

The "Columbia" Flight

by Dan Meyerson

To the collector who decides to specialize in Newfoundland flown covers the "Columbia" flight offers quite a field — albeit an expensive one. This is true because there are four different covers that should be in a complete "Columbia" collection, and possibly a fifth.

The "Miss Columbia," a Bellanca monoplane arrived at Harbor Grace on September 22, 1930. It was to leave from Harbor Grace on a scheduled trans-Atlantic flight, and it was to be piloted by Capt. Errol Boyd with Lt. Harry P. Connor as the navigator. On September 24, Capt. Boyd agreed with the postal authorities to take a bag of mail not exceeding 5 pounds on this flight across the ocean. As a result of the agreement reached between the two parties, on September 25 the newspaper carried the announcement that 160 letters would be accepted for this flight. Subsequently it was determined that 300 letters could be flown but it was too late to pass this information on to the public since the announcement had already been published in the morning newspapers.

Since there was no time to issue a special stamp the Newfoundland postal authorities decided to follow the procedure used in the case of the previous flights such as the "Hawker, Martinsyde, Alcock-Brown, Di-Pinedo, and Halifax," namely to surcharge one of their current stamps. The stamp that they chose was the 36c Caribou #126, and it was surcharged in black as follows: "Trans Atlantic—Air Mail—By B. M.—Columbia—September 25,—1930—Fifty Cents." Because of the urgent need for speed the surcharging was done at the offices of the "Royal Gazette."

Three sheets of 100 stamps each were broken up into blocks of 4 and the 75 blocks were then surcharged. This procedure was followed because the setting for the surcharge consisted of four subjects. There are minor differences in each of the subjects and the stamps can definitely be plated.

Of the 75 blocks surcharged, 63 comprising 252 stamps were placed on sale at the G. P. O. at St. Johns while the balance of 12 blocks or 48 stamps were sold at Harbor Grace. Of the 252 sold at St. Johns, only 110 were used to frank letters while all of the 48 stamps sent to Harbor Grace were used on letters.

This amounted to a total of 158 letters, but as we mentioned previously the postal authorities learned that 300 letters could be flown. As a result a number of letters bearing fifty cents in ordinary postage were also carried. When the plane was ready to take off from Harbor Grace it was evidently discovered that the letters added at St. Johns had not brought the total weight to five pounds, so several postcards bearing four cents postage were also added to those being flown.

Finally the plane took off from Harbor Grace on October 10, and reached the Scilly Islands, near Land's End, England, on October 11. The covers with the exception of the postcards were backstamped on October 13.

The 110 surcharged stamps used on the letters posted at St. Johns were all postmarked there on September 25, and the letters were then sent to Harbor Grace where they were again postmarked on October 9, the day before the plane left. Those covers bearing unsurcharged stamps that were added at St. Johns on September 25, were accorded the same treatment.

The 48 surcharged stamps sold at Harbor Grace that were used to frank letters were not canceled until October 9, and bear just that date postmarked on the face. The postcards also bear just the October 9 postmark from Harbor Grace. Many of the covers are known bearing the autographs of Capt. Boyd, the pilot, and Lt. Connors, the navigator.

The flown cover specialist should strive to have in his collection a cover bearing the surcharged stamp postmarked at St. Johns on September 25, and again at Harbor Grace on October 9. He should also strive to obtain one of the surcharged stamps on a cover postmarked only at Harbor Grace on October 9. In addition one of the covers bearing the unsurcharged stamps used at St. Johns on September 25, should also be in the collection as well as one of the postcards used at Harbor Grace on October 9.

Although I have never seen one it is very possible that some letters bearing

fifty cents in ordinary postage were added to the mailbag at Harbor Grace on October 9, in order to bring the weight up to five pounds. If such covers do exist they would provide a fifth cover to complete the collection.

The complete list is as follows:

1. Posted at St. Johns on September 25 (A) Cover bearing surcharged stamp (110) (B) Cover bearing fifty cents in ordinary stamps (?)
2. Posted at Harbor Grace on October 9 (A) Cover bearing surcharged stamp (48) (B) Postcard bearing four cents in ordinary stamps (?) (C) Cover bearing fifty cents in ordinary stamps*

*Existence unreported

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