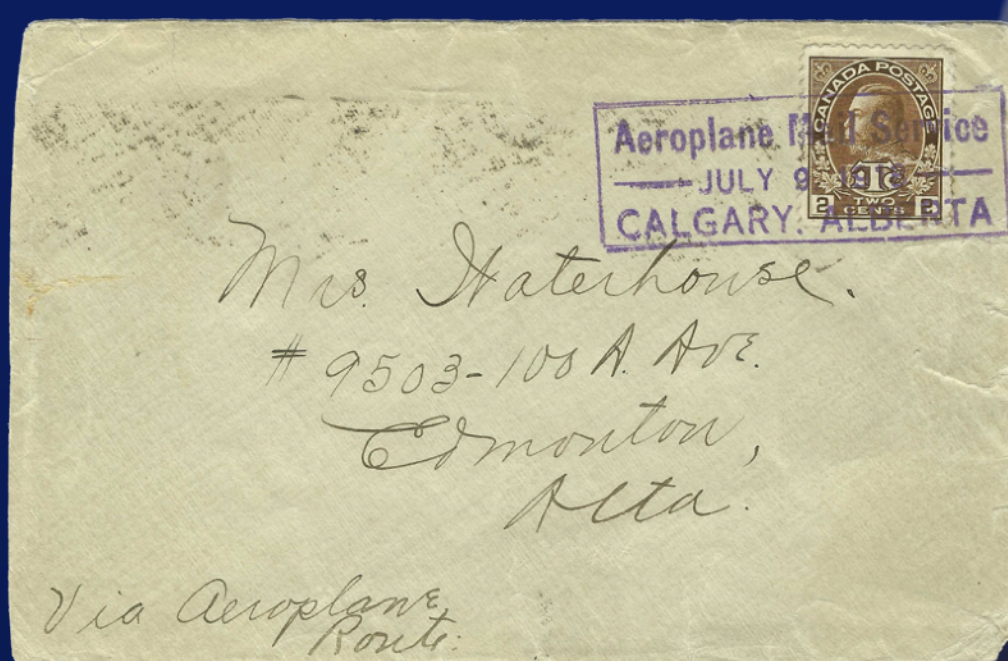


Court of Honour 2026

When a Daredevil and an RAF Pilot Carried Canada's Mail The First Official Airmail Flights of 1918

FROM FAIRGROUNDS AND TRAINING FIELDS

In the last summer of the Great War, as Canadians were only beginning to see aeroplanes above their cities, two very different pilots made postal history carrying mail. In June 1918, Captain Brian Peck, a Royal Air Force instructor at Leaside Aerodrome, flew the first official airmail between Montreal and Toronto. Three weeks later, Katherine Stinson flew Western Canada's first inter-city airmail from Calgary to Edmonton. Together, their flights showed that the aeroplane could serve not only as a machine for training and exhibition, but as a practical new instrument of communication.



One of five surviving ordinary postal envelopes carried on Katherine Stinson's Calgary–Edmonton airmail of 9 July 1918. Franked with a 2c + 1c brown Admiral War Tax stamp and struck with the violet boxed “Aeroplane Mail Service / JULY 9, 1918 / CALGARY, ALBERTA” cachet; the reverse bears an EDMONTON, ALTA. / JUL 9 / 9-PM / 1918 arrival backstamp.

Addressed to Mrs Arabella Waterhouse in Edmonton by her husband Henry and sealed with her red wax “AW” initials, it remained in the Waterhouse family for a century before it was flown again on the centennial re-enactment of Western Canada's first inter-city airmail.



Reverse of cover (scan)



One of only two known commercial window envelopes reportedly flown stampless outside the mailbag on Stinson's 9 July 1918 flight. Likely acquired from the Edmonton Exhibition Association before 1931, it was later franked by Fred Jarrett with a 3c Admiral and struck with the original Calgary slogan handstamp, whose authenticity is confirmed by a surviving proof strike in the Glenbow Archives. Jarrett then marked the inside with his personal handstamp before the envelope entered the Robert T. Stevens Worldwide Air Post Cover Collection.

KATHERINE STINSON AND THE CALGARY-EDMONTON MAIL

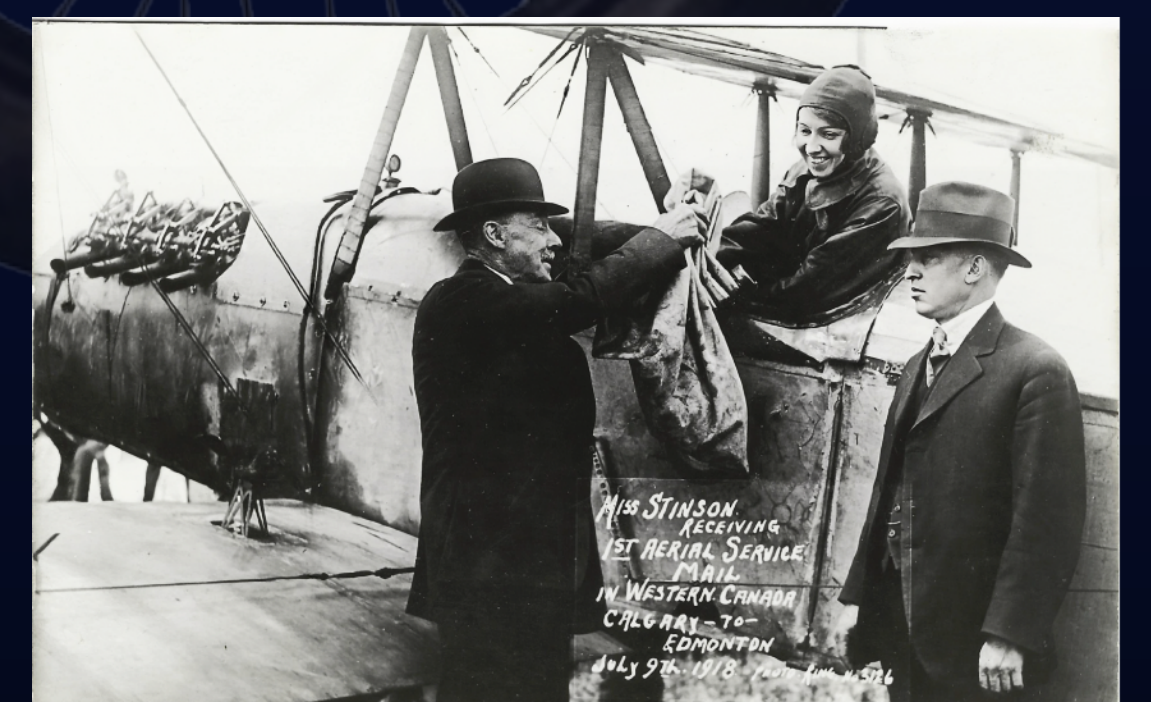
By the time she returned to Alberta in 1918, Katherine Stinson was already an international aviation celebrity. In 1912 she became one of the first women in North America to earn a pilot's licence, and in 1913 she was reported as the first woman officially authorized to carry U.S. mail by air. Newspapers knew her as the “flying schoolgirl” and the “bird girl,” but behind the publicity stood a skilled exhibition pilot with an established record in long-distance and demonstration flying.

Her earlier appearances in Alberta had not always gone smoothly. In 1917, weather and mechanical trouble disrupted her Edmonton performances and left local audiences disappointed. When she returned the following summer, exhibition organizers worked with postal authorities to have mail carried on her northbound flight, turning 9 July 1918 into Western Canada's first inter-city airmail and only the second official aerial mail conveyance in Canada.

Stinson left Calgary at 1:03 p.m. with a mailbag holding roughly 250 to 259 pieces of mail—mostly folded Exhibition letterheads sealed with red stickers, along with a smaller number of ordinary envelopes, official OHMS items, a map letter and two commercial window envelopes reported as having been flown outside the bag—but was forced down near Beddington shortly after takeoff for engine adjustment. After repairs, she resumed the flight and arrived at the Edmonton Exhibition grounds at about 8:00 p.m., where the mail was received after a day that had tested both pilot and machine. In an era when women in aviation were still treated as mere novelties, Stinson's successful mail flight demonstrated not only public daring, but practical competence in an emerging postal service.



Miss Stinson ready to leave Calgary with the first aerial mail for Edmonton; Calgary Postmaster G. C. King stands below with the mailbag, while complimentary passes to the Edmonton Exhibition are stacked on the Curtiss Special for dropping along the route to advertise the fair.



Postmaster G. C. King hands the mailbag to Katherine Stinson as Exhibition Manager E. L. Richardson observes the dispatch of Western Canada's first inter-city airmail from Calgary, 9 July 1918.

CAPTAIN BRIAN PECK AND THE MONTREAL-TORONTO MAIL

Captain Brian Peck was born in Montreal in 1892 and trained as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, later serving as an instructor with the Royal Air Force at Leaside Aerodrome near Toronto. In June 1918 he and his mechanic, Corporal C. W. Mathers, flew a Curtiss JN-4 Canuck from Toronto to Montreal for aerobatic demonstrations linked to wartime recruiting. When bad weather delayed their return, postal and aviation officials turned the homeward flight into an official test of aerial mail service between two major Canadian cities.

On 24 June 1918, before a crowd at the Bois Franc polo grounds, Peck took off with a specially prepared mailbag containing about 120 letters for Camp Leaside. Flying in poor weather, he refuelled at Kingston and Deseronto before reaching Toronto at 4:55 p.m., where the mail was delivered safely and backstamped on arrival. The success of the flight established the Montreal–Toronto carriage as Canada's first official airmail and marked a practical beginning for air mail service in Canada.



Cover carried on Captain Brian Peck's pioneering Montreal–Toronto airmail of 24 June 1918, Canada's first official air mail. Franked with three 1c green Admirals and struck twice with the bold red triangular “INAUGURAL SERVICE Via Aerial Mail, Montreal 23.6.18” cachet, it is one of only about two dozen recorded survivors from the roughly 120 letters carried on the stormy route in Peck's overloaded Curtiss JN-4 Canuck; the reverse bears the TORONTO / JUN 24 / 18 arrival datestamp.



Reverse of cover (scan)



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