

Post Office records

The Commonwealth Government took the responsibility for postal matters from the colonies on Federation in 1901. Arrangements by the Australian colonies to introduce postal services were generally made in the years soon after settlement. Background information for each colony is summarised below [1]. Before colonial control, mail was usually passed on by ad hoc arrangements made between transporters, storekeepers and settlers. These arrangements were flexible and depended on the cooperative spirit of the country people. It was common for early settlers to ride many miles out of their way to deliver neighbours' mail that had been collected from informal distribution points.

New South Wales

New South Wales had no regular postal service before 1810. On 26 June of that year Governor Macquarie issued an order designating the home of Isaac Nicholls as the colony's first regular post office. An 1825 Act of the Legislative Council provided for the regulation of postal services, including rates of postage. On 1 September 1874 the new General Post Office (GPO) was opened in Sydney.

Victoria

John Batman was appointed as the first postmaster in 1836. In 1842 the first government building for postal services in Melbourne was opened at the corner of Elizabeth and Bourke Streets.

Queensland

A post office opened at Moreton Bay in 1824, although the earliest reference to the appointment of a postmaster is 1842.

South Australia

In 1837 South Australian colonial storekeeper Thomas Gilbert was appointed as postmaster, with post office business to be conducted from his private residence. After a number of moves, the post office gained its own building in 1872 at the corner of King William and Franklin Streets, Adelaide.

Western Australia

Arrangements for postal matters in Perth were handled by James Purkis who was appointed in 1830. In 1840 the post office was set up in a room of the public buildings. The Perth GPO in St Georges Terrace was opened in August 1890.

Tasmania

A post office opened at Hobart in 1809. In 1812 John Beaumont was appointed as postmaster. In 1832 the post office became a government department and John Collicott was appointed as the first Postmaster-General in 1834.

Northern Territory

At the time of the first permanent European settlement (Palmerston, 1869), the Northern Territory was under South Australian administration. Territorial postal services before 1901 were an extension of the South Australian service.

Commonwealth

The Commonwealth assumed responsibility for postal matters at the time of Federation in 1901. Sir John Forrest was appointed as Australia's first Postmaster-General. The Post and Telegraph Act was passed in 1901.

Post Office records held by the National Archives

Many colonial records relating to the administration of the postal function came under Commonwealth Government control in 1901. These records, some of which are listed in the table below, are now held by offices of the National Archives. These records cover subjects such as administration of post offices, postal rates, postal orders, mail delivery routes and contracts, and central administrative matters such as staff appointments, accounts and telephone services. The office of the National Archives holding the records is indicated on the left above the table.

Examples of Post Office records held by the National Archives

Sydney – General Post Office, Sydney (CA1030)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Miscellaneous correspondence and documentation</u>	1858–1970	C3681
<u>Index to correspondence registers</u>	1859–69	C3143
<u>Post Office files</u>	1860–1920	SP32/1
<u>Index to correspondence registers</u>	1870–96	C3146
<u>General files</u>	1880–1944	SP63/1
<u>Post Office films</u>	1919–	C4189

<u>General administration correspondence files</u>	1920–	C2593
<u>Post Office history files</u>	1955–88	C3629

Sydney – Australian Postal Corporation (CA 2558)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Audio tapes of various Australia Post recordings</u>	1978–	C4094

Melbourne – Post Office, Melbourne (CA 6004)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Outward letter books</u>	1842–51	B4866
<u>Monthly statements of moneys received and collected</u>	1846–57	MP311/17

Melbourne – Telstra Corporation Limited (CA 7643)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Telstra Historical Collection</u>	1854–1996	B6286

Brisbane – General Post Office, Brisbane (CA 1031)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Annual reports of the Post and Telegraph Department</u>	1862–99	BP229/1
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1887–1952	BP13/1
<u>Mail service (contract)</u>	1891–1952	BP8/1

Adelaide – General Post Office, Adelaide (CA 1032)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Photographs of post office buildings, personnel and equipment</u>	1840–1990	D5440
<u>PMG miscellaneous departmental papers</u>	1871–1979	D3383
<u>Indexes – letters inward</u>	1878–1914	AP236/2
<u>Indexes – letters outward</u>	1882–1915	AP236/1

Perth – General Post Office, Perth (CA 1035)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Postal and Telegraph Conference – Adelaide 1890</u>	1890	K13
<u>Reference material of historical interest</u>	1925–67	K1062

Hobart – General Post Office, Hobart (CA 1033)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Post Office returns and reports</u>	1870–1901	P1460

[1] Much of the information provided is from the *Australian Encyclopedia*, Volume 11, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1926.