

St. Louis Pioneer Air Mail, October 4 - 8, 1911

The book, *City of Flight*, about the history of aviation in St. Louis, MO, shows the relevance of St. Louis in lighter-than-air flights starting with balloon flights in the 1830s to space explorations in the 1960s. The Centennial Week celebration in 1909 was full of balloon flights, under the sponsorship of the St. Louis Aero Club, chartered in 1907, just three years after the Wright Brothers flight at Kitty Hawk, NC. So, it was that the Aero Club's President, Albert Bond Lambert, for whom the current St. Louis airport is named, himself a pilot, worked with St. Louis Postmaster, Thomas Akins, and arranged to have mail carried by air each day during the 1911 meet using special air meet cancels. This "Air Meet" or "aerial activities" was to be the main feature of "Festival Week" which included the Veiled Prophet Parade and Ball, a marathon foot race, a national automobile show in Forest Park, and motorboat races on the Mississippi River, as some of the main highlights.

Purpose: The purpose of this exhibit is to show the dates, rates, and uses for the five days of posted mail for the meet. Mail posted on October 7 for the hydroplane flight was postponed until the next day, October 8.

Exhibit Plan: Background information is followed by all cancellation dates shown starting with October 4th. Many variations in postage and uses are shown and followed by a postlude. The story is chronological. Black headings are used to introduce new chapters and sub-chapters. Gray otherwise.

Important items are mounted on a salmon background.

Item discovered by the exhibitor.

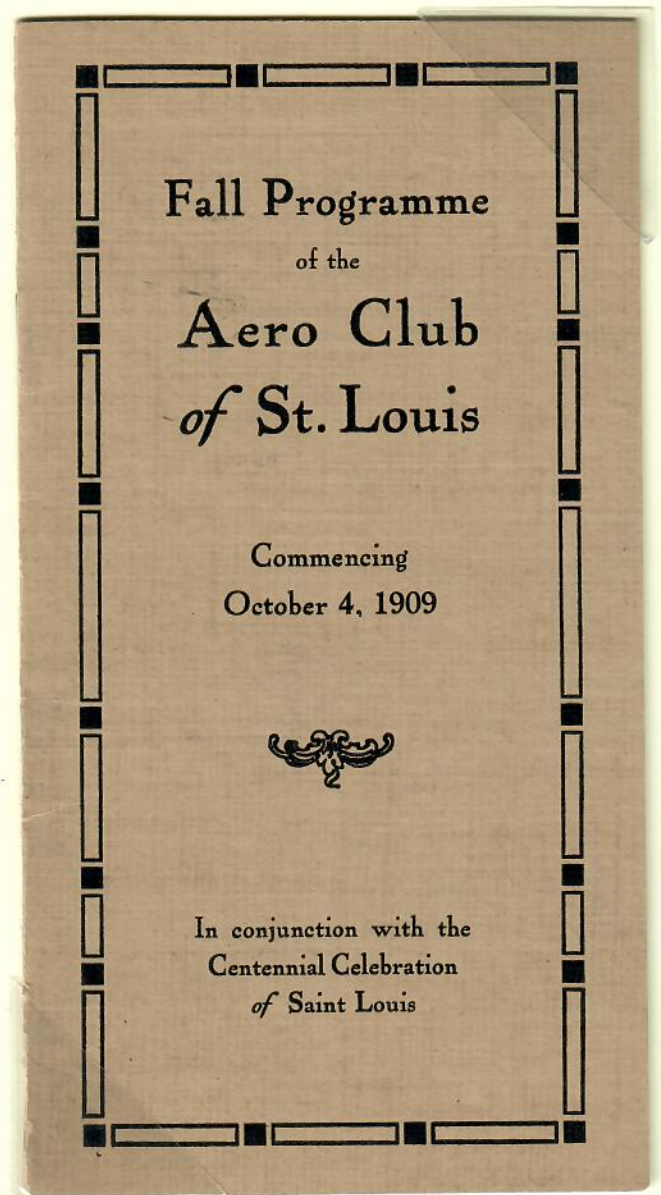
Outline: Chapter 1 – First Day of Meet, October 4
Chapter 2 - Second Day of Meet, October 5
Chapter 3 – Third Day of Meet, October 6
Chapter 4 – Fourth Day of Meet, October 7
Chapter 5 – Hydro-Plane Mail
Chapter 6 - Postlude

The pamphlet to the right was prepared for the 1909 Aero Club of St. Louis air events in conjunction with the 1909 Centennial Celebration of St. Louis. It included both balloon flights and Heavier-Than-Air machine events, thus putting St. Louis in line to fly mail on these planes two years later, under the leadership of President Albert Bond Lambert.

Spherical Balloon, Dirigible Balloon and Heavier-Than-Air Machine Contests

To be Conducted Under the Auspices of the
Aero Club of St. Louis in Conjunction
with the St. Louis Centennial
Celebration.

Copy from inside booklet

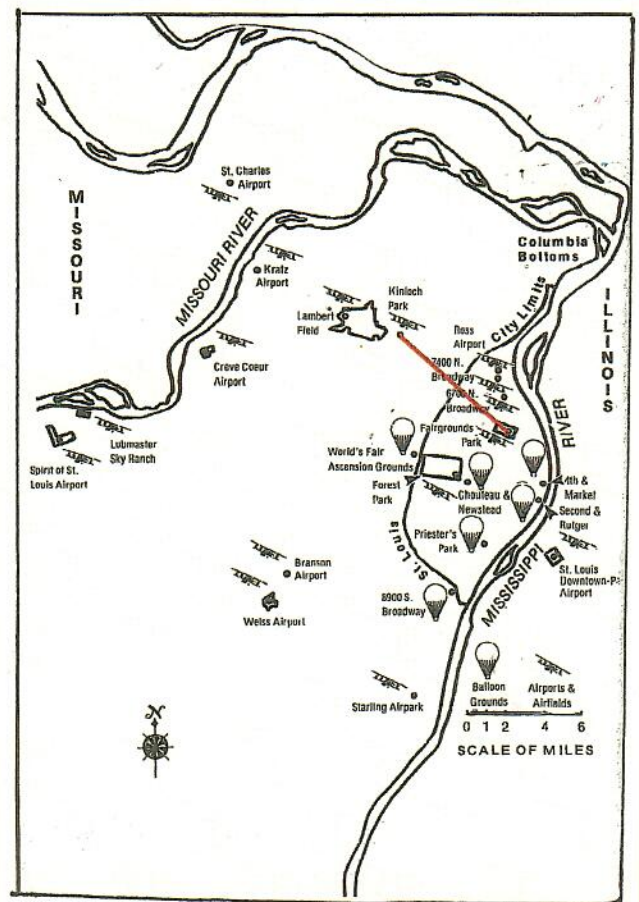


2. First Day of Meet

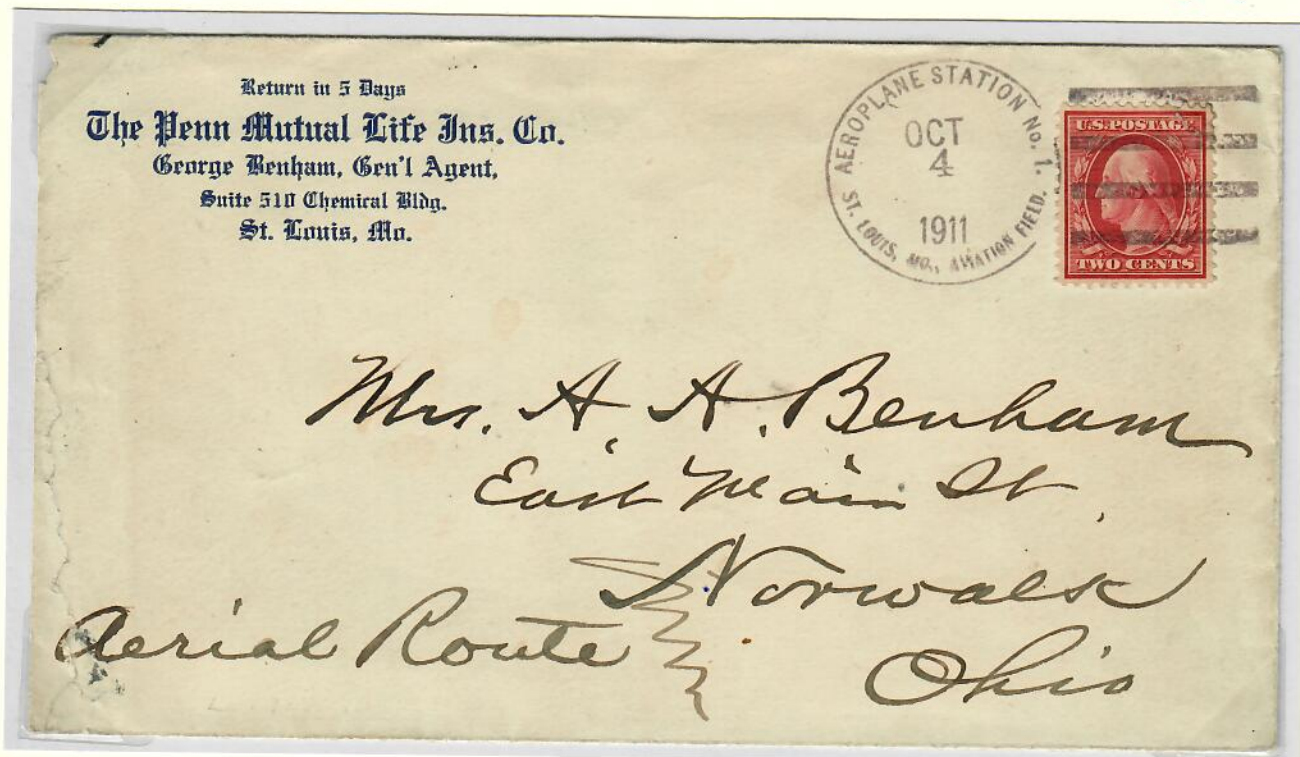
2.1 Background

The map to the right shows the relative location of the Kinloch Air Park in St. Louis County along with the route that Walter Brookins traveled the 12 miles to Fairgrounds Park in the city. Approximately 6000 cards and letters were collected and placed in two mail pouches and strapped to the wing of the plane. The flight started at 4:18 pm and Walter landed the plane at 4:32. Approximately 25,000 pieces were carried during the five days. The letter rate was two-cents and cards were one-cent, but varying rates can be seen within the exhibit. I could find no mention in the archives of the main newspapers of the day as to any special rates required. All newspaper articles indicated that the words "Aerial Route" should be written in the lower left corner of each item.

Albert Lambert, President of the Aero Club of St. Louis worked closely with St. Louis Postmaster, Thomas Akins, in the setup of the boxes at both ends of the field, getting the special canceling devices, and arranging for postal employees to remove the bags from the plane and speed the mail on to the main post office for a quick dispatch.



Company Cover



Advertising cover with correct postage and "Aerial Route" clearly marked and headed to Norwalk, OH. Note the space between the day and year is missing the normal time of day indicator.

1. First Day of Meet

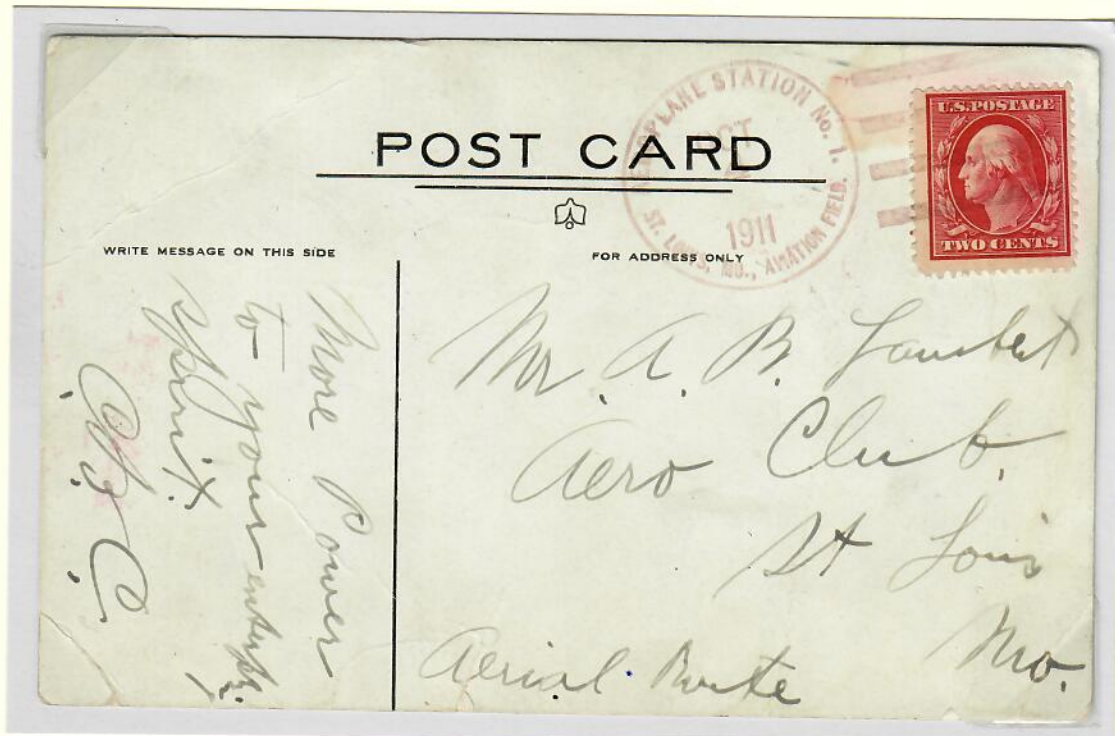
1.2 Special Addresses

Walter Brookins



Greetings to pilot Walter Brookins from Dayton, Ohio, High School classmate A.F. Yost. Brookins had been introduced to the Wright Brothers by his teacher, their sister, Katherine. Having been taught by Orville, Walter ran the Wright flying school in Montgomery Alabama. Brookins was also a daring stunt pilot, who held numerous aviation records and carried the two mail bags strapped to the wings to Fairgrounds Park, a distance of 12 miles.

Albert Bond Lambert

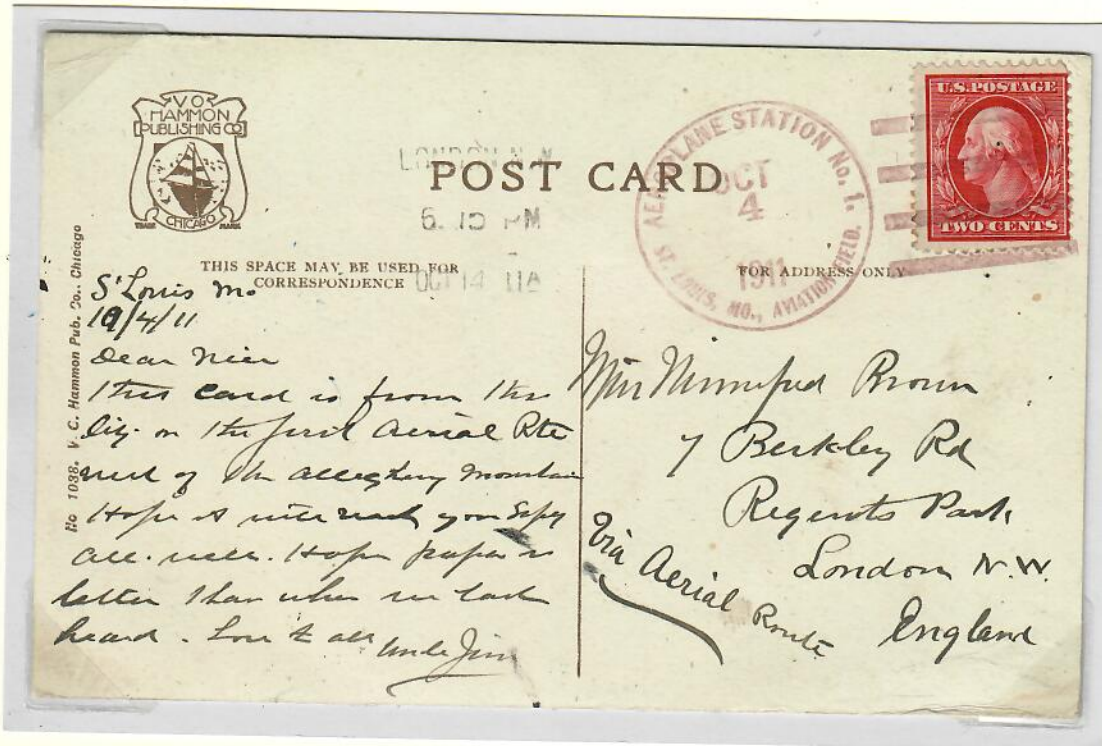


Albert Bond Lambert was President of the St. Louis Aero Club and the 5th American to hold both airplane and balloon pilot licenses. In 1909 he organized the first National Guard Aerial Detachment. Beginning in 1920, he acquired land and developed the airfield that is today St. Louis Lambert International Airport. When St. Louis established a Municipal Airport Authority in 1928, Lambert sold his airport to the City at his cost.

1. First Day of Meet

1.3 Aero Route Inscription

Manuscript Marking To London



Local papers carried the post office request that the words, "Aerial Route," be written in the lower left corner of the item to be mailed and the post office personnel were to complete the request, if the sender didn't. Card arrived in London on October 14 at 11am.

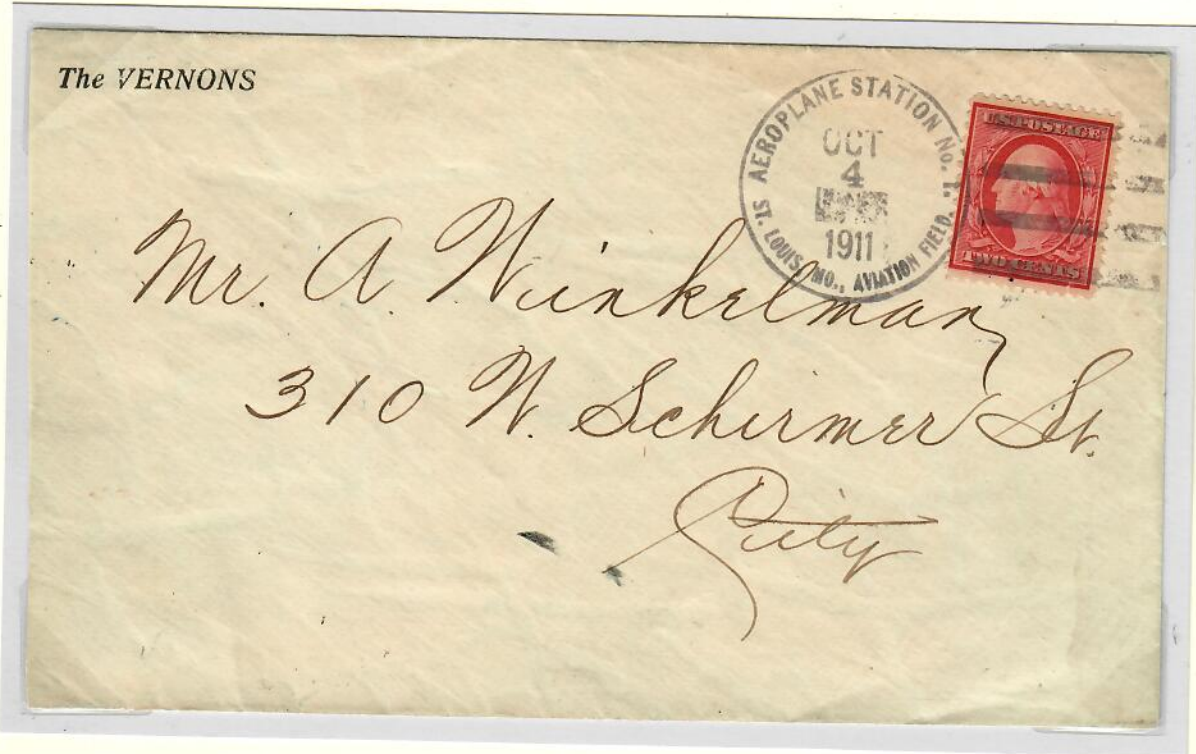
Rubber Stamp Marking



Special made "Aeri(e)l (misspelled with an e instead of an a) handstamp made for the meet, the only one I've seen. One of a few where a rubber stamped inscription of "Aerial Route" was used. Black ink for the cancel.

1. First Day of Meet

1.4 The Vernons No Aerial Route Marking Normal/Block



Apparently the Vernons mailed at least two letters to city residents. Nothing unusual above except there was no “aerial route” notations on either cover. A noticeable rectangle of “Block” appears where the Time or AM/PM would normally appear, suggesting that there was more than one device available.

Manuscript Marking/Block



A very unusual manuscript marking stating that this letter was “Dropped from (Pointing Finger to aero flight cancel) down in our back yard. ----- “Back yard” means “Our City - North St. Louis”, not literally speaking Paper Street which is in the west part of the city. Front only.

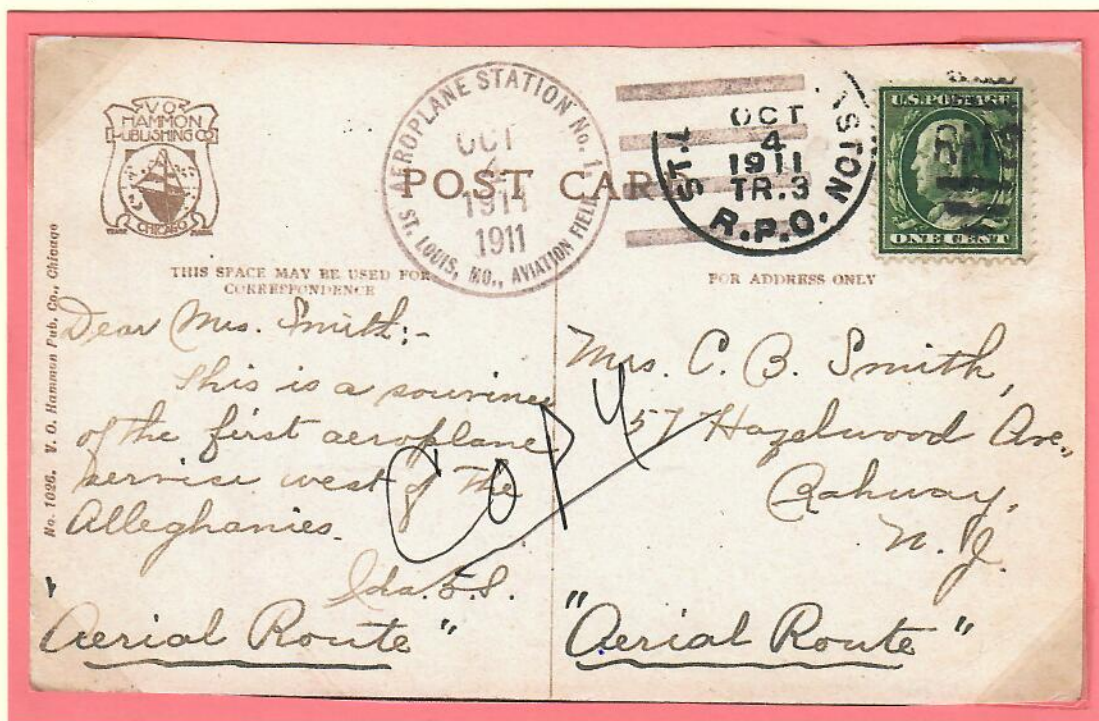
1. First Day of Meet

1.5 Double Cancels
Same Cancel



Because of the two one-cent stamps, two hits were needed to cancel both stamps plus leave a clear cancel.

**St. Louis Street Car Cancel
Aeroplane Double Year "1911"**



Under magnification, the aero cancel was applied first with the St. Louis Easton street car cancel applied over the other to kill the stamp with the Duplexed RMS Barrel killer. Only Pioneer/Street Car cancel I've encountered in 25 years and unlisted in the St. Louis Street Car Monograph. Also, double year with different spacing on aero cancel.

2. Second Day of Meet

2.1 Redirected, Perfin

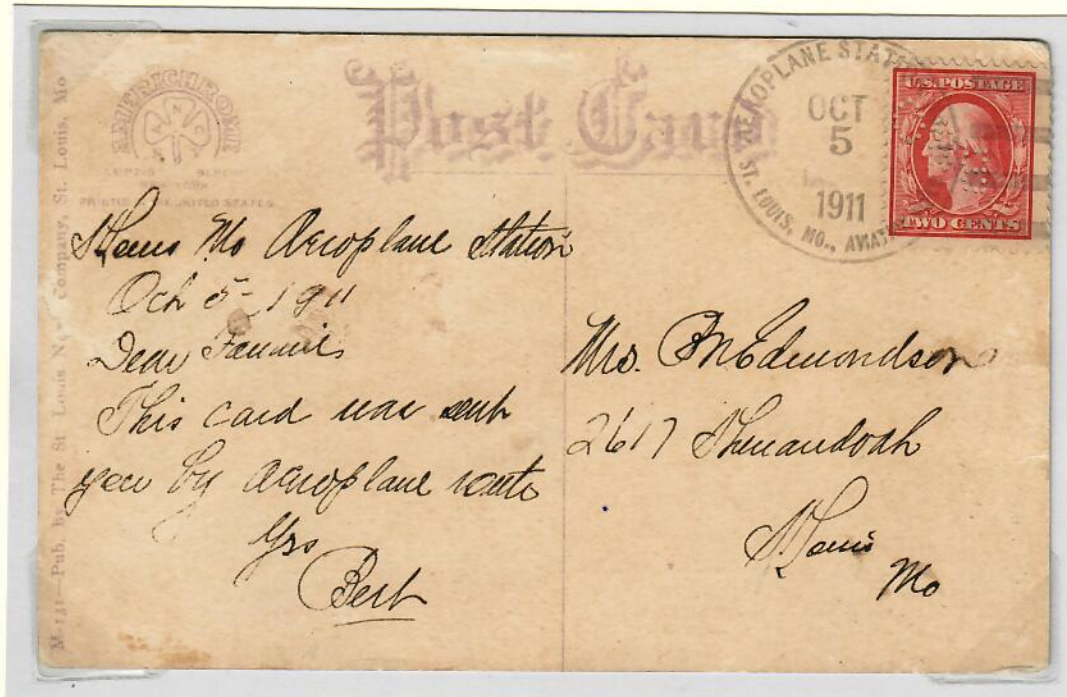
After the 12-mile flight to Fairgrounds Park the previous day, a decision was made between the Aero Club and the Post Office that subsequent flights at Kinloch Field would be a simple flight from one end of the field to the other// and the mail handed off to post office officials for distribution.

Redirected, 2 1-cent Stamps



Postmarked on October 5, arrived in Bonham, TX, on October 7, redirected to Denison, TX, arriving there on October 9, then returned to 3421 Pestolozzi in St. Louis. At some point a second 1-cent stamp was placed on top of the initial stamp, and remained uncanceled for the remainder of the journey.

B & O Railroad Perfin

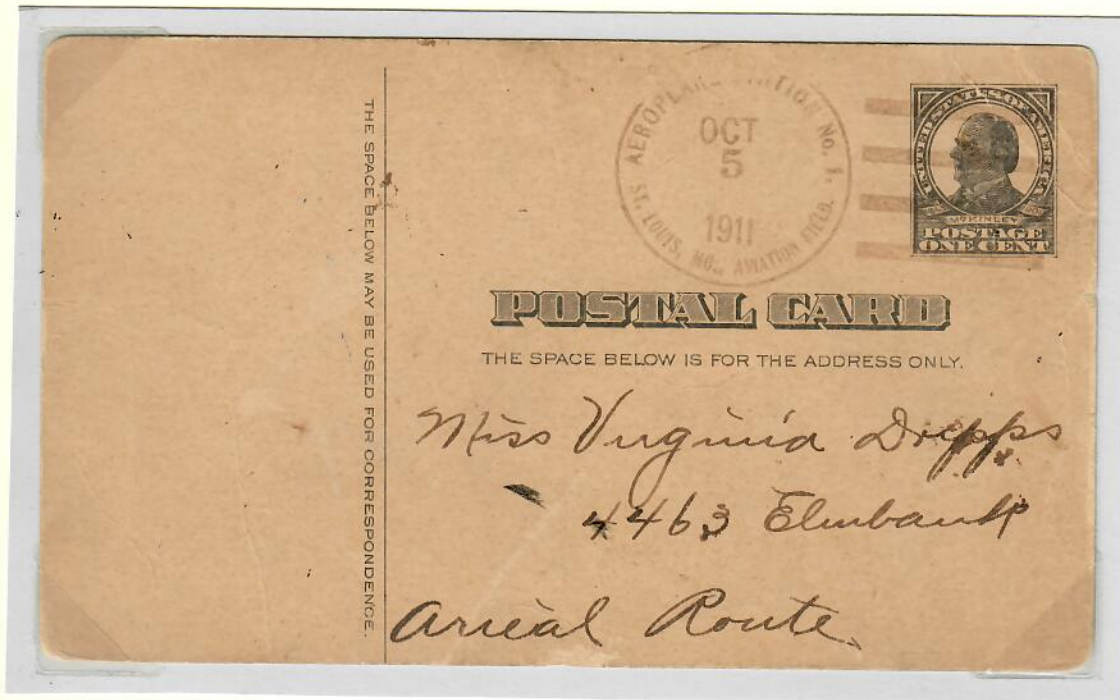


Illegal use of the B & O Railroad perfin since it was used on unofficial correspondence. No "Aero Route" marking.

2. Second Day of Meet

2.2 Postal Stationery

Postal Card, Magenta Ink



Magenta ink used for the cancel on the postal card issued in 1907.

Postal Card, Black Ink

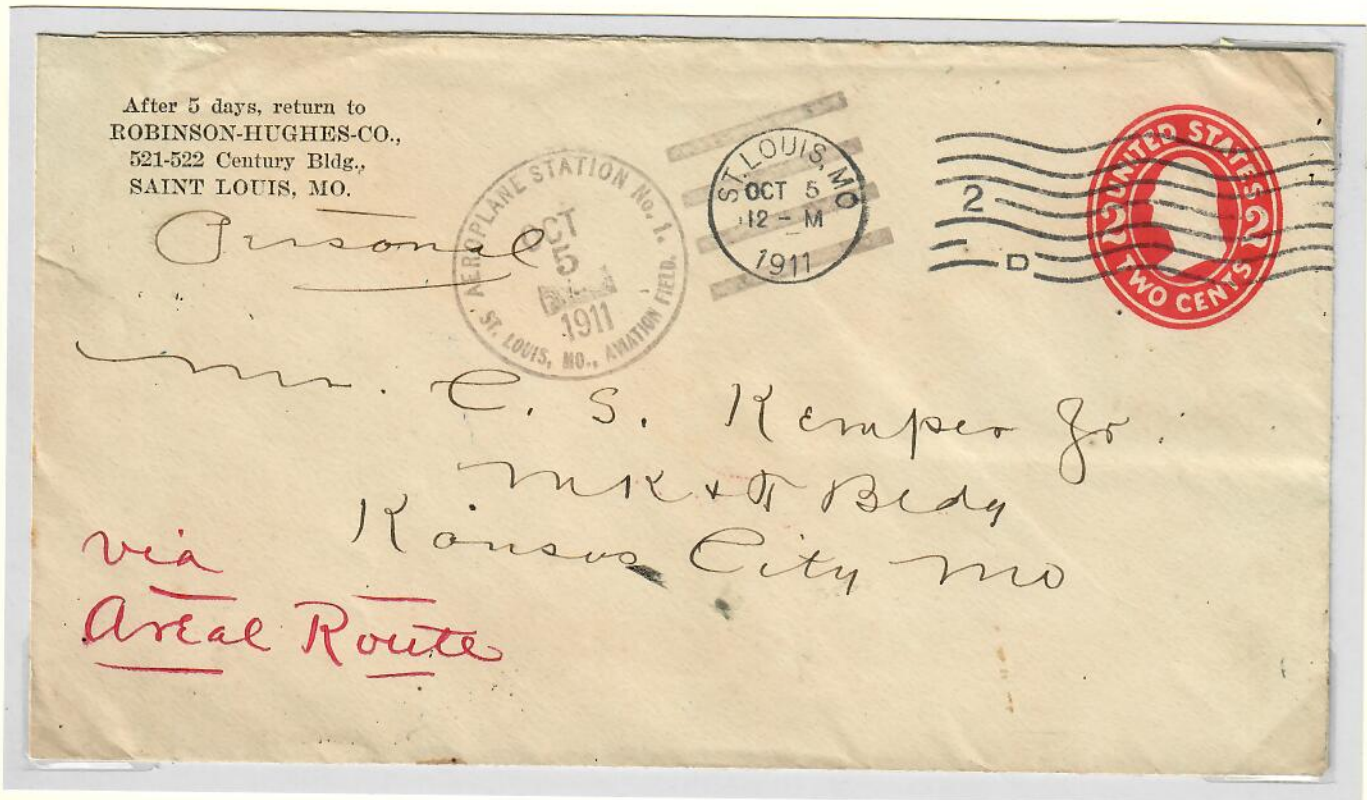


Black ink used to cancel the postal card issued in 1910. The card having gotten wet, losing a one-cent added, to make it a one cent overpaid card. Perhaps the sender, a want-to-be artist, sketched a person (pilot) at the helm of his plane.

2. Second Day of Meet

2.3 Two Cent Rate

Correct Rate



U406 Stationery letter, doubled canceled using a Robinson-Hughes corner card but with the word "Personal" noted. Letter rate was 2-cents.

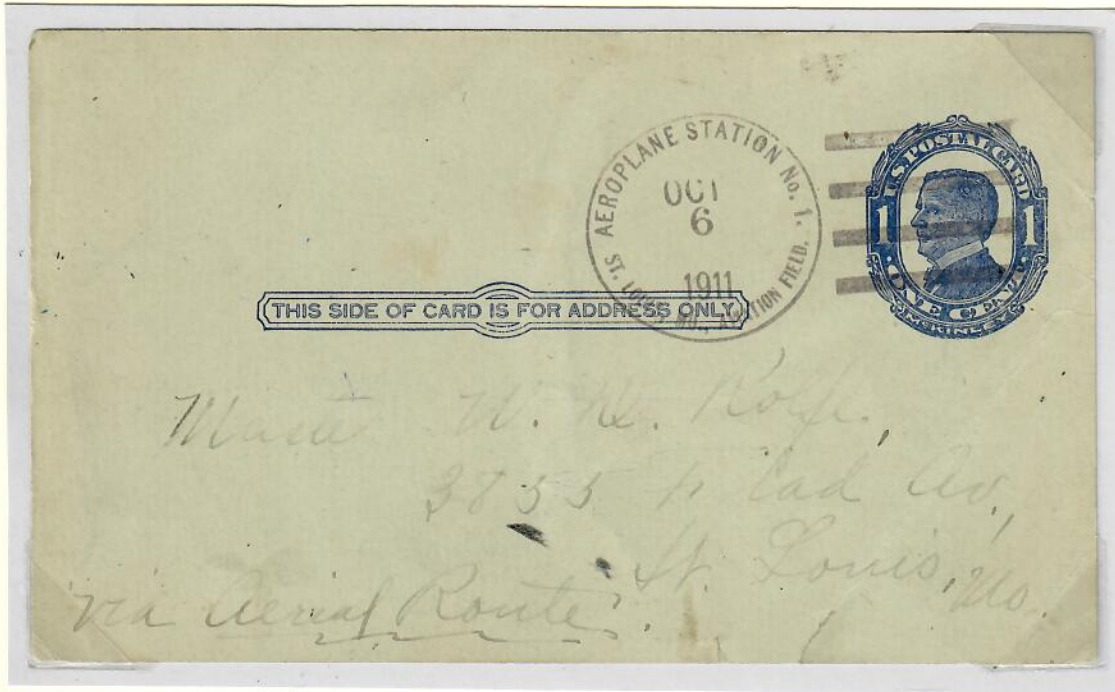
Incorrect Rate



Post card rate was one-cent, so it was one cent overpaid and double canceled so that Gus Ludwig received one clear impression.

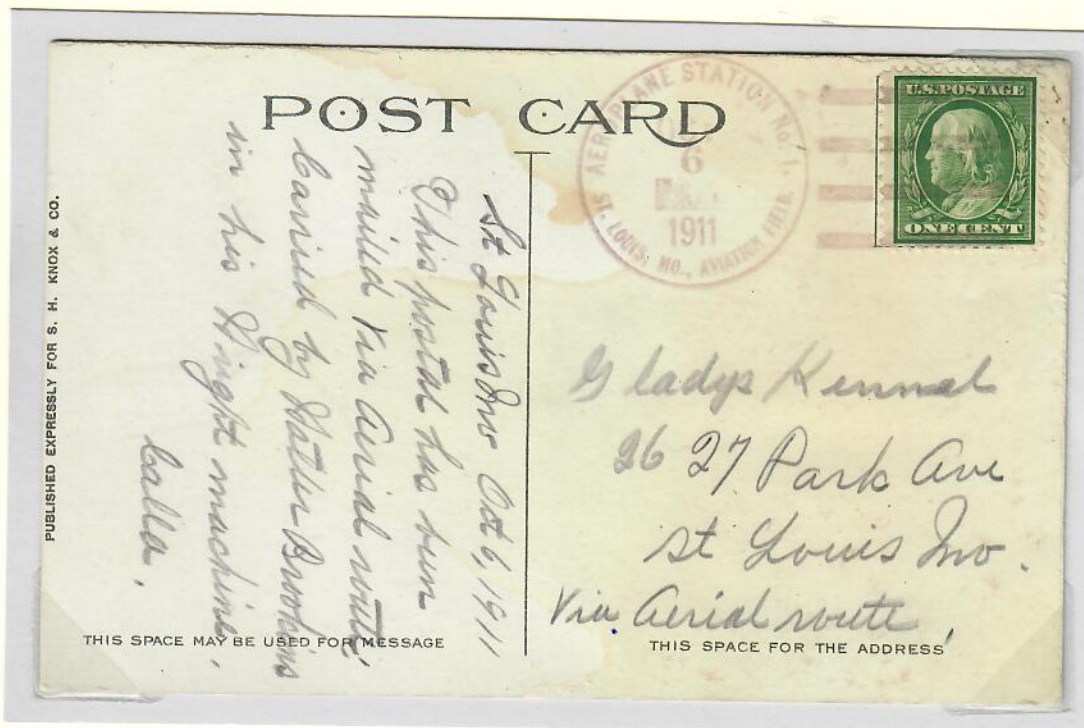
3. Third Day of Meet

3.1 Comment by Sender
Black/No Block



Dated Oct 4, 1911. Dear little man: "This will be carried to you by Walter Brookins in his aeroplane." Signed Uell. Place in dial usually reserved for the time is missing in all of the postmarks as noted above.

Magenta/Block



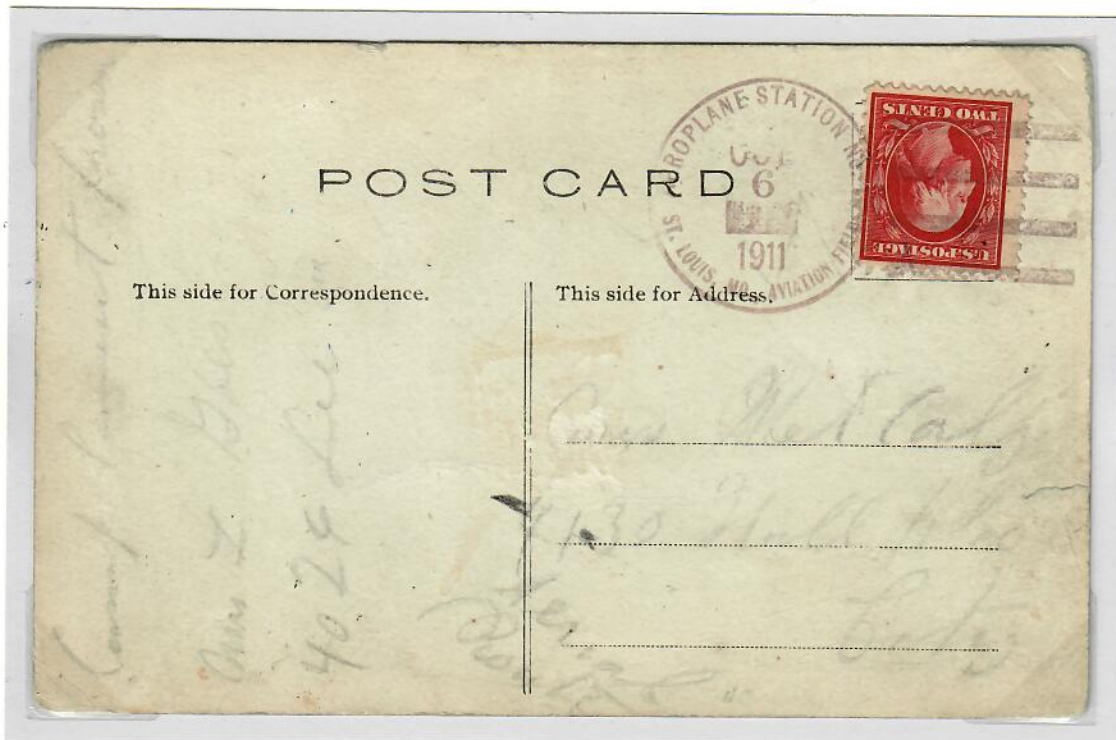
Dated St. Louis MO, Oct 6, 1911. "This postal has been mailed via Aerial route carried by Walter Brookins in his Wright machine." Signed Calla. Above, an inked block in dial slot above where the time is usually placed.

3. Third Day of Meet

3.2 Locations Sent

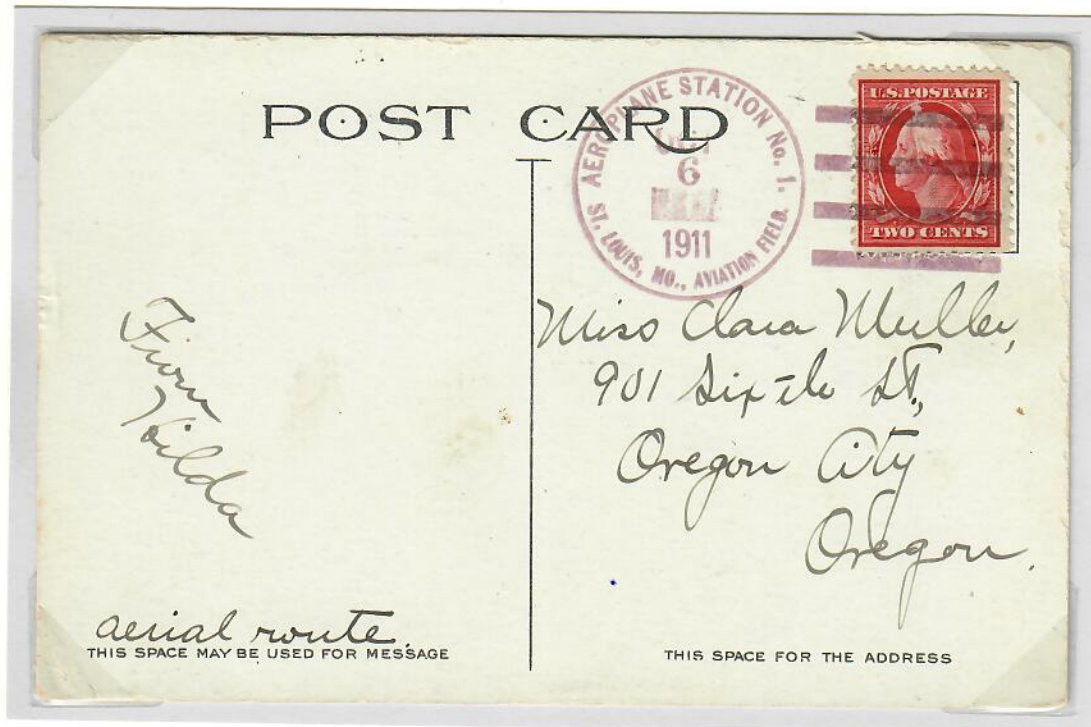
2 Cent Stamps

“City”-St. Louis



A case of no 1-cent stamps available? Can't explain for sure. Foreign postcard rate was 2 cents at the time. Addressed to “City” means city of origin, since the meet was held in St. Louis.

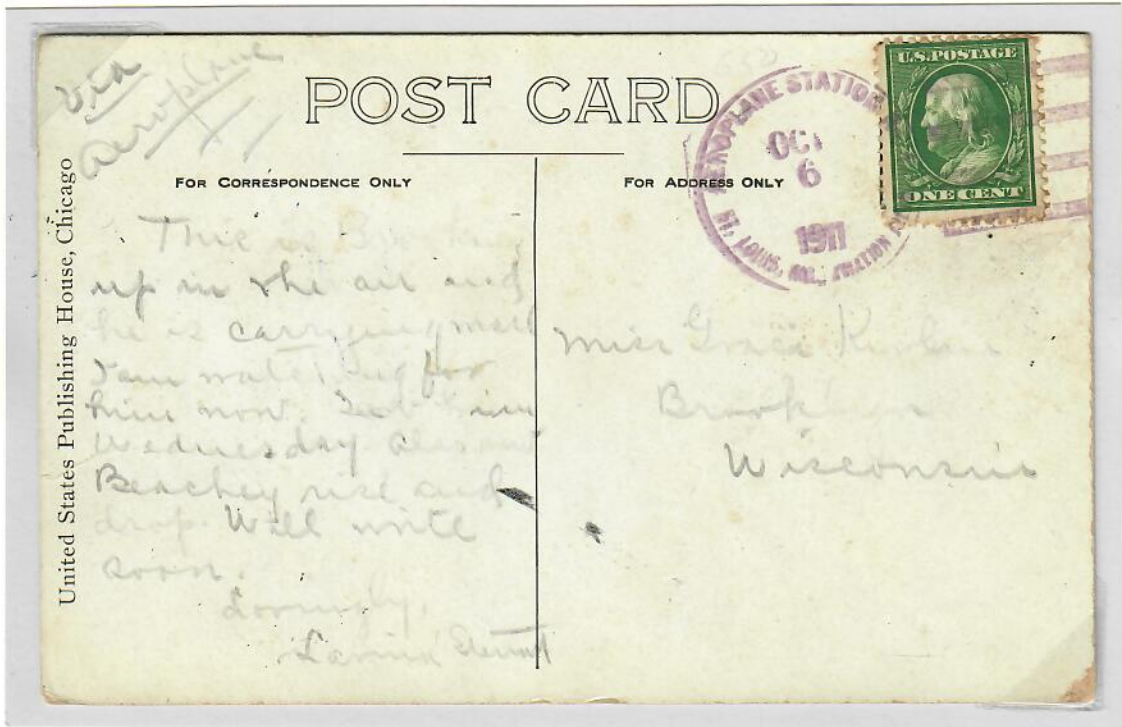
Far Away Oregon



Many visitors from all over the country were interested in seeing these flying machines carrying mail and wanted to let friends and family know mail could soon be flown in this manner noted by the special cancels.

3. Third Day of Meet

3.3 Manuscript Route Markings "Via Aeroplane"



One cent stamp used going to Wisconsin.

"Aerial Route"

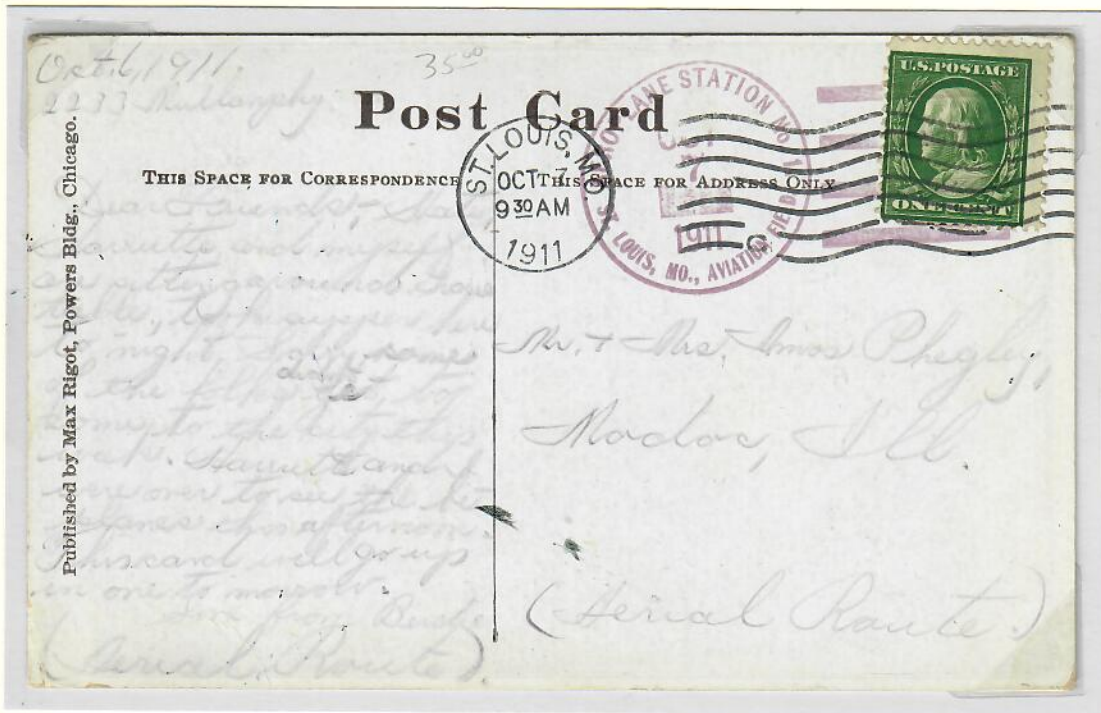


Misspelled "Aerial." Two-cent stamp used to send card a few miles up-river to Grafton, Illinois.

4. Fourth Day of Meet

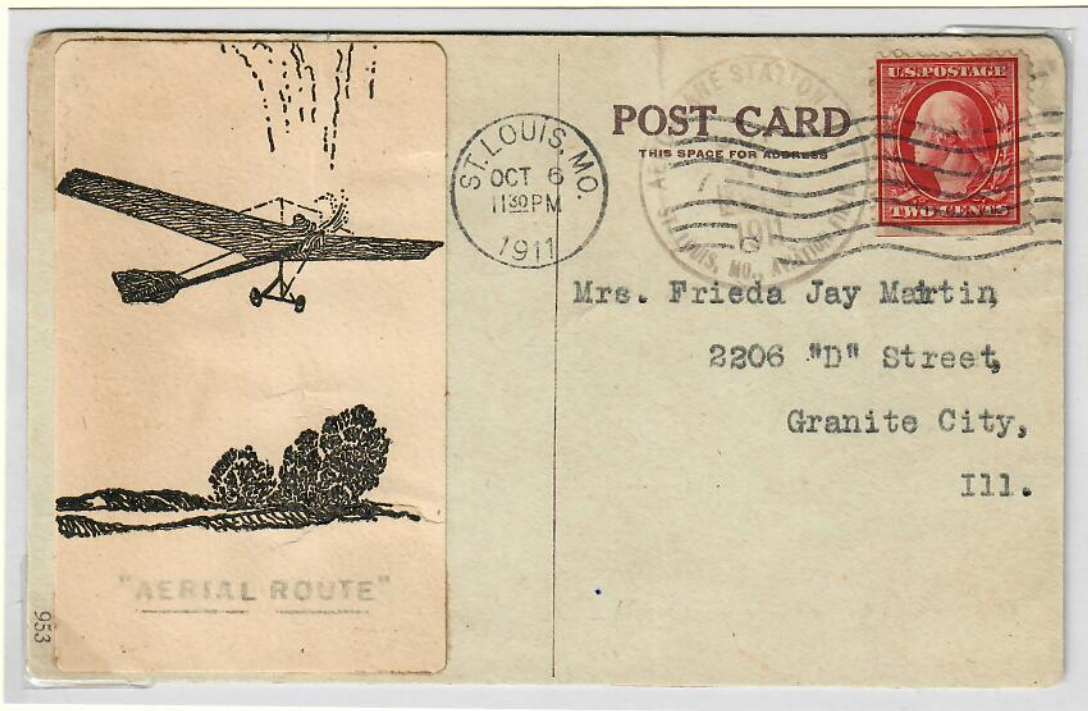
4.1 Different Rates

Magenta/Block



Less cards and covers canceled on the 4th day. Magenta cancel with a block appearing in place of the AM/PM slug. One cent Franklin used.

Purple/Label Added



Label used, with "Aerial Route" inscribed. Two-cent Washington used. Realized only recently that there were October 7 cancels made with the first device, but much harder to find.

5. Hydro-Plane Flight

5.1 Via Hydro-Aeroplane

Pilot-Robinson



Hugh A. Robinson (misspelled above), poised in flight position, in his hydro-plane that carried mail up and down and across the Mississippi River in St. Louis on October 8th after windy conditions postponed the flight postmarked on the 7th.

Hydro Cancel



According to an article on the Arago Website, very little mail was carried on this first ever Hydro-Plane flight and only about ten pieces exist today. Magenta ink used for the cancel.

6. Postlude

6.1 Late Postmark Request

After the meet the St. Louis Post Office received a request for cancels after the fact. This is a Post Office copy of their response to the request along with an unaddressed October 4th dated postal card.

Specimen

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT

Mailing DIVISION

United States Post Office

SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

Oct. 20, 1911

007-23 1911
B. D. Forester,
Asst. Cashier,
Bank of the Manhattan Co.,
40 Wall St.,
New York N.Y.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter of Oct. 18, 1911, enclosed herewith please find two postal cards, one showing the imprint of the postmarking stamp used on the postal cards and letters carried on Oct. 4, 1911, by Aerial Post by Walter Brookins; the other showing the imprint of the stamp used for the hydro-aeroplane, scheduled to make its flight on Oct. 7, 1911, but by reason of adverse winds, flew on Sunday, the following day.

Very truly yours,

Wm. H. Lamb



THIS SIDE OF CARDS FOR ADDRESS ONLY



6. Postlude

6.2 Later Air Mail

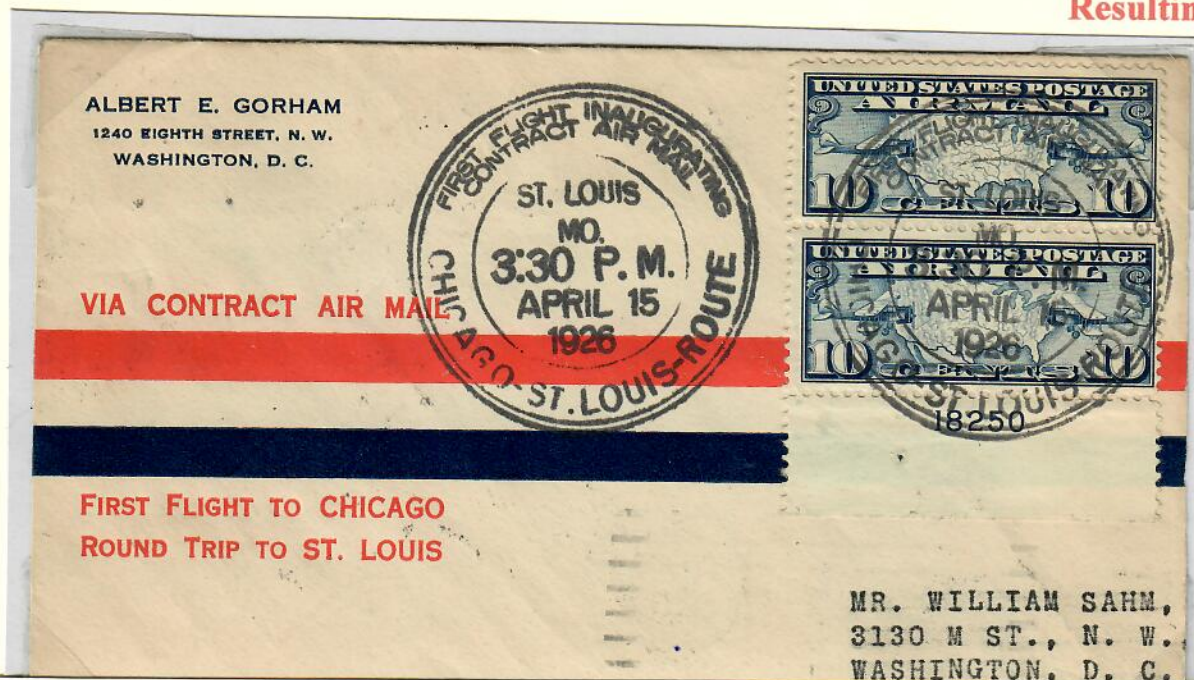
When the first experimental air mail route from St. Louis to Chicago opened on August 16, 1920, the Pioneer device came out of storage; the month, day, and year replaced with different letters and numbers, and put-to-use with the addition of a manuscript inscription "1st Airmail Route to Chicago" penned in the lower left corner. Six pounds carried.

Advertising Cover



Advertising cover, double cancelled because of two one-cent Washington-Franklins.

Resulting 1st CAM



As a result of these early pioneer air mail flights that show mail could be carried by plane, this cover represents the first recognized flight of Commercial Air Mail (CAM) under government contract from St. Louis to Chicago on April 15, 1926. Rates were 10c for up to 1000 mi, 15c for up to 1500 mi, and 20c for more than 1500 mi. And if it weren't for these brave pioneer pilots, there would not be a need for the later Jenny stamps, one of which gave us the world famous "Inverted Jenny."