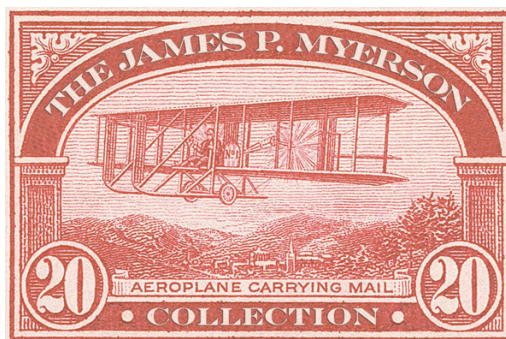


THE  
JAMES P. MYERSON COLLECTION



PIONEER FLIGHT MAIL 1910-1916

IN 1910, WHEN WOMEN COULD NOT VOTE AND THE WRIGHT BROTHERS' HISTORIC flight at Kitty Hawk was just seven years past, heavier-than-air flying machines were a completely futuristic concept to most people. As aviators crawled into the seats of rudimentary early planes, they risked and lost their lives for the thrill of being airborne. Flights were held at fairgrounds and makeshift landing fields for the amusement of crowds — it was entertaining, but had little practical value.

Within a few years, the airplane would gain respect as a practical means of transport and a lethal instrument of warfare, and aviators would be transformed from popular daredevils to highly-respected pilots. The use of airplanes for military reconnaissance, communication and eventually assault transformed the tactics and strategies of modern war.

The value of mechanical flight in transporting mail was appreciated by a relatively small group of prescient (or self-interested) individuals, both in and out of government. Postal officials, eager to obtain from Congress a generous appropriation for experimental airmail service, began to sanction mail-carrying at aviation meets, exhibitions and demonstrations.

Beginning with Earle L. Ovington's attempt to fly from New York to California in October 1911, the U.S. Post Office Department assigned route numbers to certain flights. The airmail routes were numbered in the 600,000 series; the first three digits identified the state of origin of the route, and for each state, the last three digits were assigned in sequential order. Therefore, route 607,001 was assigned to the Ovington flight (607=New York, and 001=first New York flight number assigned).

Not every authorized pioneer airmail flight was assigned a route number, and not every flight assigned a route number was actually completed. Bad weather, mechanical problems and crashes plagued these pioneer days of airmail and sometimes resulted in death.

Since the time they were created, pioneer flight covers have been appreciated as significant items — first as souvenirs or mementos of advances in aviation, and then as collectibles of value. With the growing interest in airmail philately in the 1920s and 1930s, flight covers took their place alongside airmail stamps. Societies were formed to study airmail — today's American Air Mail Society is one of the thriving organizations dedicated to this subject.

James P. Myerson — Jim, as he is known to all — is a polymathic collector and postal historian. His interest in pioneer flight covers came naturally, and it only waned after he acquired the last cover needed for a complete representation of every flight listed in the *American Air Mail Catalogue*, for which at least one example is known — 97 in the most recent edition. Several of these flight cards or covers are unique examples. If possible, Jim tried to acquire unusual examples, such as rare dates, envelopes (much scarcer than cards), atypical frankings, autographs, photo cards and usage to foreign destinations.

In 2016, we passed the century milestone since the last pioneer flight. This year, we celebrate the world's first regularly scheduled government airmail service, which was inaugurated on May 15, 1918. Virtually all of the well-documented rarities of pioneer flight cover collecting will be found in the Myerson collection, and this sale offers the potential to acquire items that have not appeared in the market for decades.

— SCOTT R. TREPEL