

Viewing Collections: Viewing the Myerson Pioneer Flights

by John F. Dunn

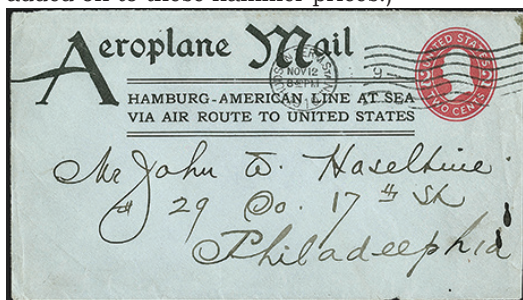
On March 8 Robert A. Siegel Galleries conducted an auction of the James P. Myerson Collection of Pioneer Flight Mail, 1910-1916. In this centennial year of the first U.S. Airmail, this viewing offers an excellent opportunity to study many of the flights leading up to that historic event.

The first lot in the auction was this picture post-card to Woodford, Wis., the reverse depicting Luna Park, with the stamp affixed to a label advertising the event and tied by the postmark. That event was the September 12-17, 1910 Rock Island, Ill. Curtiss Aeroplane Rally, unlisted in the American Air Mail Catalog. "People came from 100 miles away to see the planned twice daily demonstrations of a Curtiss-made airplane flown by 24-year old Curtiss aviator Eugene H. Ely, this special advertising card is postmarked during the event and may have been flown, but the flight was not authorized or sanctioned by the post office." (Anything in quotes is from the lot descriptions; my own comments are in [brackets]. JFD.)



Estimated at \$400-500, it drew a hammer price of \$500. (All prices quoted here do not include the 18% Buyer's Premiums that are added on to these hammer prices.)

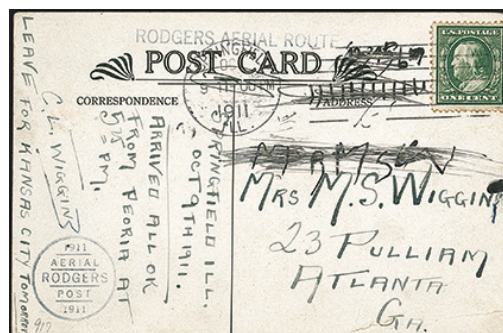
Next up is the envelope sold on board the S.S. *Pennsylvania* (AAMC 1a), a 2¢ entire with printed cachet reading "Aeroplane Mail, Hamburg-American Line at Sea, Via Air Route to United States", cancelled by "Hudson Term. Sta. N.Y. Nov. 12, 1910 8:3-PM" machine cancel. According to the AAMC, "plans were made to fly mail by plane for the first time, from the S.S. *Pennsylvania*. The ship was set to sail from Hoboken N.J. at noon on November 12, with a stop about three miles off the coast of Long Island and 50 miles from New York City. Aviator James C. 'Bud' Mars was to fly a Curtiss biplane, launched from a specially built platform at the rear of the ship. The attempt was cancelled 30 minutes prior to take-off due to equipment problems."



With an catalog value of \$3,000, it sold for \$2,100. [Catalog values are those in the AAMC Catalog.]

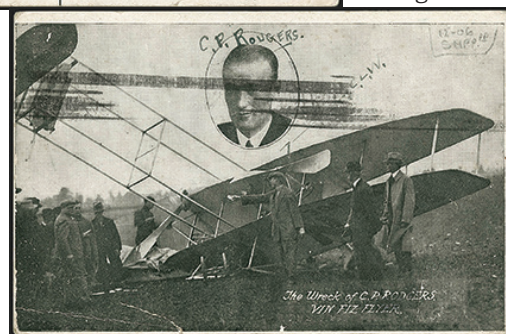
Perhaps the most famous of the Pioneer Flights are those of Cal Rodgers in his Vin Fiz Flyer.

Shown next is a Mechanic-Prepared Card (AAMC 2e) for the September 17 to December 10, 1911, with the Type



1 circular handstamp at left with five-line text "1911/Aerial/Rodgers/Post/1911" and additional "RODGERS AERIAL ROUTE" straightline

handstamp at top in matching ink on the back of a post-card depicting Rodgers and one of his many wreck scenes. The message from Charles L. Wiggin, the mechanic, reads "Springfield Ill. Oct. 9th 1911. Arrived all OK from Peoria at 5:25 PM. C. L. Wiggin. Leave for Kansas City tomorrow". The 1¢ stamp is tied by a "Springfield Oct. 9 11:00 PM 1911" machine cancel.



"October 9, 1911, the postmark date, is the day that Mabel Rodgers [Cal's wife] reportedly received a telegram from Postmaster General Hitchcock, appointing her official postmistress. Based on Wiggin's message, it seems that this card was not actually flown, but the use of the handstamp containing the word "Route" strongly suggests that the account of Mabel's appointment may be historically accurate, inasmuch as 'route' was a term specially reserved for official postal routes."

One of two recorded examples of this Type 1 Vin Fiz flight handstamped cachet and the only recorded example of the straightline marking, it realized \$6,500 against a \$7,000 AAMC value.

Another Vin Fiz flight postcard is seen on page 19. This one depicts Rodgers in his Wright Flyer with an additional separate portrait. It bears a 1¢ stamp tied by a "Kansas City Mo. Oct. 12, 1911 4PM" machine cancel, also with a purple "Carried by RODGERS'/AEROPLANE VIN FIZ/Oct. 10'11" three-line handstamped cachet—the only recorded example of this three-line handstamped cachet, used on a card flown during the Missouri portion of the Vin Fiz flight.

"According to the official log of the Vin Fiz and contemporary newspaper articles, on October 10 Rodgers took off from Springfield Mo. and ended the day in Marshall Mo. after landing for gas in a cemetery in Nebo. He was persuaded to stay in Marshall for the night after landing nearby due to a faulty spark plug. On October 11 he flew from Marshall to Kansas City Mo. with a stop in Blue Springs. Rodgers flew around Kansas



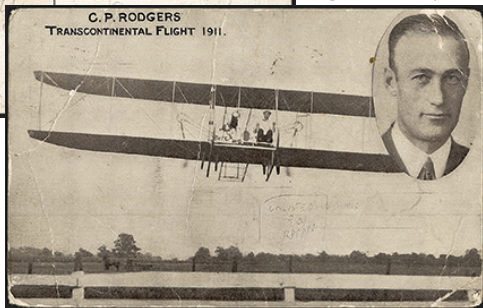
City on October 12 in exhibition flights, which explains the Oct. 12 machine cancel and use of flight card (with

stamp match the stamp pictured on the card....Reuniting the stamp with this card would restore this flown card to its former greatness.”

[Although they did not illustrate it in this lot description, this is the stamp, Sc. CL2, to which the auctioneers were referring. It most recently sold in a 2008 Siegel auction for \$47,500 hammer price. Meanwhile the most recent Siegel realization of a Vin Fiz stamp on card was for \$40,000 hammer in 2001. The realization for the card without the stamp in this Myerson Collection auction was \$7,500 against a \$5,000 AAMC value. While the math does not suggest uniting stamp with card would not add greatly to its value, it is hard to imagine that it would not.]



the old October 10-11 dates).... He departed Kansas City on the morning of October 14.

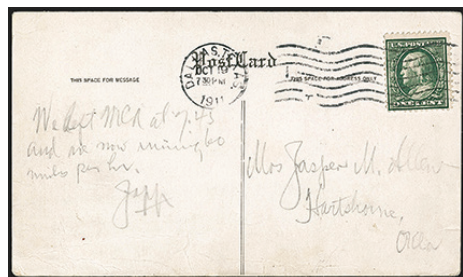


“The hand-stamp on this card was struck from a device in a style used for later markings, but the wording is uniquely represented by this example. It was probably used by Mabel Rodgers after her appointment as postmistress of the Vin Fiz flights.

“October 10 was the expiration day for William Randolph Hearst’s \$50,000 prize, which stipulated that the transcontinental flight must be completed within one year of his October 10, 1910, announcement. Hearst added the date stipulation after his original offer, and there was some controversy over whether the flight needed to be started or completed by the 10th.

“This card was listed for the first time in AAMC’s 7th Edition as AAMC No. 2c, the number previously assigned to his later Pasadena crash mail, which is now AAMC 2d. With an AAMC value of \$10,000, it went for \$8,000.

Here’s a cover with an interesting, but incomplete story. The picture postcard depicts the Vin Fiz Flyer in the air with an inset portrait of Rodgers, the 1¢ stamp being tied by a “Dallas, Texas

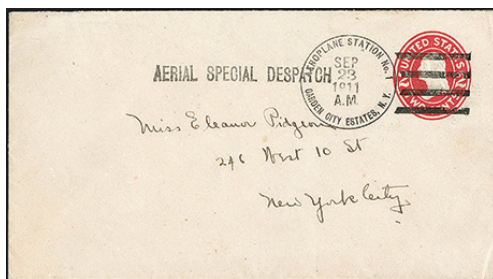


Oct. 19, 1911 7:30PM” machine cancel.

Per the auctioneers, “This well-documented postcard originally had a Vin Fiz stamp attached, which could be reunited since there is reasonable certainty about which of the three known off-cover examples originated. The stamp removed from this card is reported to have been the first one sold by Mabel Rodger, the Postmistress of the Vin Fiz flights.

“...on board the Pullman for the leg to Denison was Mr. Jasper Allen, the eminent editor and publisher of the Harts-horne Sun. Mabel promptly charmed him into purchasing a Vin Fiz stamp, her first such sale. Allen placed his stamp on a postcard addressed to his wife in Hartshorne. The card was flown from Fort Worth to Dallas and cancelled Oct. 19, 7:30 PM....the [missing] single stamp (one of three off cover or card) is probably the unused copy sold by our firm (ex Lettick and Zoellner collections). This card with the stamp still affixed was described and photographed in the 1939 Kessler auction catalogue of the Dr. Philip G. Cole collection (Part 1). The photo is very much reduced, but the margins of the Lettick-Zoellner

Next we come to an event that also is featured in this USSN edition on page 26, the September 23-October 1, Garden City-



Mineola, New York International Aviation Tournament (AAMC 3). This 2¢ entire to New York City is cancelled by an “Aeroplane Station No. 1, Garden City Estates, N.Y., Sep. 23, 1911 A.M.” duplex datestamp, the card also with an “AERIAL SPECIAL DESPATCH” handstamp, “rare as a cover and not as a card. With an AAMC value of \$525, it sold for \$600.

Now we come to the “star” of Anthony Fandino’s article on page 26. This cover addressed to Chicago is franked with a 1¢ pair tied by a “New

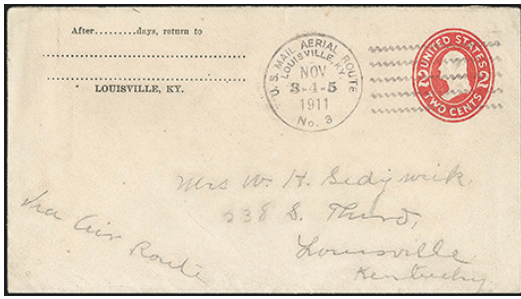


York N.Y. Sta. P Oct. 5, 1911 4:30 PM” machine cancel, also with “Via Aeroplane” in the address, but it bears a red “Return to Writer” pointing hand marking. Per the auctioneers, “Calbraith Rodgers and his Vin Fiz Flyer were not the only aviators interested in claiming Hearst’s prize money. On October 11, 1911, after the Garden City-Mineola New York International Aviation Tournament, celebrated aviator Earle L. Ovington took off from Nassau Boulevard Aerodrome for Governors Island to officially start his coast-to-coast flight....Ovington wrecked his plane on the way to the start and abandoned the effort.

“After reading a newspaper report of the upcoming flight, a collector named W. J. Stanton prepared this envelope to be carried by Ovington on the official mail route. He mailed it inside another envelope to the postmaster in New York, requesting it be held for the flight. The postmaster ignored Stanton’s request...and returned the stamped envelope by regular surface mail. This is the only cover reported to have been prepared for Ovington’s transcontinental flight attempt.”

With an AAMC value of \$4,500, this failed souvenir of a failed flight nevertheless realized \$2,800.

Next we view a 2¢ entire cancelled by a “U.S. Mail Aerial Route No. 3, Louisville, Ky. Nov. 3-4-5 1911” duplex datestamp and addressed to Louisville, with the sender’s directive “Via Air Route” at lower left.



“According to the AAMC, the Kentucky State Fairgrounds hosted an event called ‘On the Mexican Border’ which portrayed a battle between the U.S. Army and Mexican guerillas. Aviator Clifford Turpin flew mail a short distance around the fairgrounds on Nov. 3 and 5.... A special post office designated ‘Aerial Route No. 3’ station was authorized.

With an AAMC value of \$4,500, it realized \$2,800.

Next an error—not much of an error, but still an error. This postcard shows the 1¢ stamp tied by a purple “Aerial Sub-Station, Driving Park, Columbus, Ga., Dec. 13, 1912” duplex datestamp, but the year date should be 1911, and is described as “scarce with the year date error.” With an AAMC value of \$500 it went for \$250.



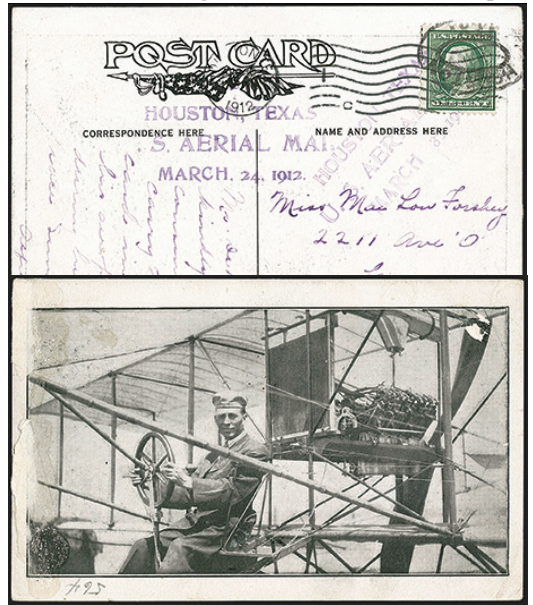
I selected this next lot more for the photo. The event was the March 17, 1912 Galveston-La Marque Tex. National School Grounds Aviation Meet (AAMC 19). The postcard to Springfield Ill., depicts “Aviator Paul Studensky receiving U.S. Aerial Mail at Galveston, Texas”, in a photo that includes a U.S. Aerial Mail office window in a small box, while mechanics prepare the plane for its flight. The 1¢ stamp is tied by a “Galveston, Tex./U.S. Aerial Mail/March 17, 1912” three-line datestamp.



With an AAMC value of \$300, it realized \$225.

Failed attempts were not uncommon during this Pioneer period, this next lot being a weather-related example.

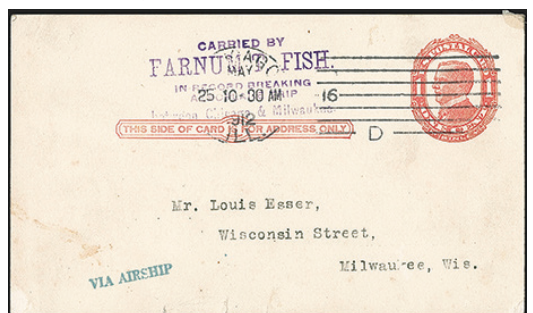
The postcard to Galveston Tex., depicting aviator Fred DeKor in his airplane, bears a 1¢ stamp tied by a “Houston, TEXAS / U.S. AERIAL MAIL / MARCH 24, 1912” three-line hand-stamped cachet, a second strike of the same handstamp with different date with a March 31 date.



“According to the AAMC, aviator Fred DeKor was scheduled to fly from Houston to Galveston on March 24. Bad weather and contract arguments prevented the flight from taking off. Mail for this flight was postmarked with the March 24 three-line cachet. Plans were made to fly on March 31, and mail intended for that flight was struck with the same marking, but dated March 31. Poor weather conditions prevented this second flight. The mail was then held in anticipation of another attempt, but was finally sent by surface mail on April 10. There are only two recorded examples of mail from this attempted flight; this has the March 24 date, which the other does not.” With an AAMC value of \$3,000 this failed flight cover sold for \$2,700.

Not shown, the other cover, which has the March 31 date, but not the March 24 marking, was the next lot in the auction. With the same \$3,000 AAMC value, it sold for \$2,600.

Next up is a 1¢ postal card with a “Chicago Ill. May 25 10:30AM 1912” machine cancel with typed address to Milwaukee Wis., the flight being a record Over-Water Flight (AAMC 26). “The Milwaukee Journal sponsored this 93-mile non-stop flight by Farnum T. Fish. He departed Chicago at 11:06 a.m. and arrived in Milwaukee at 1:24 p.m. According to the AAMC, there are four recorded flown items—three covers and one card. Two of the three covers are in museums and unavailable to collectors. The third cover was sold by the Siegel firm in our auction of the Mack Collection, where it realized \$9,000 hammer.” This postal card with an AAMC value of \$9,500 went for \$5,000.



To Be Continued

Viewing Collections: The Myerson Pioneer Flights, Cont.

by John F. Dunn

We continue our viewing of the James P. Myerson Collection of Pioneer Flight Mail, 1910-1916, that was sold on March 8 by Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries.

The next lot selected was this postcard to Quincy, Mass., with the picture side showing a plane in the distance and the title "Aviator in the clouds Atlantic Mass." It bears

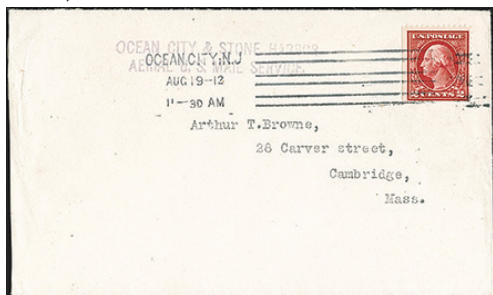


a 1¢ stamp tied by a "Boston Mass. Jun. 29, 1912" duplex datestamp, a red "BOSTON AVIATION MEET/AERO MAIL SERVICE" two-line handstamp, also showing a June 29, 1912 blue typed date.

"The card was prepared to be sent the first day of the Boston Aviation Meet in Squantum, Mass. According to the American Air Mail Catalog, flights were approved by the post office and aviatrix Harriet Quimby was designated the official mail carrier on Route 604,002....she was killed during the meet on July 1 when she and her passenger, the manager of the meet, fell out of her plane into Dorchester Bay from a height of about 1,000 feet, mail had been prepared to be flown on the 29th and a few other days." (Anything in quotes is from the lot descriptions; my own comments are in [brackets]. JFD.)

With an AAMC Catalog value of \$1,500, this cover garnered a hammer price of \$1,900. (All prices quoted here do not include the 18% Buyer's Premiums that are added on to these hammer prices.)

Next we view a cover to Cambridge Mass., with a 2¢ tied by "Ocean City, N.J. Aug. 12-12, 11-30AM" machine cancel, also with a purple "OCEAN CITY



& STONE HARBOR/AERIAL U.S. MAIL SERVICE" two-line handstamp. "...authorization for mail service was originally granted from August 3-10 but was extended until September 5 due to its popularity, very few pieces are reported used during this extended service,"

With an AAMC value of \$700, it sold for \$300.

At the top of the next column we show a color postcard to Bayonne N.J. with the picture side depicting a lover's lane in White Plains. The address side bears a 1¢ tied by a "Special Aerial Despatch, Aviation Grounds, White Plains N.Y., Aug. 31, 1912" duplex datestamp.

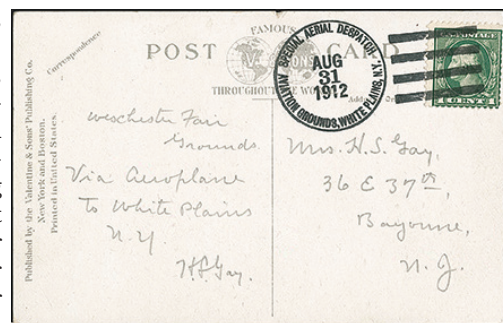
"Organizers of the Welkin Aviation Association Exhibition arranged for famed aviator Lincoln Beachey and a less well-

known flyer, William B. Hemstrought, to put on display flights in Curtiss air-planes during a fair held at Westchester County Fair Grounds near White Plains,

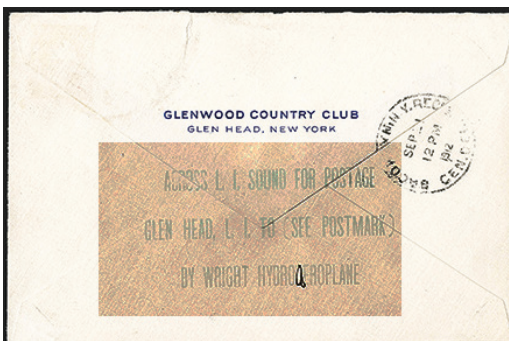
New York. On Saturday, August 31, Beachey flew a pouch containing 110 pieces of mail from the fairgrounds. A special post office was set up and route number 607,003 was assigned by the USPOD to one trip....Beachey dropped the mail bag to postal officials on the ground, but it ended up on the lawn of St. John's Church, across the street from the post office.... This is the only piece of mail known from this flight..."

With an AAMC value of \$4,500, it went for \$4,250.

Another 'only one known' piece is this cover addressed to Brooklyn with a 2¢ booklet pane stamp tied by a "Glenwood Landing N.Y. Sep. 21, 1912" duplex datestamp, the back of the cover with a light



"ACROSS L.I. SOUND FOR POSTAGE/GLEN HEAD, L.I. TO (SEE POSTMARK) BY WRIGHT HYDROAEROPLANE" three-line cachet [computer enhanced here]—"the misspelling of the word Hydroaeroplane ("Hydroerplane") in the cachet was corrected by hand with an "a" over "o"—"Brooklyn New York Gen. Del. Sep. 21, 1912 12PM" receiving backstamp.

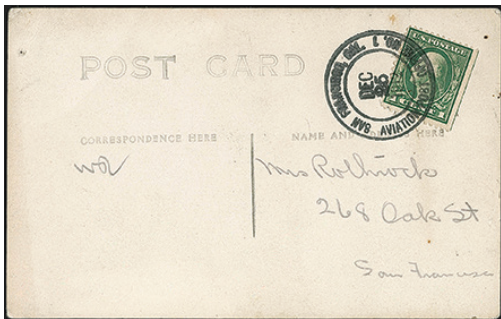


with a light "ACROSS L.I. SOUND FOR POSTAGE/GLEN HEAD, L.I. TO (SEE POSTMARK) BY WRIGHT HYDROAEROPLANE" three-line cachet [computer enhanced here]—"the misspelling of the word Hydroaeroplane ("Hydroerplane") in the cachet was corrected by hand with an "a" over "o"—"Brooklyn New York Gen. Del. Sep. 21, 1912 12PM" receiving backstamp.

"On September 21 and again on October 12, aviator Charles Wald flew a Wright biplane equipped with pontoons for water landing, to demonstrate its use for sport, rescue and carrying passengers. This is the only recorded piece of mail reported from the September 21 flight; none are known from the October 12 flight.

With an SCV of \$6,000, it realized \$5,250.

Next we view one of two 'only one known' examples. It is a postcard with a picture of Roy Francis circling the Ferry building in San Francisco with an



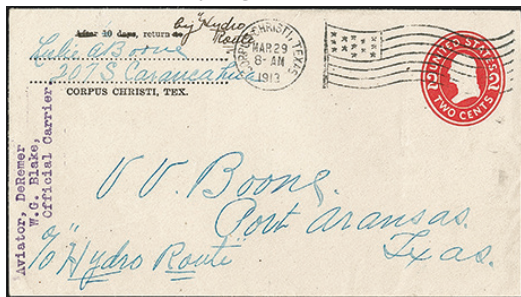
inset of his portrait, and the address side with a 1¢ tied by a "San Francisco, Cal. Aviation Post Office No. 1, Dec. 25, 1912" double-circle datestamp. It was flown during the Tanforan Park Aviation Meet (AAMC 66) which was held Dec. 25-29.

"This aviation meet was held over five days from December 25 through 29, 1912, at the Tanforan Park Race Track in San Francisco. Aviator Roy N. Francis carried souvenir cards that were dropped over the crowd. The cards could then be addressed, stamped and submitted to the special post office at the field."

Here's why there are two 'only one know' examples. "Per the auctioneers, "Two types of postmarking devices were used; Type 1 with the words "Aviation Post Office No. 1" and Type 2 reading "Aviation Postal Sta." ...only two in total (one of each postmark style) are known used on the first day of the meet, which was Christmas Day."

With an AAMC value of \$2,000, it sold for \$1,300. The very next lot in the auction, the only Type 2 December 25 usage had an AAMC value of \$2,500 and went for \$1,400—the reason for the higher realization is because seven cards are reported—one Type 2 and the other six Type 1—with only one of each from the Christmas Day flight.

Still another unique lot, we have an envelope cancelled by a "Corpus Christi, Texas Mar 29, 1913 8-AM" waving-flag machine



cancel, addressed to Port Aransas Texas, with the sender's directive "Hydro Route" at lower left and a purple typed "Aviator, DeRemer, W.G. Blake, Official Carrier" at left.

Demonstrating the nature of these pioneer flights, the auctioneers tell us, "The Post Office Department authorized an experimental flight over the water from Corpus Christi to Port Aransas, Texas. After delays of several weeks, the flight was ready to take off on March 29. The flight carried the pilot, Charles de Remer, and William G. Blake, secretary of the Commercial Club, which sponsored the flight, as a passenger. The flight was delayed after a wave swamped the engine, but it was dried out and they took off the same day. The flight ended after approximately three of the 20 miles when one of the propeller blades snapped. Another was not available, so they were towed back to port."

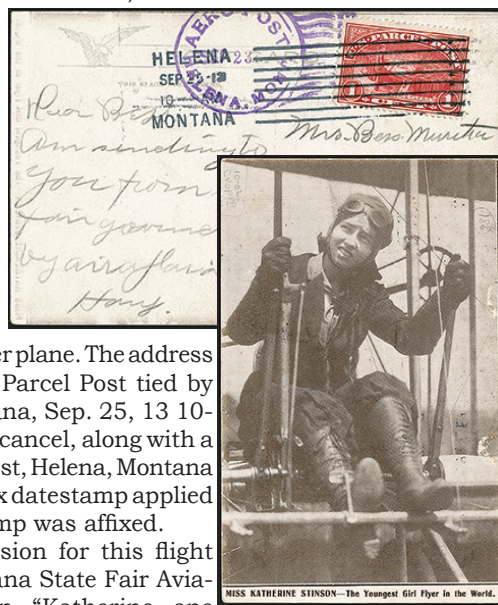
The only reported example of mail flown on this experimental Hydroplane flight, it has an AAMC catalog value of \$4,500. While the flight wasn't lofty, the auction realization for this piece was, with a hammer price of \$6,250.

Next up is an example of the makeshift nature of flight "mail." It is a neat looking cover with a 2¢ Panama-Pacific and 10¢



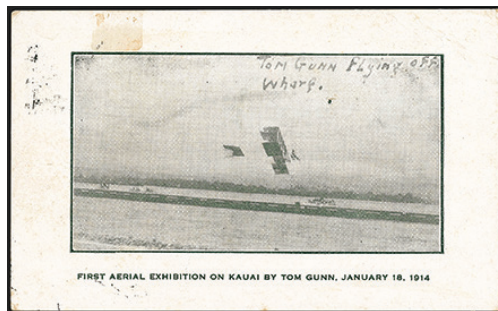
Special Delivery tied by purple "Aeroplane Mail Service, Aviation Field Sub-station, Santa Rosa Cal., May 18, 1913" circular datestamps on locally addressed cover, receiving backstamp of May 19 at 10:00 a.m. as well as a purple Special Delivery marking. Per the auction lot description, "...due to high winds the meet was cancelled on May 17, on May 18 aviator Thaddeus Kearns flew the 493 pieces of mail two miles and dropped the pouch to postal officials at a point near the post office..." Not much of a flight, but nevertheless a flight, and it is listed as AAMC 70 with a value of \$500. Due more to a lack of scarcity, it sold for \$200. (The very next lot, from the same flight, fetched \$300.)

Here we see a picture post card from the first airmail flight by a female aviator. The picture side shows "Miss Katherine Stinson—The Youngest Girl Flyer in the World" in her plane. The address side has a 1¢ Parcel Post tied by "Helena Montana, Sep. 25, 13 10-AM" machine cancel, along with a purple "Aero Post, Helena, Montana Sep. 23" duplex datestamp applied before the stamp was affixed.



The occasion for this flight was the Montana State Fair Aviation Exhibition. "Katherine, one of the two airplane-flying Stinson sisters, flew mail from the post office station at the fairgrounds and dropped the bags to postal employees at a nearby race track...The flights were assigned route number 663,002, and 1,333 pieces of mail were flown; however, surviving examples are quite rare (fewer than ten reported in the AAMC)." With a catalog value of \$2,500, it soared to \$8,500.

Next we see the picture side of one of only three known pieces from a Hawaiian Islands Experimental Flying Exhibition by Chinese Aviator Tom Gunn (AAMC 78). The address side, seen on page 20, bears

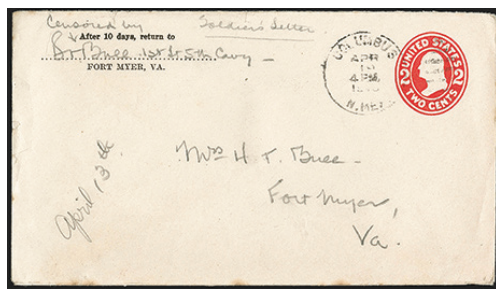


a 1¢ Washington stamp tied by a “Koloa Jan. 20, 1914 11AM” duplex datestamp.



“According to the AAMC, Chinese aviator Tom Gunn made two flights on January 18, 1914, and mail was carried on at least one of them. Three examples are recorded... Illustrated in AAMC 7th Edition on p. 323 where it states ‘2 reported’ and quotes an oddly low value, considering the realizations for this rarity in several auctions.” That AAMC value is \$6,000, and the \$8,000 realization for this piece proved the auctioneers right.

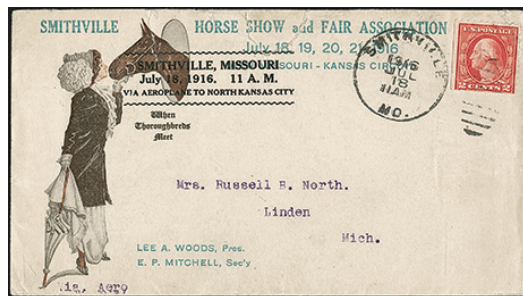
This next entire came from a flight with a serious purpose, U.S. troops in pursuit of Pancho Villa. It is addressed to Fort Myer Va., and is cancelled by



a “Columbus N. Mex. Apr. 19 4PM 1916” duplex datestamp (where it entered the U.S. mail) with the sender’s directive “Soldier’s Mail” at top and “Censored by Br. Bull, 1st Lt. 5th Cavy”.

“On March 9, 1916, Pancho Villa and his troops attacked Columbus, New Mexico... 18 civilians and soldiers from the 13th Cavalry detachment were killed with another 8 wounded... President Woodrow Wilson ordered Major General John J. Pershing to lead an expedition into Mexico to capture Pancho Villa. Curtiss JN-3 biplanes were used for reconnaissance purposes and to carry mail to and from the expedition. The dusty conditions resulted in excess mechanical failure and the loss of six planes. By April 20 flights were terminated... Examples of mail actually carried on these flights are extremely rare...” With an AAMC value of \$3,000, this example went for \$3,250.

We conclude this viewing with a cover carried on Experimental Aeroplane Flight, Route 645,001 (AAMC 94). The 2¢ stamp is tied by a “Smithville Mo. 1916 Jul. 18 11AM” duplex datestamp on Smithville Horse Show and Fair Association



illustrated cover with purple typed address to Mrs. Russell B. North, the wife of the pilot who flew and crashed, with the sender’s directive “Via Aero” at bottom left.

“..Russell Brooks North...crashed on takeoff, severely damaging the plane. Mail was brought to the Smithville post office and sent by surface transport. This is the only piece of mail recorded from this attempted flight.

With an AAMC value of \$6,000, it went for \$7,000.

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