

Preserving Highway Post Office History (The “Pony Express’ of the 1940s-1970s”)



By Frank R. Scheer

Few today are aware of the fascinating trucking history of “Highway Post Offices” (HPOs) which operated between 1941 and 1974. Even fewer have ever see one of these vehicles. Let us step back in time when the “service” was the focus of the Post Office.

Overview of the Railway Mail Service and Postal Transportation Service

Within the U.S. Post Office Department (USPO), the Railway Mail Service (RMS) was renamed Postal Transportation Service in 1949 in recognition of other mail transportation modes used after WWI. The Postal Transportation Service (PTS) changed to the Bureau of Transportation (BT) in 1960 to separate personnel management from services contracting.

These operational units were financed by Congressional appropriations. For this reason, many aspects of the Post Office Department’s functions were a channel for Congress or the President to reach out to the American public. HPOs—often pronounced “Hypos”—was an innovation spawned and nurtured through federal tax dollars.

The postal employees assigned to HPOs were referred to as Postal Transportation Clerks (PTCs) during the 1949-1960 era. Prior to 1954,

the USPO owned the vehicle, and the driver was a postal clerk. After that year, services were contracted, so vehicles were owned, maintained, and operated by contractors. PTCs only sorted mail as the vehicle traveled along a route.

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