

INNOVATION IN CANADIAN AIR MAIL, 1927

1927 was a year of innovation in Canadian air mail, as the Post Office began to pay for airmail services. - It had previously just allowed some airlines to charge for carrying mail to remote locations on a semi-official basis.

This exhibit features the four air mail services inaugurated in the Fall of 1927:

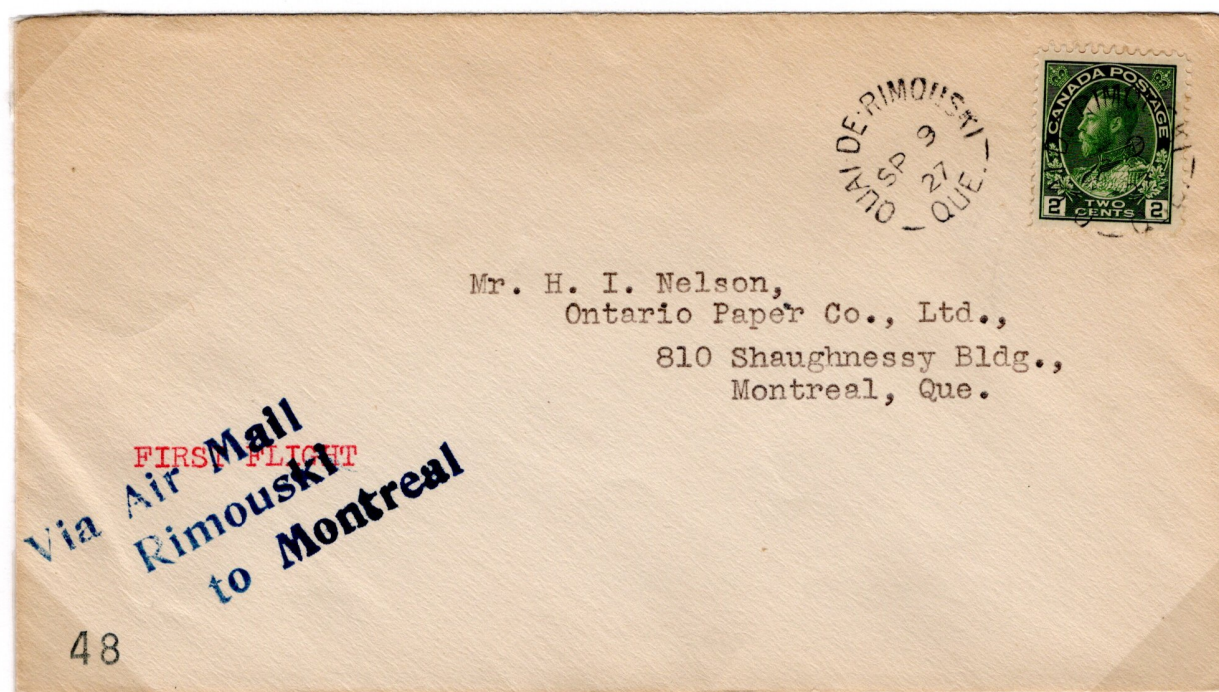
- Along the St. Lawrence from Rimouski to Montreal
- From Lac du Bonnet to mining camps in northern Manitoba
- A winter service to Pelee Island in Lake Erie
- A winter service along the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River.

The exhibit displays covers created to record how these services developed, explains why the services operated where they did, and describes how they operated.

These covers were usually produced in small quantities, and most are very scarce.

The most difficult to find covers are indicated by red dots.

The St. Lawrence Air Mail Service



Mail was carried on these new services at the regular postage rates: an extra charge for air mail was not introduced until 1928, and then only applied to some air mail services.

St. LAWRENCE: Planned Inaugural Flight September 9th 1927

This service received mail from trans-Atlantic steamships as they passed Rimouski and picked up a pilot for the St. Lawrence River. The mail was then flown to Montreal in order to speed up mail from Europe to Canada. The service also flew late mail from Montreal to Rimouski, where it was transferred to steamers going to England.

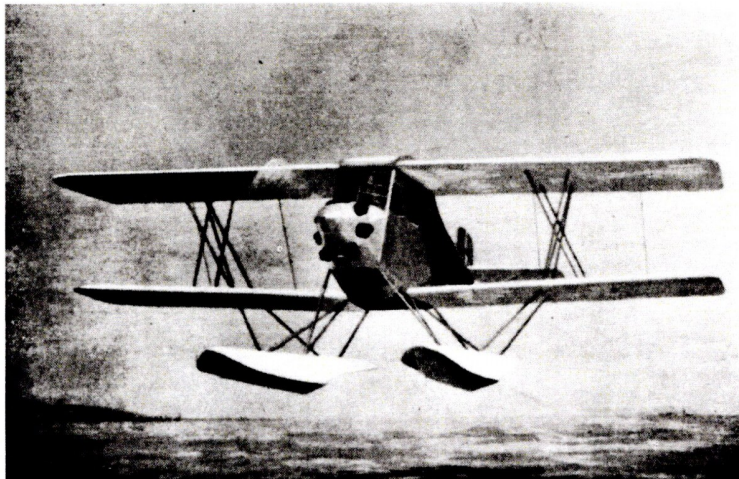
A variety of covers were produced for the inaugural flight, but there were no Post Office cachets for the flights in 1927, even though First Flight Covers were becoming a popular item with collectors.



But the plane sank!

Squadron Leader J H Tudhope R.C.A.F. flew to Montreal in a newly designed and still experimental Vickers Vanessa seaplane on September 8th. He landed during a thunderstorm, during which the floatation gear was damaged, but this was not noticed at the time.

At 8.00 am on the 9th, 500 pounds of mail was transferred from the incoming *Empress of Franc'* to the pilot boat, which then transferred them to the aircraft. As the seaplane was taxiing for take off, the floatation gear collapsed, and the aircraft sank. - The mail was rescued and sent on to Montreal, but arrived after the liner did.



Vickers Vanessa seaplane.

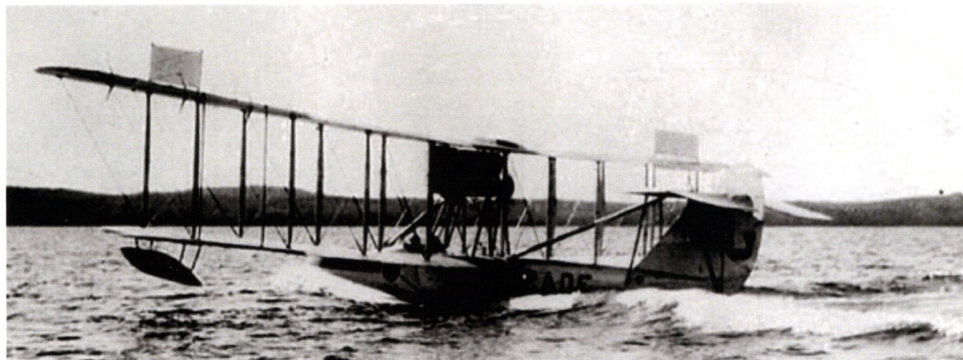
St. LAWRENCE: First successful transfer of mail - September 16th



Mailed from England - Postmarked MANCHESTER 8 SEP 1927

Manuscript "Sept 16/27" on back

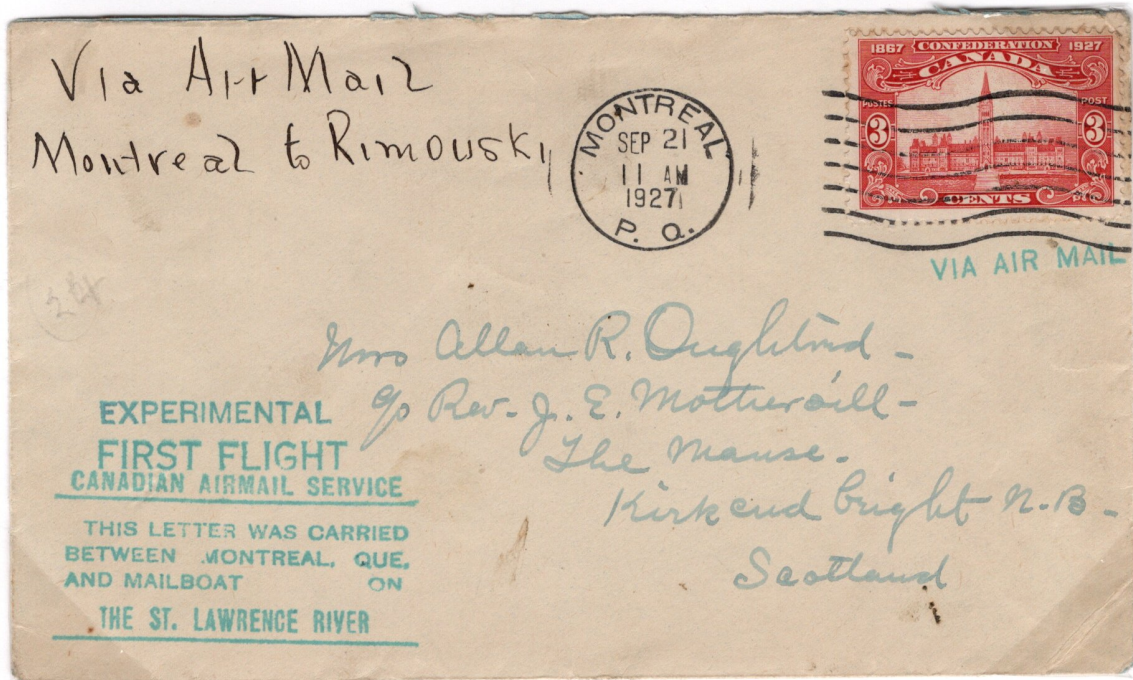
The second attempt at a Rimouski - Montreal air mail service went smoothly. - 500 pounds of mail were transferred from the *Empress of Australia*, and flown to Montreal aboard an HS-2L flying boat, chartered by the Canadian Post Office from Canadian Airways Ltd. The mail arrived in Montreal 24 hours before the ship.



Curtiss HS-2L flying boat

Covers from this flight are very rare, as it was not expected to be an inaugural flight. This cover was probably located by Montreal stamp dealer Ian C. Morgan, to whom the only other cover I have seen from this flight was addressed, and the "Via AIR MAIL" endorsement added by him.

St. LAWRENCE: First eastbound transfer - September 21st 1927



A variety of cachets can be found on covers from this flight.

The *Empress of Australia* left Montreal on the morning of September 21st. The mail was closed 8.30 a.m. 500 pounds of additional mail from across Canada, which had been received at the Montreal Post Office after the ship left, was flown to Rimouski later in the day and picked up that night by the *Empress* on her way downstream. Had it not been for the air service, this mail would have been routed to the United Kingdom via New York, and arrived four days later.

LAC DU BONNET – The Old Semi-Official Air Mail Service

On June 1st 1927, Western Canada Airways had been authorised to carry mail on a semi-official basis from its base in Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba, to mining camps at Long Lake, Rice Lake and Slate Lake.

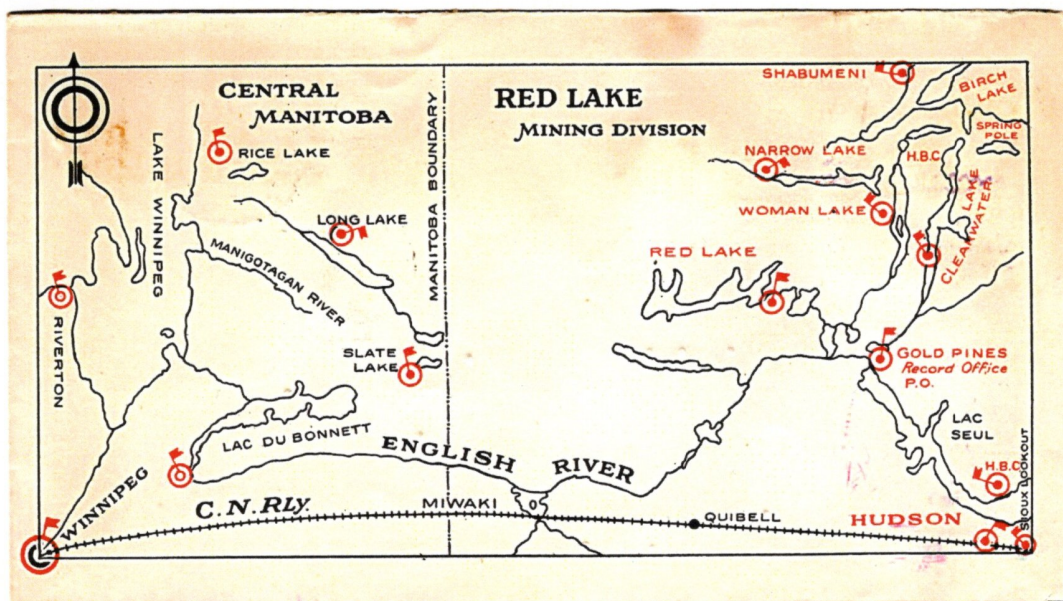
Senders had to pay 10 cents per ounce to have a letter carried, and the Post Office did not accept responsibility for delivery to the addressee.



July 1st 1927 – Special Flight to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Confederation

Flown over Western Canada Airways Lac du Bonnet – Long Lake – Rice Lake – Slate Lake Route.

The Jubilee semi-official sticker-stamp was authorised for use on that one day only



Western Canada Airways route map on back of envelope shown above

On August 1st 1927 Post Offices were opened in BISSETT on Rice Lake, and in WADHOPE on Long Lake.

LAC DU BONNET: THE NEW POST OFFICE AIR MAIL ROUTE

Following pressure from mining companies, the Post office contracted with Western Canada Airways for mail to be flown twice a week between Lac du Bonnet, Wadhope and Bisset. Mail was now flown when only franked at the regular surface rate of 2 cents per ounce.

Service from Lac du Bonnet inaugurated October 4th 1927



Postmark unreadable.

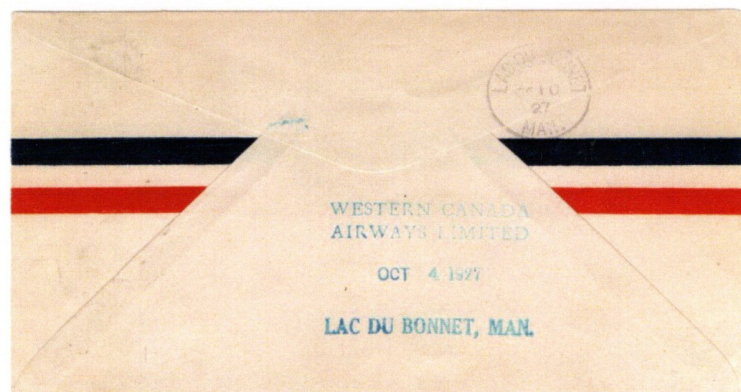
Handstamp on back:

WESTERN CANADA
AIRWAYS LIMITED

OCT 4 1927

LAC DU BONNET, MAN.

Cover flown to WADHOPE



Return flight on October 10th:
Cancelled WADHOPE on front,
LAC DU BONNET on back

Although the semi-official sticker-stamp was not needed on this cover, A.C. Roessler often added extra stamps to make his covers more eye catching.

Covers flown on the inaugural flights are extremely scarce, as little philatelic attention was paid to this change in service.

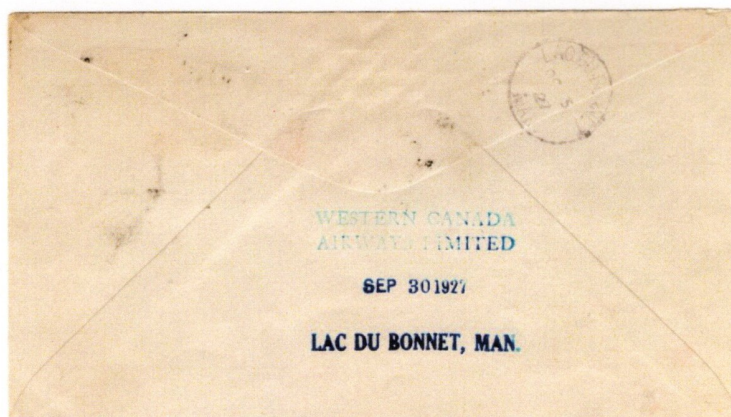
According to *The Standard Airpost Catalog* published by The Berkshire Exchange in 1933:

1927, Lac du Bonnet - Bissett - Wadhope. 2c postage. First regular Government route in Canada. No cachet. About 150 letters to each place. So far we have never even heard of any covers in existence.

October 4th: First Flight Cover to Lac du Bonnet from Bissett



**Backstamped by WCA in
LAC DU BONNET on September 30th**
Flown to BISSET post office under the
semi-official contract,
to be flown back to LAC DU BONNET on
the inaugural Post Office flight.
**Postmarked BISSET SP 30 27 on
arrival in Bissett**



The WCA sticker was postmarked BISSET OC 3 27 prior to the return flight.
Cover backstamped LAC DU BONNET OC 5 MAN after arrival in Lac du Bonnet.



Fokker Universal aircraft which operated from Lac du Bonnet.
The aircraft had a cabin which accommodated 4 passengers, but the pilot sat in an open cockpit.

MEANWHILE: ALONG THE St. LAWRENCE
Experimental service by R.C.A.F. Ottawa - Montreal - Quebec City



Postmarked MONTREAL OCT 29 11AM 1927 P.Q.

Backstamped QUEBEC 4 PM OCT 29 1927, and handstamped and initialed by S. Tanner Green, the District Superintendent of Postal Service, Quebec.

First flight using a land plane from Rimouski to Montreal.



**Postmarked
RIMOUSKI
NO11
27
P.Q.**

**This was also
the last
eastbound flight
of the season**

**This is the only
cover I have
seen from this
flight.**

PELEE ISLAND AIR MAIL SERVICE

The service was planned to give a reliable mail service to Pelee Island during the winter, when the currents around Pelee Island made the ice very unstable, and mail delivery extremely difficult.

It replaced a service from Leamington to Pelee Island by boat. The contractor was accompanied by two or three helpers who often had to climb out of the boat onto the ice, pull the boat up on the ice, over the ice and into the water again.

Experimental Flight from Pelee Island – October 28th



Backstamped
and HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

LEAMINGTON OC 29 27
TORONTO ONTARIO OCT 31 8 AM 1927



“Green” Pelee Island – best known for grapes, wine and bird watching.



Pelee Island in March 2013 - photographed by Chris Hatfield from the International Space Station

Experimental flights from Pelee Island on October 28th, November 25th, 26th and 30th are listed in *The Air Mails Of Canada and Newfoundland* (2nd edition) but very rarely seen.

December 14th - Inaugural flight to Pelee Island



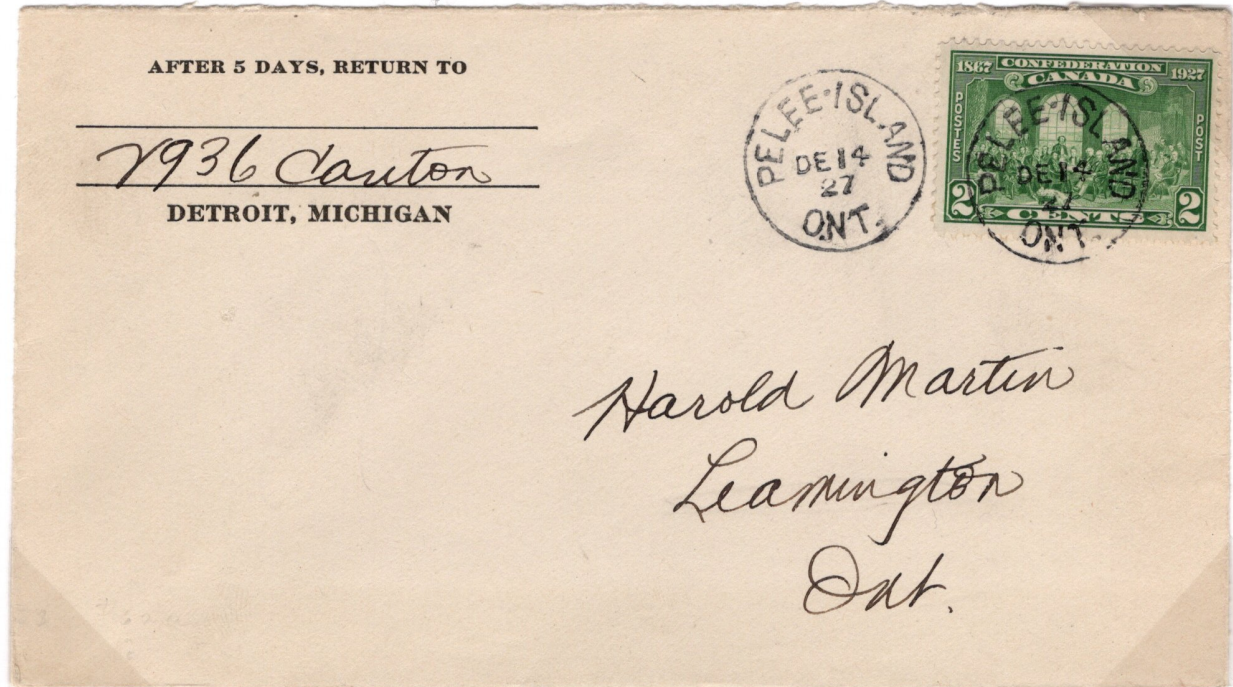
Postmarked LEAMINGTON DE13 27
Backstamped PELEE ISLAND DE 14 27

The flight was made by Floyd Banghart of London Air Transport in a Waco 9 aircraft.



Arrival of the inaugural air mail service on Pelee Island.

Air Mail from Pelee Island Inaugural flight: December 14th.



Backstamped LEAMINGTON DE 14 27

The new airmail service operated four round trips per week. It made 63 round trips during the winter of 1927-28, and carried approximately eight tons of mail.



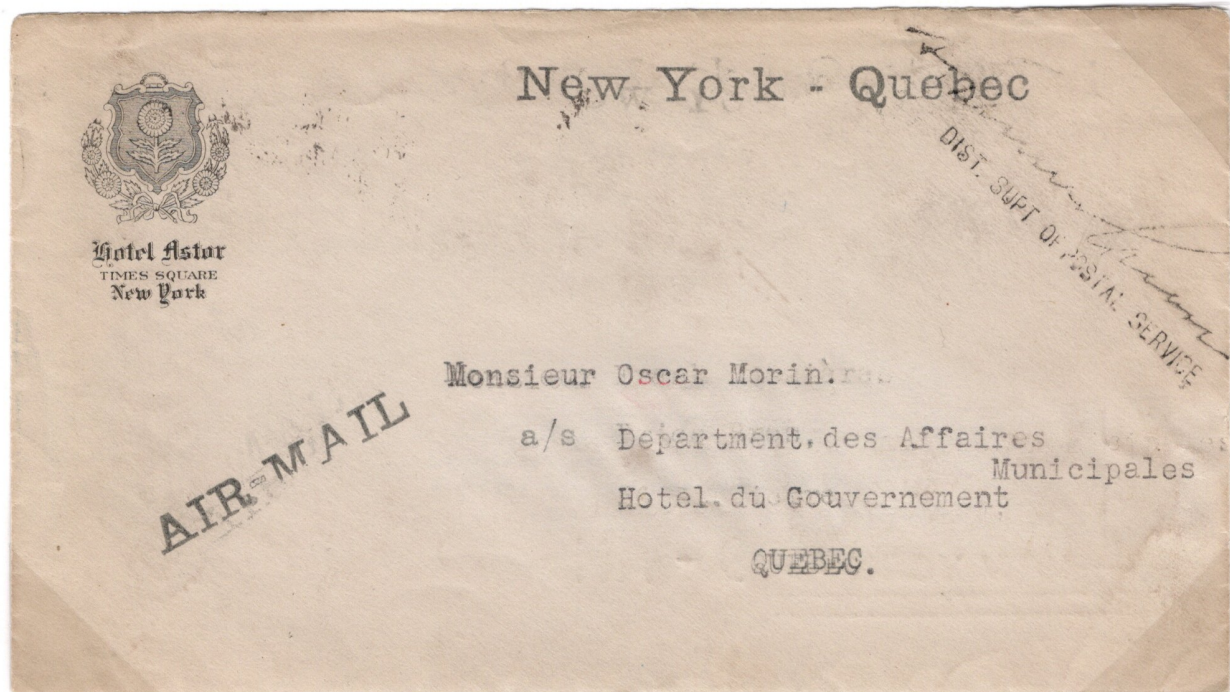
Backstamped DETROIT DEC 27 10P.M. MICH 1927

In 1927, letters from Canada to an address in the U.S.A. could be sent via a U.S. air mail route, if the fee for airmail was paid in U.S. stamps. - The 2c stamp on this cover paid for the air mail flight from Pelee Island to Leamington, and surface transport from Leamington to Detroit. - The U.S. stamp paid for the cover to travel on U.S. air mail routes between Detroit and New Jersey.

PREPARING FOR WINTER AIR MAIL IN QUEBEC

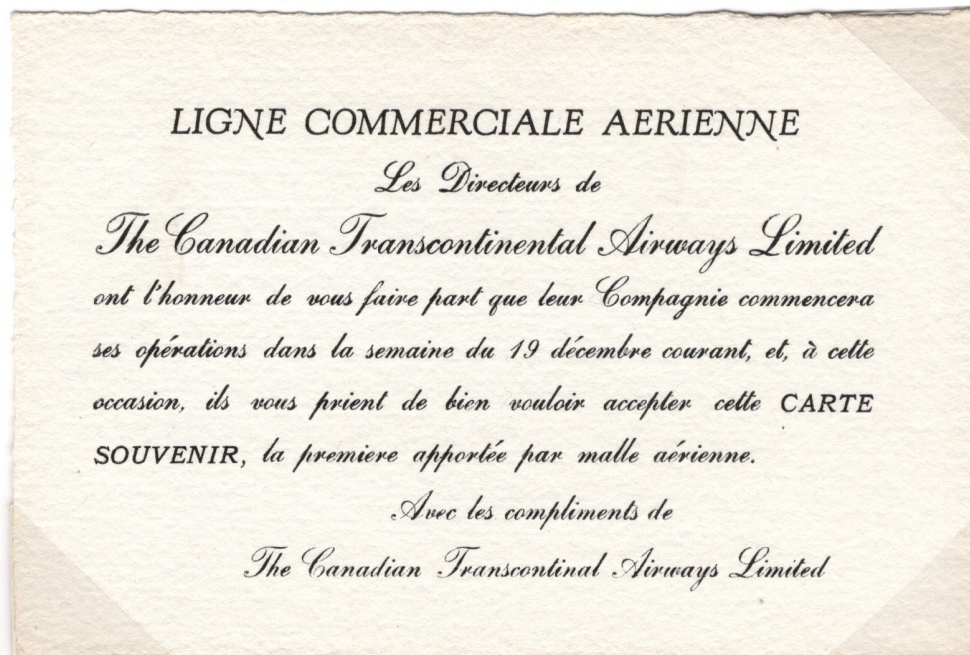
Canadian Trans-Continental Airways purchased a new Fairchild FC2-W2 aircraft, that was flown by Charles Sutton from New York to the airline's base at Lac St Agnes, which was near the end of the railway line from Montreal to La Malbaie.

Charles Sutton dropped a small packet of mail while flying over Quebec City. - The covers bore no postage or postmarks, but were put in the mail by Tanner Green, the Superintendent of Post Office Services for Quebec.



Datestamp on back: HOTEL ASTORIA NEW YORK DEC 21 9 AM
Handstamp: ADMINISTRATION DU DISTRICT POSTAL DE QUEBEC DEC 21 1927
Slogan postmark cancellation: QUEBEC 4.30 DEC 21 1927

The envelopes contained a card publicizing the company:



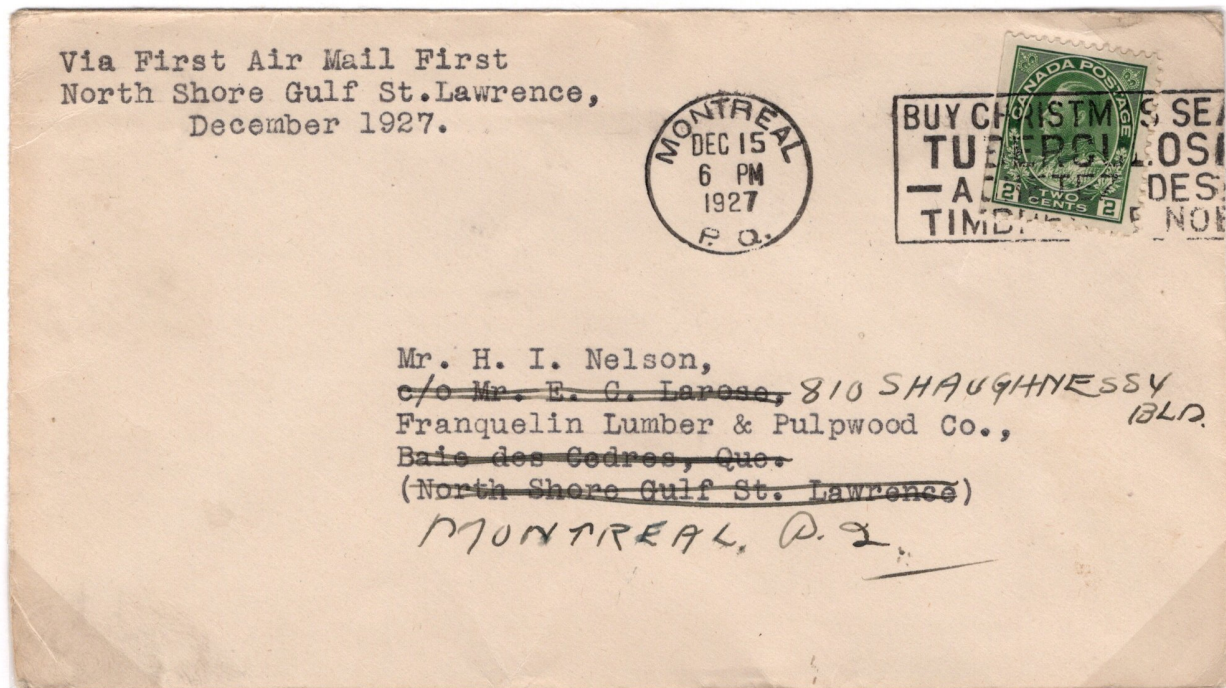
This is the only cover I have seen from this flight.

AIR MAIL ALONG THE NORTH SHORE OF THE St. LAWRENCE

December 25th 1927

There was no road along the North Shore of the St. Lawrence in 1927. There were regular mail services by ship during the summer, but in the winter ice conditions stopped the ships from reaching the shore. Before the air mail service, mail was delivered by dog-sled during the winter, and took about three weeks from LA MALBAIE (also referred to as MURRAY BAY) to SEVEN ISLANDS (known as SEPT ILES since the 1950s).

The air mail service from La Malbaie to Seven Islands dropped mail by parachute to small communities en route, as shown on the right-side map below.

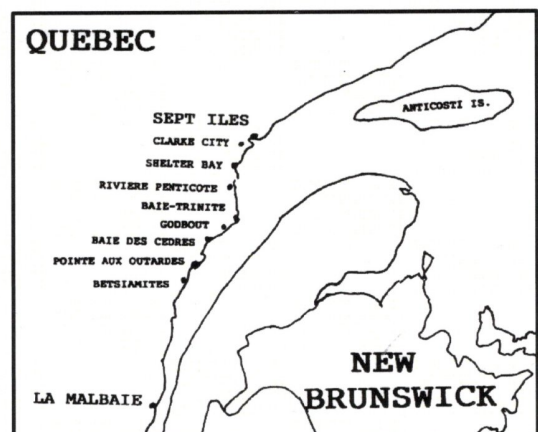


Postmarked MONTREAL DEC 15 6 PM 1927

Backstamped LA MALBAIE 24 DE 27 before the inaugural flight

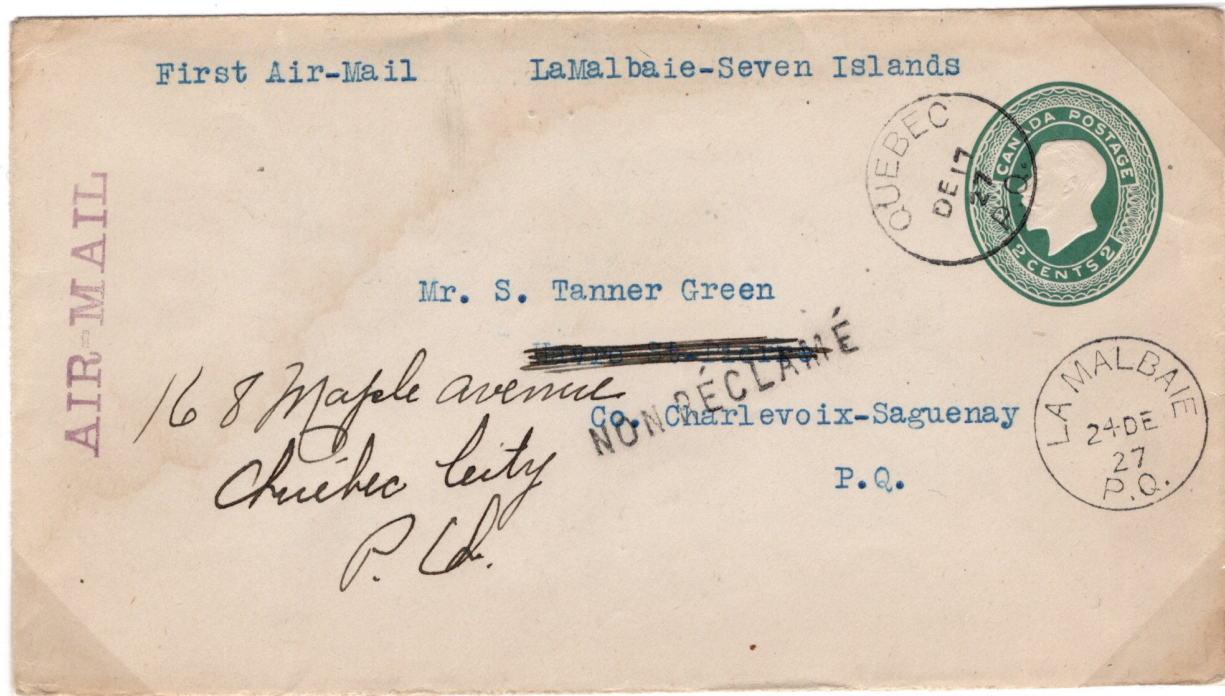
Addressed to BAIE DES CEDRES, but a mail drop to Baie des Cedres could not be made on December 25th because of a snowstorm, so the cover was carried on to Seven Islands.

Cover then sent by dog-sled to BAIE DES CEDRES where it was backstamped JAN 7 28



INAUGURAL FLIGHT TO SEVEN ISLANDS

The pilot was Charles Sutton, who was accompanied by Dr Louis Cuisinier. the General Manager of Canadian Transcontinental Airways Limited:



Postmarked QUEBEC DE 17 27 and LA MALBAIE 24 DE 27

Addressed to Mr. S. Tanner Green, Havre St. Pierre.

A note inside the cover records: "Transit of this cover: By rail from Quebec to La Malbaie (Murray Bay) by airplane (first flight) from La Malbaie to Seven Islands (349 miles) by dog-team to Havre St-Pierre (140 miles)" The cover is backstamped HAVRE ST PIERRE JA 10 28

DRAMA IN THE COCKPIT - "Dr. Cuisinier drew a gun"

According to Georgette Vachon in her book *Goggles, Helmets and Airmail Stamps*:

The Fairchild FC2 W2, piloted by Charlie Sutton, took off from Lac Ste Agnès, headed for Sept Iles. Halfway there a violent storm arose; great gusts of wind and thick clouds of swirling snow reduced visibility to zero. This was Sutton's first flight over the tempestuous north shore, and the freezing winds and blinding snow unnerved him completely. He'd never make a landing at Sept Iles. He decided to turn back.

Dr. Cuisinier knew that landing on the bay at Sept Iles would be dangerous, but he also knew that the future of the airline depended on this first mission. If they got through, the success of the airline was assured; if they were forced to turn back, it would face humiliation and disaster. Cuisinier ordered Sutton to continue on and land on the bay. The pilot refused, claiming his authority as captain of the plane, master of the ship. Both men were obstinate; neither would yield. There was a struggle, despite the fact that the slightest jar of the instrument panel would send the plane crashing. Finally Dr. Cuisinier drew a gun, and Sutton was forced to obey.

As they came down to land, flying blind in the driving snow, the high winds caught the plane and brought it smack down on the water. The men were trapped in the body of the plane, and were in imminent danger of drowning in the high waves of the St. Lawrence. They started to drift, pulled by the strong current of the river.

Sutton wanted to brave the icy water and swim for shore, but if the pilot left the controls, the plane was bound to sink. Dr. Cuisinier again drew his gun, and Sutton remained. Fortunately some fishermen on the shore saw the plane in distress, and came to their rescue.

RETURN FLIGHT TO LA MALBAIE - 27th DECEMBER 1927

The aircraft had run out of fuel shortly after landing on December 25th, which is why it was drifting. The rescue had been organized by Postmaster Georges Blouin, who had seen the plane's landing as he had been ordered by telegraph to await the plane's arrival. The fisherman anchored the aircraft, and rowed Charles Sutton and Dr. Cuisinier ashore.

On December 26th Georges Blouin procured a motor, and the aircraft was towed ashore.

The plane left Seven Islands late in the morning on December 27th. - There had been great difficulty starting the very wet engine.



Postmarked SEVEN ISLANDS DE 25 27

Backstamped SEVEN ISLANDS DE 26 27

On arrival in LA MALBAIE the mail was sent by

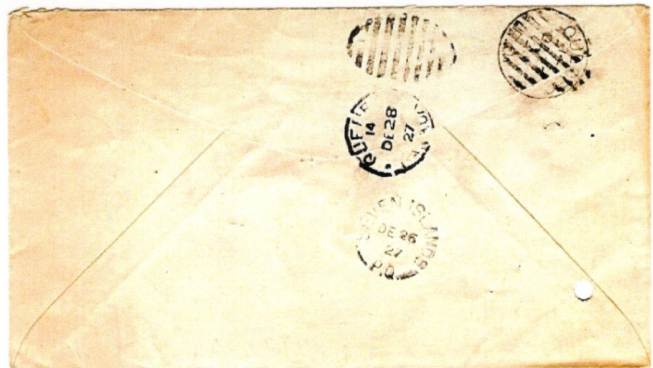
train to Quebec City and backstamped

QUEBEC 14 DE 27 28 - under obliterator

then QUEBEC 14 DE 28 27

Two Receiver handstamps on front

RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE DEC 29 1927



A Fairchild FC-2W
Used on the North Shore
Air mail route



A.C. ROESSLER'S NORTH SHORE COVERS

FLOWN or FAKE?

On December 25th mail was dropped by parachute over SHELTER BAY (now Trois Rivières).



Postmarked
LA MALBAIE DE 24 27

Second cancellation on front
SHELTER BAY DE 26 27

Backstamped
LA MALBAIE 27 DE 27



- Since mail had to be dropped by parachute on December 25th, how did this cover get back to LA MALBAIE on December 27th?
- Why are the cancellations on this cover different to those on the cover to R.H. McNabb on the previous sheet?

The cover was prepared by A.C. Roessler, who is a very controversial figure among aerophilatelists. Most of his covers are genuine, and can be rare and expensive. But some of his covers are fakes and fantasies: in 1933 he was convicted of forging covers from Sir Hubert Wilkins Arctic exploration trip in 1931.

Mail flown back from Shelter Bay is listed in some catalogues published in the 1930's.

However, when Georges Blouin was interviewed by Derek Rance, (*Canadian Aerophilatelist*, Dec, 1995)

- Georges Blouin was adamant that the plane would not have stopped at Shelter Bay on its return flight, as it had left Seven Islands late and needed to get back to its base before dark
- Georges also commented that the village postmasters were very poorly paid, and that favour cancelling for pay could be a very likely explanation for this cover.