

WESTERN CANADA AIRWAYS SERVICE

FLIGHTS TO ONTARIO AND EASTERN MANITOBA

In the Summer of 1926, there was much activity in the mining districts of Ontario and central Manitoba. Mr. James A. Richardson had a keen interest in aviation and saw an opportunity to invest in the use of aircraft to support these mining interests. In November 1926, he formed Western Canada Airways (WCA) with Pilot H. A. “Doc” Oaks, a former pilot with Patricia Airways and Exploration Company. The company acquired a Fokker Universal airplane, “The City of Winnipeg”, and began freight service to Sioux and Red Lake areas of Ontario on December 27, 1926. Mail had been accumulating at several locations after the demise of several other airline companies. Over the next few weeks, under Post Office contract, several flights were made to Woman Lake, Goldpines (Pine Ridge), Narrow Lake, and Hudson (Rolling Portage) to pick up mail and clear the backlog.

In February 1927, the Canadian Government contracted with WCA to transport over four tons of freight and supplies to Churchill in support of establishing a supply base there. For this task, the company purchased a second Fokker, “The City of Toronto” (registration G-CAGD) and began moving material in March. In the meantime, the company applied for and received permission to issue its own Semi-Official stamps and begin to carry mail commencing on May 10 to Rolling Portage (Hudson), Goldpines, Red Lake, and Woman Lake. Within a few weeks, service was begun to the Eastern Manitoba mining locations of Rice Lake and Lac du Bonnet.

The new stamps were printed in black and light red and showed an image of the G-CAGD aircraft. Since the stamp was produced in a two-part process, some printed stamps showed the airplane with its skies touching the setting sun thereby creating a flaw that gives these stamps a higher catalog value.

Here are images of the regular stamp compared to the stamps with the printing flaw.



Some of the envelopes for the company mail showed the Eastern Manitoba and Ontario routes and destinations for WCA. Figure 1 is an example. A stamp dealer in Winnipeg, Mr. W.R. Patton was responsible for producing many of the First Flight covers and his name appears on many of these covers as either the sender or as the recipient, sometimes both. Figure 2 is one of the First Flights from March 10.

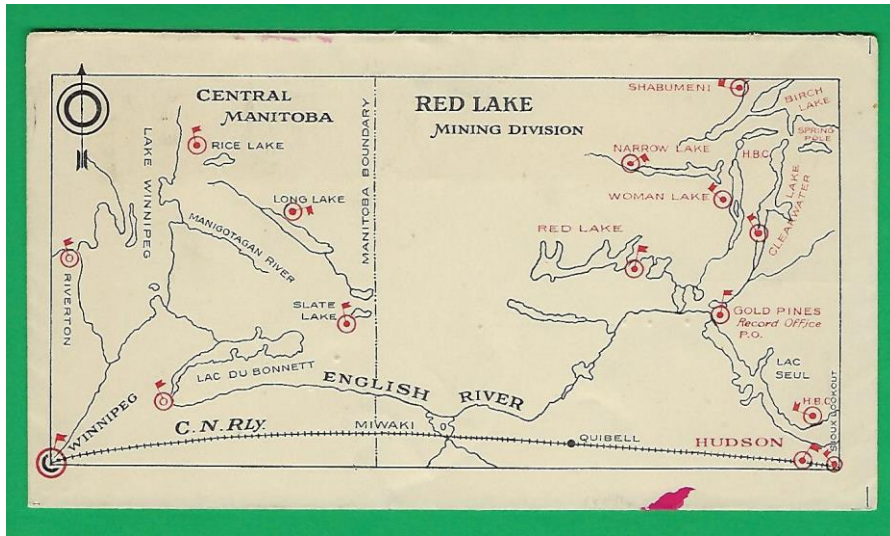


Figure 1 – map from the back of a company envelope showing the WCA flight destinations.

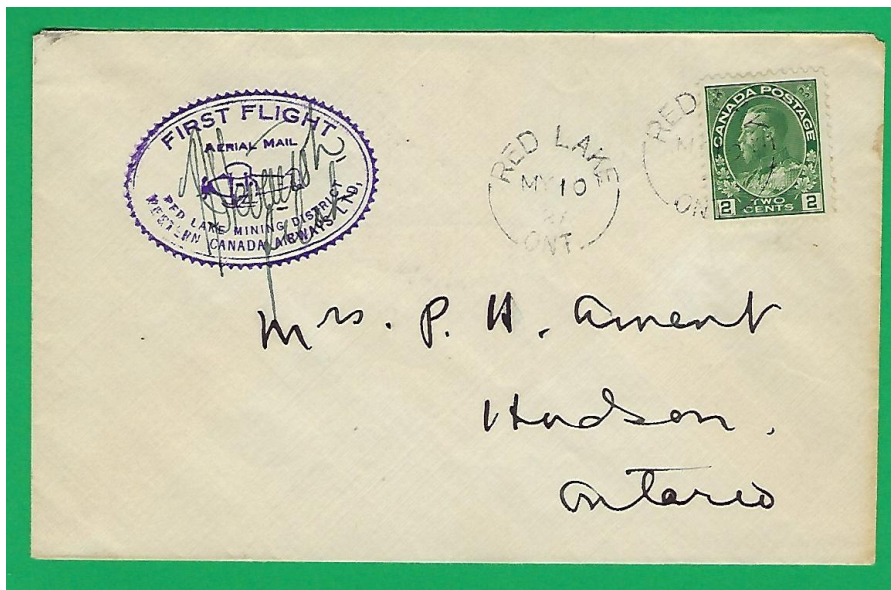


Figure 2 – a May 10 First Flight Cover from Red Lake to Rolling Portage signed by the pilot F. J. Stevenson. Company stamp is on the back.



Figure 3 – The CL40 stamp on the back of the envelope as directed by the Canadian Post Office. Later, many CL40 stamps were placed on the front by the senders.

The First Flights to the Central Manitoba Mining District (including Lac du Bonnet, Long Lake, and Rice Lake) began on May 30/June 1, 1927. The First Flight imprint on the cover is specific to the Central Manitoba District. Figures 4 and 5 are from these flights.

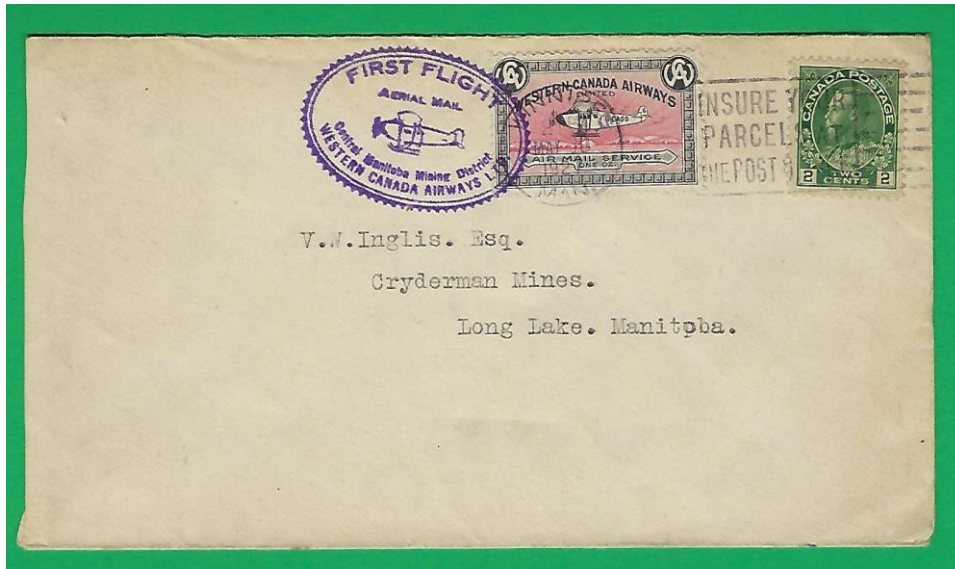


Figure 4 – Lac du Bonnet to Long Lake (now named Wadhope) the site of the Cryderman Mines.

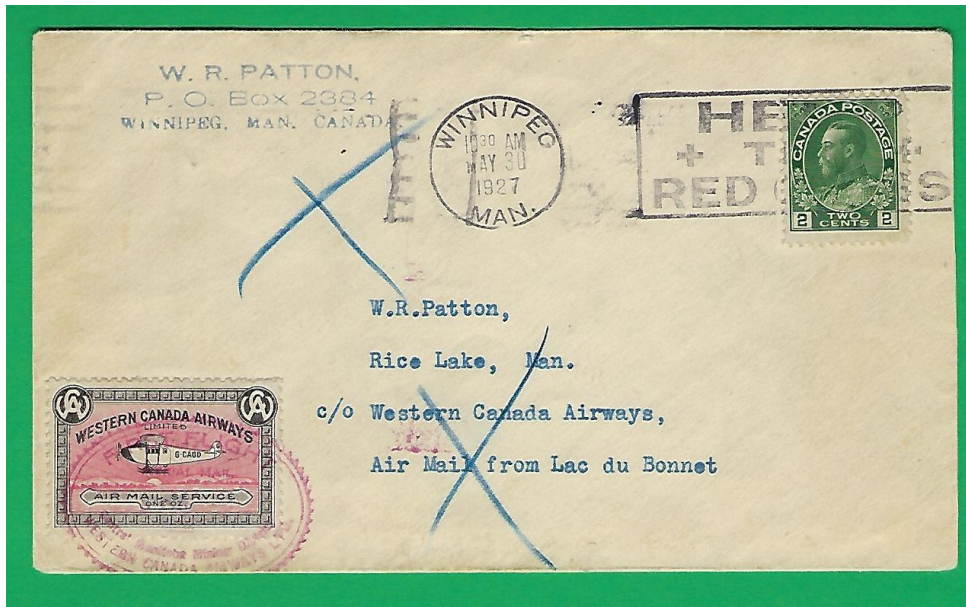


Figure 5 – First Flight from Rice Lake to Lac du Bonnet. This is a Patton to Patton cover. Note the “Central Manitoba Mining District” imprint in red ink (vs. blue or violet)

Special Jubilee Flight

To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Canadian Confederation (1867 to 1927), the Canadian Government proposed that airmail flights that were scheduled for July 1, 1927 should carry special or cachets to mark the occasion. These flights were to carry greetings to Ottawa, the capital of Canada. Many of the smaller airlines examined the potential costs of meeting this request but found that they would be too high. As a result, the proposal was withdrawn by the Government. However, WCA wanted to participate in this commemoration and asked that the company be permitted to issue and use a special Semi-Official stamp to be use only on that day on covers carried by the company. With permission granted, a unique stamp (CL41) was

produced and was placed on covers that were to be flown to destinations in the Red Lake Mining District (by Pilots J.R. Ross and S.A. Cheeseman) and the Central Manitoba Mining District (by Pilot F.J. Stevenson) on July 1. There were 10 specific routes that were flown on that day. Figure 6 is one of the Jubilee covers, this one flown from Red Lake to Rolling Portage, Ontario.

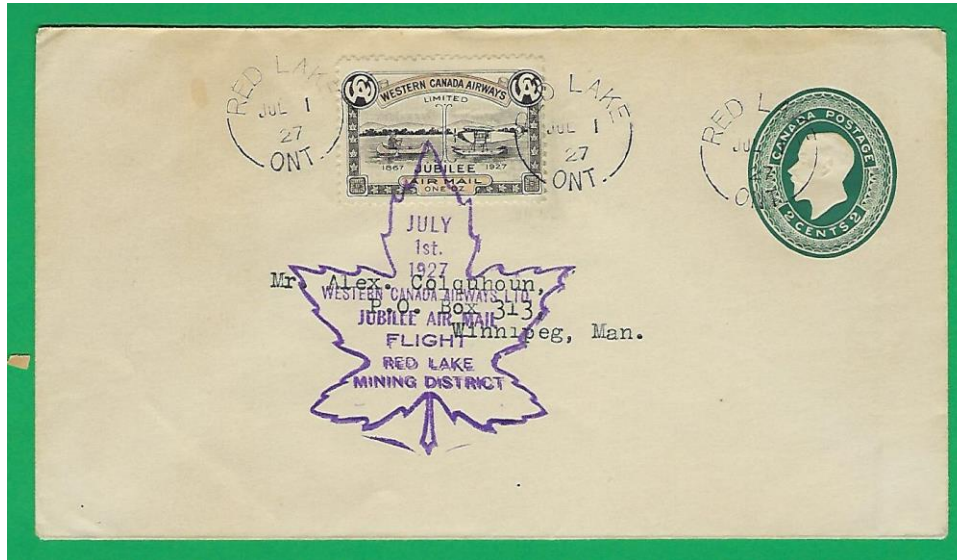


Figure 6 – a Jubilee cover from Red Lake to Rolling Portage flown on July 1, 1927.

As the company expanded over time more routes and destinations were added to the company schedules. Over the life of the company from May 1927 until November 1930, Western Canada Airways purchased and used over 30 aircraft for mail delivery and operated more than 40 for all purposes to service their routes. In 1928 alone, 28 aircraft were added to the roster.

This first installment of the beginnings of WCA only addressed a portion of the total duration of the company. Over time, WCA expanded to include flights to Western Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, Yukon and into the Northwest Territories. The next two installments will include these additional First Flights as the WCA company continued to develop and grow.

- Mackenzie River Flights to The Northwest Territories
- Flights to Western Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, and Yukon

References:

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- C. A. Longworth-Dames; *The Pioneer and Semi-Official Air Mails Of Canada 1919-1934*: The Unitrade Press, Toronto, 1995. Pages 107-123.
- Milberry, Larry; *Aviation in Canada: The Formative Years*; CANAV Books, Toronto, 2009, Pages 72-77, 98, 110.
- Molson, K. M.; *Pioneering in Canadian Air Transport*; D.W. Friesen, Altona, Manitoba, 1974, Pages 19-55.
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