

# 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 4<sup>th</sup>. 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.**

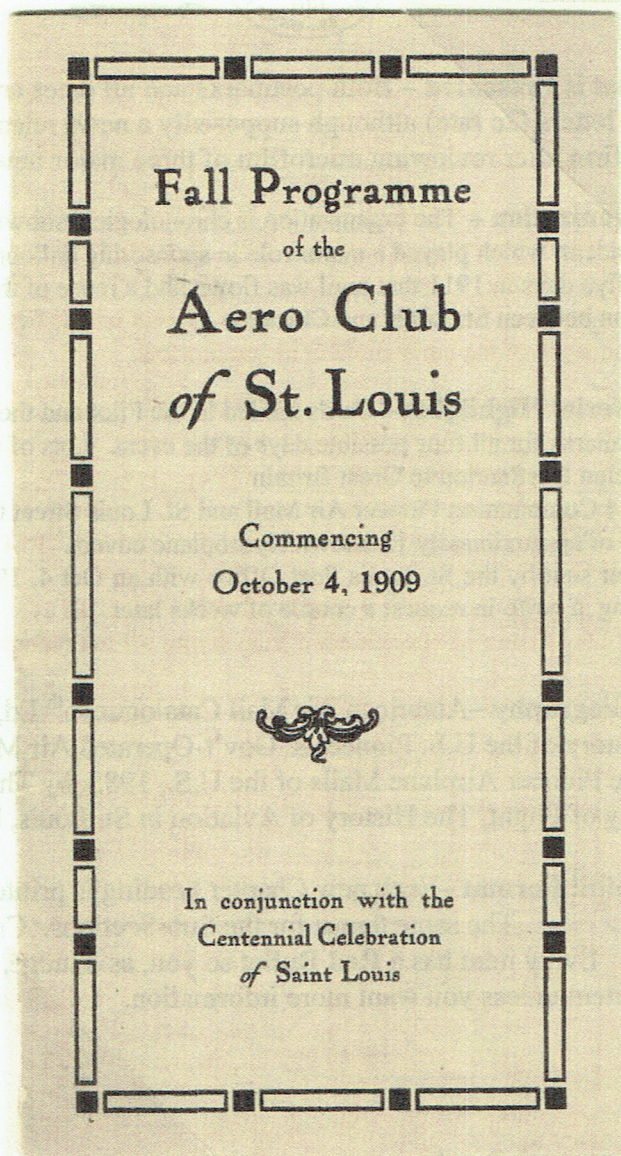
**Outline:** Chapter 1 - First Day of Meet, October 4  
Chapter 2 - Second Day of Meet, October 5  
Chapter 3 - Third Day of Meet, October 6  
Chapter 4 - Fourth Day of Meet, October 7  
Chapter 5 - Hydro-Plane Mail  
Chapter 6 - Postlude

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



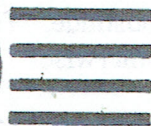


Synopsis  
**St. Louis Pioneer Air Mail, Oct 4 – 8, 1911**  
Gary G. Hendren

I began collecting MO Postal History in the early 1990s and acquired a few Pioneer Air Mail postmarks including one in combination with a St. Louis Street Car cancel. A couple of years ago, I began to diligently try to acquire key pieces for this one-frame exhibit.

**Purpose of Exhibit** – The purpose of the exhibit is to show the postmarks and uses of the St. Louis Pioneer Airmail service, during that first week in October, which was the second recognized Aero meet, carrying mail, in the U.S. behind Garden City, NY, a week earlier.

**Challenge Factor** – Although there were about 6,000 items carried in two mail bags the first day and perhaps 25,000 postmarked during the meet, relatively few remain in collector's hands today in the ensuing 100 years since the meet. There were two different cancels used. The four bar with only a change of the dates of October 4, 5, 6, and 7 and the hydroplane of the 7<sup>th</sup>, although it was **actually flown on the 8<sup>th</sup>** due to severe wind problems the previous day. I wasn't aware that both cancels could be found dated on the 7<sup>th</sup> until I acquired one in 2015. **It's also the rarest of the four bars.**



HYDRO-AEROPLANE  
MAIL SERVICE  
ST. LOUIS, MO.  
OCT. 7 1911

**What is Presented** – Both postmarks and all dates are represented. Various rates can be seen on postal cards (1c rate) and letters (2c rate) although supposedly a news release stated a 2c rate for the meet, **both cards and letters**. Could not confirm after reviewing microfilm of three major newspaper **reports prior to the meet**.

**Organization** – The organization is chronological showing an item from the 1909 Aero Club of St. Louis, Albert Lambert, President, which played a major role in sponsoring balloon meets prior to 1911 that led to the Aero Club sponsoring the meet for the five days in 1911 that mail was flown and a reuse of the cancellation device in 1920 when the first regular air mail service began between St. Louis and Chicago. **I finish with a first day cover of the 1926 St. Louis – Chicago CAM flight, a culmination of the work of the early pioneer air mail pilots.**

**Material Highlights** – Cards mailed to the Pilot and the President of St. Louis Aero Club. [P3]

Postmarks for all four possible days of the event. Lots of variations.

Foreign Destination to Great Britain. [P4]

Oct 4 Combination Pioneer Air Mail and St. Louis Street Car cancel combination. Unlisted in StL Street Car Monograph. [P6]

One of approximately 15 known Hydroplane covers. [P14]

Letter sent by the St. Louis Post Office with an Oct 4, 1911 specimen postmark canceled days after the completion of the Meet, filling a write-in request a couple of weeks later. [P15]

**First Day Cover of 10c Air Mail Map stamp + First recognized Contract Air Mail (CAM) Flight from Cleveland to Detroit.** [P16]

**Bibliography** – American Air Mail Catalogue, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed, Vol. 1, p 13-15

-History of the U.S. Pioneer & Gov't-Operated Air Mail Service 1910-1928, 1973, by O'Sullivan & Weber, p10-12

-The Pioneer Airplane Mails of the U.S., 1985, by Thomas J. Sullivan, p29-46

-City of Flight, The History of Aviation in St. Louis, by James Horgan, Patrice Press, 1984

**Exhibit Format** – Each new Chapter heading is printed in **Bold Black**. Subsequent pages within the chapter printed in **Light Gray**. The same format for the Sub-Sections. Cream colored paper used. Map on Ivory background with gray mat. Every item has a **Red Bullet** so you, as a judge, can tell what you are looking at without reading the details under the item unless you want more information. **Red dot indicates item discovered by exhibitor.**



1/01/19