

Charles Dickinson, Founder of Dickinson Air Line and the First—Which was Their Second to Last—Day of CAM 9 Service From Chicago to Minneapolis – St. Paul in 1926: SYNOPSIS

1. Overview

This Display Exhibit's purpose is to follow the life of Charles "Pop" Dickinson, who started out as a Chicago farm seed dealer, became wealthy, was keenly interested in pioneer aviation and eventually became a licensed pilot, founded and was a twenty-year President of the Aero Club of Illinois, and eventually founded of Dickinson Air Line solely to obtain the CAM 9 air mail contract from the U.S. Post Office Department. **This big event in his life—the first—which was also unofficially the second to last—day of his Dickinson Air Line's CAM 9 operations on June 7, 1926, was the most important part of his aviation career and therefore is a substantial part of the exhibit.** The exhibit shows the routes and covers flown and shows relevant original ephemera while discussing the planes, pilots, and following the events of their first day of CAM 9 service. The air mail of that first day extended to June 8 due to forced groundings and a fatal crash. After June 8, Dickinson Air Line no longer regularly carried air mail, but ran irregular flights, though Dickinson's government contract was not terminated until September 30. His successor, Northwest Airways, took over the route on October 1. The exhibit concludes with the successful start of Northwest Airways as the new CAM 9 contractor, and Charles Dickinson's retirement from CAM 9 air mail service with the termination of his contract.

2. Purpose

To showcase the life of Charles Dickinson, beginning with his foundation as a seed dealer, but focusing on his interest in aviation which led to his establishment of the Aero Club of Illinois and his creation of Dickinson Air Line for the CAM 9 contract, listing details of the CAM 9 routes, planes and pilots. It also purposes to show previously unknown information about the first day of CAM 9 flights and shows that Dickinson's failures paved the way for a successor airline—Northwest Airways—which despite inexperience, became a major air carrier. Because Dickinson Air Line's CAM 9 service was the ultimate event in Dickinson's aviation career, it is a large—but not the only—feature of the exhibit.

3. Importance

The CAM 9 route was the ninth federally sanctioned commercial airline route in the U.S. and its Chicago to Minneapolis route was one of five critical air routes in the country's fledgling commercial Air Mail Service started in 1926. Despite Dickinson's failure, his operations opened the door for Northwest Airways success.

My exhibit shows covers that the *American Air Mail Catalog* (AAMC) says do not exist. My research will effect changes to that reference in the future. My independent research also shows that—despite Dickinson's CAM 9 being stated in reference books as having ceased on June 8, 1926, he continued CAM 9 service in an irregular, occasional way through September. Northwest Airways—started by businessmen with no aviation experience—was successful and became a huge airline that eventually merged with Delta.

Charles Dickinson was important in aviation: He established the Aero Club of Illinois—second only to the Aero Club of America in its influence. He was the oldest licensed pilot in the U.S. These frames tell the complete story of his aviation and CAM 9 operations. Additional material would be redundant.

4. Challenges

It was challenging to track the details of each failed flight, because that material has not been correctly documented by prior researchers. Using covers and also primary and secondary source material, I investigated the true disposition of the mail after the fatal crash and found covers that were stated to not exist by *The American Air Mail Catalog*—showing covers mailed from Minneapolis to St. Paul and from St. Paul to Minneapolis. I discovered that Billy Brock—the pilot who took off from St. Paul—flew to Minneapolis, dropped the St. Paul to Minneapolis mail, witnessed Partridge's crash and returned to Minneapolis to carry

recovered crash mail. He successfully carried that mail to Chicago, where mail terminating there received one set of postmarks (all on June 7) and mail being forwarded onward received a different set (some on June 8).

5. Organization

The Exhibit is organized chronologically, following Dickinson's seed business, his airshow sponsorship, involvement in the Aero Club of Illinois, and his airline's CAM 9 service and termination. Section 4 shows CAM 9 routes and covers and is organized by flight sequence. All key covers are shown. Individual crash covers, signed covers, and rare covers are displayed.

6. Material Highlights

As stated earlier, I researched beyond the accepted and authoritative information in *The American Air Mail Catalog*. I have presented examples of the only known covers carried from St. Paul to Minneapolis by pilot Billy Brock and of the only known covers carried from Minneapolis to St. Paul and onward after Partridge's crash.

I have presented the only three known covers carried after the pilots completed their June 7 mail flights on June 8 and Dickinson gave his 45-day notice to the USPOD, disproving what multiple sources have written—that Dickinson never again provided mail service after June 7. Finally, though *The American Air Mail Catalog* states that Pilot Matty Laird took Pilot Keller's mail from Milwaukee to La Crosse, I have acquired a unique, original card—typed by Pilot Keller—that explains his role as a relief pilot replacing Dan Kaiser, stating that he (Keller) carried Kiser's mail to Minneapolis. This shows *The American Air Mail Catalog's* statement to be incorrect. Relief Pilot Matty Laird never flew mail on June 7 or 8.

I have shown an Elmer Partridge crash cover signed by pilot Billy Brock, and through my independent research on the backstamps applied to the many crash covers that I have studied, I have clearly shown that Brock carried a large quantity of Partridge's crash mail. This disproves previous claims that all Partridge crash mail went by rail to its final destination. I have also shown a Northwest Airway's cover, without cachet, postmarked October 1, 1926—their first day of CAM 9 service. Original photos and other original ephemera is included in the exhibit and marked as original.

7. References

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Charles Dickinson, Founder of Dickinson Air Line and the First—Which was Their Second to Last—Day of CAM 9 Service From Chicago to Minneapolis – St. Paul in 1926

1: INTRODUCTION

This Display Exhibit's purpose is to follow the life of Charles "Pop" Dickinson, who started out as a Chicago farm seed dealer, became wealthy, was keenly interested in pioneer aviation and became a licensed pilot, founded and was a twenty-year President of the Aero Club of Illinois, and eventually founded of Dickinson Air Line solely to obtain the CAM 9 air mail contract from the U.S. Post Office Department. CAM 9 was the ninth federally sanctioned commercial airline route in the U.S. This big event in his life—the first—which was also unofficially the second to last—day of his Dickinson Air Line's CAM 9 operations on June 7, 1926, was the most important part of his aviation career and therefore is a substantial part of the exhibit. The exhibit shows the routes and covers flown, and relevant original ephemera, while discussing the planes, pilots, and following the events of their first day of CAM 9. Air mail service of that first day extended to June 8 due to forced groundings and a fatal crash. After June 8, Dickinson Air Line no longer regularly carried air mail but ran irregular flights, though their government contract was not terminated until September 30. Their successor, Northwest Airways, took over on October 1. The exhibit concludes with the successful start of Northwest Airways, and Charles Dickinson's retirement from CAM 9 air mail service.

OUTLINE

Section 1: Introduction, including: Outline, Legend, Significant Cover.

Section 2: History of Dickinson's Family Seed Business in Chicago and Minneapolis.

Section 3: Charles Dickinson—President of the Illinois Aero Club & the "Oldest Pilot in the U.S."

Section 4: Dickinson Air Line & CAM 9, June 7-8, 1926: The Flights, Stops, Pilots & Trials of the First & Last Days of Dickinson's CAM 9.

- In this section material is grouped as Westbound Flights (CAM 9W) & Eastbound Flights (CAM 9E):

A: Westbound Flights from Chicago

1. Chicago to Milwaukee
2. Chicago to La Crosse
3. Chicago to St. Paul
4. Chicago to Minneapolis

B: Westbound Flights from Milwaukee

1. Milwaukee to La Crosse
2. Milwaukee to St. Paul
3. Milwaukee to Minneapolis

C: Westbound Flights from La Crosse

1. La Crosse to St. Paul
2. La Crosse to Minneapolis

D: Westbound Flights from St. Paul

1. St. Paul to Minneapolis

E: Eastbound Flights from Minneapolis

1. Minneapolis to St. Paul
2. Minneapolis to La Crosse
3. Minneapolis to Milwaukee
4. Minneapolis to Chicago

F: Eastbound Flights from St. Paul

1. St. Paul to La Crosse
2. St. Paul to Milwaukee
3. St. Paul to Chicago

G: Eastbound Flights from La Crosse

1. La Crosse to Milwaukee
2. La Crosse to Chicago

H: Eastbound Flights from Milwaukee

1. Milwaukee to Chicago

Section 5: Story & Reality: Dickinson's CAM 9 After June 7 & the Only Known Covers Carried.

Section 6: Conclusion: Northwest Airlines' Startup & Dickinson Air Line's Demise.

LEGEND

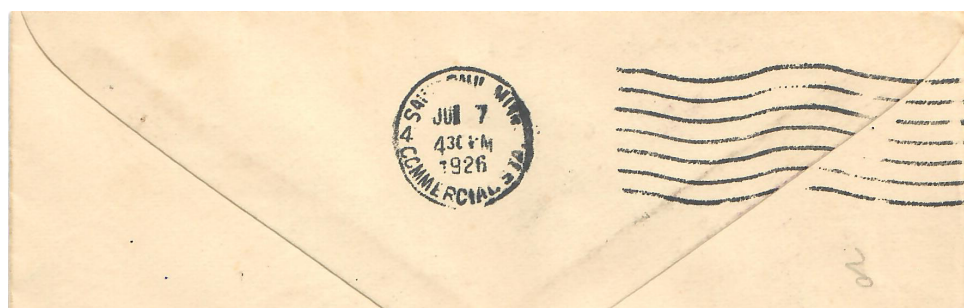
- **Key Information** is in *italics* in a blue frame.
- **Examples of independent research** are in dark blue.
- Auxilliary Information is not within a box.
- **Rare items** are identified with a **Red Airplane**



This cover, sent from Minneapolis to St. Paul, was on the Crashed Plane of Elmer Partridge, who died in the crash. The salvaged cover was carried to St. Paul by Pilot Billy Brock & received on June 7 at 4:30 p.m. Franked with an 8-cent Columbian Exposition on 2-cent Columbus & Liberty postal stationery.

According to the *American Airmail Catalog, Volume 1*, "There were no dispatches from St. Paul to Minneapolis or Minneapolis to St. Paul."

- One of six known from Minneapolis to St. Paul.



Back, showing receiving mark, Minneapolis, 4:30 p.m. June 7, 1926.