

**Lenape ("Delaware") Mail Carriers and the Origins of the US Postal Service
[Abstract]**

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The Lenape of the lower Delaware Valley were the most reliable Native carriers of mail among the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The principal period of Lenape mail-carrying activity coincided with the Dutch period (ca. 1623–1664). This well-paid service provided the Lenape with access to desired European goods. The English colonizers of this region also availed themselves of the skills of those traditionalist Lenape who had not yet gone into the western pelt trade but had remained in the Delaware Valley. The evidence reveals that members of several other Native tribes also carried letters, but that Lenape carriers were reliable even during periods of conflict, when their forest skills and individual abilities made these able runners an important part of colonial networking. These skills also made them preferred guides and explorers. English control of these colonies led to the slow development of expanding services that ultimately evolved into the United States Postal Service.

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