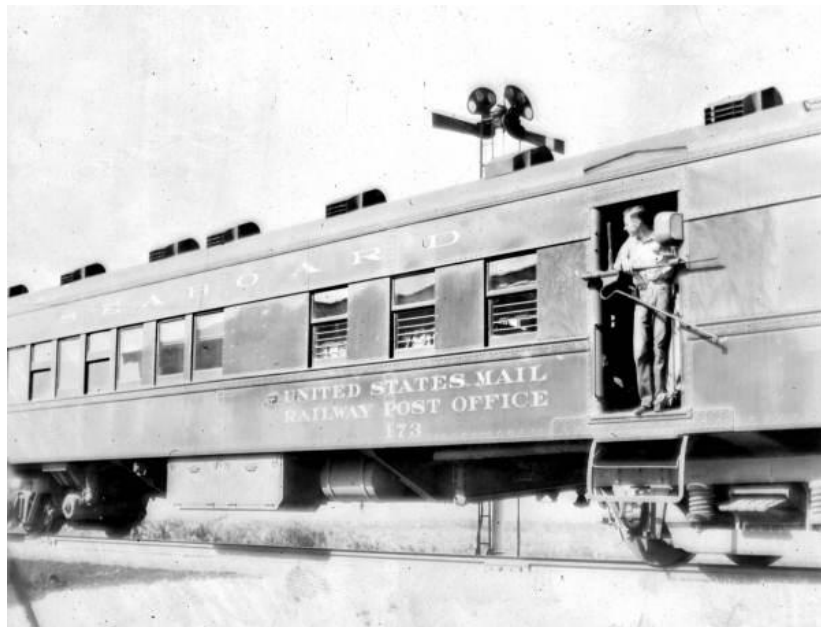


The Railway Post Office and the Railroads that Merged to Form Present-Day CSX

Created by Brian Bombei, Trinity Florida

On July 7, 1862, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair called for the establishment of the nation's first Railway Post Office (RPO) car on the *Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad* between Hannibal and St. Joseph, Missouri. The first railway postal route in operation was on the Iowa division of the *Chicago and Northwestern Railroad*, from Chicago to Clinton, Iowa, on August 28, 1864. In the east, railway postal cars were placed on the *Pennsylvania Central* and *Erie* railroads, all in 1864. The Ward mail bag catcher, which used a steel catcher arm affixed to the door of railway post office cars, allowed clerks to extend the catcher arm at selected points on the route and pick up mail from a fixed crane on the fly from all non-stop towns. Starting in 1882 employees were known as railway postal clerks, and all rail lines covered by the service were referred to as railway post offices. Among those other work-related accidents were train robberies, which, although infrequent, plagued the railway mail service from the 1860s through the 1920s, when men such as Jesse and Frank James and later the Newton and De Autremont brothers made being a railway mail clerk dangerous at times. The potential for violence and the threat from robberies led to the arming of railway postal clerks. By 1930 over 10,000 trains were sorting mail, which accounted for 90% of the nation's inter-city mail transport. By 1946, the number of railway mail clerks rose to 22,546, and assets included 2,600 RPO cars and 11,500 baggage express and freight cars by the 1950s. During its service life from over 100 years up until its final run in 1977, the Railway Mail Service of RPOs bound the nation together by rail and precipitated the growth of commerce through the speed and dependability of its service. Business and commercial activity were pushed along in an environment where fast service, reliability, and a can-do attitude prevailed, giving America a mail service that was the envy of the world.



The standard RPO car was the first car in back of the engine, and was generally 60 feet long, and included a 5-foot tall by 20-foot wide grid of mail sorting bins 6 inch x 6 inch for each of the towns along the route. Voluminous mail that came to the train's RPO car had already been separated in the terminal depot post office into pouches and sacks, or also loaded on at stops along the way, or by mail catcher at non-stop points. All sacks received were opened on-route by the clerks, who sorted the contents into other sacks and pouches for varying destinations. RPO Clerks were each assigned a station, for example pouches of first-class mail, newspapers, registered mail, and mixed mail. The clerks would work through the night at breakneck pace sorting the letters into each of the 100s of town bins in order to keep up with the seemingly endless flow of mail. When a pouch was completely sorted for a town along the route that was not being stopped at, the clerk would secure the pouch and hang it outside on the car's bag catcher, where the pouch was grabbed at full speed by the depot's mailbag arm catch. The clerk would also rope in a new bag of mail from that town that needed to be sorted along the route.

For RPO cover and stock/bond certificate collectors to be able to detail their collection, and to facilitate buying and selling of RPO covers and stock certificates, two separate cataloging systems were created. Charles Towle created the RPO cover catalog system for RPO cover collectors, detailing over 10,000 RPO train route city pair combinations over the years that RPOs operated. Similarly, Terry Cox created the railroad stock/bond certificate catalog, detailing over 10,000 railroad stock/bond certificates.

The contents of this exhibit display seven important original railroads that merged over time to form the current CSX railroad, headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. Each of the seven pages displays a summary of the railroad, a stock or bond certificate with Cox catalog number, and a mailed RPO cover sorted on a passenger train, with Towle catalog number. One page displays a mailed cover on company stationary with a Perfin stamp with 'NYC' (for *New York Central RR*) pressed into the reverse/gum side (letters in reverse from the front). Another page also display a mailed cover on company stationary with return address. Two of the pages display a package stamp receipt from a parcel shipped on a passenger train.