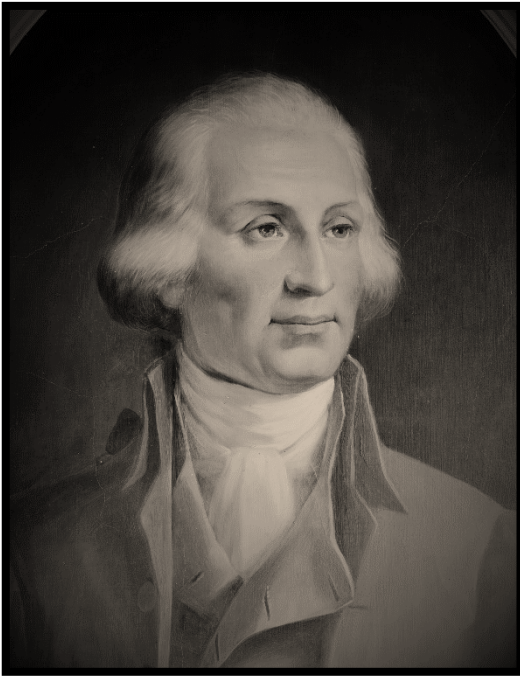


SAMUEL OSGOOD

Postmaster General

September 26, 1789 to August 12, 1791



Samuel Osgood (1748 - 1813)
*First Postmaster General under the
US Constitution 1789 - 1791*

Samuel Osgood was the first Postmaster General to serve under the U.S. Constitution. He was born in Andover, Massachusetts, on February 3, 1748. After graduating from Harvard University in 1770, he served as a delegate to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. During the Revolutionary War, he rose from volunteer militia captain to army colonel. Osgood served in the Massachusetts State Senate and was a member of the Continental Congress. After the war, he became director of the Bank of North America and was one of three board members to oversee the U.S. Treasury under the Articles of Confederation.¹

When George Washington was elected President, Osgood offered his home at 1 Cherry Street in New York City to serve as the first Presidential residence. Washington moved in on April 23, 1789, and resided at Osgood's home for nearly two years.²

On September 26, 1789, Washington appointed Osgood as the first Postmaster General under the U.S. Constitution. Article 1, section 8, of the Constitution states that Congress "shall have the power ... to establish Post Offices and Post Roads." The Constitution made no mention of the Postmaster General's role, which was later clarified in the Post Office Act of 1792.³

Osgood had broad experience in public office and as a businessman, but he was a newcomer to the postal service. He wrote to President Washington, "I find the business is more extensive and various, than I had expected; and that it will require some Months Practice and Experience, to obtain adequate & Just Ideas of it."⁴ Before ratification of the Constitution, the General Post Office was subject to numerous, often conflicting, ordinances. Osgood's predecessor, Ebenezer Hazard, proposed a single set of postal regulations. Osgood concurred with these proposals and added some of his own.

Osgood could see that the Post Office was not going to be a money-maker for the government: "As to the revenue of the post-office ... there may be so few letters written, it would not amount to anything considerable; and the dispersed manner of settling the country, may operate powerfully against the productiveness of the post-office."⁵ Nevertheless, protecting postal revenue and improving the security of the mail were important to Osgood.

He submitted a detailed plan for strengthening the postal service. This included limiting franking (the practice of government officials mailing for free), collecting fees for "ship letters" from overseas, regulating stage drivers and private post riders, and establishing fines and sanctions for postal offenses. Osgood also favored an examination of rates and establishing cost effective charges for transport and delivery.⁶

Osgood tackled the work with characteristic zeal, but when Congress decided to move the nation's capital to Philadelphia he declined to leave New York.⁷ Osgood submitted his resignation on July 11, 1791, but stayed on as Postmaster General until August 18, 1791.⁸ His successor, Timothy Pickering, was then appointed the second Postmaster General under the Constitution.

After resigning Osgood stayed out of politics until 1800, at which time he was elected to the New York State Assembly and served as speaker.⁹ President Thomas Jefferson appointed Osgood Supervisor of Internal Revenue for the District of New York and later, Naval Officer at the Port of New York.¹⁰ Osgood was a founder and the first president of the City Bank of New York in 1812. The bank still operates today as Citibank.¹¹

Osgood married Martha Brandon in 1775; after her death he married Maria Bowne Franklin in 1786. He lived in New York City until his death on August 12, 1813. Osgood was buried at the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. His remains were later moved to Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn in 1856.¹²



Samuel Osgood's house at 1 Cherry Street in New York served as the first Presidential Mansion. George Washington lived there from April 23, 1789, until February 23, 1790.

-
- ¹ "Samuel Osgood (1789–1791)," 2023, *U.S. Presidents*, University of Virginia Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/president/washington/essays/osgood-1789-postmaster-general>, accessed 4/18/2024.
- ² "George Washington Moves into First Presidential Residence," 2015, *Old New York Tours*, <http://www.oldnytours.com/on-this-day-in-old-new-york/george-washington-moves-into-first-presidential-residence>, accessed 4/18/2024.
- ³ 1 Stat. 232.
- ⁴ "To George Washington from Samuel Osgood, 9 December 1789," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-04-02-0272>, accessed 3/18/2024.
- ⁵ Samuel Osgood, "Postmaster General's First Report" (New York: United States Post Office, 1790), https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=269, accessed 4/18/2024.
- ⁶ "To Alexander Hamilton from Samuel Osgood, 20 January 1790," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-06-02-0095>, accessed 4/18/2024.
- ⁷ 1 Stat. 130. Under the Residence Act of 1790, the nation's capital was moved to Philadelphia for a period of ten years, and thereafter moved to the new federal district on the Potomac River.
- ⁸ William H Smith, *History of the Cabinet of the United States of America* (Baltimore: Industrial Printing Company, 1925), 365.
- ⁹ Jason Mandresh, "The First Postmaster General - Samuel Osgood," *Founder of the Day*, September 4, 2021, <https://www.founderoftheday.com/founder-of-the-day/osgood>.
- ¹⁰ United States Congress, "OSGOOD, Samuel," accessed April 18, 2024, <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/O000116>, accessed 4/18/2024.
- ¹¹ "A new bank born in New York," Citigroup.com, <https://www.citigroup.com/global/about-us/heritage/1812/new-bank-born-in-new-york>, accessed 4/18/2024.
- ¹² Jeff Richman, "The Mystery of the Lost Postmaster General," 2017, Green-Wood.com, <https://www.green-wood.com/2017/the-mystery-of-the-lost-postmaster-general/>, accessed 4/18/2024.