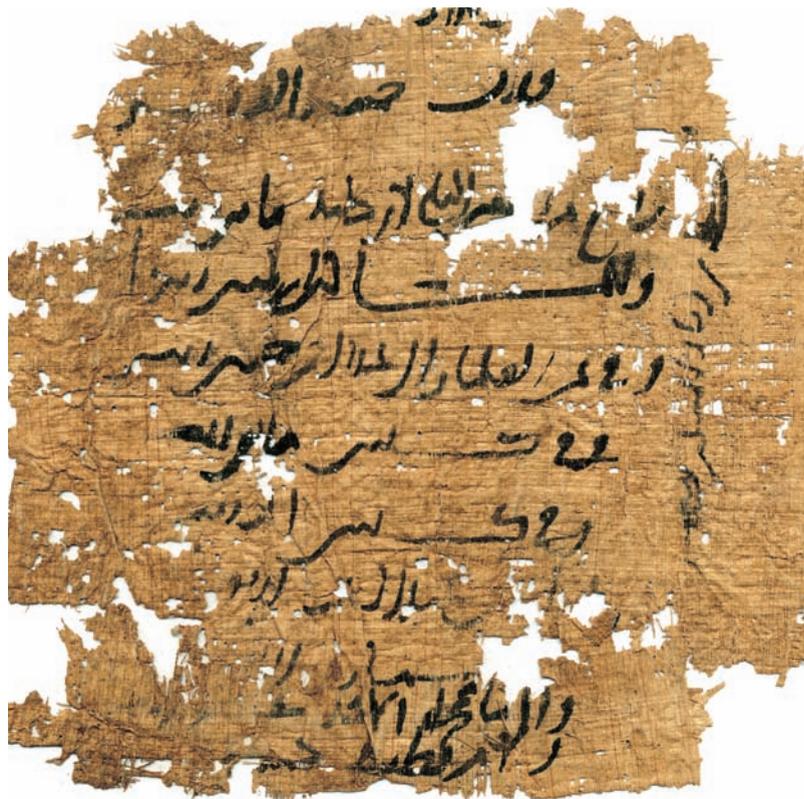


# A Journey of Ingenuity

by Paul M. Zatulove

If this exhibit had a sire and dam, it would most likely be Dr. Zaven M. Seron's book *"From the Winged Heels of Mercury"* and Dr. Robert LeBow's collection entitled *"5000 Years of Postal History"*. This is a Special Study about the ingenuity, energy, and determination of people to communicate by written word while improving the timeliness, distance and reliability of mail. Ordinary citizens risked their lives. They traveled by dangerous contraptions. They exposed themselves to plague, perils of war, and the forces of nature on land, sea, and in the air. Ingenious methods of mail delivery were the result. The original premise was to create an exhibit that would interest all those supportive souls in attendance at a philatelic exhibition who accompany the dealers, exhibitors, judges, and collectors. But as the pages took shape and philatelists offered suggestions, the challenge of material and organization rose to formidable heights. These are the criteria, self imposed, which govern the philatelic story.

Mail delivery from every continent and subcontinent is in the exhibit. Mail over land is approximately 30%, on water 30%, and in the air 40%. Each item had to pass a test of philatelic importance. The time span of the exhibit was extended again and again. Gathering this material took many years and multiple avenues. The Postal History Foundation in Tucson, AZ, was a major re-



arch resource with complete indexed issues of major philatelic society publications, many of which are noted at the bottom of the exhibit pages. Every dealer with whom I spoke tried to contribute an unusual method of mail delivery. Auctions around the world were scanned for affordable acquisitions. The most interesting part of putting the exhibit together is the open ended nature of the material. If a viewer can finish the exhibit and know an item that should be included, then the exhibit is a success because it has provoked thought about philately. However, it is also the most frustrating part of the challenge because I know it will never be complete! Organization was difficult because all material did not lend itself chronologically. However,

some did. Man's first wrestling with written communication was what to write on.

## The Origin

Early materials consist of a four thousand year old Sumerian clay messenger tablet ca. 2032 BCE, a papyrus document ca. 780 AD, and a Venetian parchment letter sent to a merchant in Alexandria, Egypt dated 1419, one of the earliest pieces of mail from Europe to Africa. The development of postal markings tackled the problem of timeliness and reliability. Covers from the 15th to the 18th century show the ingenuity of a developing postal service. These items are correspondence carried by Milanese Tasso couriers, Venetian courier service, and royal messengers. The official postage stamp comes on the

world scene with the "invention" of the government sponsored pre-paid adhesive by Sir Rowland Hill.

## Moving the Mail

A Penny Black cover has a delivery date on Christmas day, 1840. Another example is the only recorded letter originating in Russia stamped with a Penny Black as it entered the British mails. Delivery over land begins with a "shirt" letter carried over the Himalayas by Royal foot runner. This is followed by mule mail between the oceans, ex Grunin, Sudanese camel mail with inverted overprint, horse cart by one of the two recorded examples of Australian local carrier McCulloch & Co, and a series of Wells Fargo Virginia City Pony Express covers, including one of two known imprint covers.



## Mail by Rail

Mechanical ingenuity, 1800's style, is evidenced by Coolgardie Cycle Express covers of Western Australia of which sixteen are recorded, Victor Bicycle twelve day American Railway Union strike mail, an Orient Express rail cover from Turkey to Europe stamped with the earliest known German forerunner, and finally US Railway Post Office mail delivered on the last leg of the journey by Wells Fargo while the final tracks were being laid to Los Angeles.

## Mail by Boat

Delivery over water begins with Canoe Brigade mail from Norway House, British Canada. The pioneer steamship S.S. Robert Fulton sped the delivery of mail in 1820. Use of the Great Lakes, rivers, coastal waterways, and the oceans extended the distance and speed where land was an impediment.

The Danube Steamship Company, Prince's Letter Dispatch, less than ten covers known, and Lady McLeod covers, Britain's first stamps in the colonies and the first stamp depicting a ship, were all private carriers exploiting the efficiency of convenient, fast delivery of mail.

Transatlantic mail became a business of its own. Ships were used for mail exclusively, as evidenced by the cover carried on the S.S. *Africa*, Cunard Line's last wooden paddle wheeler.

The exhibit continues with two covers of

Waghorn's Express from India to England and return, examples of entrepreneurial ingenuity. A former British officer stationed in India set up a mail service like a military operation and ran it so efficiently the British Postal Service paid him to carry their mail. The German Seepost connected the far flung Pacific empire at the turn of the 20th century. A cover from Deutsch Neu Guinea was sent on a ship that sunk, the mail retrieved, sent on to Germany, only to be assessed Postage Due because the forerunner stamps on cover had during the cover's odyssey.

## Special Delivery

"Special" delivery refers in this exhibit to very unusual methods of mail delivery. A Chinese document to an Amoy Naval patrol, a cover from a Japanese warship of WW I operating a mail route during its battle patrol, and a German example of submarine mail are shown. The precursor to fax was House's printing telegraph. It claimed to be prompt, accurate, and reliable. Tonga Island group's Tin Can Mail was put in watertight biscuit tins and carried inward and outward by swimmers and outrigger canoes. The inward mail shown is from Argentina to the Tin Can Canoe Mailman.

In Vienna, one of several cities that used pneumatic tubes for across town delivery, the postal authorities guaranteed delivery within ninety minutes. Another unusual special delivery pertaining to fast, faster,

and fastest was Swedish/Finnish feather mail. On the exterior of the envelope were one, two, or three feathers, depending on how much the sender was willing to pay for celerity. All are present. Obstacles of weather are confronted in the delivery of mail.

#### Adventures

Postmarks from rarely seen latitudes written by polar expedition explorers exemplify the courage, curiosity, and fortitude of men and their dogsleds. The content of Jeaffreson, Shackleton, Scott, and Amundsen correspondence, i.e. "eating the ponies" to stay alive, "enduring constant gale force winds", adds human interest to this philatelic adventure. It truly emphasizes the risk that was taken while still pursuing communication with the outside world creating covers sought by collectors. Obstacles of war, blockade and siege, are examined. A unique and important letter written in 1806 was put in a bottle and tossed into the Atlantic Ocean. It helped precipitate the War of 1812 between the United States and England because it was a documented account by an American citizen of how he was impressed into the British Navy from an American merchant ship. A U.S. Civil War letter carried by blockade runner shows the ingenuity of a Southern officer exporting cotton. It is ironic that the letter breaks the blockade, transfers to a British ship that first stops in a Northern port and then continues to England where the letter is delivered.

The siege of Paris, capital of the 19th century, occurred for four months in 1870-71 and spawned ingenious methods of mail delivery.

#### Mail by Air

A piece of microfilm containing hundreds of letters flown by pigeon mail into the city, a zinc capsule, "Boule de Moulin", filled with 400 letters and floated into the city at the bottom of the Seine River, and letters carried out of the

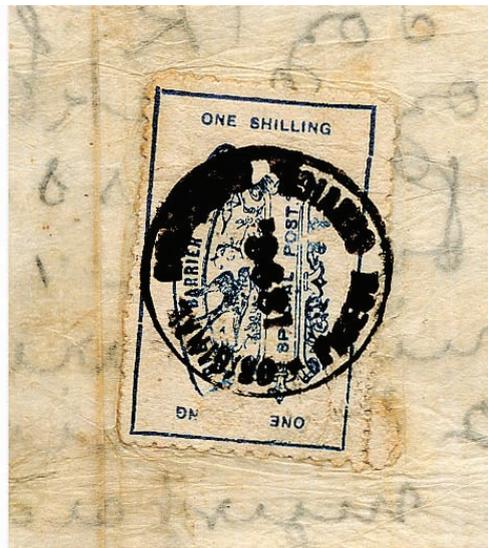
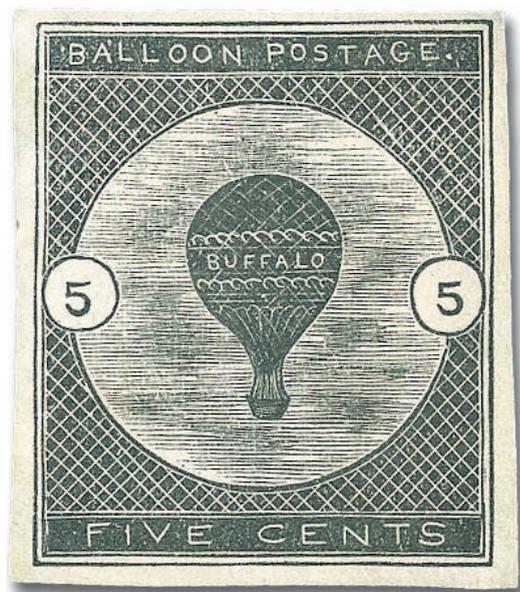
city by hot air balloon, Ballon Monté, are all exhibited. It was a hot air balloon that gave birth to the first stamp created for airmail in 1877. The Buffalo Balloon became the model for a private issue fivecent airmail stamp prior to the plane. At the Buffalo, NY and Erie County Historical Society the exhibitor found a photo of the inaugural lift off of the Buffalo Balloon over Buffalo harbor. The balloon was so named because the citizens of Buffalo contributed \$1500 toward its construction. The photo verifies the similarity of the balloon and the stamp. One of two known proofs is shown. In 1898-99 sixty miles off the coast of New Zealand the first regular airmail service began. The Great Barrier Island Pigeon Mail Agency and its competitor the Service delivered mail between Auckland and the island for ten years. Both the Agency and the Service printed stamps. One of three known flimsies, the name given the delicate message paper sheet, of the first Service issue is exhibited. There are flimsies of the Service second and third issues with content that ratifies the necessity for the pigeon mail to connect the island inhabitants with the outside world. Both Agency issues appear on flimsies. The first available covers from Government sponsored airmail are from the 1911 flight that took place February 18 at the Allahabad, India U.P. Exhibition only eight years after the flight by the Wright bro-

thers. In September of that year airmail was flown from Garden City, NY, USA. Both items are displayed followed by a U.S. airmail cover of 1918, the Curtiss Jenny, a cover of many firsts.

The development of airmail and the airplane after WW I can be greatly credited to Colombia, South America. On the ground, its mountain capital was months away from the seacoast, an uphill route that was an arduous trek along a river filled with rapids. By air it was a matter of hours. The exhibit contains a 1919 cover of the first flight. A complete set of twenty Curtiss Jenny labels with slogans promoting flight, nine designs of which were overprinted and used as temporary stamps for the first mails. Next, ocean liners were equipped with airplane catapults to speed delivery of mail by one day. Overprinted stamped covers from the first westward catapult launch in 1928 from the ile de France are displayed. The dirigible displaced catapult mail until its demise with the 1937 crash of the Hindenburg.

Recovered mail from the crash is displayed. Rocket mail experiments from Europe and North America follow. The last two pages are reserved for the grand finale of ingenuity in achievements of mail delivery, stamped mail to and from the Soviet space station, MIR.

This is the epitome of the lengths to which we strive to deliver mail faster, farther and with reliability.



Previous page, top: ca. 2032 BC Sumerian clay tablet

Previous page, center: ca. 780 AD Papyrus Document in old Arabic.

Left: Great Barrier Island Pigeon Mail.

Below: Waghorn's Express cover from India to England.

Center below: Buffalo Balloon Die Proof.



## This collection will be offered by **Harmers of London** in the autumn 2008

Collezionare Storia Postale è come viaggiare nel tempo e nello spazio. L'articolo di Paul M. Zatulove è tratto dalla presentazione della sua collezione, dal titolo "Un viaggio dell'ingegnosità" che copre un arco temporale di 4000 anni. Dalle origini della scrittura ai primi corrieri, l'autore racconta la storia delle comunicazioni e dei documenti postali dai Sumeri alle pergamene e quindi alla posta viaggiata con tutti i mezzi possibili di trasporto: con gli sherpa dell'Himalaya, con il Pony Express, con le biciclette, i treni e le navi a vapore, le canoe, la posta pneumatica, i palloni, i primi voli con aerei, la posta trasportata da un servizio di piccioni e quella viaggiata per sottomarino. Nella collezione, che sarà offerta dalla Harmers di Londra, non manca la posta militare e i documenti storici della Guerra Civile Americana e dell'Assedio di Parigi del 1870. È anche presente una sezione dedicata alla posta catapultata o recuperata da incidenti di volo (Hindenburg). L'ultima parte della collezione riguarda la posta tra la terra e la stazione spaziale MIR, l'ultima frontiera della distanza raggiunta dalle comunicazioni postali.

Il catalogo dell'asta si può richiedere a:

Harmers, N. 11, 111 Power Road, Chiswick, London W4 5PY

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