

Outgoing Commercial Airmail: from U.S. & Territories, 1922 – 1941

Purpose: This exhibit demonstrates outgoing commercial airmail from U.S. & territories (1922-41) using exhibitor's original & secondary research.

Treatment: Starting with U.P.U. Congress of 1920, I present commercial U.S. (including its territories) to foreign destinations via airmail. First US postal agreement with another postal administration occurred with UK in 1922 with Cairo-Baghdad airmail route. Exhibit ends with eventual disruptions due to World War II in Europe & Asia. Exhibit plan includes: (1) forerunner air service examples; (2) U.S. Post Office agreements with European airmail hub service through Europe, to Asia & Oceania, & Africa; (3) U.S. Post Office agreements with non-European foreign air service; & (4) U.S. Foreign Airmail (F.A.M.) air service to Latin America, Europe, Asia, Oceania, & Africa. Exhibit is arranged within most sections generally following geographic progression of an air route. More detailed outline is presented at beginning of pertinent new chapters.

Because airmail rates underwent substantial revisions during 1922-41, this era of postal history can at first appear complex & difficult to understand. Viewer is guided through exhibit with use of descriptive page headers & succinct descriptions (e.g., date, place of origin, destination, itemized rate) with each cover.

In select cases, more complex routes are clarified with maps. Important general background information is circumscribed. For most destinations, timelines have been created to aid viewer in understanding time relative to rapidly changing rates.

Only when helpful, backstamps have been used to demonstrate intermediary steps along route. Note, most covers after 1929 usually did not receive backstamps due to accelerated mail processing (unless letter was registered).

Of note, **current exhibit has been extensively revised from earlier versions.** Viewer will note new material, extensively improved text, & enhanced organization.

Importance: Following U.P.U. Congress of 1920 until onset of U.S. entry into World War II (7 December 1941), world witnessed dramatic geographic expansion of commercial air travel. This era had significant & lasting effect on worldwide airmail service that can still be observed today.

Philatelic & Related Knowledge: This exhibit reflects over 35 years of studiously collecting this specific topic, as well as personal census data. Exhibit reflects best covers to demonstrate subject. I have **recently extensively revised current exhibit** to better reflect research & extensive experience with topic.

Selection of air routes is demonstrated through balanced display of exemplary covers. This includes display of European hub air services (including elusive U.S. via Italian air service, U.S. to Japan via Europe & Eastern U.S.S.R., & elusive destinations to Asia & Africa); non-European air services (including only known example of U.S. use via intra-Peruvian airmail service & U.S. to Papua New Guinea via Australian airmail service, both examples using only U.S. stamps); & U.S. airmail FAM service (including early short-lived rates to Latin America as well as commercial airmail to Canton Island). Not every single rate or destination is displayed in this exhibit since there are near-infinite number of possible permutations. Most unusual versions (& better condition) of relatively common rates as well as elusive rates, routes, or destinations have been included. First flight airmail covers have not been included. Backstamps have been illustrated when they are needed to confirm route when there is another possible route choice.

Personal Study & Research: For over three decades, I have researched & published on U.S. airmail rates & its associated U.S. postal agreements with foreign administrations. Since there was no complete or comprehensive U.S. airmail rate guide when I started this collection, I initially performed

comprehensive review of U.S. Postal Bulletins & created master compendium of all U.S. airmail rates to Europe, Asia, Oceania, & Africa (reference #1). As I attempted to expand my understanding of topic, I reviewed all published material on subject (see abridged listing from recommended reading list). Because I remained unsatisfied with existing literature, I pursued my own primary research. Initially I traveled to Washington D.C. & spent several weeks at U.S. National Archives to uncover airmail postal payment ledger & additional clues about U.S. handling of early commercial non-FAM airmail to foreign destinations (reference #2 & #3). As I looked to better understand U.S. Post Office & its relationships with foreign postal administrations, I then traveled to London where I uncovered records at British Postal Museum & Archive regarding first U.S. (post-1920 U.P.U.) airmail agreements with Great Britain (reference #4 & #5). Information from my research have been incorporated in this exhibit. Original research & general secondary research are indicated within exhibit with this symbol: 

Articles that I have published &/or presented on this topic include:

- 1) "U.S. airmail rates to Asia, Africa, & Australia: 1922-1940." *The United States Specialist*, vol. 67, no. 3 (March 1996), 100-123. [research published prior to release of H. Beecher & A. Wawrukiewicz international rate book]
- 2) First Postal History Symposium (November 3 - 4, 2006), abstract & presentation, *What is Postal History? The Blount Symposium on Postal History*, "United States Airmail Rates, Routes, & Regulations to Africa, Asia, & Australia" [original research based on primary sources]
- 3) "On the Hunt." *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, vol. 86, no. 6 (November-December 2007), 345-7. [U.S. National Archives containing quantity of airmail in & out of U.S. during late 1920-30s]
- 4) "New Findings Regarding United States Mail Dispatched to Europe for Onward Air Transmission." *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, vol. 87, no. 3 (May-June 2008), 149-52. [revealed agreement between U.S. & British post office regarding acceptance of U.S. airmail for further transmission via British airmail service]
- 5) Ninth Postal History Symposium (June 2-3, 2016), abstract & presentation, *How Postal Treaties Influenced Post Office Reforms*, "A Non-Treaty Postal Agreement of the United States Post Office Department with the British Post Office as an early significant step towards the development of United States airmail to European, African, Asian, & Australian destinations" [original research based on primary sources]

I have presented my U.S. airmail postal history collections & research at N.Y. Collectors' Club (2002, 2007, & 2020), Smithsonian/APS Postal History Symposium (2006 & 2016), Royal Philatelic Society of London (2022 FRPSL recipient of Ronald Lee & Alma Award for best online presentation), Spellman Postal History Symposium (2018), Collectors Club of Chicago (2024).

Condition: It is important to note that all covers presented in this exhibit experienced commercial air travel. Thus, wear may be seen due to challenging conditions given typical mail handling & care received during worldwide transport over last 100 years. I display only covers in best available condition.

Rarity: I have enriched exhibit with more elusive rates, routes, or airmail destinations. While common rates, routes, or destinations certainly exist within scope of this exhibit, I preferentially included examples of short-lived rates &/or highly unusual destinations. Many covers in this exhibit are rarely encountered; some being only known example of rate or destination. Covers of particular significance are indicated within exhibit with **red frame**. Please note that I limited my use to only 5 such examples per frame throughout entire 8 frames; determination to use this designation is based on my own 35-year census.

Recommended reading list: Additional background regarding airmail postal history during this era:

- 1) Aitink, H. & Hovenkamp, E. *Bridging the Continents in Wartime*. Chapter 6, BOAC Horseshoe Route. De Stichting Luchtpostgeschiedenis Tweede Wereldoorlog, 2005.
- 2) Helbock, R.W. *With a Little Help from Our Friends*. (series) La Posta Publications, 2011.
- 3) Piszkievicz, Leonard. *Foreign Incoming Airmail to the United States 1920 - 1950s*, Collectors Club of Chicago, 2025

Outgoing Commercial Airmail: from US & Territories, 1922-41

Purpose: Exhibit demonstrates outgoing commercial airmail from US & territories (1922-41) using exhibitor’s research.

Scope: Following UPU Congress of 1920 recognition of international air transportation, exhibit presents US (including its territories) expansion to foreign destinations via airmail. Ends w/ onset of US entry into WWII (7 December 1941) as most air service halted due to war.

Philatelic/Historic Importance: During pre-WWII era, world witnessed dramatic expansion of commercial air. Era had significant & lasting effect on world history as well as worldwide airmail service that is still observed today.

Rarity: Based on exhibitor’s 35-year-plus experience & personal cover census, exhibit enriched w/ elusive rates, routes, &/or airmail destinations. Many covers exhibited are rarely encountered, some are only known &/or earliest known commercial examples of rate or destination.

Background: Two decades preceding WWII, world witnessed creation & rapid growth of regular commercial airmail service, both domestically & internationally. During 1920s, US & European countries developed airmail services within their borders & nearby neighbors. Postal administrations formed partnerships to broaden commercial air service. European nations extended airmail service to their colonies in Africa & Asia/Oceania, while US established routes to Latin America, Transpacific to Asia/Oceania & eventually Transatlantic to Europe. Expansion continued until WWII disrupted or terminated many routes, ending this period. Regular & dependable air service would not resume & standardize into its modern form until after WWII.

Organization:

Exhibit organized by chapter. Background notes &/or detailed outline at beginning of each chapter (gray box). Arranged as outlined, generally following geographic progression of air route. Chapter & sub-chapter headers top page (gray indicates start of new section). **NOTE:** this current exhibit has been extensively revised from earlier versions.

Chapters:

- I.) Forerunner: UPU air recognition & early domestic US airmail
- II.) European hub service
- III.) Non-European foreign air service
- IV.) Foreign airmail (FAM) routes



2 June 1922

Surface mail (NY to England to Egypt, UPU rate): 5¢
Airmail (Egypt to Iraq, 15¢/oz.): 15¢
Registry fee: 10¢

Earliest known use of any US-foreign postal administration air agreement

I.) Forerunner: UPU air recognition & early domestic US airmail

Earliest US mail use of international air services

1920 UPU Congress (Madrid) 1st UPU to recognize air transportation. W/ ratification of UPU Article 4b, US Post Office Department could enter into agreements w/ other postal administrations for foreign air service.

Chapter I is organized to demonstrate transition from domestic only US air service to eventual US & foreign air service between countries using UPU-allowed postal agreements & US Foreign Airmail (chapters II-IV).



Starting October 1920, 1st US Foreign Air Mail (FAM) route began regular air service between Vancouver & Seattle.

Established to expedite to ships for foreign destinations.

Gratis service

8 April 1925

Airmail (FAM 2, Seattle to Victoria): no charge
Surface mail (Victoria to Australia): 5¢

As of December 1921, SCATDA provided air service within Colombia.

Private company could not make agreement w/ USPOD, so US postage & SCATDA stamps required.



early May 1923

Surface mail (NY to Barranquilla, treaty rate): 2¢
Airmail (Barranquilla to Bogota, 30¢/20g): 30¢ (Colombia)

Note for viewing exhibit:

- Original primary research indicated w/ symbol:
- Covers of particular significance w/ bold red frame**
- Airmail rates in exhibit mostly presented w/ timeline
- End of chapter & sub-chapter indicated w/ decorative line:

