

Looking Backward

Through Blade Files of 50, 25 and 10 Years Ago

Toledo Blade 11-25-47 June, 1897

"Owney," the famous dog who hitch-hiked his way around the country in railroad mail cars received the death sentence from Toledo's Postmaster Brand. Owney wore a confusion of tags around his neck attesting to his travels, but lately had become cross and overbearing, haughtily assuming all government buildings were his and all government employees his servants. Recently he had been grounded by an order forbidding his traveling in mail cars and by way of protest he bit a local mail clerk. It was predicted that his body would be stuffed and sent to the dead letter museum in Washington.

Any time the Post Office Department is accused of being anti-dog, it tells the story of Owney, the post office dog, who was mounted and is now on display in the Smithsonian Institution. Owney showed up at the Albany, N.Y., post office in 1888 and began taking out of town trips with the mail sacks. The clerks put an identification tag around Owney's neck and he began traveling all over the country.

One day he got aboard a mail steamer in Tacoma, Wash., and went around the world in 132 days. In Japan, the Mikado gave Owney a canine passport and he collected what the department calls "200 medals and certificates." He was considered lucky because no train nor ship on which Owney was riding ever had an accident.

If this doesn't convince critics of the Post Office Department's dog policy, the story then is told of how Owney died on the streets of Toledo, Ohio, in 1897. Another dog attacked and Owney—not being equipped with Halt — Tought back unto death.

Where hasn't little dog gone?

WASHINGTON, D.C. — AP — About 75 years ago, a mutt named Owney was the pampered mascot of the Railway Mail Service. Now, stuffed and wearing a few of his medals, he is seen yearly by millions at the Smithsonian Institution.

His picture has been published many times, but his story is not well known. It has been researched by Carl Scheele, a curator at the Museum of History and Technology.

Owney, a mongrel basically of terrier stock, traveled all over the United States on mail trains, apparently went to Mexico and Alaska, and may be the only dog who went around the world more or less on his own.

The origin of his name is not known. He wandered into the post office in Albany, N.Y., in 1888 and was befriended by employees.

He was soon at home among the mailbags. He frequently rode on top of sacks which were carrying mail from the Albany post office to the local railroad depot.

One day he followed the pouches onboard a train bound for New York City. That turned out to be the start of his odyssey. Albany clerks bought him a collar saying, "Owney, Post Office, Albany, N.Y." His absences became frequent and lengthy.

Clerks in Albany fastened to his collar a card asking that the dog's journeys be

recorded by Railway Mail Service employees. They attached metal tags to his collar, eventually accumulating 1,017 tags, tokens and medals.

It is known that he visited Paris, Ky.; Charlestown, Mass.; Puyallup, Wash.; Detroit; Denver; Philadelphia; Atlanta; Brookings, S.D.; Reno, Nev.; Cincinnati; Manchester, N.H.; El Paso, Tex.; Bald Knob, Ark.; and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

On a visit to the national capital, he was given a jacket by Postmaster General John Wanamaker on which the trinkets could be pinned. He couldn't wear them all at any one time, so many were kept in Albany.

His most impressive trip was arranged by postal employees in Tacoma, Wash. Leaving there on Aug. 19, 1895, Owney visited Yokohama, Shanghai, Woosung, Foochow, Hong Kong, Singapore, Suez, Algiers and the Azores before returning to New York City on the steamship "Port Phillip." From there he went back to Tacoma on Dec. 29, 1895.

Postal clerks regarded him as a symbol of luck, believing that no train on which he traveled was ever involved in an accident.

He had lost the sight of his right eye early in life, and by 1897 he was eating only milk and soft food. An official decided that he should stay in

Albany, but he rode the trains to Toledo, Ohio.

While being interviewed, he became ill tempered. The Smithsonian says the circumstances were not satisfactorily reported; Owney died of a bullet wound on June 11, 1897.

Postal clerks contributed money for a Toledo taxidermist to preserve Owney. With his medals, he came to the museum room of the Post Office Department, and in 1911 he was transferred to the Smithsonian, where he now occupies a place in the Hall of Stamps and Mails.

Milwaukee Sentinel
11-7-77

Meet Owney, the Globe-Trotting Mail Mascot

Nearly 100 years ago, a homeless dog wandered into a post office in Albany, N.Y.

The postal clerks made friends with the mutt and named him Owney.

For the next 19 years he was the mascot of the Railway Mail Service and one of the most-traveled dogs in the world. This was back in a time when travel was not as easy as it is today. There were no jets. Trains and ships were the only ways to go long distances.

Owney lived among the mailbags. He would often ride to the station on them. One day he followed them right onto a train.



Owney was very famous and received many honors before he died in 1897. Postal clerks gave money to have him stuffed. He is now on display at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

Soon he was riding mail trains all over the U.S.

Owney became well-known to the mail clerks across the country. They welcomed him aboard as a symbol of good luck for a safe ride.

The postal clerks in Albany gave him a collar. In each town he visited, a tag with the town's name on it was attached to the collar.

Owney collected many tags, and the collar became too heavy.

On a visit to Washington, D.C., the postmaster general gave him a jacket. All the tags could be attached. Owney wore it proudly.

Owney traveled over 140,000 miles during his lifetime. He even took a trip around the world.

A Traveling Post Office Pooch!

Owney, the Mail Mutt



Owney was a scruffy-looking terrier. This photo shows him wearing some of his many tags with the names of the cities he had visited. We really don't know where he got his name.



Our story begins more than 100 years ago, in 1888, when a homeless mutt strayed into a post office in Albany, N.Y.

He had such winning ways that the clerks

adopted him and named him Owney.

Owney liked living among the mail bags. He often rode to the train station on top of them.

One day he followed the bags right onto a train. Away he went on his first trip.

He began hitching many train rides, but he always returned to Albany now and then.

Mail clerks across the country welcomed him aboard as a good-luck charm. No train he was on ever had an accident.

In each town he visited, clerks

attached a baggage tag with the town's name to his collar.

On a visit to Washington, D.C., the postmaster general (the top boss) presented him with a jacket. Now there was a place to display all of those tags.

In all, Owney traveled more than 140,000 miles. He even sailed around the world. A big crowd met him when he arrived home.

When he became too old to travel, he retired to Albany. He is remembered as a true and loyal member of the post office family. He died in 1897.

An exhibit about Owney is in the new National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C., that opened last month. The museum is our country's only big museum devoted just to postal history and stamps. The collection is the largest in the world.



When Owney lived, there were no jet planes or speedy trucks. Trains carried most of the mail. Crew members liked having Owney on board.

IF OWNEY'S TRAVELS HAD ALL BEEN AROUND THE WORLD, HOW MANY TIMES WOULD HE HAVE CIRCLED IT?



The Earth is about 25,000 miles around at the middle.



The National Postal Museum is part of a group of museums called the Smithsonian Institution.

Lakeland Ledger 11-26-97

A DOG OF OUR OWNEY

Owney, the unofficial Postal Service mascot, is probably one of the most unusual exhibits on display in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

His tiny doggy bod, stuffed and mounted and shimmering with mail bag tags, is part of the National Postal Museum collection.

Once an abandoned pooch, Owney was found outside a post office in 1888. The mail clerk who discovered his near-frozen body wrapped him in empty mail bags for warmth.

Sadly, Owney died of a gunshot wound nine years later, in 1897.

Want to give this tourist attraction your stamp of approval? For info on visiting, call the Smithsonian Institution at 202-357-1300