Burlington Bulletin

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Railway Mail Service on the Burlington
Burlington Bulletin

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F. Hol Wagner, Jr ........................................... Editor

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From the Editor

Included in this issue dealing with railroad mail service on the Burlington should be a little something for almost everyone. Nearly all periods are dealt with, from 1860 through 1970, and specific subject matter includes equipment, operations, personnel and even RPO postmarks. In addition to numerous exterior and interior views of RPO cars through the years, there are action photos of trains from the steam, motor car and diesel eras. Plans included range from detailed scale drawings to diagrams and cover wooden, steel and stainless steel equipment.

Special credit is due to those who provided some of the more vital elements of this issue. The Mobile Post Office Society, headquartered in Omaha, kindly provided us with the all-time listing of Burlington RPO routes. More data on MPOS can be found on page 17. RPO postmarks come primarily from Gerald Edgar and from my own collection. Society member Bill Glick loaned us a number of RPO car drawings he has made. Due to space limitations, we have reproduced some of the drawings in a rather small size; the originals are all HO scale and will be the major portion of a book covering Burlington passenger equipment on which Bill is now working. Roster material—data on builders, dates of construction, dates of conversion and dispositions—comes from a car-by-car roster of Q passenger equipment prepared over a period of years by Joe Douda. Without this roster, there would be countless unanswered questions about Burlington passenger equipment. And, of course, Bernard Corbin came up with material unavailable anywhere else. We are particularly honored to be able to publish Bernard’s very first railroad photo—a real gem taken in December 1920 in his hometown, New Market, Iowa.

By singling out the above individuals, we certainly do not mean to slight any of the others who also contributed invaluable material. Our sincere thanks to all of you.

This issue began as a suggestion by Al Hoffman and initially met with some resistance on my part because I didn’t feel we would be able to turn up enough material for a thorough coverage of the subject. Material literally came out of the woodwork. For example, after finding drawings of the standard RPO catcher arm, we began looking for companion drawings of a mail crane, but to no avail. Then, while attending the April 30 society meeting in Red Oak, several of us were rummaging through a number of condemned B&B cars in the yard at Pacific Junction when what should appear in a pile of “trash”—you guessed it! The result appears on page 20.

Material Wanted

We are in search of material of any sort on the following topics for use in future Bulletins: D-4-A and D-4-B 2-8-0’s; C&S/FW&D B-4R1 2-8-0’s; Aeolus; Creston, Iowa; 9900; multi-story depots/division offices at Aurora (III.), Lincoln, McCook, Alliance, Casper and Sheridan; World War II aircraft parts cars (fuselage containers on flats and “high-cube” wooden boxcars for wings); all Burlington E-units; A-2 4-4-0’s, all Burlington business cars; SD45’s 516-530; M-4 and M-1-A 2-10-4’s; refrigerator cars, and stock cars.

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Spring meet held in Red Oak

Over 50 people attended the first spring meeting of the society, held April 30 in Red Oak, Iowa, to honor long-time Q fan and historian Bernard Corbin. Through the day there were railroadiana and model exhibits at the Holiday Inn, a tour of railroad equipment displayed at Dodge Park in Council Bluffs, and perhaps of greatest interest, tours of Corbin’s home and famed O gauge model railroad.

At an evening banquet, Corbin’s 76th birthday three days earlier was commemorated with a cake, and the guest of honor was then presented a brass lifetime membership card from BRHS, a plaque from the society in appreciation of his years of effort in collecting, preserving and publishing Q history, and honorary citizenship from West Chicago, the “home of the Burlington.”

Following the presentations, John Brunner of Omaha entertained the audience with a Burlington slide presentation covering steam, motor car and diesel operations in the Omaha-Lincoln area.

Plans are now being completed for the society’s annual meeting, to be held this October in Burlington, Iowa.

Below: Society members visited railroad exhibits at Dodge Park in Council Bluffs, including Q waycar, K-4 Ten-Wheeler 915 and lounge car Omaha Club.—Hol Wagner

Bottom: Members Al Holck (far left) and Al Hoffman (glasses) discuss Holck’s Q railroadiana with other attendees. Holck is completing a book on the Burlington’s 100 years in Lincoln.—Hol Wagner

Below: Rod “Bat” Masterson and Gerald Edgar check out features of one of Masterson’s kitbashed Q freight cars. Members Jim Sandrin and Dave Flood also displayed scratchbuilt, kitbashed or superdetailed models.—Hol Wagner

Bottom: Bernard Corbin poses with plaque presented him by BRHS in appreciation of his efforts in collecting, preserving and publishing Q photos and data. Flanking Corbin are Hol Wagner (left) and BRHS President Jim Miller.—Al Hoffman
EARLY IN 1859 the Burlington-backed Hannibal & St. Joseph's Railroad succeeded in completing a 206-mile rail connection between its namesake cities, thus linking the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers across the state of Missouri with the nation's furthest westward railhead.

The next year an event occurred which brought national prominence to the Hannibal & St. Joe and forever linked the Burlington with the transportation of the U.S. mail. At 12:20 p.m. on April 4, 1860, a CB&Q train arrived in Quincy from Chicago with the first messenger from the East bringing mail to be turned over to the new Pony Express in St. Joe. Then, as Richard Overton relates in Burlington Route, A History of the Burlington Lines (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1965):

"Captain Taylor of the Quincy ferry got him across the river in exactly six minutes; the Quincy and Palmyra Railroad [a subsidiary of the H&SJ] sped him to the junction with the Hannibal and St. Joseph at Palmyra in just twenty-three minutes more. There a special train with a single car was waiting to make the dash westward. Addison Clark was at the throttle of the 'Missouri'; his only instructions were to make a record run that would last 50 years. This he proceeded to do by covering the 192 miles to St. Joseph in a little over four hours; total time of the messenger from river to river was four hours and fifty-one minutes, including stops. Considering that the Hannibal's roadbed was hardly seasoned, that its rails were light, its grades abrupt, and its curves sharp, it was something of a miracle that the train made it at all. In St. Joseph, an immense crowd was on hand to watch delivery of the mail sacks from the rail vav to the Pony Express rider, who dashed for the ferry and on to his ten-mile stint in the saddle. Nothing could have been done to bring the Hannibal and St. Joseph more into the limelight as the farthest western extension of the nation's rail network."

Davis communicated his idea to Bittinger, who, quite impressed, forwarded it on to Washington on May 23, 1862. The Post Office Department promptly dispatched Special Agent A.B. Waller west to Missouri to determine the idea's practicality. Convinced, Waller recommended the concept be adopted on an experimental basis, and on July 7, 1862, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair ordered the establishment of a railway post office on the Hannibal & St. Joseph.

Davis took his plans to Hannibal to see about having the cars specially constructed for the service. He talked with Master Car Builder George Nettleton and Car Repair Superintendent H.C. Whiting at the H&SJ shops, and they agreed that two cars could be easily and quickly built. With the approval of H&SJ General Superintendent Hayward, work on the pair got under way at once.

As H.C. Whiting recalled in 1884, "I immediately drew the plans and proceeded to erect the cars, which were... 30 feet long with..."
be sent up to Quincy to be placed in service, Davis himself went
I think the work can be done until the new cars are ready.”
the service], I proceeded to Hannibal and succeeded in getting the
to promises made to Mr. Walter, instead of going to Quincy [to start
Assistant Postmaster General G. W. McLellan in an Aug. 5, 1862,
parts of the interior arrangements.”
we wisely omitted until they proved successful. Mr. Davis visited
services for local stations, and the other end for points north, south and west
of the car with names of stations from Hannibal to Saint Joseph
bution enroute. The first cars had boxes arranged across one end
and 1862, remembered in 1885 that, “There were many difficulties
new service was an immediate success.
his car [Davis] to so distribute the mail by placing, re-arranging my baggage to make
room for him so to do: further . . . I swept the floor of the car, and
Davis, and as Car Repair Superintendent Whiting remembered, “I put up a
counter and temporary case in one end of the baggage car, which
was used by either Mr. Davis or Fred Harvey or John Patton in the first
to distribute mail matter in transit.”
Fred Harvey (yes, the Fred Harvey of Harvey House and Santa Fe
dining car fame), John M. Patton and W.E. Reeves were U.S.
Mail route agents on the H&SJ who became the nation’s first RPO
ers when the service began.
The problems experienced by the H&SJ in getting the mail across
Missouri on time are exemplified by the fact that on the first west-
bound run, the train—and some accounts say the mail car itself—
derailed, delaying arrival of the train in St. Joe. But since the overland
mail had been sorted enroute, it was carried directly across the
Missouri River to its stage coach connections in plenty of time. The
new service was an immediate success.
John G. Prosser, a Hannibal & St. Joe baggageman between 1859
and 1862, remembered in 1885 that, “There were many difficulties
to be overcome in getting cars properly arranged to facilitate the distri-
bution enroute. The first cars had boxes arranged across one end
of the car with names of stations from Hannibal to Saint Joseph
painted thereon. This did not satisfy Mr. Davis, as he wished to distri-
bute the immense overland mail before reaching Saint Joseph. So,
after a while, cars were sent out from Hannibal which were arranged
with distributing boxes at each end of the room; one end as before
for local stations, and the other end for points north, south, and west
of Saint Joseph. I believe I first suggested to Mr. Davis the idea of
having the boxes arranged in oval shape, as being more convenient
to distribute, and also as an economy in space, room at that time
being an important consideration.”
The first two all-new RPO cars, H&SJ 1 and 2, were completed
by the Hannibal shops in August 1862 and immediately placed in
service.
The H&SJ roadbed continued to be a problem. Addison Clark,
the engineer on that first record-setting Pony Express run back in
1860, recalled in 1905: “The track on the Hannibal and Saint Joseph
was very rough and the cars, being very short, got off the track quite
often. Mr. H.W. Farley, the Master Mechanic, put two iron rods
along the top of the car for the postal clerks to hang onto while the
car was off the track and it proved to be an excellent safety appliance.”
This initial experimental RPO route lasted only a year or two,
however, “on account of having no money to pay the employees, and
the Saint Joseph Post Office objecting to have their pay charged to
their jobs in Hannibal. In rebuilding, the car was stripped to the frame, and 12'
was removed from the middle. As rebuilt, the car featured mule hide roofing and
yellow paint with gold leaf lettering. After years of display use, it was donated, along
with restored 4-4-0 35, to the Patee House Museum in St. Joseph in 1969. Above
is the car before rebuilding, seen at Galesburg in 1930; below, the replica mail
car on display at Des Moines in 1938. — Above, Bernard Corbin; below, Van Patten
photo, DPLWHD

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was reinstated, becoming the first official RPO route on the Burlington lines. It was followed in 1869 by the connecting Chicago-Quincy route on the Q proper and by a run between Peoria and Burlington.

From Burlington's 1866-67 annual report, we learn that in June 1867 the Q had a total of 88 passenger cars, of which 29 were baggage, mail and express cars. Of these 29, nine were equipped with RPO compartments—five in cars with six-wheel trucks and four in four-wheel-trucked cars—even though the Q had no official RPO routes until 1869.

By 1877, RPO routes linked Chicago with Kansas City and Council Bluffs, Council Bluffs with Kansas City, and Peoria with Galesburg (this latter one as the final leg of an Indianapolis-Galesburg route). As the railroad expanded, new RPO routes were added almost as quickly as new passenger train service commenced.

In 1884 the Post Office Department felt that the steadily increasing volume of mail across the country, primarily from east to west, had reached the point where the operation of a series of westbound all-mail trains from coast to coast was warranted. Interchange was still in its infancy, so separate but connecting trains would be run on as many roads as necessary to span the country. Since 1875 the New York Central & Hudson River/Lake Shore & Michigan Southern had been operating a Fast Mail train over the New York-Chicago portion, and the Union Pacific/Central Pacific "transcontinental" route was the only logical choice for the western end of the run. And since the UP originated in Council Bluffs, across the Missouri River from Omaha, the Post Office had but to find a road to move the mail from Chicago to Council Bluffs.

Postmaster General Walter Q. Gresham, Assistant Postmaster General Frank Hatton and Railway Mail Service Superintendent Captain James E. White canvassed the Chicago roads for a likely candidate. None of the railroads wanted the task, for it seemed all but impossible to take the eastern mail arriving in Chicago at 12:35 a.m. and forward it to Council Bluffs, some 500 miles distant, in time to connect with the UP mail train departing at 7:59 p.m. that same day. The monetary incentive offered by the Post Office simply wasn't enough to interest anyone, and the prestige of holding an exclusive contract to move all mail between Chicago and the Missouri River wouldn't pay the bills.

The Burlington, as previously noted, was already operating RPO's on the Chicago-Council Bluffs route, but the road just wasn't interested in what the Post Office Department was proposing: an exclusive contract to operate a solid mail train from Chicago to Council Bluffs, 499 miles, six days a week, in just 15 hours and 50 minutes. That's an average speed of 31½ miles per hour! At that time, Q train No. 1, the Denver and Pacific Express, took 20½ hours to cover the same route!

But the Post Office officials persisted. Burlington was their choice for the job, and they kept up the pressure until Q Vice President Thomas Potter finally relented on March 10, 1884, and signed an agreement to operate the train. Queried by Postmaster General Gresham as to when the railroad would be ready to begin service, Potter calmly replied, "Tomorrow morning, General."

The very first Fast Mail train left Chicago, as Potter promised, at 3:00 a.m. the next morning. March 11, 1884. Behind the 4-4-0 on the point were just three cars: one full of mail from New York which had arrived at midnight, a carload of Chicago newspapers, and a business car carrying the Postmaster General, his party and Burlington's Potter. The engineer, a man named Paradise, was instructed to "open her up and get to Aurora as fast as God will let you." He made the 37-mile run in just 43 minutes, and a tradition was begun.

The Fast Mail engendered legends almost from the outset. The Burlington never had a better public relations tool, and the railroad used it wisely. At the time the train was inaugurated, Burlington was just beginning to paint its passenger equipment Pullman green instead of the previously standard yellow. To set the Fast Mail cars apart, the Q followed the precedent set back in 1875 by the New York Central lines and painted the mail cars solid white. The full road name, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, appeared on the letterboards, flanked by the names of the terminal cities, Chicago and Omaha. "The Fast Mail" was lettered centrally on the car sides below the windows, while coats of arms were painted at the outer ends of the sides, representing the states on the Fast Mail's route: Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska. (The train always operated through to Omaha, although until 1967 the RPO actually terminated on the Iowa side of the Missouri River at Council Bluffs.) This striking paint scheme unfortunately lasted only about a dozen years, and by the late 1890's nearly all the cars wore the more sedate Pullman green.

Speed was a popular topic of discourse in the late 1800's, and Burlington mesmerized the public with the Fast Mail's dizzying pace.
Three Belpaire-boilered class M 4-4-0's were built in 1892-93 for service on the Fast Mail. Rogers-built No. 550 was displayed at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 before entering service. As noted in the text below, it was then assigned to Creston and worked the western end of the train's run. Above, it races north from Pacific Jct. to Council Bluffs with a four-car Fast Mail on Sept. 6, 1897. At right, No. 612, the first class M (built at Aurora in 1892), pauses with the Fast Mail at the Galesburg depot for a portrait in 1893. The class M engines were reclassed A-6 in 1898 and joined that year by six identical sisters. But by 1900 their days on the Fast Mail were over. — Both, Bernard Corbin collection

No less than 10 times between 1884 and 1897, the schedule of the Fast Mail was shortened, and the public responded with awe. Fast Mail engineers were idolized by a whole generation of women and youngsters.

In the booklet Fast Mail, The First 75 Years, published by the Burlington in 1959, Trains magazine Editor David P. Morgan described the public fascination with the train:

Rival roads, jealous of the prestige that went with the mail contract and aware that more and more mail was being moved, began to race the Burlington to Council Bluffs by setting up competitive schedules to win the favor of the Post Office Department. And just as often as the attempt was made, Burlington fought back with faster schedules—and still arrived on time, virtually every time. Iowa newspapers, attuned to the public excitement attached to the Fast Mail, began reporting the train and its exploits in a manner reserved today for moon rockets.

On Christmas Eve 1894 the Ottumwa Daily Courier breathlessly reported one speedup in which "when the train reached Chariton it was 19 minutes behind time but began to redeem itself from that point westward. When it reached Creston quite a crowd had gathered at the depot to witness the movement and see how it came out. The stop there consumed one minute and three seconds during which time the mail for that place was delivered and engine 550 with Engineer Kelley at the throttle was hitched on. A pusher helped to give the train momentum and she seemed to be a thing of life as she moved in her onward course. The train scored a minute between Creston and Cromwell making the distance, 6 miles, in as many minutes."

As readers clamored for more, eager to champion their own railroad, the press virtually camped on the right of way.

There was sympathy for the victims of speed: "At Biggsville a horse attempted, at the last moment, to cross just ahead of the train. He figured wrongly though, and when last seen he was skimming through space . . . his spirit had flitted to horse heaven."

There was praise and wonderment expressed over the engines: "A large class M never working more smoothly . . . No. 92 is the regular Fast Mail engine between Ottumwa and Creston and it seemed natural for her to get down to business . . . She is a perfect model of the locomotive builder's art. Of course, the west enders are doubly proud of her for on her rapidity depends the reputation of the road. She is relied upon to make up any lost time which may be lost on any of the divisions between Chicago and Creston, and she usually does it."

Enthusiasm was rampant in an age wherein the railroad steam locomotive represented man's crowning technical achievement, and it was richly deserved by the Fast Mail—and never more so, before or since, than on the climactic night of February 17, 1899. That night the Mail was held in Chicago 1 hour 17 minutes awaiting its connection from New York. Thereupon Burlington managed to cover the 500.2 miles into Council Bluffs in a running time of 524 minutes, excluding stops.

Small wonder that in a day when there were sheet-music sales instead of TV programs, Burlington sponsored a popular song entitled "The Fast Mail" and a booklet called "How the 'Greyhounds' of the Burlington Beat the Rising Moon." Small wonder, too, that the train's engineer was included in a boy's book, "Careers of Danger and Daring," or that in years to come people in railroad towns were to say almost reverently of a retired engineman, "He ran the Mail."

From the time of the Fast Mail's inauguration in 1884 until the end of Railway Mail Service in the early 1970's, RPO operation...
These four obviously posed views made by the Burlington in 1900 depict aspects of work aboard the Fast Mail. Clockwise from upper left, the photos show: loading mail sacks into the RPO car; a clerk holding the catcher arm steady in preparation for catching a mail pouch on the fly; sorting mail in the Pintsch gas-illuminated car, and two clerks pausing for what was captioned a "midnight snack." A 1902 change in physical requirements for RPO clerks might have adversely affected one of these two snacking clerks, but certainly not the other. The general superintendent of the Railway Mail Service noted of the change that, "...the increase in the requirement in height from 5 feet 4 inches to 5 feet 6 inches and as to weight from 125 to 135 pounds, will give us a class of men much better fitted for the arduous duties of a postal clerk. Experience has shown that men 5 feet 4 inches in height are not tall enough to reach the top boxes in the letter cases in our standard cars, and one whose weight is barely over 125 pounds is not heavy and strong enough to do the heavy lifting sometimes required without becoming too fatigued to continue to work on a long and tiresome run." — BN collection

Working the Fast Mail
During the 10-year period from 1891 to 1901, the Burlington regularly used Moguls in passenger service, though generally not on the Fast Mail. Ten-Wheelers and Atlantics eventually supplanted the 2-6-0's, and the Moguls were relegated to lesser service. The top view here is of a day train passing through Sandwich, Ill., around 1895. On the point is H-2 2-6-0 530, a 68"-drivered Rogers product of 1893, similar in many respects to class M 4-4-0 550 turned out by the same builder that same year. A 60' full RPO car and three cars of storage mail, express and baggage trail the Mogul's tender, followed by three coaches.

The center view finds B&MR H-4 2-6-0 342 ready to depart Denver Union Station with an eastbound in 1900. Equipped with larger 72" drivers and piston valve cylinders, the 342 was an 1899 Baldwin product that became Q 1228 in 1904.

Finally, the bottom photo shows a westbound passenger train on the B&MR in 1900, probably at McCook, Neb. Up front is brand new K-4 4-6-0 27, a product of B&MR's own Havelock shops. In both of these B&MR photos, the first car is a member of the road's rather unusual fleet of 52' full RPO's which, because they had no end doors, featured full length running boards along the bottom edge of the carbody and handrails fastened to the bottom edge of the letterboard, giving it a scalloped appearance. The car in the center view is identifiable as B&MR 70, which was built at St. Joe in October 1888 and became Q 2126 in 1904. It was converted to baggage car 1236 in 1912 and entered non-revenue service on Dec. 21, 1935, as Q 250817.

In all three of these photos, the RPO car is immediately behind the locomotive. A 1902 Post Office Department publication notes that: "The department has arranged with many of the larger railroads to have a car between the mail car and the locomotive, which it is hoped will lessen the number of serious accidents, the mail car having in the past been usually next to the tender, thereby receiving the full shock of collision." — Top and center, Bernard Corbin collection; bottom, Colorado Railroad Museum collection.
changed very little. Passenger service extensions or cutbacks, frequency of service and competing railroads all influenced the selection and continuation of RPO routes. And the same basic changes in American society which brought about the eventual demise of passenger train service were also responsible for the end of mail transportation and sorting aboard such trains.

Shortly after the turn of the century, when RPO service was at its peak, there were some 1,300 routes nationally, with 63 of them on the Burlington. By 1951 the number had dropped to just over 700 routes nationally, with 29 on the Burlington. As more and more mail—and passengers—moved over the nation's growing network of highways and airways, passenger trains and RPO routes became highly interdependent. Loss of mail contract usually served to kill a marginal passenger train, and of course, discontinuance of a mail-carrying train automatically eliminated an RPO.

A sure sign of the changes taking place was the 1949 switch from the long traditional and very specific title, Railway Mail Service, to the generic Postal Transportation Service. By 1961, only 262 RPO routes remained, with a count 14 on the Q and C&S/FW&D. The Post Office Department, after numerous efficiency studies, had concluded that the country was growing at such a rapid pace that RPO's and their cousins, Highway Post Offices, could not possibly cope with the future.

Discontinuances of passenger service in the Sixties became publicized, bitter, even bizarre events. Burlington applied to drop the Lincoln-Billings passenger service, trains 42-43, and the Denver-Billings service, trains 29-30, in March 1967. After ICC hearings, permission was granted to drop trains 29-30 on Aug. 31, 1967, but trains 42-43 were required to remain in service. The Post Office, however, did drop the Middle and Western Division RPO's on trains 42-43 from Alliance to Sheridan (M.D.) and Sheridan to Billings (W.D.) at this time. Only the Eastern Division between Lincoln and Alliance remained in service, though still as the Lincoln and Billings RPO.

The Q continued to refute its discontinuance application, and a bitter battle ensued, with residents of the sparsely populated area served by the train teaming with labor unions and local politicians to put up a surprisingly vocal opposition. In January 1969 the U.S. District Court in Cheyenne issued a temporary restraining order blocking discontinuance of the trains. Then in April the ICC finally granted its approval of the discontinuance, but not while the restraining order was still in effect. Court proceedings dragged on into the summer of 1969. When the court eventually ruled on Aug. 14 that the trains could be dropped immediately, Burlington, after more than two years of fighting, jumped at the order and stopped the trains dead in their tracks. No. 42 had already departed Alliance, so it was stopped at Hemingford, some 16 miles up the line. The passengers and pouch mail were transferred to a bus, and the train was backed to Alliance.

So great was the outcry over this literal interpretation of the court ruling that the matter was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court, which immediately issued a 10-day stay order, putting the trains back in service for a final 10 days, but the Eastern Division RPO, dropped on Aug. 14, was not covered by the stay and so did not operate during the trains' final 10 days. When the Supreme Court chose not to consider the case, the trains were dropped when the stay expired.

In 1965, the Burlington began its last five years of corporate existence with just 13 RPO routes remaining. Seven of these were discontinued in 1967 alone. By 1970, just one route remained: Chicago & Kansas City, a 466-mile route begun back in 1889. At the end, trains 19 and 20, the Kansas City Zephyr, carried the RPO car, and in the final months the train actually terminated at the North Kansas City freight yard rather than operating all the way into Union Station. The trains and the RPO both survived the Burlington Northern merger of March 2, 1970, but the 107-year history of in-transit mail sorting on the Burlington drew to a close on July 10, 1970, when the Post Office Department discontinued the route.

The Last Five Years
RPO Route Discontinuances: 1965-1970

1965
Alliance & Casper disc. July 31
Lincoln & Billings MD and WD disc. July 31

1966
Chicago & Council Bluffs chg. to Chicago & Omaha, April 23
Council Bluffs & Kansas City chg. to Omaha & Kansas City, April 23

1967
Denver & Amarillo disc. March 31
Amarillo & Ft. Worth disc. March 31
Burlington & St. Louis disc. April 7
Alliance & Denver disc. July 7
Billings & Denver ND and SD disc. Sept. 1
Chicago, Savanna & Minneapolis disc. Sept. 2
Omaha & Denver disc. Oct. 12

1968
Omaha & Kansas City disc. Jan. 12

1969
Chicago & Omaha disc. June 27
Lincoln & Billings ED disc. Aug. 14

1970
Chicago & Kansas City disc. July 10

A Texas-bound C&S passenger train highballs south out of Denver at 55 mph behind C-SH Ten-Wheeler 324 on June 23, 1922. The C&S and FW&D had a penchant for combination RPO-coaches, owning a total of 28 such cars (including two on the Wichita Valley), while parent CB&Q rostered but 16. This configuration had the effect of forcing the RPO car back next to the passenger-carrying cars and away from the locomotive, accomplishing just what the Post Office Department wanted. Here the car behind the baggage car is a 60'-RPO-coach from C&S series 328-331. — Otto Perry photo, DPLWHD
Postal regulations requiring all-steel construction of RPO cars brought about consists by the 1920's which saw steel mail cars frequently trailed by wooden baggage cars and coaches. A Twin Cities train leaves Chicago around 1925 behind S-2 2942. A 1910-series steel baggage-mail car is followed by a steel-sheathed wooden baggage-dynamo car and a mixture of wooden and steel coaches. Note the steel diner in the coachyard.—Hol Wagner collection.

A 60' full mail car and a combination baggage-mail car, both with mail catcher arms ready, trail S-1 Pacific 2810 on train No. 9, the Colorado Limited, as it nears Denver on the morning of Jan. 2, 1928, with eight cars at a leisurely 30 mph. The advent of steel mail cars allowed them to once again be safely placed immediately behind the locomotive. —Otto Perry photo, DPLWHD

This common occurrence in the diesel era was unusual in steam days: two complete passenger trains combined for a portion of their run. In this case, a pair of Atlantics, the 2571 and 2564, leave Alliance, Neb., with combined trains 303 and 31 on July 5, 1931. At Northport, 37 miles south of Alliance, the trains will split; 303, with its Alliance & Denver RPO, will continue on south to Denver, while 31, carrying an Alliance & Casper RPO, will turn west and head for central Wyoming.—Otto Perry photo, DPLWHD

Four years later, this is what train 31 looked like as it approached Casper, through the oil refineries of Evansville. Behind S-1-A 2814 is an 1889-series 60' baggage-mail car converted from one of the early 2300-series steel RPO cars built for the Q in 1914.—Otto Perry photo, DPLWHD

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The last motor car RPO run in the country was on the Q in the form of trains 15-42 and 41-16 between Lincoln and St. Joseph. The classy consist normally included silver motor car 9767 (with a large 30' RPO compartment) and chair car Silver Pendulum. Shown here at Lincoln on Dec. 4, 1960, the motor car made its last run a year later on Dec. 28, 1961, although the train and RPO route lasted into early 1962.—Bernard Corbin

The Peoria & Galesburg RPO route ran from 1862 to 1897, from 1906 to 1911, from 1918 to 1921 and finally between 1948 and 1960 as a motor car run. Here motor 9772 and trailer, operating as train No. 56, sit at the Peoria depot on May 27, 1958.—Dick Wallin collection

Gas-electric and later diesel-electric motor cars prolonged the lives of many local passenger trains, and with them, many RPO routes. Burlington operated more motor cars than any other road, and this view is typical of most of the runs. Car 9845 pauses for mail and passengers at Maryville, Mo., while operating as train No. 30 between Creston, Iowa, and St. Joseph on Sept. 24, 1957. The Creston & St. Joseph RPO route was operated continuously from 1962 until 1959.—Charles Zeller collection

All the western subsidiary roads operated motor car RPO's. At left is C&S 401 running as train 31 north of Fort Collins, Colo., on June 2, 1935, with the Billings & Denver Southern Division RPO. At right is Burlington-Rock Island 63 at Dallas Union Station in 1940, just in from Houston with the Dallas, Waxahachie & Houston RPO. —Left, Otto Perry photo, DPLWhD; right, Everett DeGolyer, Jr., photo, Hol Wagner collection
Of the early shovelnose Zephyr trains, only the 9900 and 9903 had RPO compartments in the actual power unit. Other Zephyrs had mail compartments in trailing cars, except for the Twin Cities Zephyrs, which never carried RPOs since Milwaukee Road had the high-speed Chicago-Minneapolis mail contract. The Pioneer Zephyr's most famous RPO route was its first one, between Council Bluffs and Kansas City, although the train later ran on a number of other routes. Above, with catcher arm plainly visible on the RPO compartment door, 9900 arrives in Kansas City as train No. 20 on a chilly Jan. 18, 1936. At right, 9900's RPO compartment is not much different than compartments in cars of 50 years earlier.—Above, Otto Perry photo, DPLWHD; right, Hol Wagner

Last shovelnose unit in service, and consequently the last to hold down an RPO run, was the 9908. After being bumped from Lincoln-St. Joe service by motor car 9767, it moved east to the local run between Burlington and St. Louis until the trains were discontinued. Here it appears with a 1910-series heavyweight baggage-mail car on train No. 1 near Hannibal in August 1961. The last run (see cancellation) was made on April 27, 1963.—Dick Wallin

Catching mail on the move has always been one of the most fascinating aspects of RPO service. Here the Denver Zephyr flies east through Brush, Colo., at 80 mph on June 11, 1939. A mail pouch has just been snatched from the trackside crane and is visible in the RPO's catcher arm.—Joe Schick photo, DPLWHD
Besides Chicago-Omaha Fast Mail service, for years there was a Chicago-Denver mail run which was anything but fast. Trains 7-8 made virtually all the local stops on their 1,000-mile journey and encompassed two RPO routes: Chicago & Council Bluffs and Omaha & Denver. Here, a lengthy No. 7 pulls into Denver on the morning of Sept. 9, 1951, behind a pair of E7's.—R. E. Andrews photo, Hol Wagner collection

Mail trains most frequently made nocturnal departures from their terminals, waiting until the day's mail had been assembled for transit. In this view, an unusual phenomenon finds E8 9939B's numberboard reflected by the camera lens and seemingly projected in the sky above in this December 1961 view of a much smaller No. 8 being readied for departure from Denver Union Station.—Ken Crist photo, Hol Wagner collection

Lincoln-Billings train No. 43 and Alliance-Casper train No. 31 load mail and passengers at the Alliance depot one August morning in 1964. No. 31 was discontinued in 1965, but No. 43, renumbered 41 in 1968, lasted until Aug. 14, 1969, becoming the most notorious service discontinuance in O history.—Hol Wagner

Last mail service on the western half of the original RPO route was this Brookfield-St. Joe local, seen at Chillicothe, Mo., in August 1956, a year before the run was discontinued. The interesting consist includes E7 9919B, a 1910-series baggage-RPO and experimental chair car Silver Pendulum.—Dick Wallin collection

Burlington Bulletin
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1908-1916 Frannie [Wyo.] & Cody [Wyo.]
1909-1915.
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1910-1910 Billings [Mont.] & Kirby [Wyo.]
1910-1914 Billings [Mont.] & Thermopolis [Wyo.]
1911-1917 Peoria & Quincy
1911-1935 Sterling [Colo.] & Cheyenne [Wyo.]
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1912-1922 Chariton [Ia.] & Bethany [Mo.] & St. Joseph
1913-1924 Lincoln & Falls City [Neb.]
1914-1934 Omaha & Wymore [Neb.]
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1922-1930 Peoria & Creston [Ia.]
1917-1945 Keokuk [Ia.] & Shenandoah [Ia.]
1918-1948 Chicago & Rockford (III.)
1918-1952 Chicago & Sauvana [Ill.]
1918-1935,
1944-1952 Minneapolis & Rock Island (III.)
1919-1933 Streator (III.) & Denrock (III.)
1920-1922 Galesburg & Vermont (III.) (via Yates City)
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1931-1934 Burlington, Washington [Ia.] & Oskaloosa [Ia.]
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1934-1934 Ashland [Neb.] & Schuyler [Neb.]
1935-1944 Minneapolis & St. Louis
1935-1941 Davenport [Ia.] & Rushville (III.)
1935-1950 Table Rock [Neb.] & Oxford [Neb.]
1937-1947 Streator (III.) & Clinton [Ia.]
1938-1941 Beatrice [Neb.] & Holdrege [Neb.]
1939-1950 Quincy & Milan [Mo.]
1940-1949 Red Oak [Ia.] & Hamburg [Ia.]
1948-1951 Chicago & Zearing (III.)
1949-1950 Burlington & Centerville [Ia.]
1950-1953 Quincy & Kirksville [Mo.]
1952-1967 Chicago, Sauvana (III.) & Minneapolis
1953-1953 West Quincy [Mo.] & Kirksville [Mo.]
1953-1955 Burlington & West Quincy [Mo.]
1955-1962 Lincoln & St. Joseph
1956-1969 Chicago & Omaha
1966-1968 Omaha & Kansas City

Colorado & Southern/Fort Worth & Denver
(Including Wichita Valley and Trinity & Brazos Valley/Burlington-Rock Island)

1882-1882 Cheyenne, Boulder [Colo.] & Denver (CC)
1882-1886 Fort Collins [Colo.] & Denver (CC)
1882-1884 Denver & Leadville [Colo.] (3' gauge—DSP&P/DL&G until 1899)
1883-1883 Denver & Georgetown [Colo.] (CC—3' gauge)
1882-1886 Wichita Falls [Tex.] & Fort Worth
1883-1884 Guerra Vista [Colo.] & Gunnison [Colo.] (DSP&P)
1883-1888.
1903-1904 Denver & Pueblo [Colo.] (D&NO/T&G until 1898)
1884-1887 Como [Colo.] & Gunnison [Colo.] (DSP&P/DL&G—3' gauge)
1886-1886 Harold [Tex.] & Fort Worth
1886-1887 Vernon [Tex.] & Fort Worth
1887-1888 Quanah [Tex.] & Fort Worth
1888-1888.
1902-1903 Clarendon [Tex.] & Fort Worth
1888-1902.
1936-1944 Denver & Fort Worth
1888-1931 Wandoover [Wyo.] & Cheyenne (C&NW/UP&DG)
1891-1892 Douglas [Wyo.] & Cheyenne (UP&DG, Wandoover to Cheyenne)
1892-1895 Orin Jct. [Wyo.] & Cheyenne (UP&DG)
1893-1897.
1900-1927 Denver & Silver Plume [Colo.] (UP&DG until 1899) (3' gauge)
1901-1912 Denver & Colorado Springs
1902-1903 Denver & Clarendon [Tex.]
1903-1904 Pueblo [Colo.] & Amarillo [Tex.]
1903-1930
1904-1936,
1944-1967 Denver & Amarillo [Tex.]
1904-1907 Cleburne [Tex.] & Mexia [Tex.]
1906-1907 Byers [Tex.] & Seymour [Tex.]
1907-1914 Fort Worth, Teague [Tex.] & Houston
1907-1917 Wichita Falls & Abilene [Tex.]
1910-1938 Stamford [Tex.] & Spur [Tex.]
1912-1914 Cheyenne & Fort Collins [Colo.]
1913-1917 Denver & Falcon [Colo.]
1914-1935 Cleburne [Tex.] & Houston
1917-1931 Denver & Como [Colo.] (3' gauge)
1929-1950 Childress [Tex.] & Lubbock [Tex.]
1935-1952 Dallas, Waxahachie [Tex.] & Houston
1938-1949 Stamford [Tex.] & Lubbock [Tex.] (WV, Stamford to Spur)
1917-1945
?? - ?? Teague [Tex.] & Houston
?? - ?? Waxahachie [Tex.] & Houston

Data for this all-time listing of Burlington RPO routes was provided by the Mobile Post Office Society, a non-profit corporation devoted to the interests of collectors of covers, cachets, postmarks, history and data of transit markings of all kinds, including railway, highway and waterway. The society, which is affiliated with the American Philatelic Society, is headquartered in Omaha under the able direction of Edwin P. Bergman, a former Union Pacific RPO clerk. With over 600 members, MPOS publishes the bi-monthly "Tran Postmark Collector" featuring society news and articles of interest. The society also publishes books and monographs relative to the interests of the members. Three forms of membership are available: Regular at $6.00 per year plus a $1.00 initiation fee; Sustaining, at $15.00 per year and including two free paperbound monographs each year; and Patron, at $50.00 per year and including all paperbound monographs published during the year and a 40% discount on any hardbound publications. Contact MPOS in care of Edwin P. Bergman, Secretary, 5030 Aspen Drive, Omaha, Nebraska 68157.

Second Quarter 1983
***The Fast Mail at age 75***

Excerpted from *Fast Mail: The First 75 Years* by David P. Morgan, published by the Burlington in 1959 on the 75th anniversary of the Fast Mail

**EVERY EVENING** at nine o’clock an ancient, honorable, unsung ritual takes place a few hundred feet beyond the concourse and gates of [Chicago] Union Station, along a track that passengers never ride, in the basement of the largest building of its kind in the world. The ritual involves two organizations, one public and the other private. The party of the first part is the United States Post Office Department; the party of the second part, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company. These two institutions for gather under the lights of track 30, on a concrete loading dock stacked with locked canvas sacks and alert to the activity of men in khaki work clothes with little silver badges. And there each night at 9 the P.O. and the CB&Q renew an historic agreement.

The government entrusts the railroad with a solid train of mail, and the railroad undertakes to move it west to the Missouri River—dependably, rapidly, on time. For all its want of ceremony, this ritual is now in its third generation. It has survived three international wars, outlived the station in which it was born and the steam locomotives that made it possible, matched the sternest competition, and accommodated immense increases in loadings.

This is train No. 29, the train that doesn’t appear in the familiar red Burlington timetable, the train of somber, businesslike cars that seem at home in the shadows, the train nevertheless with a name: *Fast Mail*. It is just that. Its doors are open to anything that bears postage, from a post card to a package—that and that alone. All the personnel aboard are there to work. This includes seven or more Postal Transportation Service clerks for the P.O. and the engine crew and three trainmen for the railroad. No. 29 is important but undaunted, without a trace of the glamour of Vista-Domes and stainless steel, pretty dresses, silverware and window drapes of the *Kansas City Zephyr* arriving across the way in Union Station. The men who sponsor and operate train 29 don’t give a fig for frills, only performance.

The performance begins early in the evening when a yard engine spots the storage mail cars and the R.P.O. custom-constructed to meet rigid P.O. specifications. Inside are pigeonhole cases for sorting letters, pipe racks to hold the open-mouthed canvas sacks and pouches, tables and storage space. Seven or more men work here... standing up. At peak output they could depart Chicago with 150 pouches, each containing up to 3,000 letters; pick up 150 more pouches en route; and process all 300 before No. 29 terminates at 5:45 a.m. across the river in Omaha. All this in a space just 60 x 10 feet. A half mile into it, the workers, tiny wooden car on the Hannibal & St. Joe that inspired it all...

...The essence of mail handling is twofold, if reduced to its simplest terms. The mail must be transported. The mail must be sorted. Train 29 does both jobs, simultaneously. For as the *Fast Mail* rolls along, the clerks are opening up sacks of mail labeled for areas and states; making separations of the mail by sorting it into the pigeonhole cases; finally pouching it for stations en route and connecting trains. In this specific Railway Post Office—which is officially “Chicago & Council Bluffs 29”—the crew is making 72 "mixed" separations for such Western states as Wyoming and Utah; 36 for Missouri; 108 for Nebraska; and 204 for Iowa—not to mention 96 for the city of Omaha itself, where the car finally stops.

Before dawn the R.P.O. will have pouch mail for a total of 22 connecting trains and Highway Post Offices (“hypo’s,” the clerks call ’em), plus even more mail for Star Route trucks. Example: Mail is sorted for such on route Iowa destinations as Burlington, Ottumwa, Albia, Osceola and Creston, then unloaded at Galesburg, Ill., and held there for train No. 3, which follows in about two hours and picks up the pouches for fast delivery. Another example: The clerks of train 29 will sort mail for towns through which the *Fast Mail* hurtles even while the pigeonholes bearing their names are filling up. No worry, though, for these pouches are simply dropped off for pickup by the eastbound *Denver Zephyr’s* Railway Post Office for morning delivery. Yet another example: Mail for Omaha “proper”—the city itself—will be sorted so specifically that the letter carriers can pick it up at the station without the need for the pouches to even enter the Post Office building.

And just as a dining car can turn out a meal a minute from a galley whose size a housewife would complain of, so can a Railway Post Office separate mail in a volume which a sizable brick-and-mortar and immobile Post Office would be hard pressed to emulate. Foot for foot, man for man, in fact, there exists no equal of an R.P.O.

The *Fast Mail* doesn’t dawdle. It never has. From a standing start in Chicago Union Station the big diesels require just 36 minutes to eat up the 37.7 miles out to suburban Aurora. The next lap to Galesburg, 124 1/2 miles, is taken at an even faster clip, the average speed being 71.8 miles per hour. The air-horns blasting for country grade crossings and the clickety-clack of the wheels on rail joints inject a sense of drama that even a mail clerk of 20 or 30 years’ seniority is susceptible to... but the sustained speed of the diesels seems automatic by the standards of yesteryear.

...It is an honorable history that today’s *Fast Mail* continues as No. 29 thunders across Illinois and Iowa toward the Missouri River. Galesburg, 11:20 p.m. Burlington, 12:07 a.m. Ottumwa, 1:46 a.m. At each stop a postal transfer clerk or a Burlington employee records the loading and unloading of pouches. And back along the train, lead mail car. Carmen mate air-brake hoses and steam-heat lines. No. 29 is being born again. A few hours ago it was just a string of empty cars; now there is mail aboard and power ahead.

The expressionless, inexorable clocks along the track 30 platform tick toward nine o’clock and discipline tightens. Doors slam shut on the storage cars as the foreman of the loading dock surveys his creation. At 8:56 four bags are flung into the R.P.O. car, at 8:58 1/2 one more sack appears. Then the seconds drain away, the foreman lifts his arm, and Burlington, the party of the second part, is ready to roll. Up front, diesel engines pick up on the rpm’s, the generators convert their torque into direct current, which flows silently to the axle-mounted, truck-suspended traction motors. The long silvery locomotives move... and with them move 15 cars of mail.

The *Fast Mail* is under way, a ritual has been observed.

And a proud seventy-five-year-old tradition is intact and perpetuated.

...Tonight... we’ve got 15 cars of mail... and No. 29 sometimes departs Chicago in two sections with as many as 25 cars.

...The R.P.O. is officially CB&Q car No. 2332, a 60-foot vehicle custom-constructed to meet rigid P.O. specifications. Inside are pigeonhole cases for sorting letters, pipe racks to hold the open-mouthed canvas sacks and pouches, tables and storage space. Seven or more men work here... standing up. At peak output they could depart Chicago with 150 pouches, each containing up to 3,000 letters; pick up 150 more pouches en route; and process all 300 before No. 29 terminates at 5:45 a.m. across the river in Omaha. All this in a space just 60 x 10 feet. A half mile into it, the workers, tiny wooden car on the Hannibal & St. Joe that inspired it all...

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railroad employees open the bulk cars of parcel post, loading and unloading the bags of packages.

This is not mere freight but rather human expression and deed which the clerks in the Railway Post Office sort into pigeonholes labeled Pawnee City, Wahoo, Grand Island, Lincoln, also in the instance of Omaha "proper" Grain Exchange Building, University of Omaha, UP, Offutt Field, Federal Reserve. The pouches are opened, the mail separated, the pouches locked, the mail loaded and unloaded. Train 29 races the dawn into Council Bluffs.

A few minutes past two o'clock one of the clerks in the R.P.O. slides back the door, watches for a familiar landmark in Chariton, where he puts off a couple of sacks. No. 29 rolls on. Oseola, 2:44 a.m. Creston, 3:16 a.m.

No. 29 is the flagship of an impressively large Burlington mail-carrying fleet which provides the Post Office Department daily service on 17 different lines covering 5,008 route-miles of railroad in 10 states. A roster of 251 cars are allocated to this service, of which 63 are Railway Post Offices. In addition, the railroad provides mail storage and handling facilities at 521 on-line communities and cities.

The Post Office Department makes payments to the railroad in three ways: a basic payment per mile for an R.P.O. car, regardless of load; a payment per linear foot of space occupied in a storage mail car; and a payment per sack handled on loading docks and platforms by railroad employees. The P.O. is vested with authority to place mail upon any passenger train Burlington operates, from an Iowa local to No. 1, the gleaming Vista-Dome Denver Zephyr; to fine the railroad for tardy or otherwise inadequate service; and to establish the specifications for mail-carrying equipment. The Post Office Department places the mail on the basis of cost, time and service. P.O. men are notoriously impartial about their business.

All of which helps to explain why Burlington men are quietly proud of their Fast Mail. Since that epic night in March of 1884 [when the Fast Mail first ran], one generation after another of engineers and firemen, conductors and trainmen, dispatchers and trainmasters, section foremen and presidents has jealously preserved, the train's reputation for delivering the mail—on time. The task has not been routine.

No mass transportation job ever is. A draft board can thin the ranks of skilled employees in time of war. A thunderstorm over Iowa can swell a river, push a thousand streams over their banks. Christmas mails can stack the sacks 8 feet high in every last car the railroad can beg or borrow. But the mail moves regardless.

No man on today's Burlington knows that better than Harry C. Murphy, present occupant of the president's chair in the Burlington Building near Union Station, Chicago. As a young man he was wont to hang over the railing of the old Spring Street overpass in Aurora when the high-wheeler hauling the Fast Mail came blasting through town on its way to keep an appointment on the banks of the Missouri. As a man in the ranks he acquired a wholesome admiration for locomotive engineers of whom it was said simply, "He ran the Mail." As a district maintenance engineer and later division superintendent at Creston he had programmed the work of the section gangs whose mauls and strong backs surfaced and aligned the track the Fast Mail pounded down toward Council Bluffs and Omaha. As president, he makes it the first business of the day to examine Burlington's morning report, the sheet of terse figures that spell out how the trains are operating on 11,000 miles of high iron in 14 states. On the sheet is No. 29. It had best be labeled "on time." It almost invariably is—as it was at that Spring Street overpass.

And as it is today when the diesels of the Fast Mail roll into Council Bluffs at 4:59 a.m.—on time. Here at the vast, mechanized mail handling center, jointly sponsored by Burlington and Union Pacific, No. 29 all but dissolves. During the night one car of storage mail was cut off at Burlington, one at Ottumwa, and another at Creston. Several cars are destined for Council Bluffs itself; others will be switched into the Transfer so that their contents can be unloaded and distributed onto other trains; and certain loads are destined for the mail train for California. Which leaves the Fast Mail reduced to just its diesels, its Railway Post Office, and storage mail cars for Omaha.

Switching completed, No. 29 eases off into the faint, breaking daylight, trundles across the bridge spanning the wide, muddy Missouri, and rolls into Burlington's Omaha station. The diesels are cut off...the flagman takes down the marker lamps from the rear car...the Railway Post Office clerks pick up their grips and climb down from their car...The railroad has observed its nightly ritual with the United States Post Office Department, moved all the mail it was offered, rolled it to the Missouri River on time.
Postal Cars
From the 1925 Car Builders Cyclopedia

THE TRANSPORTATION OF MAIL requires the use of specially designed cars equipped for operation in passenger trains. These cars are constructed along the same general lines as baggage cars and other passenger train equipment but are provided with interior fittings especially designed to facilitate the handling of mail. Some cars are provided with facilities—letter cases, pouch racks, etc.—for sorting mail en route; other cars—mail storage—are designed only for the transporting of mail.

In order to standardize this class of equipment, the Post Office Department of the United States Government, in 1912, after conferences with a committee of mechanical engineers appointed by the railroads, issued specifications and floor plans for postal cars and fixtures for use in United States Mail Service.

In 1915 the specifications and floor plans were adopted as Recommended Practice by the Master Car Builders’ Association.

Modifications of these plans, which provided for optional standards, were issued in September 1917; these optional plans were so designed that the mail compartments can be converted from one standard length to another when service conditions make it necessary to increase or decrease the space devoted to handling mail. Further modifications were made under date of February 2, 1920.

Selected U.S. Government Postal Car Specifications

35. INTERIOR EQUIPMENT—The following equipment shall be furnished. Railway Mail Service drawings should be followed where these details are shown; otherwise details to be as per railway company’s standard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bag Racks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catcher arms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair or stout stool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinder guards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinfectants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributing tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deck-sash opener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dustbrush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumping tray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire buckets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire extinguishers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folding washbasin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter cases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter-drop, Chute and Scoop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock rods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirror</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper-boxes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper rakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portable bins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register cages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sack and pouch racks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelf and letter drop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slip case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheme case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepladder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torch for lighting gas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet-paper holder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wardrobe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water cooler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water tank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrecking tools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire screens for letter case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37. PAINTING—The painting of car body and trucks shall be in accordance with railway company’s specifications for steel cars. Light-color enamel paint shall be used for interior finish above side plate; below that line the car shall be painted a medium shade of darker color, preferably light buff or light brown, with dull finish. The lettering and numbering of postal cars shall conform to Railway Mail Service requirements and the railway company’s standards. The inside length and width, the car number, and title of the company owning shall be painted at a convenient place inside the car. End doors and end door posts must not be sanded.

LETTERING—Lettering on outside of mail cars shall be substantially as shown on Railway Mail Service drawing sheet 64, dated February 2, 1920. On 60-foot full R.P.O. cars lettering should preferably be central with respect to side door opening. On 30-foot apartments, lettering should be confined to the side wall of the apartment. On 15-foot apartments the lettering shall be abbreviated and in three lines, thus:

U.S. MAIL
RAILWAY
POST OFFICE

and lettering should be confined to side wall of the apartment, if possible.

Standard RPO Door Safety Bar and Brackets

NOTE: Full lines indicate location of mail pouch for present stream trains, mail cars and 10-car Chicago-Denver Zephyr trains. Dotted lines indicate location of mail pouch for mail car of streamlined Zephyr trains 9900 and 9921.
**Burlington RPO Cars**

**CB&Q: 1904-1970**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baggage-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1600-1614(1)</td>
<td>40'-45' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-1601(2)</td>
<td>69' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602-1603(2)</td>
<td>82' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1604(2)</td>
<td>70' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605(2)</td>
<td>86' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-1659</td>
<td>45'-50' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1719</td>
<td>50'-52' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-1761</td>
<td>55'-60' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-1828</td>
<td>60'-63' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1851(1)</td>
<td>65' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1852(2)</td>
<td>40' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-1899</td>
<td>60' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-1909</td>
<td>70' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1949</td>
<td>70' Stainless Steel</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mall</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>28'-30' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>35' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2050-2062</td>
<td>30'-44' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2275-2080</td>
<td>40' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2100-2101</td>
<td>45' Stainless Steel</td>
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<tr>
<td>2125-2133</td>
<td>52' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2150-2151</td>
<td>55' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2175-2245</td>
<td>60'-62' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2300-2346</td>
<td>60' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2600-2605</td>
<td>45'-50' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2625-2639</td>
<td>50'-52' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2675-2678</td>
<td>55'-60' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2700-2714</td>
<td>60'-66' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2715-2716</td>
<td>66' Stainless Steel—formers motor cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2725-2726</td>
<td>75' Stainless Steel—former motor cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2750-2751</td>
<td>70' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2752</td>
<td>70' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T&amp;BV/B-RI</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>52' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-28</td>
<td>60' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>61' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>64' Stainless Steel</td>
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**C&S: 1906-1970**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baggage-Mail</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>40'-42' Wooden—Narrow Gauge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>40' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251</td>
<td>51' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>252-256</td>
<td>70' Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257-260</td>
<td>80' Steel Sheathed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>320</td>
<td>86' Stainless Steel—Became Q 1605(2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-43</td>
<td>42' Wooden—Narrow Gauge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>322</td>
<td>60' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>323-327</td>
<td>50'-51' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>328-331</td>
<td>60' Wooden</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**FW&D: 1900-1970**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baggage-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>50' Wooden—Reblt. to Coach-Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-34</td>
<td>70' Steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>86' Stainless Steel</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>52' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-28</td>
<td>60' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>61' Wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>64' Wooden</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Wichita Valley**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baggage-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>42' Wooden</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Passenger Motor Cars**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB&amp;Q 9625-9629</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB&amp;Q 9665-9666</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baggage-Mail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB&amp;Q 9724-9735</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB&amp;Q 9765-9773</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB&amp;Q 9900, 9901</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB&amp;Q 9902(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FW&amp;D M-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-RI 61-63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Burlington RPO Cars**

**CB&Q: 1904-1970**

Builder's photos of cars constructed at the Aurora shops are rare, but this Sept. 29, 1904, view shows just-completed 60' mail car 2221, one of three dozen similar cars built there during the first decade of the 20th Century. Because of the 1912 regulations restricting the use of wooden mail cars in mainline service, most of the wooden 60-footers became baggage cars by 1924, with 2221 becoming the 1346 in 1915.—CB&Q photo, BN collection
Six unusual 40-footers

Prior to the issuance of Post Office Department standards for mail cars in 1912, RPO compartments were built to any convenient size, and very short RPO cars were quite common, even on mainline passenger trains. Only such all-mail trains as the Chicago-Council Bluffs Fast Mail rated big 60'-RPO's. Consequently, when the Q renumbered passenger equipment in 1904, there were 21 full RPO cars on the roster which were under 50' in length (some being as short as 28'), along with another 10 cars of 52' or 55' length.

A good many 60'-RPO's had been constructed by the Aurora shops during the 1880's and 1890's for mail train service, and Aurora began building these cars once again in 1902, turning out another 36 of the wood-bodied 60-footers by the end of the first decade of the 20th Century.

Then in 1911, just a year before the mail car standards were promulgated, the Q acquired its first all-steel RPO's. The six cars, built by American Car & Foundry in June and numbered 2075-2080, were intended primarily for secondary and branchline service and were only 40'-7" long. Next year, when the first standards were released, they called for all-steel construction of new cars, but they also established RPO compartment lengths of 8', 10', 15', 30', 60'-no 40' compartments were authorized, so the year-old cars were already obsolete. The standards were shortly modified to allow ready conversion of a compartment from one length to another, but placing a 30'-compartment in a 40'-car didn't make much sense, and the Q didn't particularly need a smaller compartment than that at the time. Fortunately, the nation's railroads were given a number of years to come into compliance with the federal standards, so the Q had time to decide what to do with the little 40'-RPO's.

Beginning in 1912 the Burlington began buying 60'-full RPO's (2300 series) and 70' combination baggage-mail cars with 30'-RPO compartments (1910 series) and by 1922 had acquired a total of 81 steel RPO cars meeting the federal standards. This gave the road an abundance of acceptable cars, so many wooden RPO's were either retired or converted to baggage or company service, and the six 1911 40'-steel cars were converted to baggage cars 1094-1099, trading their twin 2'6" doors for a single 6' door on each side.

But the tale of the 40-footers doesn't end here—not by a long shot. In just six more years, four of the cars once again sported RPO compartments—standard compartments this time.

Baggage cars 1099 and 1094 in December 1928 became baggage-mail cars 1850-1851. They kept their central 6' baggage doors and regained a 2'6" door on each side to serve the new 15'-RPO section.

Cars 1095-1096 similarly were outfitted with a 15'-RPO compartment served by a 2'6" door on each side. But instead of a baggage section, they were totally rebuilt at Aurora with a coach section seating 30. This modification involved adding a vestibule to the new coach end, increasing the overall length of the two cars by just over 3'.

Only cars 1097 and 1098 remained as baggage (or mail storage) cars for the rest of their careers. And their lifespan was the shortest of the six 40-footers: 1097 was destroyed in a wreck at Shabbona, Ill, in 1944, while 1098 was cut up at Aurora in 1949.

But the other four were far from finished. In 1943 the 3004 lost its RPO compartment, becoming baggage-coach 3550. It retained this configuration until it was dismantled at Eola in 1950.

Only photo yet discovered showing one of the 40-footers as a full RPO is this unusual view of a westbound passenger train near Keenesburg, Colo., in April 1920. Immediately behind S-1 Pacific 2829 is the RPO — the only all-steel car in the train. The other six cars — baggage, baggage-coach, chair car, diner, two sleepers and a solarium lounge — are wooden cars with steel underframes. — Joe Schick collection, DPLWHD
Above, the 1850 in Chicago around 1950, shortly before it lost its RPO compartment for the second time, becoming a full baggage car, also for the second time.—Lee Hastman collection, courtesy Jerry Albin

Above right, baggage car 1300, formerly the 1850, at Lincoln in January 1961. Little has changed since the photo at left. The RPO compartment door and window remain (though the window is partially plated over), the mail slot has been removed, the stove and its stack are gone and the lettering has been modernized.—Hol Wagner

At right is coach-mail combine 3004 at Red Oak, Iowa, around 1942. The addition of a vestibule at the coach end has lengthened the car some 3', but the 15' RPO compartment is identical to those on cars 1850-1851. In 1943 this car lost its mail section in favor of a baggage compartment and was renumbered 3550.—Bernard Corbin

Second Quarter 1983
Above is a well known view of a train from Savanna, Ill., at the Galesburg depot in 1905, a year after Burlington’s general renumbering of locomotives and cars. On the point is K-3 Ten-Wheeler 677, a former Chicago, Burlington & Northern engine. Behind it, and enlarged at right, is diminutive mail car 2001, thought possibly to also be of CB&N origin. Burlington records list it only as former CB&Q 905—presumably second 905. The abrupt end of the clerestory roof clearly shows that open platforms have been removed from both ends of the car. The tiny 28’ RPO is so small that it rides on the same No. 7 trucks used by Q waycars.—Bernard Corbin collection

Mail car 2001
HO scale drawings by Hol Wagner

Remarkably, for a car that was off the roster by 1915, yet another photo of 2001 exists. This view, on the former Keokuk & Western Des Moines & Cainsville RPO route at Cainsville, Mo., around 1910, shows one window to have been removed, the door to have been modified slightly and the roof details to have changed considerably.—Bernard Corbin collection
There were no combination baggage-RPO cars as short as the 28' full RPO's, but there were a number 40' to 45' long in the 1600-1610 series. One is seen above at Bucklin, Mo., on the old H&SJJ around 1920 sandwiched between K-4 4-6-0 703 and a 1910-series steel baggage-mail car. Note the wooden mail crane beside 703's cab. Below is car 1603, a 44'2" car very similar to the one above. Built at Aurora in 1877 as baggage car 167, it was subsequently renumbered 662, rebuilt to baggage-mail car 887 and renumbered 1903 in 1904. Modified with a standard 16' RPO compartment after this photo was made, the car lasted in branchline service until being renumbered 250619 on Oct. 20, 1928.—Above, Otto Perry photo, DPLWH; below, Bernard Corbin collection

One of the oldest cars on the post-1900 roster, venerable baggage-RPO 1655, here trailing coach-baggage motor car 9529 at New Market, Iowa, in 1935, was built way back in February 1867 at Aurora as Q baggage-express car 25. It was subsequently converted to baggage-mail car 889 and, after removal of its end platforms, was renumbered 1655 in 1904. The 49' car, shown working the Keokuk & Shenandoah RPO route, was finally scrapped at Eola on July 23, 1946, the year after its southern Iowa RPO route was discontinued. — Bernard Corbin

Second Quarter 1983
In the Q 1700-series were nearly three dozen wooden baggage-mail cars between 50' and 60' in length. Many received standard 30' RPO compartments after 1912 and continued in branchline service as late as 1947. One of the 1700's appears above with A-2 468 and a 57' coach near Beardstown, Ill., on Dec. 30, 1917.—Bernard Corbin collection

Some 29 wooden 60' baggage-mail cars occupied the 1800-1828 series. Typical are cars 1805-1806, represented in these drawings showing latter-day appearance. The 1805 was built at St. Joe in 1887 as StLK&NW 106 and was scrapped in 1945; the 1806 was turned out by Barney & Smith in 1888 as B&M 69 and was scrapped in 1942.

Last wooden mail cars acquired by the Q were 70'9½" steel underframe baggage-mail cars 1900-1909, built by AC&F in February 1911. Since they didn't meet the 1912 standards but were too new to relegate to branchline service, they became baggage cars 1490-1499 in 1923-24. One of the 1900's is seen behind P-2 Atlantic 2535 approaching Denver on Oct. 1, 1922.—Otto Perry, DPLWHD
There were 12 different narrow gauge RPO routes on Burlington predecessors/affiliates, not including the C&S. None, however, were on the famous Black Hills lines. This 1903 scene at Galesburg finds Fulton County Narrow Gauge 4-4-0 66, baggage-mail car 4 and an unidentified coach ready to depart on the Galesburg & Havana RPO route, which remained 3' gauge until 1905.—Bernard Corbin collection

On the C&S and its predecessors, there were a total of six 3' gauge RPO routes. Here UPD&G train No. 52 pauses at Empire, Colo., on April 7, 1894. The Denver & Silver Plume RPO was being worked by baggage-mail car 30, one of three 1880 cars (30-32) which became C&S 110-112, later 10-12.—Union Pacific Historical Museum collection

C&S baggage-mail car 13 was built by the UP in 1880 for the Denver, South Park & Pacific, passed to the Denver, Leadville & Gunnison in 1885 and became C&S 114 late in 1898. Renumbered 13 in 1906, it lasted to the end of narrow gauge passenger service in 1937, then was sent with the C&S display train to the 1939 New York World's Fair. Subsequently stored at the Q's Aurora shops, it next became "Deadwood Central" car "Buffalo Bill" in the Q's operating exhibit at the Chicago Railroad Fair of 1948-49, where its RPO compartment cancelled mail. The car survives today—but just barely—on the Black Hills Central tourist operation in South Dakota.—Above, George Lundberg photo, Hol Wagner collection; right, CB&Q photo, BN collection

C&S train No. 71 pauses at Dickey tank on April 6, 1937, with the tri-weekly Leadville-to-Denver passenger run, which was discontinued just four days later. Behind leased Q 2-8-0 537 is baggage-mail car 13.—Frank Kelley photo, Hol Wagner collection

Second Quarter 1983
Seen at the Galesburg depot one morning around 1905 is a 4-4-0-powered two-car local. Ahead of coach 5005 is coach-baggage-mail car 2630, one of 47 cars of this type owned by the Q since the turn of the century. This particular car, built at Aurora in June 1881 as coach 140 and subsequently converted to coach-baggage-mail 671, is quite unusual in having a central RPO section. In November 1909 the car’s coach section was removed and it became baggage-mail car 1716, lasting as such until Dec. 7, 1935, when it was scrapped.—Bernard Corbin collection

Bernard Corbin's first railroad photo, below, taken in December 1920, shows a very similar 4-4-0-powered two-car local, but this time the scene is Corbin's hometown of New Market, Iowa. The American type is A-2 No. 398, the coach is unidentifiable, and the other car is a more commonly configured coach-baggage-mail with the 15' RPO compartment up front.—Bernard Corbin

Second car on this westbound passenger train nearing Denver at Derby, Colo., in July 1918 is one of the Q's 16300-series coach-mail cars. From outward appearances, it is probably the 3027, a 49'10" car built at Plattsmouth in 1900 as B&MR 32, as it was the only 3000 new enough to be outfitted with the enclosed vestibule this car features, although such a vestibule could have been retrofitted. The photographer's motorcycle is visible near the rear of the train.—Otto Perry photo, DPLWHHD
Above, 1918 lettering diagram and 1916 floor plan of C&S coach-mail cars 328-331. These four were built by Pullman in 1906-07; the 329 was destroyed by fire in 1924, and the others were converted to steel-sheathed baggage-mail cars 257-259 in 1925-26. Car 259 was destroyed in a 1938 collision, and the two survivors became baggage cars 228 and 230 in 1941 and 1943. The 230 was dismantled in 1955, but the 228 survives in June 1983 as tool car 99070.

FW&D coach-mail cars 27-28, left, were 1909 conversions of unpopular cafe cars 251-252, built by Pullman in 1900. C&S identically converted its cafe car 625 into coach-mail 322, and FW&D also converted two slightly longer cafe cars (253-254) into coach-mail cars 29-30. After remodeling the mail compartments to meet standards, all four FW&D cars were finally scrapped in the mid-1930's. C&S 322 became baggage-mail 260 in 1927, baggage car 229 in 1941 and was wrecked in 1948. — All, Hol Wagner collection.
Class MA-10 Steel Mail Cars 2315-2324

HO scale drawings by Bill Glick

Joe Legner collection
Although the Post Office Department first issued mail car standards in 1912, they didn't become mandatory until 1915-16. Burlington bought its first all-steel 60' mail cars, the 2300-2304, from Standard Steel Car Co. in April 1912 and followed with 10 cars (2305-2314) from American Car & Foundry in March 1914. None of these cars met the new interior configuration standards, and consequently by 1924 all had either been rebuilt to comply or were rebuilt to baggage or baggage-mail types. In August 1916 AC&F delivered cars 2315-2319, and sisters 2320-2324 followed in October 1917. Strangely, none of these 10 met the interior standards either. They were classed MA-10 by the Q and featured an unusual window arrangement, with two three-window pairs on one side and a two-four window grouping on the other. As the post office began to enforce the new standards, all but three of the MA-10's were modified with standard interiors which caused the window spacing to be changed to a set of five on each side. Cars 2316, 2317 and 2319, instead of being standardized, were converted in 1923-24 into baggage-mail cars 1897-1899 and outfitted with standard 30' RPO compartments. Cars 2321 and 2324, although modified to meet the standards, were similarly converted to baggage-RPO's in 1936-37, becoming the 1892-1893. Then in 1941 the 2315 and 2318 were converted into baggage cars 1316-1317. The three survivors lasted almost until the end of RPO service, with 2322-2323 being sold for scrap in 1967 and 2320 becoming a building at Galesburg in January 1970.
Largest single group of full RPO cars on the Q roster was the 2325-2346, 22 cars turned out in December 1922 by Standard Steel Car Co. and fully complying with Post Office Department standards, even to the pair of skylights over the letter cases, where it was impossible to place windows. As more powerful lighting became available, the skylights were eventually removed. Cars 2327 and 2335 were destroyed in the disastrous Aurora shop fire of Sept. 2, 1931, but all the others lasted into the mid-1960's and beyond. One of the cars spent three full seasons cancelling postcards at the 1932-34 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. In the mid-1950's, cars 2330 and 2337 were equipped with roller bearing journals and painted silver for Zephyr protection service. Upon its retirement in 1968, the 2330 was donated to the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, Wis. The accompanying builder's photos show the as-built appearance of the class MA-11 cars, which changed little through the years. — Jerry Albin collection

Burlington Bulletin
The Q began buying all-steel baggage-mail cars in 1913 with the acquisition of the 1910-1919 from AC&F, followed in 1914 by the 1920-1934 from the same builder. Standard Steel Car Co. added cars 1935-1944, C&S 252-256 and FW&D 31-34 in 1922 (as part of the same order as cars 2325-2346, opposite), and AC&F completed the group in November 1924 with a final five cars, classed MB-23 and numbered 1945-1949. Also, as part of this last AC&F order, C&S car 253 was rebuilt from the rails up, having been virtually destroyed in a derailment near Casper, Wyo., on Sept. 27, 1923. All 49 of these cars were similar in appearance and construction, featuring standard 30’ RPO compartments, and nearly all lasted into the 1960’s. Two were destroyed in the 1931 Aurora shop fire, four were converted to baggage cars around 1950 and eight more became baggage cars in the early Sixties, but the rest remained essentially as-built until the end. A few gained or lost RPO compartment windows through the years, and car 1947 was given roller bearing journals and a coat of silver paint for Zephyr protection service in the mid-Fifties. Three of the cars are preserved today: 1923 at the Illinois Railway Museum, 1942 at the National Museum of Transport in St. Louis and C&S 254 at the Colorado Railroad Museum.

Class MB-23 Steel Baggage-Mail Cars 1945-1949

Drawings by Bill Glick
A member of the Q's very first batch of all-steel baggage-mail cars, the 1914 appears at Lincoln in October 1968, a year before it was sold for scrap. Built back in June 1913, the car has four RPO compartment windows rather than the more common three.— Hol Wagner

Turned out by Standard Steel Car Co. in November 1922, FW&D 32 was photographed at Fort Worth in December 1966. By this time its third RPO compartment window had been removed (to allow extension of the letter cases), but the letter slot remained just below the former location of the third window. This car became tool car X-316 in March 1968. — Hol Wagner

Q 1947, one of the 1924 AC&F cars, has also lost its third RPO compartment window in favor of a larger letter case, but more significantly, it has been equipped with roller bearing truck journals and painted silver (actually aluminum) for Zephyr service. It is seen leaving Denver Union Station on No. 10, the Denver Zephyr, during the 1962 Christmas mail rush. The car was sold for scrap five years later, in December 1967.— Hol Wagner
In May 1925 the Q completely re-equipped its Black Hills locals, Edgemont-Deadwood trains 141-142, by converting two 1903 coaches into parlor-coaches 425-426 and rebuilding 1905 AC&F coach-baggage combines 3502 and 3510 into coach-baggage-mail cars 2750-2751. These latter two had a large central baggage compartment with a 15’ RPO compartment forward and a nearly-as-small coach section aft. The wooden cars all lasted on 141-142 until 1940, when they were replaced with all-steel equipment. Above, No. 141 leaves Edgemont behind K-2 665 on Oct. 15, 1933. At right, with leased C&S Ten-Wheeler 330 on the point, No. 141 rolls through the hills north of Edgemont on June 20, 1936.

— Otto Perry photos, DPLWHD

As mentioned on page 28, the Q owned a total of 47 combination coach-baggage-mail cars. Only five were of all-steel construction, and four of these were converted gas-electric motor cars. Car 2752, then, was a one-of-a-kind gem, purchased from Pullman in 1927 as part of lot 6068, which also included chair cars 4520-4527, coaches 6161-6170 and five lounge cars, including the Omaha Club. Also equipped with a 15’ RPO compartment, 2752 had a much larger coach section than 2750-2751. Apparently used all its life on branchline and mixed train service in eastern Nebraska, primarily out of Lincoln, the car survived the BN merger as a mixed train waycar—by this time stripped of its RPO section. It was scrapped in the early 1970’s. These three Pullman builder’s photos depict the car ready for delivery on Sept. 2, 1927.— Joe Legner collection

Four motor cars were de-engined in 1941 and 1943 and converted into coach-baggage-mail cars. The 9096 and 9724, both 65’ cars, became 2715-2716, while 75’ cars 9839 and 9847 became 2725-2726. They were used as motor car trailers and/or mixed train accommodation cars. 2715 and 2726 were scrapped in 1957-58, 2726 lasted until 1964, and 2716 was finally sold for scrap in August 1967. Here 2726 nears the end of its career in the Creston, Iowa, yard on Oct. 11, 1964.— Charles Zeller
The Q bought its first standard lightweight baggage-mail cars from Budd in 1940. Cars 1600/Silver Sheen and 1601/Silver Mail were 70′ stainless steel cars with 30′ mail compartments — simply modernized versions of the standard baggage-mail car in use since the turn of the century. Another very similar 70′ car was purchased from Budd in October 1952. Externally, the 1604/Silver Pouch was more modern — a postwar design — and had three RPO compartment windows rather than the two on cars 1600-1601. All of the lightweight mail cars lasted in service through the 1970 BN merger, but with the end of railway mail service on the Q that same year, the cars became redundant. When Amtrak was formed in 1971, it had no interest in them, so they were either placed in company service or scrapped. Below left is 1601/Silver Mail just out of the Denver wash rack in May 1963, and below right is 1604/Silver Pouch waiting to be loaded at Lincoln on Sept. 29, 1968. — Left, Hol Wagner; right, Bernard Corbin
The Burlington system owned four lightweight stainless steel baggage-mail cars over 80’ in length. Two were bought from Budd in 1940 for the Texas Zephyr (C&S 320/Silver Tidings and FW&D 150/Silver Messenger). These 86’ cars had 30’ RPO compartments and long baggage sections. In 1948 the Q bought cars 1602/Silver Post and 1603/Silver Page, 82’ cars with large 60’ RPO compartments and short baggage sections — just the opposite of the C&S/FW&D cars. When passenger service on the subsidiaries ended in 1967, Silver Tidings was sold to the Q, becoming the 1605 in January 1969, and Silver Messenger was converted into FW&D tool car X-326 in July 1970. Above, Silver Tidings at Pueblo, Colo., in April 1965; below, builder’s photo of Silver Post at Budd’s plant in Philadelphia on Jan. 17, 1948.— Above, Hol Wagner; below, BN collection

In addition to its Budd lightweight stainless steel mail cars, the Q owned two other lightweight cars with RPO compartments — one each for the Empire Builder and North Coast Limited, which operated over the Burlington between Chicago and the Twin Cities. CB&Q 41 was an 81’ baggage-mail car built by AC&F in 1950 as part of a Great Northern order and painted GN’s standard Omaha orange and Pullman green. Q 479, built by Pullman in 1947, was originally Northern Pacific 430 and was purchased and renumbered by the Q in 1954. The two-tone green car, seen here in Denver in May 1969, had a 30’ RPO compartment and 52’ of crew dormitory space.— Hol Wagner

Second Quarter 1983
Three drawings: Hol Wagner collection

Lettering for
N.G. Baggage & Mail Cars 10-12.

Lettering for
N.G. Coach & Mail Cars 40-45

Lettering for
S.G. Baggage and Mail Car 250
FLOOR PLANS OF 60 FT., FULL POSTAL CAR AND 30 FT., 15 FT., AND 15 FT. 8 IN. COMPARTMENTS, SHOWING ARRANGEMENT OF DOORS, WINDOWS, ETC., AND LOCATION OF LETTER CASES, POUCH RACKS, STANCHIONS, ETC.

(1) 60 ft. Full Car—Floor plan showing doors and windows arranged for 60 ft. car, or for converting to a 30 ft. or 15 ft. compartment. Windows shown in full lines and the skylights shown by dotted lines for 60 ft. car; windows shown in dotted lines may be installed complete in original construction, or provision made for completion when required. So that part or entire car may be used in other than distributing mail service, extra posts may be provided in side walls of such nature as will permit widening the doors at minimum cost.

(2) 30 ft. Compartment—Doors and windows located to permit compartment being reduced to 15 ft. without change in this respect. If originally fitted up as a 30 ft. compartment, windows shown in full lines and the skylight in dotted lines are required; windows shown in dotted lines can be installed complete or provision made for completion when change to 15 ft. compartment is made. If contemplated that car may be changed into a 60 ft. car, the additional doors, windows and skylights shown on the 60 ft. plan can be installed complete, or provision made for completion as required.

(3) 15 ft.—15 ft. 8 in. Compartment—Optional, in lieu of the standard plan shown on R.M.S. Sheet F, revised February 2, 1926. Designed to permit compartment being extended to 30 ft. or 60 ft. without change in doors or windows. In this case of side doors of same width as in 60 ft. and 60 ft. cars, and same space for toilet as in the larger units. The compartment is 8 inches longer than the 15 ft. shown on Sheet F, although there is no increase in the facilities in the compartment and it is rated the same as the 15 ft. compartment.

(4) If inside length of car exceeds 60 ft. the excess should be added between side door opening and end of car. If excess is greater than 3 ft., stove should be located at same end of car, on opposite side, and adjacent to the door opening, with a bulkhead of insulated metal plates to height of stove and wire netting panel above; face of bulkhead to be flush with edge of door opening.