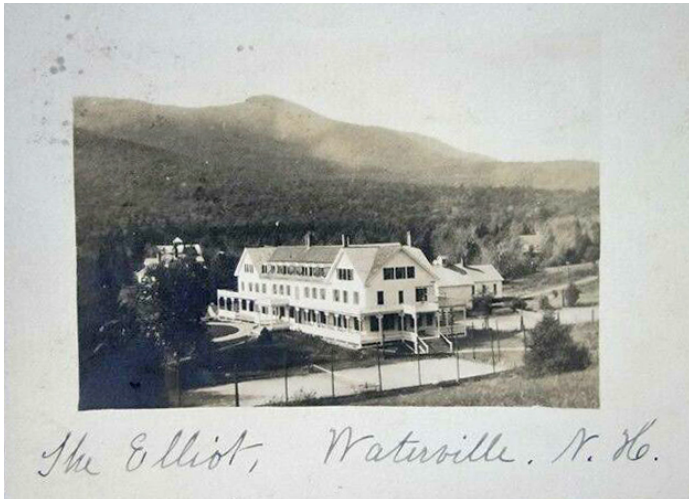




A POST OFFICE FOR THE VALLEY



In 1889, the newly appointed Postmaster General of the United States was John Wanamaker, a Philadelphia businessman and retail developer famous for his pioneering views on marketing, advertising, and worker efficiency. He enthusiastically supported the expansion of mail delivery by stagecoach and horseback to rural areas (going so far as to predict this means of delivery would be functioning for another century!). Nor did he delay in answering letters that came to him from remote areas of the country, asking for new postal service.

The summer vacationers of Elliot’s Hotel were among those who got on the bandwagon and petitioned President Harrison for a new post office. They would arrive in Plymouth or Campton every summer by train, taking the stagecoach shuttle from the station up to the valley. Many would stay for months, and wanted to be able to ‘work from home’. Their families wanted to easily correspond with friends about all their summer adventures. So, everyone put their heads together with the hotel owner and sent a letter.

To the President:

The undersigned, summer residents and others at Waterville, New Hampshire, respectfully petition that a post office be established at Elliott’s House, and that Silas B. Elliott, of said Waterville, be appointed Postmaster ... The nearest post office is some twelve miles distant at Campton Village, ... all passengers arriving in the afternoon who go to Elliott’s are obliged to wait for the mail to be opened and distributed at Campton Village post office, thus wasting about an hour’s time; and this same inconvenience occurs again in the morning. Your petitioners, many of whom are business men, desire quick despatch [sic] for their mail morning and evening, and pray

that their petition be granted as soon as possible, to the end that improved service may be enjoyed this season.
Waterville, N.H., May 28, 1889.

They were not disappointed. The petition and a personal letter were forwarded via a Philadelphia businessman, and on August 2 the Postmaster General sent this succinct reply:

I have given my personal attention to the request of your friend, whose letter I return, and I am glad to say to you that the post office desired is an accomplished fact.

Yours truly,
John Wanamaker

Efficiency, indeed! Within three months Waterville Valley had its first post office. By 1898, when Congress approved the universal 1-cent stamp for postcards, the local hotel had an array of images to choose from, and tourists could mail their messages with a local postmark.

Today, Postal Manager Anne Whitehouse still stops at the Campton Post Office to pick up our mail six days a week. There are probably only a few days every winter when she thinks that a horse-drawn stagecoach would make it up the hill as quickly!

Source: Letters quoted are in the Waterville Valley collection, Rauner Library, Dartmouth College.



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