

# Pioneer Mail Flights, Semi-Official Air Post, and Air Mail Development in Canada, 1918-34.


## Synopsis (Second Version, August 21, 2018).

The **purpose of this exhibit** is to study the development of air mail within Canada through pioneer mail flights and the semi-official air post from 1918 to 1934. It is essential to show with a few covers how the Post Office Department (POD) phased out the semi-official post by contracting air mail from 1927 to 1934. However, the full story of POD air mail after 1927 and of international flights lies beyond the scope of this exhibit.

**Philatelic knowledge** informs descriptions of dates, rates, cancellations, and numbers of covers flown. This is not a traditional exhibit studying semi-official stickers in detail. Even so, knowledge of semi-official postal history would be incomplete without representative examples of a few proofs, printings, and varieties.

**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 now explains the history of individual covers.

**Personal study** reveals covers' complex histories.

**Research in primary sources.** Thousands of pages of Post Office, Corporations Branch, and Malott papers at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) supplement and correct many details about air mail found in articles and books. New information from primary sources is noted by a blue book . Details include:

1. The first full notes on mail volumes for all semi-official airlines (*Report on Civil Aviation*, 1924-31).
2. Dozens of new details on the Elliot-Fairchild partnership (LAC RG3, vol. 2675; LAC RG95, vols. 1414, 1429; LAC R.K. Malott fonds, 1990-045, vol. 4002).
3. New details about airplane problems of Patricia Airways and Exploration Co., Ltd. (Archives of Ontario, F.E. Davison fonds; LAC RG3, vol. 2675).
4. Confirmation of POD permission for Patricia Airways, Ltd., to fly with semi-official stickers in 1928 (LAC RG3, vol. 2675; *Report on Civil Aviation*).
5. Unequivocal POD records about mail flown by Klondike Airways and sticker approval (*Report on Civil Aviation*; *Whitehorse Star* newspaper).

**Photographs** preserved in archives are reproduced from scans, with sources indicated in the exhibit.

**Difficulty of acquisition.** The exhibited material has been collected from many sources during ten years, but does not include difficult to obtain covers such as the 1919 "1<sup>st</sup> B.C.-ALBERTA AERIAL POST" or the Hamilton-Toronto Grand Army flight of May 28, 1920.

**Commercial covers** flown semi-officially numbered millions according to the *Report on Civil Aviation*. However, a report of the exhibitor tallies only 528 in his own collection of ten years, in a second more extensive collection formed over 27 years, and in a dozen large semi-official sales over 47 years. The exhibitor owns no covers from 5 airlines with 0 to 5 reported commercial covers. For the other 10 airlines, 69 exhibited commercial covers represent 54% of the total 128 shown.

**Value of non-commercial covers.** Commercial covers are desirable but do not always tell the full story. For example, it is important to know every destination and the date of its inauguration. As time wore on, few or no commercial covers were flown on first flights. When airlines took big risks, first flights sometimes were so uneconomical or unsafe that they were last flights.

**Condition.** Many exhibited covers are fine or better. Commercial covers usually have creases, rough openings, or miners' grime. 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. Of the 260 items exhibited, 58 (22%) are rare (12 or fewer known, reported, or recorded) They are **mounted on red card stock**.

**Selected Rarities Exhibited.** **Frame 1.** Several rare pioneer flight covers. **Frame 2.** Both Northern Air Service Experimental Flights. Proofs of first approved Jack V. Elliot Air Service sticker. **Frames 4-5.** Several Patricia Airways and Exploration proofs and "FED" overprints. Eight of ten reported "blue Patricia" commercial covers. **Frame 8.** Four flown Klondike Airways covers. **Frame 9.** Letter about a Cherry Red Airline fire. **Frame 10.** Commercial Airways sticker essays. Rejected Canadian Airways 10¢ overprint proof. Canadian Airways sticker, 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.

### Post Office publications:

*Monthly Supplement to Canadian Official Postal Guide.*  
*Post Office Weekly Bulletin*, 1924-34.

**Many articles, books, and newspapers.**

## ***Report of Numbers of Semi-Official Commercial Covers in Fourteen Large Collections.***

The annual Department of National Defence *Report on Civil Aviation*, 1924-30 indicates that millions of covers were flown by semi-official airlines. Most of them would have been commercial—that is business, government, and personal letters. Many commercial covers survive from some airlines, but none from others. Collections surveyed include (1) the exhibitor's collection of 81 commercial covers formed over 10 years (with concentration on commercial covers for two years), (2) a more advanced collection of 411 commercial covers formed aggressively over 27 years, and (3) the survey of a dozen large semi-official sales in auction catalogues of the past 47 years. There were surprising few large sales of semi-officials (only 12) in the exhibitor's collection of hundreds of auction catalogues, and surprisingly few commercial covers in them (only 36). The exhibitor also noted few commercial covers in an informal examination of four other semi-official air mail collections. This report tallies only 528 commercial covers. There may be as many more in other collections. Even so, the numbers suggest that fewer than 2,000 semi-official commercial covers have survived.

| <i>Airline.</i>                                       | <i>Number of covers<br/>in (1) + (2) + (3).</i> | <i>Number of commercial covers<br/>and percentage in this exhibit.</i> |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Laurentide Air Service, Ltd., 1924-25.             | 5+4+3 = 12.                                     | 4 (50%) of 8 covers exhibited.   |
| 2. Northern Air Service, Ltd., 1925.                  | 3+8+1 = 12                                      | 2 (50%) of 4 covers exhibited.   |
| 3. Jack V. Elliot Air Service, Ltd., 1926.            | 12+35+8 = 55.                                   | 8 (62%) of 13 covers exhibited.  |
| 4. Elliot-Fairchild Air Service, Ltd., 1926.          | 6+12+1 = 19                                     | 5 (63%) of 8 covers exhibited.   |
| 5. Fairchild Air Transport, Ltd., 1926.               | 1+6+0 = 7                                       | 1 (50%) of 2 covers exhibited.   |
| 6. Patricia Airways & Exploration Co., Ltd., 1926-27. | 21+79+5 = 105.                                  | 18 (69%) of 26 covers exhibited.                                       |
| 6B. Patricia Airways & Exploration blue sticker.      | 8+2+0 = 10.                                     | 8 (73%) of 11 covers exhibited.  |
| 7. Patricia Airways Ltd., 1928.                       | 3+5+4 = 12                                      | 3 (38%) of 8 covers exhibited.   |
| 8. Western Canada Airways, Ltd., 1926-30.             | 13+169+10 = 192.                                | 12 (41%) of 29 covers exhibited.                                       |
| 9. Yukon Airways & Exploration Co., Ltd., 1927-29.    | 2+42+2 = 46.                                    | 2 (15%) of 13 covers exhibited.  |
| 10. British Columbia Airways, Ltd., 1928.             | 7+40+0 = 47.                                    | 6 (100%) of 6 covers exhibited.  |

*For these ten airlines, 69 (54%) of the 128 exhibited covers are commercial.*

*In the entire exhibit, 69 (27%) of the 260 exhibited covers are commercial.*

*Very few commercial covers have survived from five semi-official airlines. Klondike and Cherry Red flew to very isolated locations, which militated against preservation. Commercial Airways flew with semi-official stickers only on the first, introductory flights of routes that then became POD contracts. Canadian Airways flew with semi-official stickers only up the Mackenzie River for just two years.*

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|---|-------------------------|----|
| 11. Elliot Fairchild Air Transport, Ltd., 1926. | 0+0+0 = 0.              | 0. |
| 12. Klondike Airways Ltd., 1928-30.             | 0+0+0 = 0.              | 0. |
| 13. Cherry Red Airline, Ltd., 1929-31.          | 0+2+0 = 2.              | 0. |
| 14. Commercial Airways, Ltd., 1929-31.          | 0+3+0 = 3.              | 0. |
| 15. Canadian Airways, Ltd., 1930-34.            | 0+3+2 = 5.              | 0. |
| <b>TOTALS</b>                                   | <b>81+411+36 = 528.</b> |    |