BRANIFF TRAIL HISTORICAL PLAQUE ARRIVES FOR WICHITA KANSAS - On Thursday, August 22, 2019, the newest Braniff Trail Historical Plaque to honor Braniff's service at Wichita, Kansas, arrived from the engraver. The 12"x12" by 1/4" thick stainless steel plate features elegant laser engraving in black. The new plaque will be placed at the Kansas Aviation Museum, located in the historic former Wichita Municipal Airport Terminal Building near Wichita, Kansas. The new plaque is the first of many planned for the Midwest United States, which was where Braniff built its earliest air carrier service with Wichita playing a key role in the development and growth of the Dallas-based airline.

The city of Wichita, Kansas, has played an important role in the history and development of Braniff Airways, Inc. The Oklahoma City-based airline inaugurated its first service at Wichita Municipal Airport on May 17, 1934, as a result of the award of a coveted US Mail Contract, Route AM-9. Prior to the airmail award, Braniff was totally dependent on passenger and cargo revenue and the company had suffered hard times. On March 16, 1932, it was announced that Braniff would cease all operations. The future looked bleak for the small Oklahoma airline that had only begun operations less than two years earlier.

However, in Washington, DC, events were transpiring that would not only rescue Braniff Airways but many of the nation's other small independent airlines that were in desperate need of air mail contracts. The Air Mail Act of 1930, had given Postmaster Walter Folger Brown, at his request, a number of new powers. As a result of this power, deals were made between the Postmaster and the larger carriers, which blocked out the smaller airlines.

It was this alleged abuse of power that changed the future for Braniff, because, in September 1933, a Senate Investigating Committee was formed to look into a complaint of fraud and collusion between the Hoover Administration and the nations big airlines. The complaint stated that awards had been made to airlines that had not submitted the lowest bids as required by law. However, at the Spoils Conference, two weeks after the Air Mail Act of 1930 was enacted, Postmaster Brown had decided that he had the authority to award all air mail contracts to the three largest airlines, TWA, American and United.

Postmaster Farley and the President concluded that their duty was to protect the public's interest in response to the air mail contract revelations and as a result, President Roosevelt canceled all domestic air mail contracts on February 7, 1934. However, the Postmaster had asked that the bids remain in place until June 1, while new bids were being solicited and the Army Air Corps flew the routes without success. On June 12, 1934, the Air Mail Act was signed that returned the air mail contracts to the commercial airlines but with strict regulations to ensure that contracts were awarded in a fair manner.

The founders of Braniff Airways were watching with interest the developments in Washington DC. All new air mail contracts awarded in 1934, were generally given to the lowest bidder as required by law, which opened the doors to smaller carriers like Braniff and Delta. Braniff General Manager Paul Braniff traveled to Washington to testify before Congress about the possibility of his airline obtaining air mail contracts between Texas and Chicago.

It paid off, Braniff was awarded its first Air Mail Contract, AM-9, between Chicago and Dallas on May 7, 1934, and mail only service began on May 17, 1934, followed by passenger service on the northbound route on May 30 and May 31, 1934, on the southbound leg. The new route stopped at Kansas City, Wichita, Ponca City, and Oklahoma City and was quickly accompanied by reinstating passenger and express cargo service over the new air mail route. Braniff was saved and the company began a strong and steady growth over the next several decades.

Over the new few decades, Braniff Airways continued to grown along with the city of Wichita. Service was expanded and Braniff jet service arrived in Wichita in the early 1960s and ones-stop connection service to Hawaii arrived at the end of the decade. By the end of the 1970s, Braniff offered nonstop service from Wichita Mid-Continent Airport to: Dallas/Ft. Worth, Kansas City and Oklahoma City along with single-plane service to Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami and Tampa/St. Petersburg. Braniff introduced single-stop service from Wichita to London beginning in March 1978.

The plaque will now be sent to the Kansas Aviation Museum for its placement. A dedication ceremony will be held in the fall of 2019 to mark the placement of this historical marker of the legacy of Braniff International.

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