A Study of Visitors to the *Mail Call* Exhibition at the National Postal Museum
Summer 2012
Abstract

The National Postal Museum (NPM) initiated this study of the Mail Call exhibition, conducted by the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) in the summer of 2012. The results reported here are based on exit surveys of visitors to the exhibition. From a random sample of 161 intercepted visitors, 131 completed surveys were collected (81% response rate).

Visitor satisfaction with the Mail Call exhibition was broadly in line with overall satisfaction from the previous series of surveys for the entire museum. More than three-quarters of visitors gave the exhibition a rating of Excellent (57%) or Superior (21%). However, the Superior rating percentage for Mail Call was about double that of three previous exhibitions, Pony Express (2011), Victory Mail (2008), and Postal Inspectors (2007).

More than half of exhibition visitors self-identified as either having served in the military (14%) or having a family member in the service (42%). Participants in the exhibition activities, on average, were more likely to rate their overall experiences with the Mail Call exhibition as “Superior”, than non-participants. These activities included: reading about certain topics related to the formats (27% Superior rating), delivery (25% Superior), and meaning (24%) of military mail and watching the exhibition video (32%).
Summary

In the summer of 2012 OP&A conducted two surveys of two specific exhibitions on display at the National Postal Museum. This report considers one of these, the Mail Call exhibition.

The Survey: A sample of visitors exiting the Mail Call exhibition was surveyed. The overall response rate was 81 percent.

Visitors: A majority of NPM visitors were making their first visit to the Museum (90%). More than three-quarters of respondents stated they came for a general visit to the museum (78%); a small percentage identified seeing the Mail Call exhibition (7%) as their purpose for visiting the museum. More than half of exhibition visitors identified themselves as either having served in the military (14%) or having a family member in the service (42%).

Rating: The ratings that visitors gave the exhibition (0% Poor, 3% Fair, 20% Good, 57% Excellent, and 21% Superior) were in line with overall Smithsonian museum ratings averages, and generally higher in the top two categories, Excellent and Superior, compared to previously studied NPM exhibitions.

Activities within the Mail Call Exhibition: Reading explanatory panels on different topics (75-78%) and reading letter content (86%) took precedence for visitors over multimedia activities like listening to audio clips (58%), watching the video (53%), or taking photos (24%).

Observations: Survey respondents appeared to rate the Mail Call exhibition “Superior” when they had engaged in various activities within the exhibition:

☐ About a third of respondents (32%) who watched the video rated the exhibition “Superior” versus 10% who didn’t watch the video.
☐ Respondents who read about the formats of military mail selected the Superior rating considerably more than those who didn’t indicate reading about this; 27% to 3%.
☐ A quarter of visitors who read about the delivery of military mail gave the exhibition a Superior rating while only 7% of respondents who didn’t read about this topic did so.
☐ Lastly, the survey respondents that reported to have read about the importance of military mail for morale provided Superior ratings at higher rates (24%), than those that didn’t read this content (10%)¹.

Also, survey respondents that said they would definitely return the National Postal Museum were more likely to provide a Superior rating to the Mail Call exhibition (35%), while only 9% of those who might come back rated the exhibition “Superior”.

¹ Due to the small sample size, the “Reading letter content” activity was not seen as statistically significant in terms of rating.
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Preface

In the summer of 2012 the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) conducted this study for the National Postal Museum (NPM). The goal of the study is to understand the experiences of visitors within the Mail Call exhibition. Data for the study were collected by means of a survey. This report presents the results from the survey, conducted with visitors exiting the exhibition. We appreciate visitors’ willingness to participate in this study.

I would also like to thank National Postal Museum staff for their assistance and guidance in the course of this study. K. Allison Wickens, Director of Education, initiated the studies. It is always a pleasure to work with her. She and Rebekah “Becky” Daniel helped with logistics and pretesting questionnaires, in addition to spearheading data collection efforts using only NPM staff. It was a true team effort.

Within OP&A, Zahava D. Doering guided and participated in the overall survey design, analysis, and report writing and preparation. Kelly Richmond, an OP&A volunteer, took on the survey development, questionnaire design, preparation of materials, and discussion of data collection protocols for NPM staff (with assistance from Andrew Pekarik), data processing and analysis (with direction by Lance Costello), and drafting this report. Hyemin Kim, an OP&A intern, helped greatly with the technical aspects of analysis.

I thank all of them for their hard work.

Carole M. P. Neves  
Director, Office of Policy and Analysis

Cover: Mail Call exhibition at the National Postal Museum. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution
Introduction

In the summer of 2012 OP&A conducted two surveys of two exhibitions on display at the National Postal Museum (NPM), Mail Call and Systems at Work. The Mail Call exhibition opened in November 2011 and will remain a permanent exhibition. According to the National Postal Museum’s website, the Mail Call exhibition seeks to explore “how the military postal system works and why the mail is an important resource.” The exhibition highlights how the “types of mail, transportation methods, and postal workers have changed over time” and how technological and organizational innovations have allowed mail to become more diverse and mail services be more reliable.

The exhibition is in one room that is approximately 500-600 square feet. External visual panels of enlarged historical photographs create an entryway into the exhibition from the National Postal Museum’s central atrium space. A panel located directly in front of visitors entering the gallery gives the name of the exhibition and branches visitors either left or right into the main, expanded horseshoe space. The assumed pathway through the exhibition is that visitors would turn to the right upon entry. There is a video near the entrance with four seats and audio stations on the back wall of the exhibition. The rest of the exhibition is composed of object vitrines and explanatory panels.

Methodology

Data for the study were collected by means of a sample survey. The survey was administered to a scientifically selected sample of visitors as they exited the Mail Call exhibition. Exiting visitors were intercepted during nine two-hour survey sessions and asked to complete a one-page, self-administered questionnaire about themselves and their visit. Of 161 intercepted visitors eligible to participate, 131 completed the questionnaire, for a cooperation rate of 81 percent.²

The questionnaire used for the study is in Appendix A. Frequency distributions of survey responses are in Appendix B.

² Smithsonian staff, contractors or other people at NPM for business or meetings, and young people under the age of 18 or in school groups were not eligible to participate. In this study, five of 166 intercepted visitors were not eligible.
Findings

Mail Call Exhibition Visitors

- Nine out of ten Mail Call visitors were making their first visit to the museum (90%); the remaining tenth were people who had visited the NPM before.

- More than three-quarters of respondents identified coming for a general visit to the museum (78%) as their reason for coming to the National Postal Museum. Only a small number identified seeing the Mail Call exhibition (7%) as their purpose for visiting.

- About one-fifth of visitors were visiting the museum alone (22%). Of the remaining visitors about half were with other adults only (47%). The other group compositions were: with children under 12 only (8%), with adults and children 12-17 (8%), with adults and children under 12 (11%), with children of any age (2%), and with adults and children of any age (3%). Visitors to the exhibition that were with a child of any age were about one third of visitors (32%).

- Visitors were spread almost equally among the age groupings; with visitors in their 60s (18%), 50s (18%), 40s (21%), 30s (20%), and 20s (24%). The average and median visitor age were 42.

- Slightly more than half of the visitors were women (52%).

- More than half of exhibition visitors identified themselves as either having served in the military (14%) or having a family member in the service (42%).

- A small percentage of visitors (7%) indicated they worked for the US Postal Service (USPS) and another 18% of respondents had family members who worked for the USPS.

World War I postcard marked “nurse’s mail.” Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution
Satisfaction with *Mail Call* Exhibition Visit

_visitor satisfaction with the *Mail Call* exhibition was broadly in line with overall satisfaction data from the previous series of surveys for the National Postal Museum. A majority of visitors gave the exhibition a rating of Excellent (57%) or Superior (21%).

However, the Superior rating percentage for *Mail Call* was about double the percentages of three previous exhibitions, *Pony Express* (2011), *Victory Mail* (2008), and *Postal Inspectors* (2007) (Figure 1). While *Mail Call* is an exhibition of similar size to *Pony Express*, size did not appear to impact the respondents’ impressions of the exhibition.

**Figure 1. Rating of Experience in the Mail Call and in Other NPM Exhibits (Percent):**

- Close to half of visitors marked that they would _definitely_ return for another visit to the National Postal Museum if they were in Washington in the next year (48%); approximately the same percentage stated they _might_ visit again (47%). Only five percent of surveyed visitors stated they _would not_ make a return visit.

- Three fifths of survey respondents who reside locally stated they _might_ visit the museum again (60%), while the percentage of local respondents who would _definitely_ visit the museum in the future was more than a third (37%). Two fifths of respondents who did not live in the area stated they _might_ visit NPM at another time (41%). More than half out of town respondents stated they _definitely_ visit the galleries going forward (54%).

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3 The *Pony Express* report suggested that perhaps lower ratings were due to the small size of the exhibition.
**Activities During the Mail Call Exhibition Visit**

- Visitors indicated that they read letter content and explanatory panels in the exhibition at higher rates than doing interactive or multimedia activities (Figure 2).
  - The most popular activity in the exhibition for visitors was reading what was written in or on letters on display in the exhibition (86%).

  - Visitors also read about the importance of mail for service personnel’s morale (78%), read about how military mail traveled to and from addresses (77%), and read explanations about the various type and formats of military mail (75%).

- In terms of the media aspects of the exhibition, visitors reported less usage.
  - Less than two thirds of visitors listened to audio clips in the exhibition (58%) and just over half watched the exhibition video (53%).

  - Less than a quarter of visitors chose to take photos while in the exhibition (24%).

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**Figure 2. Survey Responses to activity participation during Mail Call visit (Percent):**

- Read what was written in/on some of the letters on display: 86%
- Read about the importance of mail to morale of service personnel: 78%
- Read how military mail got to and from the addresses: 77%
- Read explanations about the different formats/types of military mail: 75%
- Listened to audio clips on the back wall: 58%
- Watched the exhibition video: 53%
- Took photos while in the exhibition: 24%
Observations

From the study it appeared that survey respondents were inclined to rate the Mail Call exhibition “Superior” when they had engaged in particular activities within the exhibition:

- The activity that created a difference of 22 percentage points was watching the exhibition video. About a third of respondents (32%) who watched the video rated the exhibition “Superior” versus 10% who didn’t watch the video.

- Reading explanatory content in the exhibition also contributed to increased Superior ratings. For instance, those respondents who participated in reading about the formats of military mail selected the Superior rating considerably more than those who didn’t indicate reading about this; 27% to 3%.

- Visitors who participated in reading about mail delivery gave Mail Call a Superior rating at a higher rate (25%), than those who didn’t read about this topic (7%).

- Lastly, about a fourth of the respondents (24%) who reported to have read about the importance of military mail for morale considered the exhibition “Superior,” while a tenth of visitors gave this rating, when they didn’t read this content.

Also, survey respondents that said they would definitely return the National Postal Museum were more likely to rate Mail Call as Superior (35%), while only 9% of those who might come back rated the exhibition “Superior”.

Before the study it was hypothesized that visitors who had performed military service or had family members who had served might be more inclined to rate the Mail Call exhibition “Superior”, but due to the small number of responses that had these characteristics (14 responses), the data was not adequate to prove such a conclusion.

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4 Due to the small sample size, the “Reading letter content” activity was not seen as statistically significant in terms of rating.
Appendix A: *Mail Call* Exhibition Survey Form

Summer 2012
Mail Call Exhibition Survey

Is this your first visit to the National Postal Museum?
- Yes
- No, I have visited [ ] times before today

What led you to visit the museum today? [Mark all that apply]
- General visit to museum
- To see *Mail Call* exhibition
- To see *Systems at Work* exhibition
- To visit the museum store
- Other reason, specify: __________________________

Please rate your overall experience in the *Mail Call* exhibition today:
- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent
- Superior

Which of the following did you do with regard to the *Mail Call* exhibition? [Mark all that apply]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entered after seeing large graphic panels outside the room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticed the name of the exhibition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read what was written in/on some of the letters on display</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to audio clips on the back wall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watched the exhibition video</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read explanations about the different formats/types of military mail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read how military mail got to and from the addresses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read about the importance of mail to morale of service personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took photos while in the exhibition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you or a member of your family served in the military? [Mark all that apply]
- Self
- Family
- No
- Don’t know

Have you or a member of your family ever worked for the U.S. Postal Service? [Mark all that apply]
- Self
- Family
- No
- Don’t know

Do you live in the United States or another country?
- United States, specify ZIP code: __________
- Another country, specify: __________________________

Are you visiting alone or with other people?  
- I am alone
- I am with other people

Other than yourself, how many people are with you?
- [ ] # of adults (18 and over)
- [ ] # of youth 12 to 17
- [ ] # of youth under 12

Are you male or female?
- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

What is your age? [ ]

If you were in Washington in the next year, would you visit this museum again?
- Yes, I would definitely
- Yes, I might
- No, I would not

Thank you for your assistance!

Please comment on your experience in the exhibition, *Mail Call*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Seg 1</th>
<th>Seg 2</th>
<th>Seg 3</th>
<th>Seg 4</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>I (age)</th>
<th>Int</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


## Appendix B: Frequencies of *Mail Call* Exhibition Survey Responses

Is this your first visit to the National Postal Museum?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For “No” respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visits:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-8</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What led you to visit the museum today? *Could select multiple options*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General visit to museum</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see <em>Mail Call</em> exhibition</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see <em>Systems at Work</em> exhibition</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To visit the Museum Store</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please rate your overall experience in the *Mail Call* exhibition today:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>101%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you or a member of your family served in the military? *Could select multiple options*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you or a member of your family ever worked for the U.S. Postal Service? *Could select multiple options*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which of the following did you do with regard to the *Mail Call* exhibition?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enter after seeing large graphic panels outside the room</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice the name of the exhibition</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read what was written in/on some of the letters on display</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to audio clips on the back wall</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch the exhibition video</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read explanations about the different formats/types of military mail</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read how military mail got to and from the addressees</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read about the importance of mail to the morale of service personnel</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take photos while in the exhibition</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you live in the United States or another country?

- United States 82%
- Another country 18%
- TOTAL 100%

Are you visiting alone or with other people?

- Alone 21%
- With others 79%
- TOTAL 100%

*For “With others” respondents*

- With Adults 70%
- With Youth 12-17 72%
- With Youth under 12 77%

Other than yourself, how many people are with you?

- With adults (18 and over)
  - 0-2 87%
  - 3-5 10%
more than 5  3%
With youth 12 to 17
0-2  100%
3-5  0%
more than 5  0%
With youth under 12
0-2  89%
3-5  6%
more than 5  6%

Are you male or female?
 Male  48%
 Female  52%
 TOTAL  100%

What is your age?
 Aged 60 or above  18%
 Aged 50-59  18%
 Aged 40-49  21%
 Aged 30-39  20%
 Aged 18-29  24%
 TOTAL  101%

If you were in Washington in the next year, would you visit this museum again?
 No, I would not  5%
 I might  47%
 Yes, I definitely would  48%
 TOTAL  100%