

The Cover Story: The American Legion & Aviation Development in the 1920s – 1930s

Part I of III by Phil Fettig

One of the side benefits to being a Stamp Dealer is that sometimes when you make a purchase, you get philatelic things to play with before you try to sell them. Over the years I had been stockpiling airpost covers to do something with “when I got around to it”! It was also clear that I needed an education. When Ann made a nice purchase of covers at the store, I sat down with a set of American Air Mail Catalogs and started researching some of the stockpile. (Remember me saying I like to buy books more than stamps? - that 5th Edition set is worth much more than I paid!). Now we can jump to the early 2000's when the FSDA was working to get FLOREX returned to APS World Series status for exhibits. Help was needed in obtaining a certain number of frames so I worked on an airpost exhibit which, by the way, gained a Silver, the high water mark of my exhibiting life. This article is a result of some of the work on that exhibit.

The four stamps shown on the newsletter cover (Figure 1 a-b-c-d) represent clues to one of the historical timelines I learned from working on the exhibit. Of course, Stamp Collecting is the foundation for the existence of our club, this newsletter and the reason we have our varied interest in different subject areas. Hopefully the rest of the article will show how the subjects of the remaining 3 stamps work into telling a story. Figure (2) shows another clue in that this early airpost cover (1921) commemorates a National Convention of the American Legion and was carried on a flight between Kansas City and Omaha. Thus the cover brings together stamp collecting, World War I and veterans along with pioneer aviation.

As a philatelic side note, the cover is also addressed to A.C. Roessler, a pioneer of collecting and dealing airpost covers. He addressed covers to himself and to “A. C. Roe” which, along with his airpost newsletter contributed in a major way to early airpost philately. Unfortunately he also was later arrested for his involvement in producing faked cancellations on philatelic covers which tarnished his spot in philatelic history.

We will all probably agree that war is not a good thing. However, sometimes even something as horrible as a war can create good for the future. World War I was no different in this period of hardship for mankind. The airplane, although used as a weapon, gave a glimpse of something better in the future. At the start of the war, airplanes were somewhat limited in what they could accomplish and most military leaders did not give them a high priority. As time and events progressed, so did the development of the plane's operational abilities. They could fly higher and faster for a longer distance. Better guns were installed, and a really important factor, they could carry a heavier load of bombs. Of course, the important keywords for the future were not heavier loads of weapons, but the ability to maybe carry freight and people.

To keep these planes in the air, large numbers of pilots and trained ground crews were required. This early part of the 20th century was a time when young Americans were working in factories and with farm equipment more complicated than a plow. Of course, we can't forget a growing automobile industry also. So, as all wars hopefully do, WWI ended and peace arrived, at least for a while. One product of the war's end was a surplus of thousands of airplanes, and even more important, a supply of trained pilots and mechanics.

Service in the military, especially in an overseas conflict, often gives young men a taste of life and adventure that was never even imagined let alone experienced up to that point in their lives. Upon returning home some only wanted to return to families and the lives they were living prior to WW I. However many others wanted to continue the more active life recently experienced using the skills learned in military duties such as flying, or at least working around aviation related activities. At the same time veterans also have a tendency to want to be around others who have shared the same experiences.

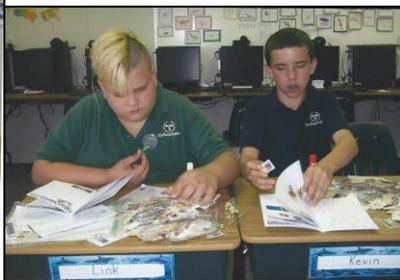
[Editor's Note: Part II will appear in the May Newsletter and Part III will be in the June issue.]

Helping Those in Need by The Editor

In my capacity as President of the Florida Stamp Dealers' Association and the General Chairman of FLOREX I am often placed in the position of being asked to donate to one cause or another. Common sense requires the request to be vetted before action can be taken. From experience I have learned that there are way too many folks out there, trying to get something for nothing – for personal gain. Sad, but true.

In the middle of August of 2013 I received an email from Jean O'Brien that requested material for use in a special needs class at the DeLaSalle Academy located in Fort Myers. After some back n' forth emails I agreed to have the Central Florida Stamp Club provide material and have the FSDA pay the postage.

The material was everything that was desired and more. The following pictures and write-up came from Jean O'Brien who was extremely appreciative of the donation.



“Thanks to your fabulous response this past summer to my inquiry about stamps for my class at the DeLaSalle Academy (for mentally-challenged children) in the Fort Myers, Florida, it was a fun day for all and excitement really reigned when one of the boys found a stamp with his birth year – 2002! Of course, in their kit they received a bag of stamps, but I had such an abundant supply, I shocked the class with the question, “Anybody in the class grabby?” No one said yes, so I said “Too bad, I thought we could have some fun with a stamp grab” ... and we did! So thanks to you and The Central Florida Stamp Club, I think we have started another group of budding collectors. As you requested attached are some of the photos you may use in the FSDA (and/or CFSC) Newsletter. If you use one of the photos, may I have a copy of the newsletter – the kids would be thrilled.” Jean O'Brien, Lehigh Acres, March 2014.