

Robert W. Richardson Railroad Library

Built in 1997, the Robert W. Richardson Railroad Library at the Colorado Railroad Museum is designed to look like a small town depot and contains one of the most comprehensive railroad reference libraries in the United States. From timetables to employee records, photographs to engineering documents, maps to books, it offers a wealth of information on railroads across the nation and around the world.

Excerpt from the Colorado Railroad Museum Equipment Data Sheet No. 5 compiled by Kenton Forrest and Robert Jensen. All photographs are from the Colorado Railroad Museum collection.



Mission Statement

To acquire, preserve and exhibit to the general public, railroad equipment, artifacts, paper records, books, artwork and photographs emphasizing Rocky Mountain area railroads, to explain and interpret the role of railroads in the history of this region from the 1860s to the present by means of exhibits, a reference library, educational programs, publications and information sharing with other historical groups. Furthermore to provide incentives that will enhance interest in railroads and railroading history.

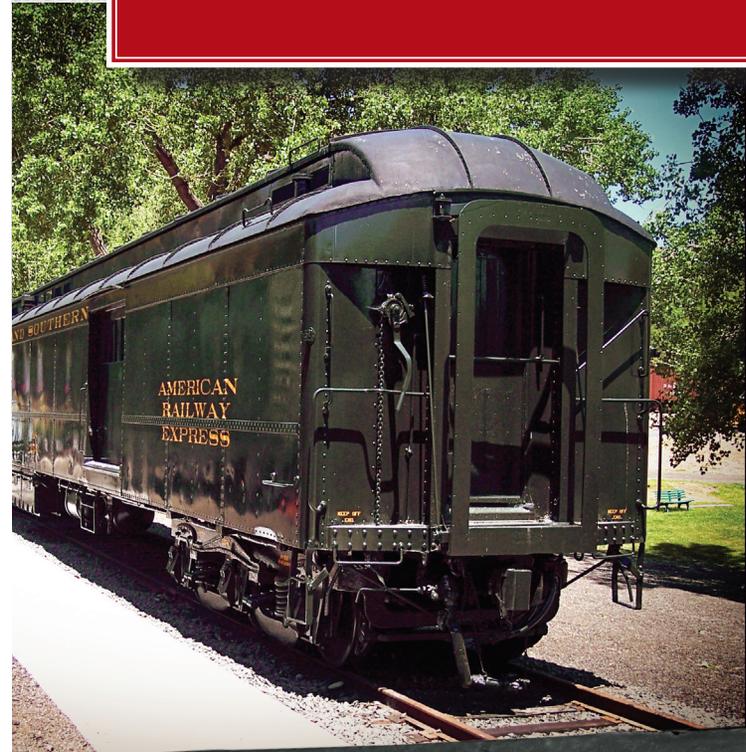
Colorado **RAILROAD** Museum®

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COLORADO & SOUTHERN RAILWAY

RPO CAR NO. 254

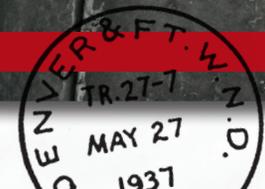


The movement of United States Mail was once accomplished by cars called RPOs, railway post offices. These were attached to passenger trains, generally right behind the locomotive. For over 100 years, RPOs crisscrossed the nation delivering and collecting the mail.

Colorado & Southern Railway ordered five postal cars in the 1920s from the Standard Steel Car Company and AC&F to replace older wooden cars. These included a section for baggage and express as well as a compartment for use of the postal service. Railway Express provided in its time the same service that UPS, FedEx and similar companies do today.

The new cars operated on the Billings & Denver and Denver & Amarillo RPO routes until these were discontinued in 1967. Car No. 254 was donated by the railroad to the Colorado Railroad Museum in 1968.

Railway Post Office





The RPO Crew

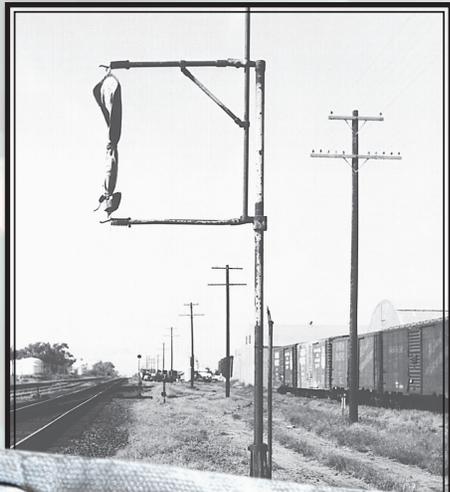
An RPO was an operating post office. The crew would dispatch and collect mail at train stations along the route. They also handled such varied shipments as gold bars, live bees, baby chicks and saddles.

At major stations, mail was exchanged with the postmaster. The car also was equipped with a hook so that it could pick up bags from mail cranes at smaller stations without having to stop the train.

An RPO crew had to be a walking encyclopedia of postal regulations and schedules. Rigorous testing kept the clerks on their toes. To protect the mail, many were armed with government issued revolvers. They also had to keep 18¢ in change in order to sell stamps, because anyone could mail a letter by handing it to a clerk or by using the mail slot on the side of the car.

Mail Crane

Shortly before train time, the postmaster in a small town would place a special mailbag on a mail crane next to the track along the station platform. The RPO clerk would raise the catcher arm as the train passed without stopping and the arm would grab the bag. At the same time, the clerk would toss out a bag of arriving mail.



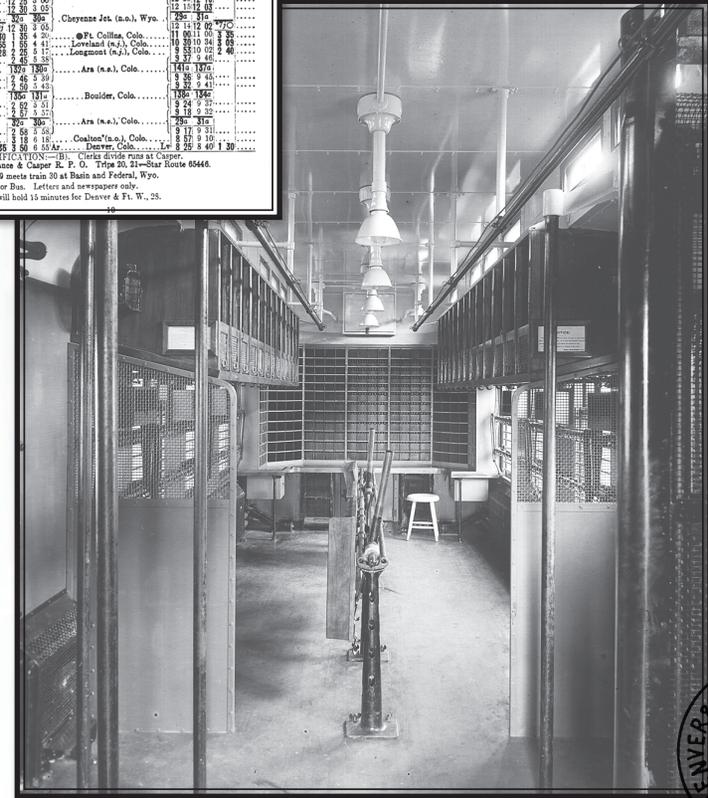
8-BILLINGS & DENVER R.P.O.
 C. B. & Q. R. R. (Casper Div.) Billings to Wendover (Route 114,723 ps)
 426.00 miles and Colorado & Southern Ry. (Northern Div.) Wendover to Denver,
 Route 114,719, ps. 242.00 miles. Francis to Cody, 42.4 miles. Route 114,722
 Whole mileage, 710.87 miles. Billings to Casper, 235.83 miles; Casper to Denver,
 241.42 miles; Billings to Francis, 72.05 miles; Denver to Cheyenne, 120.24 miles.
 Cheyenne to Wendover, 122.38 miles. Denver to Fort Collins, 74.32 miles.
 Star Route 6346, Edgar to Billings, 35 miles.
 Star Route 6311, Fort Collins to Denver, 65.3 miles.
 Dist. 5.

Time	Station	Time	Station
9 15	3 00	8 50	Billings, Mont.
9 25	3 10	9 00	Laramie, Mont.
9 35	3 20	9 10	Shelby, Mont.
9 45	3 30	9 20	Dryden, Mont.
9 55	3 40	9 30	Edgar, Mont.
10 05	3 50	9 40	Fromberg (n.s.), Mont.
10 15	4 00	9 50	Bridger, Mont.
10 25	4 10	10 00	Frankie (n.s.), Wyo.
10 35	4 20	10 10	Denver (n.s.), Wyo.
10 45	4 30	10 20	Cody (n.s.), Wyo.
10 55	4 40	10 30	Denver (n.s.), Wyo.
11 05	4 50	10 40	Greyhull (n.s.), Wyo.
11 15	5 00	10 50	Bonerville (n.s.), Wyo.
11 25	5 10	11 00	Casper, Wyo.
11 35	5 20	11 10	Douglas, Wyo.
11 45	5 30	11 20	Orin, Wyo.
11 55	5 40	11 30	Wendover, Wyo.
12 05	5 50	11 40	Wheatland (n.s.), Wyo.
12 15	6 00	11 50	Cheyenne Jet. (n.s.), Wyo.
12 25	6 10	12 00	Cheyenne, Wyo.
12 35	6 20	12 10	Cheyenne Jet. (n.s.), Wyo.
12 45	6 30	12 20	Fort Collins, Colo.
12 55	6 40	12 30	Loveoad (n.s.), Colo.
1 05	6 50	12 40	Longmont (n.s.), Colo.
1 15	7 00	12 50	Ara (n.s.), Colo.
1 25	7 10	1 00	Ara (n.s.), Colo.
1 35	7 20	1 10	Boulder, Colo.
1 45	7 30	1 20	Ara (n.s.), Colo.
1 55	7 40	1 30	Ara (n.s.), Colo.
2 05	7 50	1 40	Camden (n.s.), Colo.
2 15	8 00	1 50	Denver, Colo.

CLASSIFICATION—(B). Clerk divide runs at Casper.
 —Alamosa & Casper R. P. O. Trains 29, 21, 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.
 Train 29 meets train 30 at Basco and Federal, Wyo.
 1—Motor Bus. Letters and newspapers only.
 Tr. 29 will hold 15 minutes for Denver & Ft. W., 25.

Scheme

This schedule, known as a "scheme," was for the Billings & Denver RPO.



Fully Operational Post Office

The interior of the RPO car featured racks for the mailbags in a folded position. Parcel Post and full bags of mail would be stored in the left and right side spaces.

The cars were painted "Pullman Green" with a black roof. The interiors were originally white, but later painted light green with white ceilings. Some metallic parts were painted black.

