Jessie Stackhouse (1890 - 1945)

The story of Jessie Stackhouse, Rochester’s first female postmaster, was uncovered through a scrapbook found in the Museum’s archives. The scrapbook, presumably curated by Jessie herself, contains newspaper clippings, photographs, and other ephemera related to her time in the United States Postal Service and the Rochester area. Inside the scrapbook, Jessie’s interests and love for her community are on full display.

Born in 1890, Jessie spent her early life in Mt. Pleasant. She attended the local public schools and graduated from Central Michigan University in 1909. Eight years later, she began working for the United States Postal Service in Detroit. Her marriage to James Stackhouse in 1924 brought her to Rochester, where she would remain for the rest of her life.

While in Rochester, Jessie threw herself into the community. She was a member of the First Congregational Church and the Rochester Business and Professional Women’s Club. As an active member of the Democratic Party, she took on the role of ticket chairman for the President’s Birthday Ball held in Rochester in 1938.

Jessie’s biggest impact came when she joined the staff at the Rochester Post Office. In 1935, Jessie was appointed Postmaster, the 24th in Rochester’s history. Jessie was the first woman to take the position. Under her leadership, the post office reached first class status, doubled the number of employees, and saw a $50,000 increase in stamp receipts. In 1938, construction began on a new post office at Fourth Street and Walnut Boulevard.
The new building offered more space than the old location on East Fourth Street. As Jessie explained in a newspaper article, “There will be plenty of room for our two carriers, the auxiliary carrier, the R.F.D. men, the parcel post truck and everything. There’ll even be a rest room for the clerks.” The new post office was a significant sign of progress for the community. The dedication on June 18, 1938 drew a crowd of 2,500 people and included a parade through Rochester from the old post office to the new one.

Jessie’s death in 1945 was a shock to the greater Rochester community, although she was ill for two years prior. Her obituary in the local Rochester Era newspaper reflects how the community felt about her:

“The rebirth of industry in Rochester brought about the great growth, but her initiative and determination to have the office rate as high as possible caused her to take steps which won the cooperation of larger industrialists until her goal of a first class post office was reached.

In addition to her duties as postmistress, Mrs. Stackhouse always was deeply interested in the civic and religious activity of the community life and contributed freely of her time and effort in the promotion of things for the betterment of the village.”

On the day of her funeral, all businesses closed from 2:15 pm to 3:30 pm, giving employees the opportunity to attend. During her eleven years as Rochester’s Postmaster, Jessie Stackhouse brought change to the community and made a lasting impact on the people whose paths she crossed.
Online Resources

NOTE: If the below links do not take you directly to the photo or document, click on “Open Document File” under the Links section.

- Jessie M. Stackhouse’s Scrapbook:  
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211359

- Jessie Stackhouse’s Obituary in the July 5, 1945 Rochester Era newspaper:  
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/pdfopener?md=1&did=206292

- Photo of Jessie Stackhouse (middle) with two other women:  
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211175

- Photo of women standing on stairs of post office at Fourth St. and Walnut Blvd.:  
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211192

- Photo of construction of post office at Fourth St. and Walnut Blvd.:  
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211198

- Photo of sculpture inside post office at Fourth St. and Walnut Blvd.:  
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211167