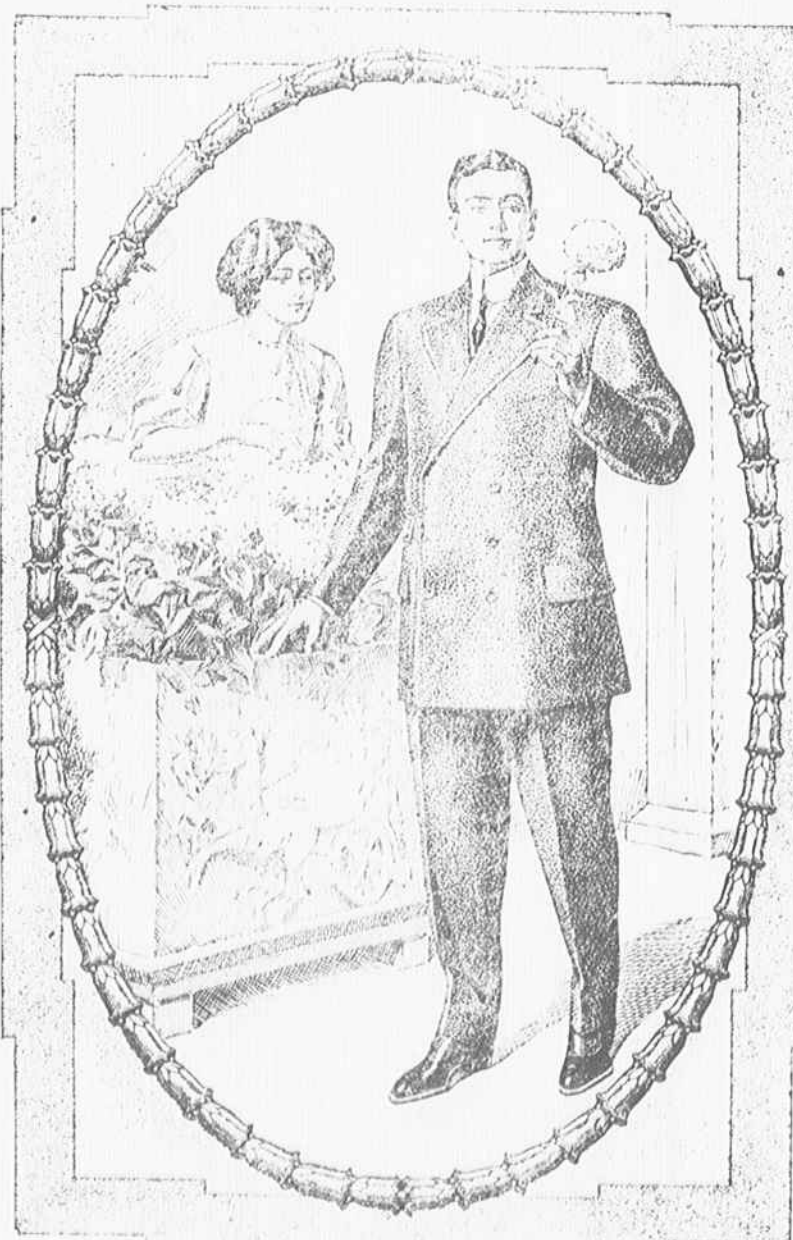
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