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Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Archives

Paul Studenski Collection - Scrapbook, Volume 2 (2 of 2), 1915-1961

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[[image - drawing of a stamp showing a plane and envelope with the text FIRST FLIGHT United States Air Mail. Route No. AM 40, Birmingham, Ala.]]

- TYPICAL Contract Air Mail cachet applied to first flight covers by the U.S. Post Office Department.

collectors and the non-aero-philatelic public.

The Government flew the mails for eight years after 1918, and eventually extended air-mail service until coast-to-coast routes were set up under private auspices. Year by year new stamps were produced in keeping with the reduction of rates as volume made cheaper service possible. By 1926, air mail was popular, regular service and the Post Office decided to encourage yet further developments through private enterprise. Private carriers were given contracts to carry mail over specified routes. From the beginnings of a route between Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland, established on Feb. 15, 1926, a vast network of airways has been woven across our country. As every new city was added to this aerial web, cachets were applied to first-flight letters. And as most of them were the creations of famous artists, the covers bearing them are as attractive as they are historical. Through a collection of them the collector can trace the complete growth of airmail service in the United States.

FAM's—covers flown over foreign air mail routes that extended from the United States to the four corners of the world—are also avidly collected as historic souvenirs.

Foreign Air Mail routes began with simple hops from points in the United States to adjacent cities across the border—from Seattle to Victoria; from Maine to New Brunswick; from Key West to Havana—all routes approximately 100 miles long. But air-mail spread farther afield and soon the winged globe emblem of our service cruised to Latin



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