

The Development of Pioneer and Semi-Official Air Mail within Canada, 1918-1934.

Synopsis.

The **purpose of this exhibit** is to show the development of air mail within Canada from 1918 to 1934 through pioneer flights and air mail with semi-official stamps. It is essential to show how and when the Post Office gradually phased out the semi-official post by contracting air mail starting in 1927-1928. However, the full story of Post Office air mail after 1928 and of international flights lies beyond the scope of this exhibit.

Importance. After World War I, planes opened huge areas of Canada for natural resource development. Airlines offered short or long term access anywhere without the expense and commitment of building roads or railways. Air mail provided speedy contacts to remote locations. Canada as we know it would not exist without those initiatives. The Post Office committed no funds for early ventures where planes often crashed, so it allowed private airlines to sell semi-official stamps to cover flying costs. Once demand for specific routes was established, the Post Office took over by contracting air mail services. In 1928, the first full year of contract air mail, over eleven million pieces were flown. Such enthusiastic use proved a demand for the service.

Philatelic knowledge informs descriptions of dates, rates, cancellations, and numbers of covers flown. This is not a traditional exhibit studying the semi-official stamps in full detail. Even so, knowledge of airline development and covers would be incomplete without occasional accounts of the proofs, printing, and varieties of the stamps that enabled semi-official service.

Subject knowledge includes study of pilots, planes, and airlines. Such details helped the Post Office to decide when to contract air mail routes. That information also explains the history of individual covers.


Personal study uncovers the complex histories of covers. The most startling conclusion is that only a couple of thousand commercial covers have survived from the millions of pieces flown. A common misjudgment is that all registered covers are commercial. Actually, they are often philatelic, registered to guarantee a full record of transit cancels.

Research in primary sources. Scrutiny of thousands of pages of Post Office and State Department documents at Library and Archives Canada has supplemented and corrected many details about air mail found in articles and books. Newly verified information

from primary sources is highlighted by a blue book. 

Difficulty of acquisition. The exhibited material has been collected from many sources during ten years. It can be decades before some items become available. This exhibit does not include difficult to obtain covers such as the 1919 "1st B.C.-ALBERTA AERIAL POST" or the Hamilton-Toronto Grand Army flight of May 28, 1920. Commercial covers are very difficult to find, because most remain in specialist collections.

Condition. Most exhibited covers are very fine to pristine. The few **commercial, government, and personal covers (identified in green)** are desirable but rare. They usually have creases, folds, rough openings, or grime from mining offices. A rule of collectors of semi-official commercial covers is "The grubbier, the better!"

Rarity is determined from handbooks, articles, exhibits, auction catalogues, dealers' stocks, and collectors. Rare items (8 or fewer recorded or known) are shown by a red plane. 

Selected Rarities Exhibited. 37 commercial covers. **Frame 1.** Several scarce pioneer flight covers. **Frame 2.** Both Northern Air Service Experimental Flights. Proofs of first approved Jack V. Elliot Air Service stamp. **Frames 4-5.** Two Patricia Airways and Exploration covers with the "FED" overprint stamp. **Frame 8.** Flown Klondike Airways cover. **Frame 9.** Letter about Cherry Red Airline fire. **Frame 10.** Commercial Airways stamp essays. Rejected Canadian Airways overprint proof. Cover with Canadian Airways stamp having the orange misregistered.

REFERENCES

Two standard handbooks:

The Air Mails of Canada and Newfoundland. Mineola, NY: American Air Mail Society, 1997.

Longworth-Dames, C.A. *The Pioneer and Semi-Official Air Mails of Canada 1918-1934.* Toronto: Unitrade, 1995.

Archival and published government documents:

Canada Post Office and State Department documents at Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. RG3, vol. 2675. RG 95, vols. 1414, 1429, 2035.

Dominion of Canada Department of National Defence. *Report on Civil Aviation.* Ottawa, 1924-31.

Monthly Supplement to Canadian Official Postal Guide, 1924-31.

Post Office Weekly Bulletin, 1924-31.

Newspapers: *Hamilton Spectator, Toronto Star, Ottawa Citizen.*

Too many articles and books to list.