



“Golden Age of Flight” & A Postal Thief!

Michael L. Wilson

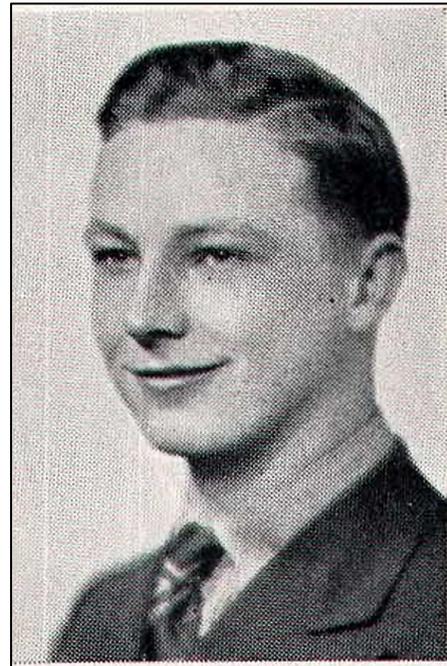
Greater Philadelphia Stamp & Collectors Club

November 18, 2025

The Cast of Characters



Asst. PM
Herman Pietsch
(aka "Uncle
Herman") as a
corporal during
the Spanish-
American War



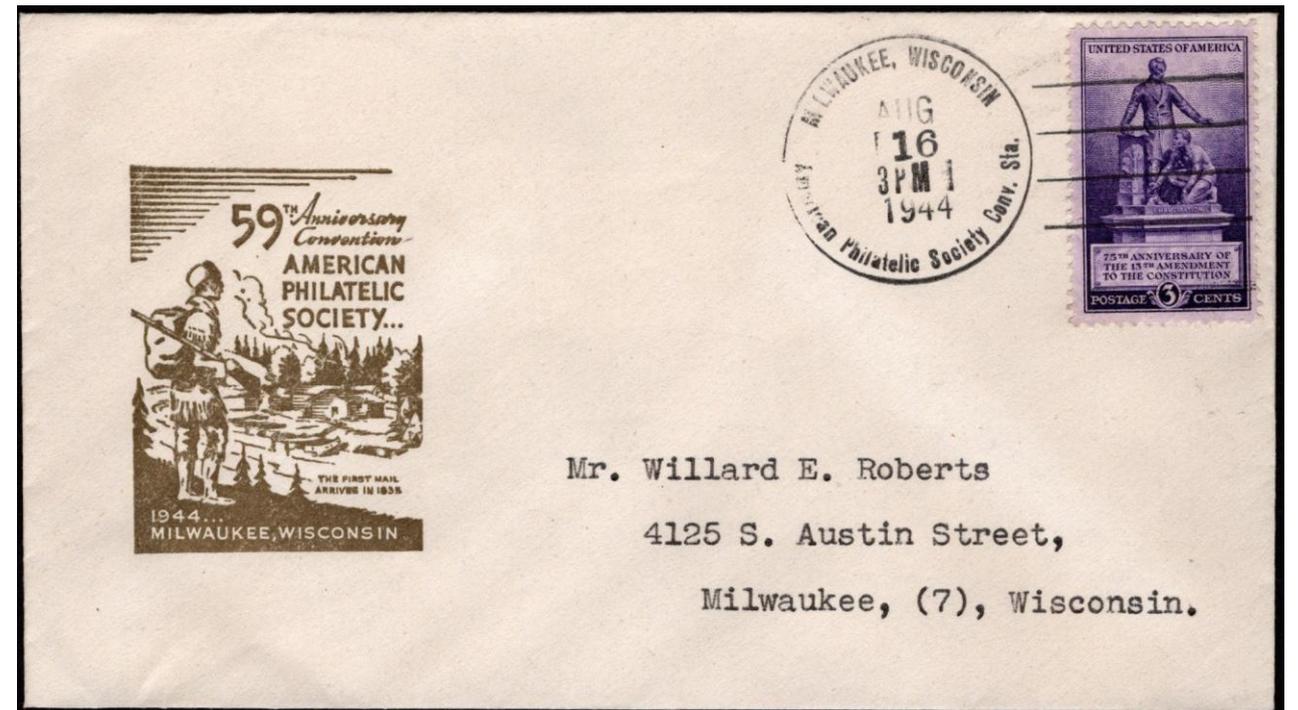
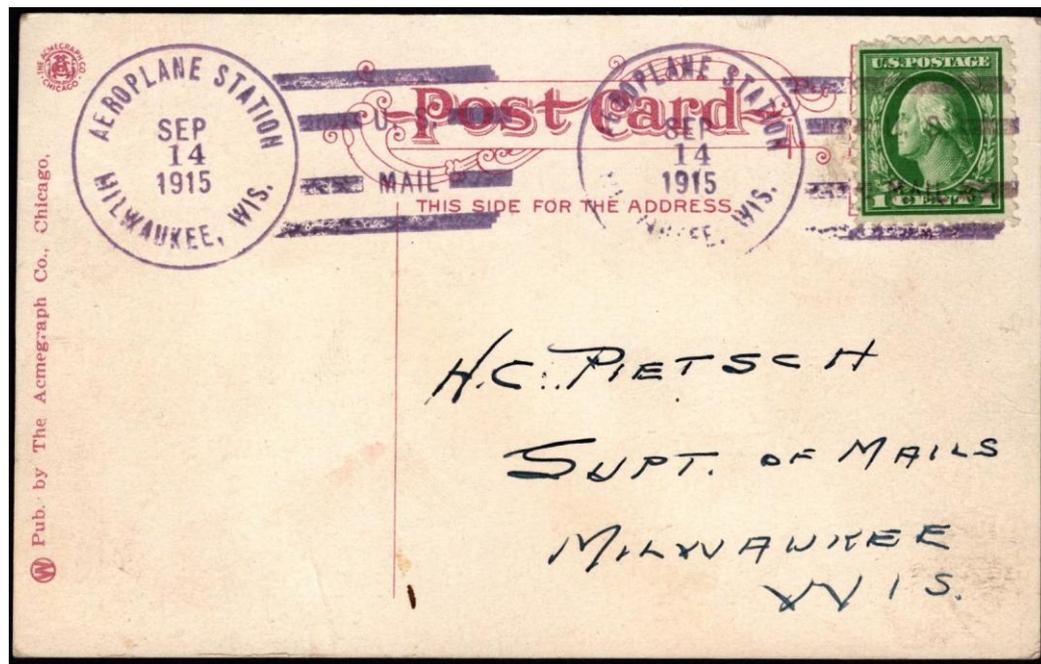
1939 high
school picture
of Willard
Roberts



PM Peter Piasecki (right)
posing with plane
carrying first contract air
mail from Milwaukee,
6/7/1926

*Willard's older sister, Milo, is named on some covers but most are addressed to Willard.

Collection Spans 1915 to 1944



8/16/1944 postmarked cover w/ 1944
APS convention cachet from
Milwaukee

Post card flown on experimental airmail
flight staged in Milwaukee 9/14/1915.
Picture on back: Federal Building where
Uncle Herman & PM Piasceki worked

Glamor of Flight Is Captured...



Postal card flown on *Graf Zeppelin's* 1st flight U.S.-Germany October 1928



Post card carried by *Graf Zeppelin* on last leg of its Europe-Pan America flight June 1930

Cover from *Graf Zeppelin's* round-the-world flight August 1929 signed by both Uncle Herman & PM Piasecki



...As Is the Tragedy



A Boeing 40B-4 crashed into a mountain on 1/22/1931, killing the pilot. The wreck was found a week later

Collection Has 1st CAM Flights from Wisconsin...

CAM #9
Milwaukee-
Chicago,
6/7/1926

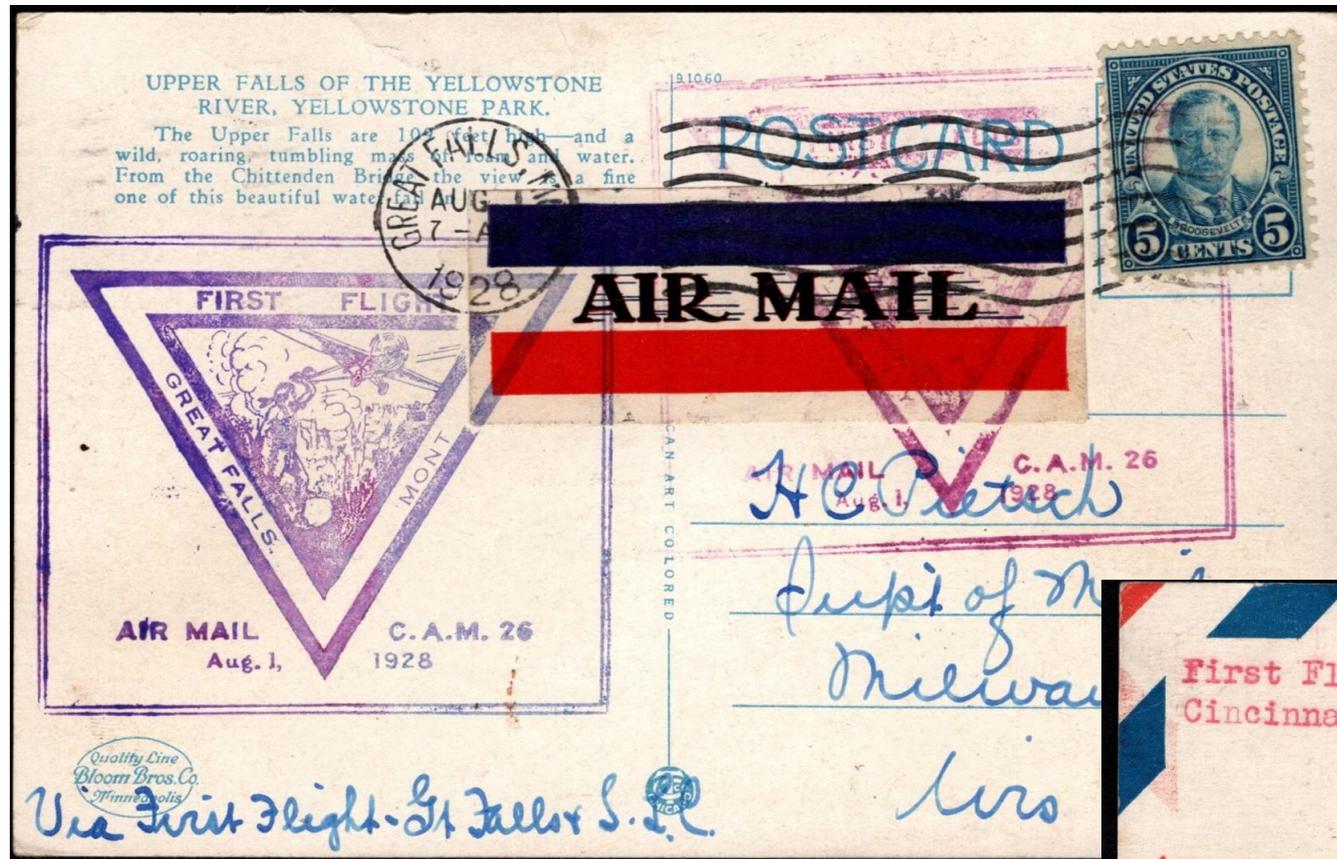


CAM #9 extended
to Wisconsin's Fox
River Valley,
12/15/1928

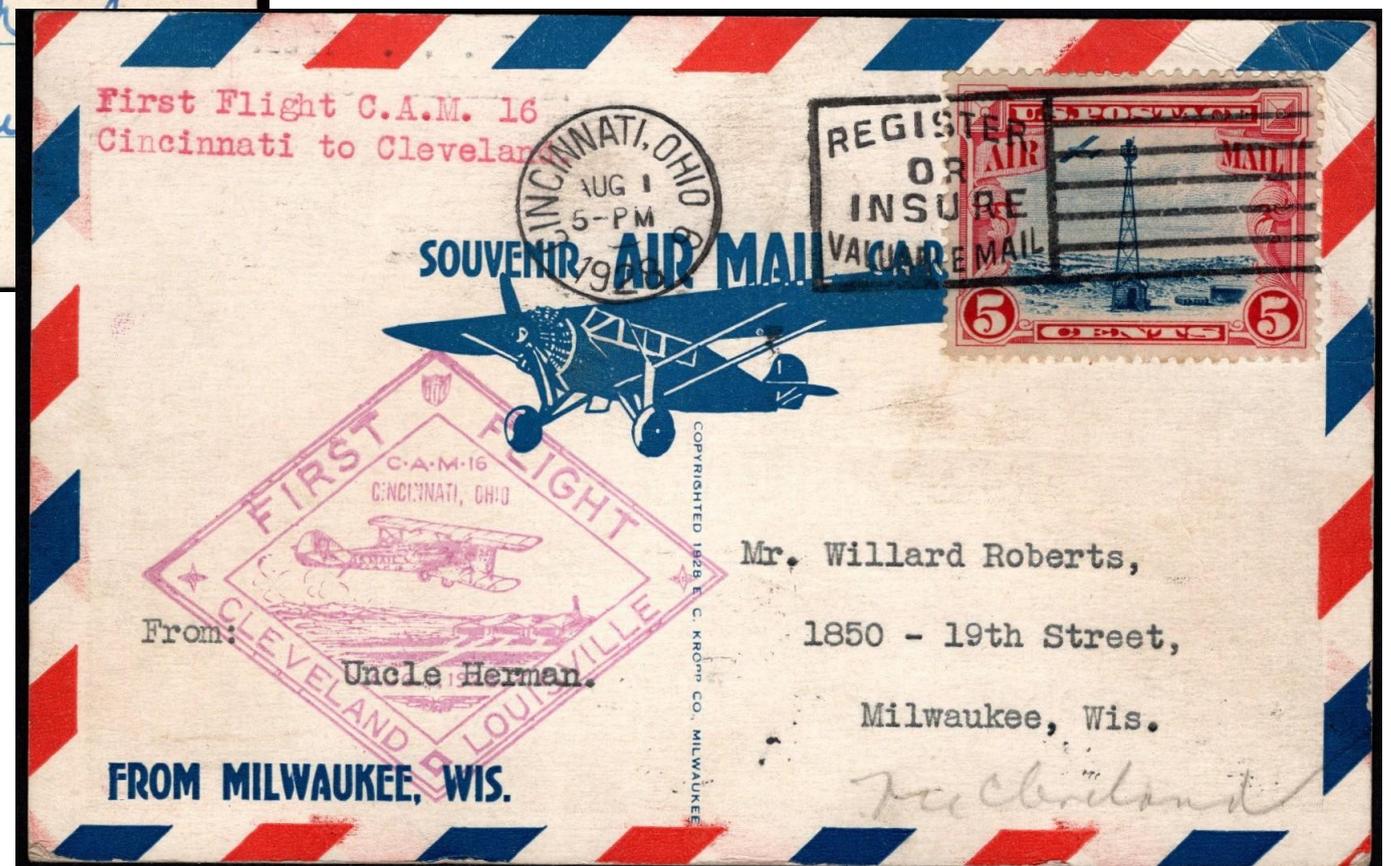


"Greetings" enclosure in
CAM #9 extension flight
cover signed by Tom
Watson, a Fond du Lac
letter carrier

...From Elsewhere in the U.S. ...



CAM #26 Great Falls MT-Salt Lake City, 8/1/1928



CAM #16 Cincinnati-Cleveland, 8/1/1928

...And From FAM Routes and Canada & Mexico



FAM #5 Miami-Cristobal, Canal Zone (Panama), 2/4/1929 (left) & FAM #5 Cristobal-Miami, 2/10/1929 (right). Charles Lindbergh piloted a Sikorsky S-38 flying boat on both legs.



FFC Winnipeg, Manitoba-Calgary, Alberta, 12/10/1928

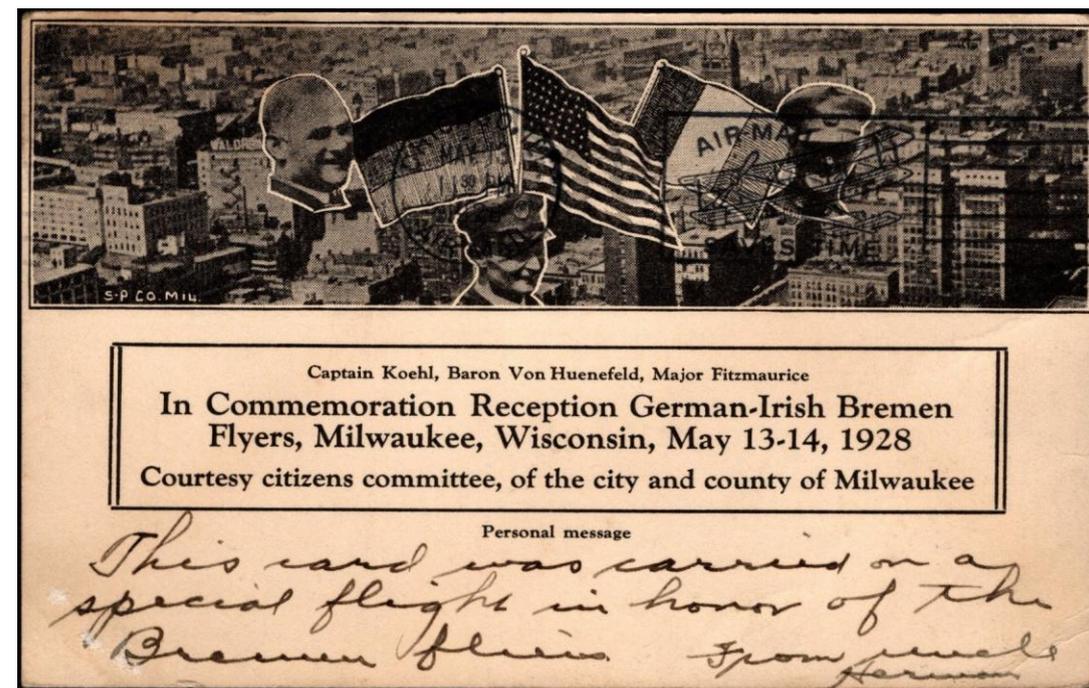
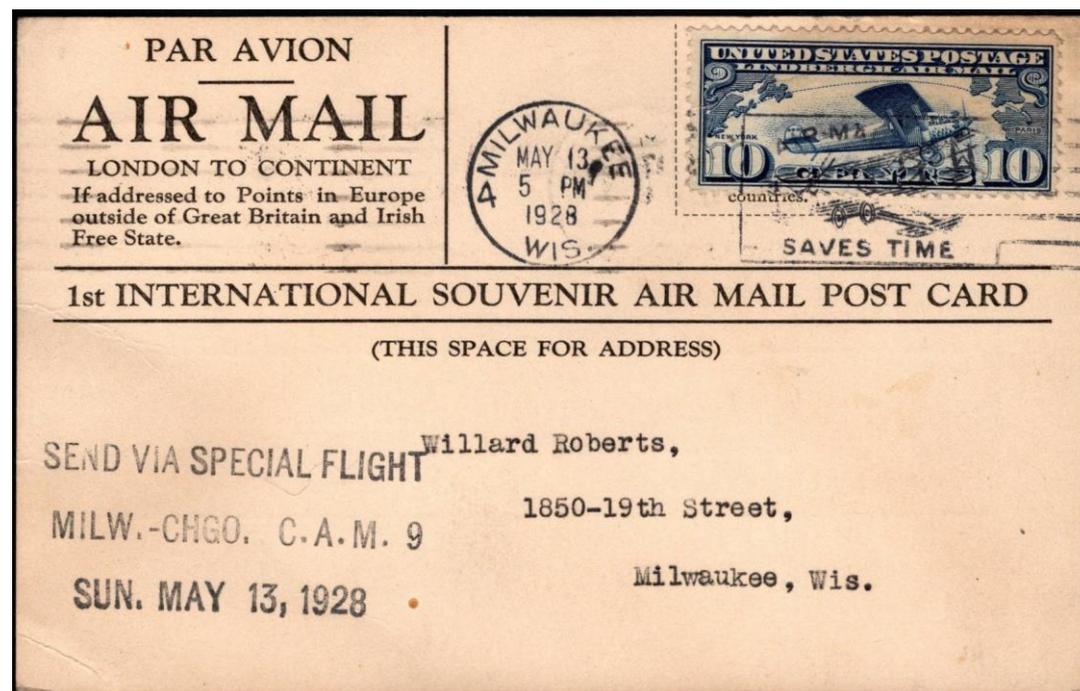


FFC Mexico City-Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, 10/1-2/1928

Plenty of Souvenir Mail from Milwaukee...



8/1/1928 cover celebrating advent of 5-cent airmail rate & 1st ever (and only!) pick-up of mail at a post office by a plane (Fairchild FC-2 w/folding wings). Events reported by *Milwaukee Leader* included a parade & giant talking mailbox.



"Bremen Flyers" - two Germans & one Irishman - made 1st east-to-west transatlantic flight 4/12-13/1928. Their success was widely toasted, including in Milwaukee, 5/13-14/1928.

...Including Visits from Charles Lindbergh

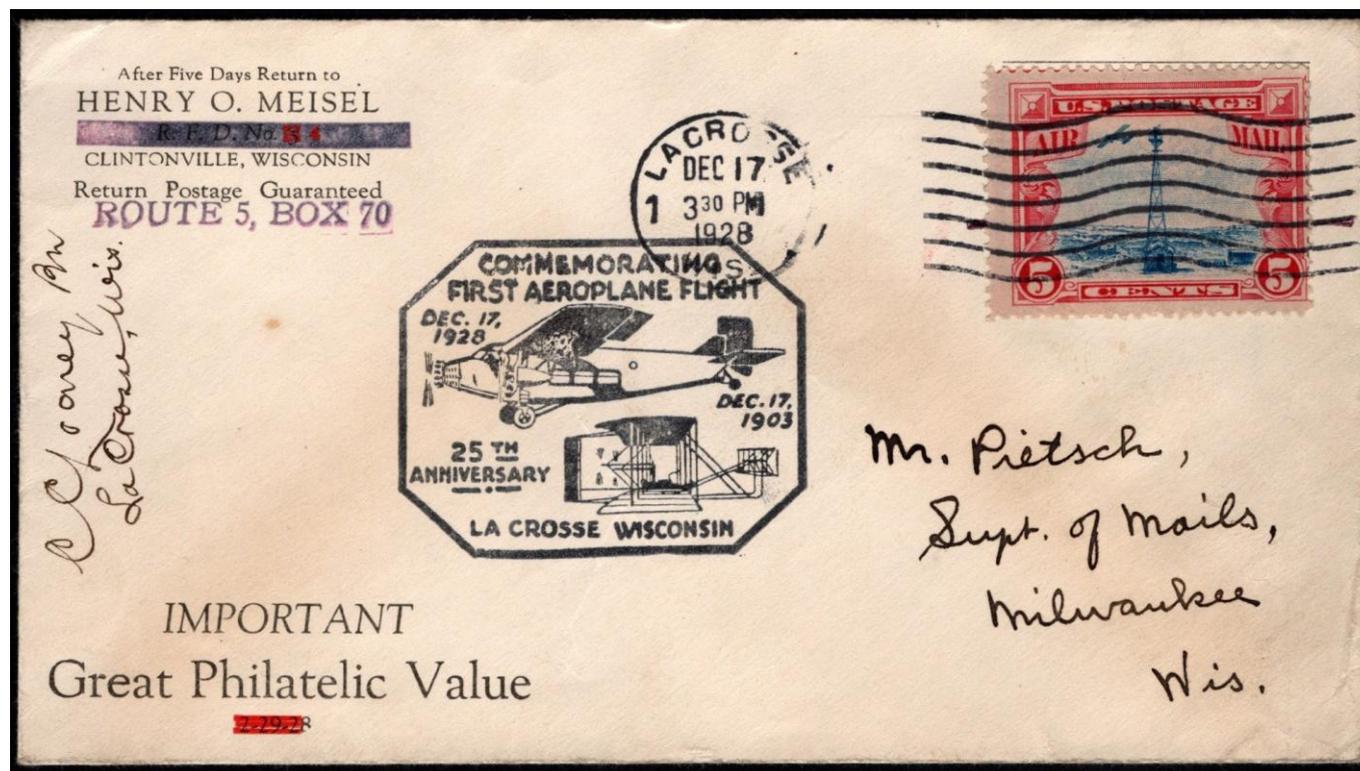


Charles Lindbergh visited Milwaukee 8/20-21/1927



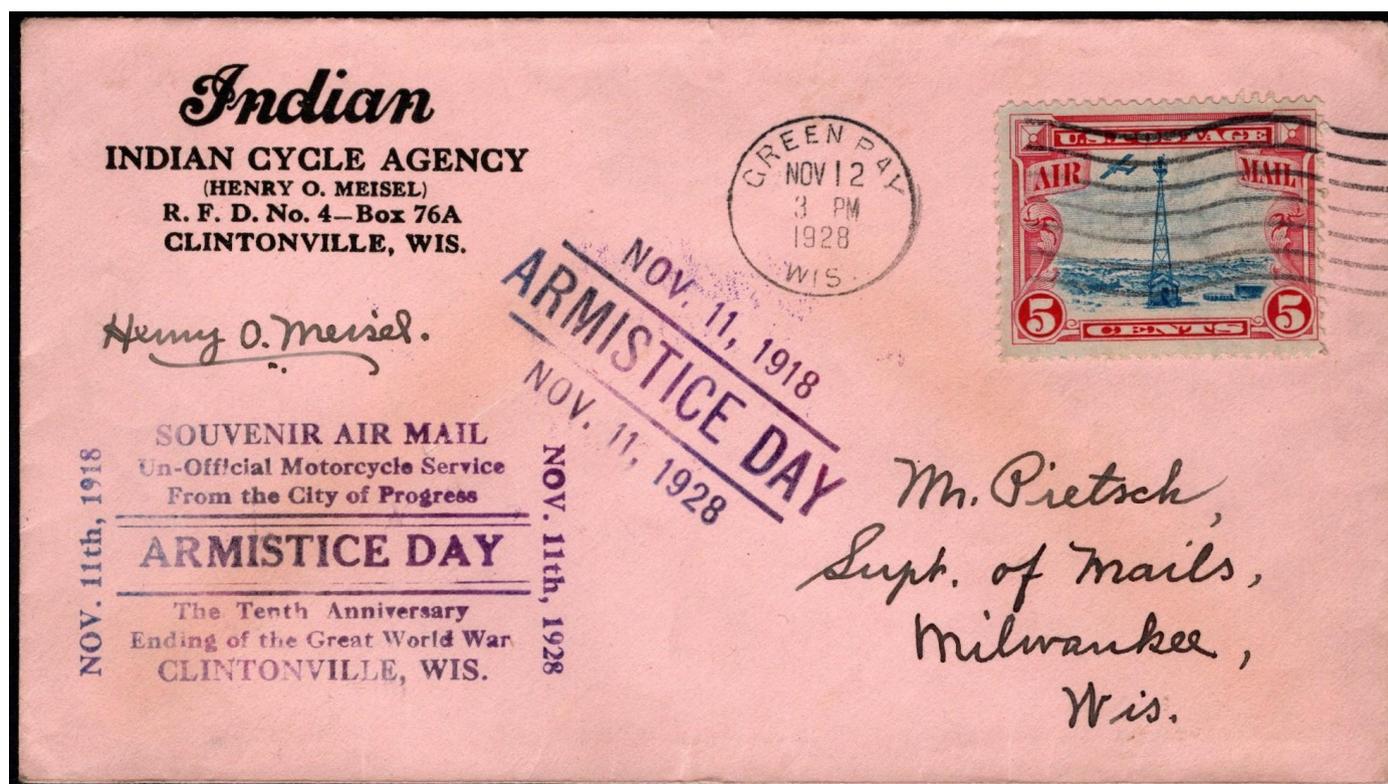
Charles Lindbergh flew mail on CAM #2, his original airmail route, on 2/20-21/1928, to promote air mail. Thousands of letters & post cards were prepared that required multiple planes. Lindbergh flew each at least some distance.

Covers of "Great Philatelic Value"!



Two covers prepared by Henry O. Meisel, a stamp collector & advocate for transporting mail via motorcycle to local airfields.

Top: Postmarked La Crosse 12/17/1928 to commemorate 25th anniversary of Wright Brothers' 1st flight. Charles C. Looney, postmaster of La Crosse, signed cover on left edge.



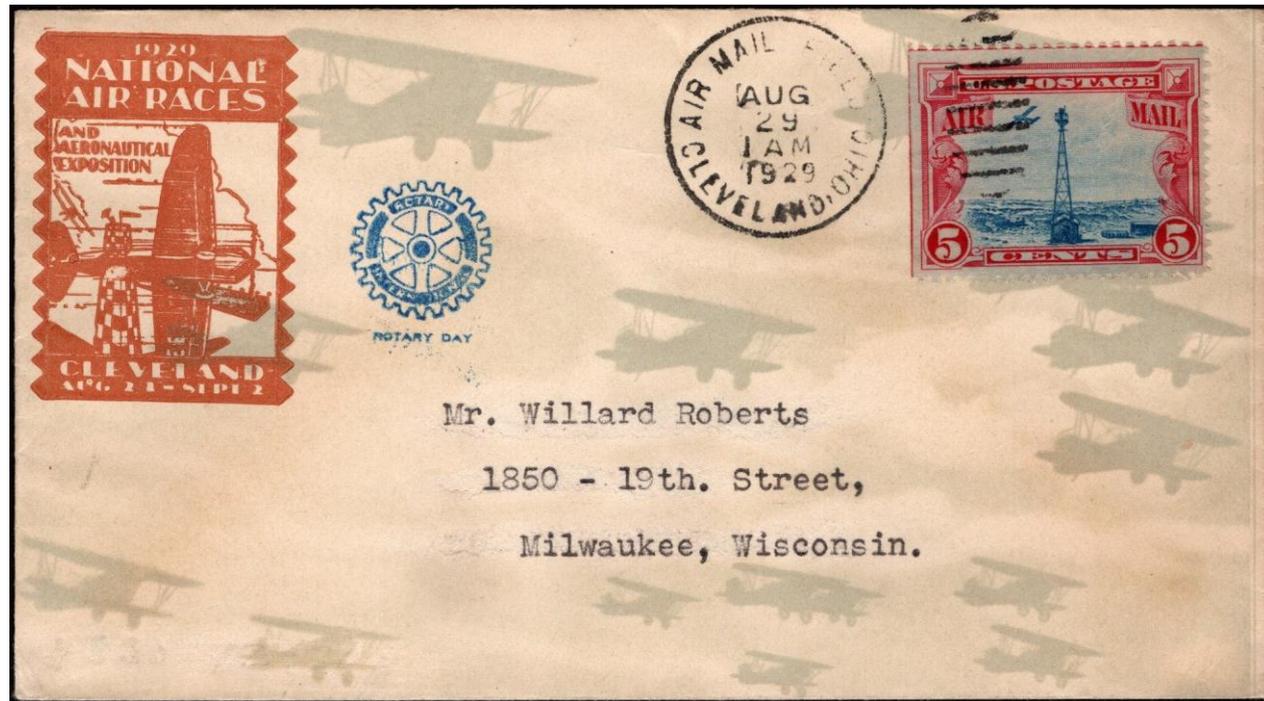
Bottom: Corner advertising cover for Indian Cycle Agency postmarked Green Bay 11/12/1928 to commemorate 10th anniversary of World War I armistice. Signed by Henry O. Meisel. Transported the 46 miles between Clintonville ("City of Progress") & Green Bay by motorcycle.

If a Cover Had the Words "Air Mail," Save It!



Covers related to 1st international aeronautical exposition (Chicago) & conference (Washington, DC), December 1928. Exposition cachet (top left); conference postmark in green (bottom left); & 2-cent and 5-cent stamps issued for conference tied to FFCs for CAM #19 (top right) & FAM #8 (bottom right).

In Fact, What Couldn't Be Celebrated with a Cover?!



1929 National Air Races, Cleveland



1929 Women's Air Derby, Santa Monica-Cleveland

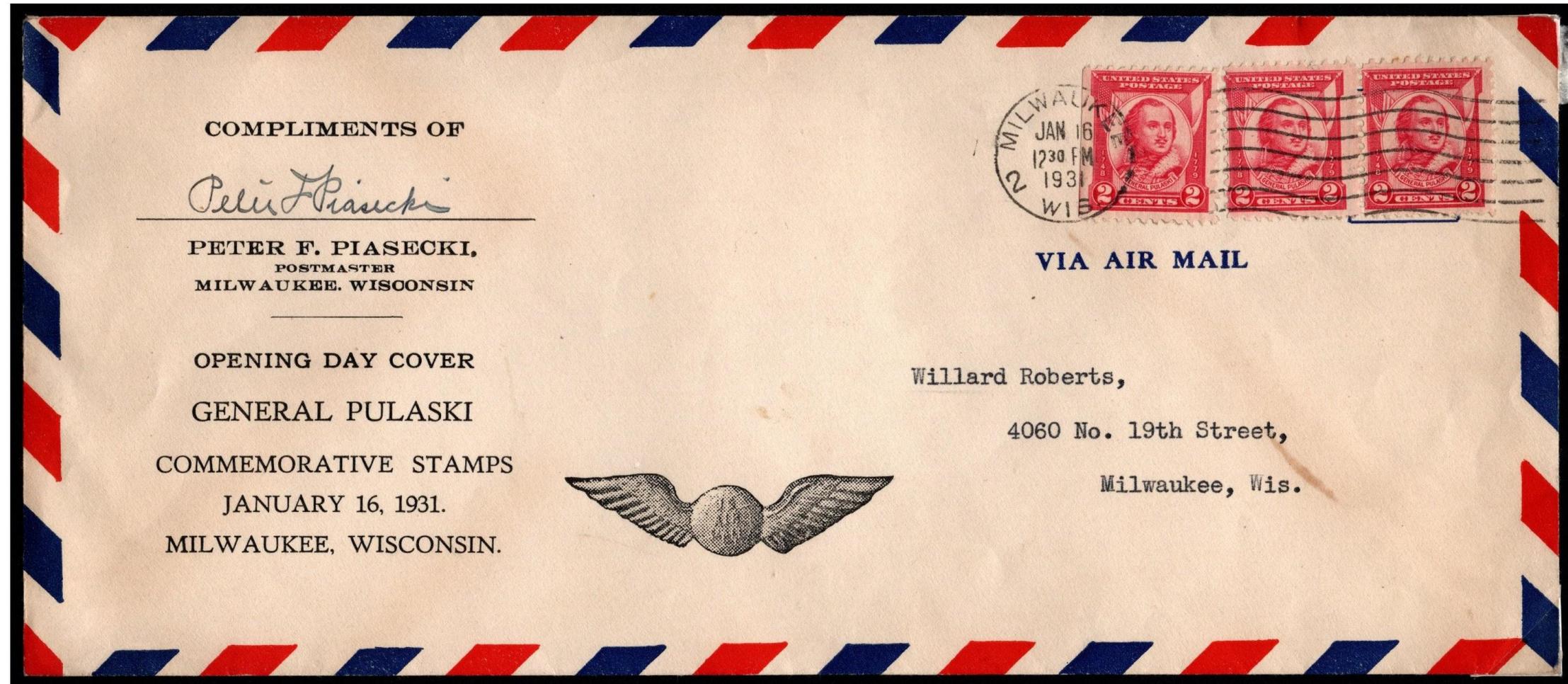


1929 Army Air Maneuvers, Ohio.



1929 New York Seaplane Airport dedication

In Early 1931, the Covers Stopped Coming - But Why?



First Day Cover for General Casimir Pulaski commemorative issue postmarked Milwaukee 1/16/1931. Milwaukee was 1 of 11 First Day of Issue cities.

Because Uncle Herman Was Caught Stealing Money From the Mail!



"Our inequality materializes our upper class, vulgarizes our middle class, brutalizes our lower class."—Matthew Arnold.

The Milwaukee Leader

HOME EDITION

Vol. 20—No. 138. TUESDAY EVENING, MAY 19, 1931. Entered as second-class matter August 25, 1920, at the postoffice at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, under the Act of March 3, 1879. PRICE THREE CENTS

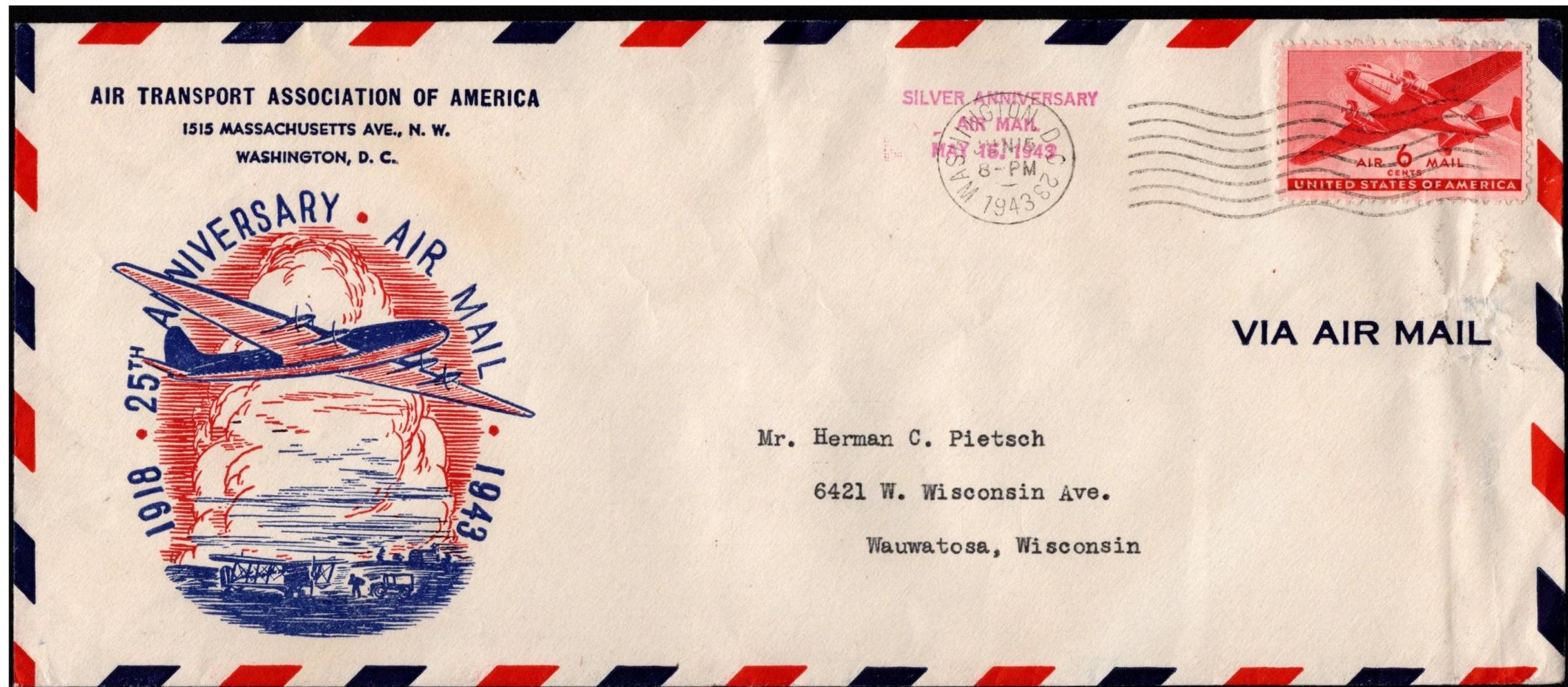
SAY PIETSCH ROBBED MAIL TO GET THRILL

On 5/18/1931, Uncle Herman, a 30-year postal employee, was arrested for stealing money from the mail.

He didn't need the money. He said he did it because he got "a thrill in picking out the letters which contained money."

He was found guilty on 12/15/1932 & sentenced to 5 years at Leavenworth. Paroled in July 1935, he died at age 93 in 1973 never having worked again.

Yet Uncle Herman's Passion for Air Mail Never Lessened



Cover mailed to Herman Pietsch in 1943, 8 years after he was released from prison, was added to Willard's collection

The Rest of the Cast

- Willard enlisted in the Navy during World War II, escorting convoys across the Atlantic. After the war he earned a degree in electrical engineering & worked in Chicago, New York & California. He passed away in his mid 90s circa 2015.
- Milo Willard married & remained in Wisconsin until she retired to Florida in the early 1980s. She passed away at age 87 in 2001.
- PM Piasecki, who was not only Uncle Herman's boss but a close personal friend, served as Milwaukee postmaster until 1936. He passed away at age 91 in 1967.
- As best can be determined, Willard was not a lifelong stamp collector, but he did take care of the scrapbook that held the covers he received from Uncle Herman and PM Piasecki.
- And as for "Golden Age of Flight," that came to an end as well. Air travel these days is ho-hum, & air mail as a separate service is no more w/ domestic airmail service officially ending 5/1/1977 & international air mail on 5/14/2007.