



Figure 1: Postmarked WINNIPEG 9AM FEB22 1932

THE "D.w." HANDSTAMP - A new theory!

That it indicates the end of air mail service in Winnipeg , when letters marked for "air mail" service were transferred to surface routes.

Chris Hargreaves

The topic of the "D.w." handstamp was initially raised in the December 1993 issue of the *BNAPS Air Mail Study Group Newsletter*, when it was illustrated by the cover in Figure 1. The mystery was revisited in 2010 with an article in *The Canadian Aerophilatelist*.

The first response to the question had been by Trelle Morrow, who suggested that:

it is a private collector's mark, such as some people use in approval books, or for other markings. I have seen several of these covers so marked, and one cover has the sender's return address. It is W.C. Diment, Sintaluta, Sask. So I believe that the Dw endorsement is that of Mr. Diment.

The cover to W.C. Diment is shown as Figure 2.



Figure 2: Postmarked WINNIPEG 8AM FEB2 1931

Continued

However, it seemed strange that a collector would place a mark partially over a stamp, when there was ample "white space" on the cover, as occurred on the Figure 1 cover.

Don Amos, who worked in the Winnipeg Post Office after World War II, also responded to the question:

Before I retired I was in the main post office. One day I wanted to check back in the records for someone asking a question about them. I went to the room where the records were. I was told they needed the room and the records were all thrown out! I couldn't believe it. I tried Ottawa but they had no record of them. I have copies of it used in 1930-1931-1932. I have written to all the postmasters of each town and/or city giving all names and details, including Sintaluta in your letter, but never received a reply from any of them. The old-timers must have all gone.

Trelle may be right, but the general opinion here seems to be "Delayed-Weather". You are probably aware that the FF from Pembina Feb. 1931 was delayed until the next day because of bad weather.

But it also seemed odd that the Post Office would use a handstamp that just says "D.w.", as Post Office handstamps normally state the reason for which they are applied in full. Also, when abbreviations are used, the letters are normally the same size.

The article about the mystery of the "D.w." handstamp in the September 2010 *Canadian Aerophilatelist* was followed up with articles in the *Jack Knight Air Log* of the American Air Mail Society, *BAMS News* published by the British Air Mail Society, and in *BNA Topics*. - This led to additional "D.w." covers being reported, and a very interesting debate in which some eminent aerophilatelists supported the "collector's mark" theory, while others believed it was a "post office marking".

As more covers with the "D.w." handstamp were recorded, some patterns began to emerge. - Murray Heifetz recognized that all the covers were either mailed from Winnipeg, or had passed through Winnipeg.

It also looked like all the covers were from the period of the Prairie Air Mail Service, which operated between Winnipeg and Calgary, and between Winnipeg and Edmonton, from March 3rd 1930 to March 31st 1932.. - For a long time the earliest cover found was dated March 25th 1930, and the latest was March 27th 1932.

The handstamp was also only found on Air Mail covers - but not all the covers had arrived in Winnipeg by air, or left Winnipeg by air! - Figure 3 was particularly puzzling, as the Siscoe - Amos First Flight took place before the Winnipeg - Pembina link was inaugurated, so this cover would have arrived in Winnipeg by train. It also left by train, as Grande Pointe is about 30 kms south-east of Winnipeg.

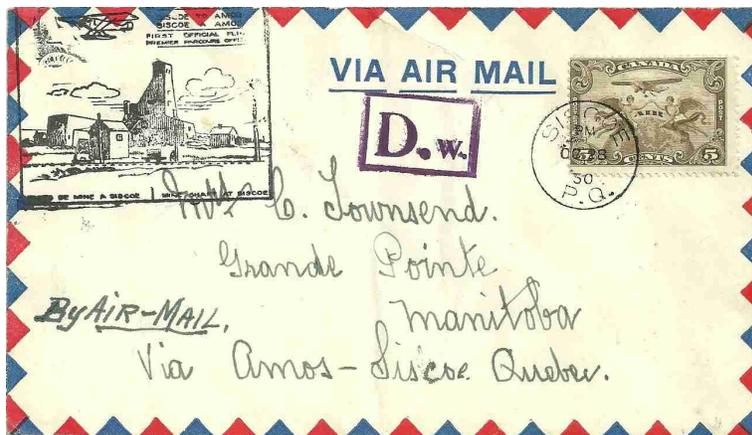


Figure 3: Postmarked SISCOE OC28 30

As the enquiry progressed, it became accepted that the covers came from too many sources to all have received a collector's mark from one person. - The number of covers also ruled out a suggestion that the handstamp was a "pilot's mark" applied in lieu of a signature, as the covers were flown by many different pilots.

But the "Delayed by weather" theory was also running into problems!

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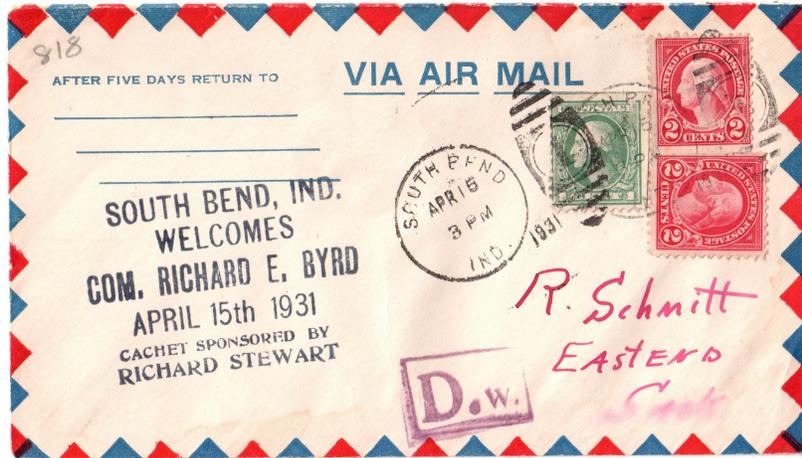


Figure 4: Postmarked SOUTH BEND IND, APR 16 3PM 1931

In *BNA Topics* #544, a collection of five covers from the U.S.A. to East End, Saskatchewan, was described. Three of these covers had a "D.w." handstamp, (including Figure 4), but two didn't. The covers had been mailed on different dates between April 1931 and September 1931. On checking the weather reports and forecasts in old issues of *The Winnipeg Free Press*, it was discovered that there was no correlation between the dates of the covers with a "D.w." handstamp and reports or forecasts of bad weather.

The same article described a collection of 14 First Day Covers for the c3 air mail stamp, that was found by Alain Gauthier. These covers were all mailed to his father-in-law in Ponteix, Saskatchewan, and included Figure 5. Nine of the covers had a "D.w." handstamp, five of them didn't. Most of the covers had backstamps from Ponteix, and none of them seemed to have been delayed! - The Prairie Air Mail service operated once per day, except Sundays. If it was flown, Figure 5 would have left Winnipeg at 8.00 p.m. on Feb 22nd, arrived in Moose Jaw at 23.10 on the 22nd, and been delivered to Ponteix by rail the next day, February 23rd.



Figure 5: Postmarked WINNIPEG 7AM FEB22 32 Backstamped PONTEIX FE 23 32

But if weather wasn't a factor, and the covers hadn't been delayed, what did "D.w." stand for?

During the enquiry, several people had wondered whether the "w" stood for weight, and whether "D.w." indicated the mail had been diverted to a train because the mail plane was overweight. - But if this had happened, how did Figure 5 get from Winnipeg to Ponteix the next day?

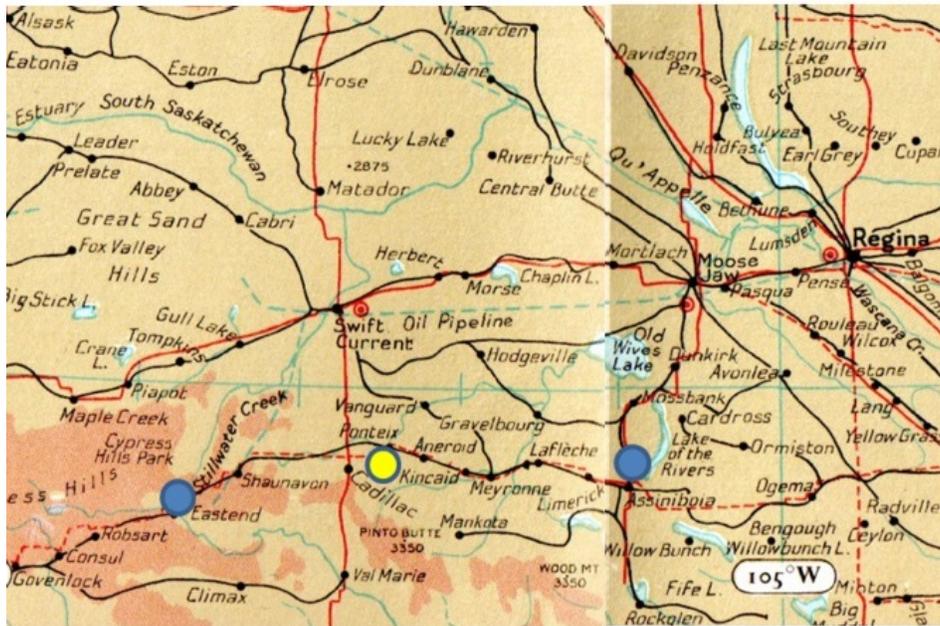


Figure 6 - The railway route to Ponteix

After discussions with Nino Chiovelli and Rick Parama, I obtained copies of some railway timetables from 1931 from Ross Gray, (editor for the BNAPS Railway Post Offices Study Group).

It turns out that the covers from Winnipeg to Ponteix could in fact have travelled by train – if they left early enough! The railway connections to Ponteix are shown in Figure 6.

- There was one train daily to Ponteix from the east. It left Assiniboia at 2.05p.m., and reached Ponteix at 4.22 p.m.
- there was one train daily from Moose Jaw to Assiniboia, which left Moose Jaw at 11 a.m. and reached Assiniboia at 1.35 p.m.
- there were two trains from Winnipeg to Moose Jaw each day, one in the morning and one in the evening. Train 1 left Winnipeg at 7.00 p.m. and arrived in Moose Jaw at 4.50 a.m.

So: the covers from Winnipeg could have reached Moose Jaw by rail in time to arrive in Ponteix on Feb 23rd, but the decision to divert them to the train must have been made during the afternoon, as Train 1 left before the plane! The Post Office staff couldn't have waited until the plane was being loaded, and then seen whether or not the mail was going to be over the weight limit.

This started me wondering how often a decision to send "air mail" by train was made during the afternoon, in order to avoid weight problems later in the day?

Then I started wondering if rather than indicating that mail had gone by rail due to unusual circumstances, (such as bad weather), "air mail" was regularly diverted to surface mail to avoid weight problems later in the day, or because the railway mail service was considered more reliable than the air mail service? Did the "D.w." handstamp indicate a routine "end of air mail service" / diversion of "air mail" in Winnipeg to surface mail? -

When the various "D.w." covers were reviewed, it eventually turned out that all them could in fact have reached their destination as quickly by surface mail from Winnipeg, as they would have done if they had been flown beyond Winnipeg! For example:

- Figure 4 is to East End, which was on the same railway line from Assiniboia as Ponteix. Figure 4 would have arrived in Winnipeg on the mail plane from Chicago and Pembina at 1.00 p.m., and been transferred to Train 1 which left at 7.00 p.m.

- Figure 2 was flown back to Winnipeg after the Pembina First Flight. It could then have been sent by train to Sinaluta, which was on a railway line from Winnipeg to Regina, rather than being flown in Regina, and then sent back to Sinaluta by rail.
- Figure 1 was postmarked in Winnipeg at 9 AM on February 22nd, and is addressed to Calgary. According to The Winnipeg Free Press for February 24th 1932: *Winnipeg mail closes as follows: For Vancouver, 9 a.m and 6.30 p.m.* The Calgary mail would have closed at the same time. Since the rail journey from Winnipeg to Calgary took about 23 hours, Cover #1 could have travelled by train and been delivered in Calgary on the morning of Feb 23rd.

An "end of air mail service" marking would also explain some of the most puzzling covers, such as Figure 3, which had to have travelled the 30 kms from Winnipeg to Grande Pointe by train; Figure 7 that was handstamped "Insufficiently paid for transmission by air mail"; and Figure 8 which was mailed in 1942.

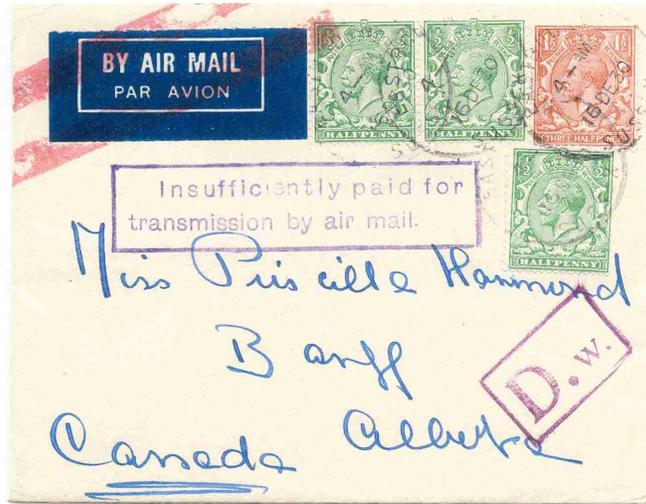


Figure 7 - Postmarked EASTBOURNE 16 DE 30

Figure 7, sent from England to Banff, Alberta, was franked 3 pence, but from November 4th 1929 to February 22nd 1931, the correct rate for sea mail from Britain to New York, with onward transmission by air in the USA and Canada was 4 pence. The cover was handstamped "Insufficiently paid for transmission by air mail", and the air mail etiquette obliterated. The cover would have arrived in Winnipeg by rail, as there were no air mail services to Winnipeg from the east in December 1930. It would have been stamped "D.w." to indicate it was to continue from Winnipeg to Calgary by rail, not by the Prairie Air Mail Service.

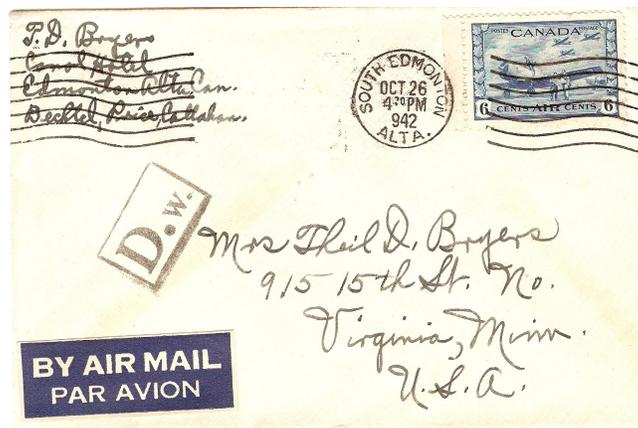


Figure 8 - Postmarked SOUTH EDMONTON, OCT 26 4.30PM 942 (error in datestamp).

Figure 8 is the only cover with a "D.w." handstamp recorded after the Prairie Air Mail Service ended in March 1931. - It is addressed to Virginia, Minnesota, which is a small town in eastern Minnesota. By 1942 Trans-Canada Air Lines was operating a regular air mail service across Canada. The cover would have been flown from Edmonton to Winnipeg, and then been transferred to surface routes in Winnipeg.

The cover which was most difficult to explain is shown as Figure 9:

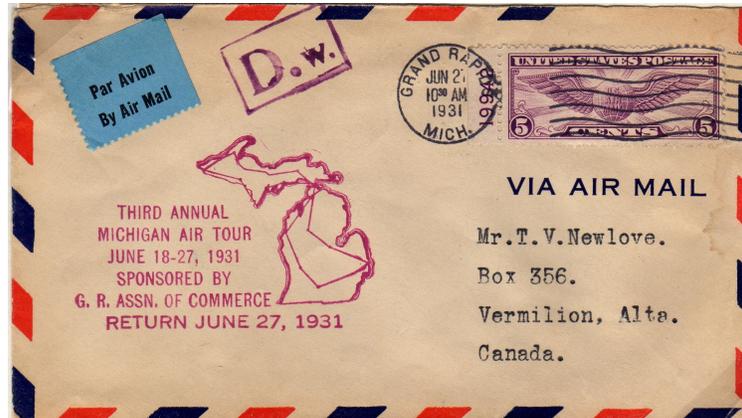


Figure 9 - Postmarked GRAND RAPIDS MICH. JUN27 10.30AM 1931

Figure 9 was postmarked 10.30AM on June 27th 1931 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and addressed to Vermilion, Alberta, which is between North Battleford and Edmonton. If the cover connected with the U.S. Air Mail via Chicago that day, it would have arrived in Winnipeg on Sunday June 28th at 1.00 pm. It could then have left Winnipeg by the Prairie Air Mail service at 7.30 p.m. on June 28th, and arrived in Edmonton at 7.25 a.m. on June 29th. Since the train from Winnipeg to Edmonton took about 24 hours, it looked like being diverted to rail would have slowed down its delivery.

However, when I obtained a *Waghorn's Guide* which gave railway timetables for all of Western Canada, it turned out that there was only one train per day from Edmonton to Vermilion, which was on the route from Edmonton via North Battleford, Saskatoon and Regina to Winnipeg. This train left Edmonton at 10.00 p.m. each day, so the cover would have arrived in Vermilion at 3.00 a.m. on June 30th. But: if the cover had travelled by "Train No. 5" from Winnipeg, it would have left Winnipeg at 9.00 p.m. on June 28th, and arrived in Vermilion at 1.40 a.m. on June 30th.

A detailed analysis of the 44 covers, showed that all them either had to travel by surface routes from Winnipeg, or would have been delivered as quickly or more quickly if they had been sent by rail from Winnipeg, as they would have if they'd been flown. - Full details regarding the analysis of these covers was published in the March 2015 issue of the *Canadian Aerophilatelist*: a copy can be obtained by emailing hargreavescp@sympatico.ca

Although diverting covers to surface routes when they were labelled "Air Mail", and franked for air mail, may seem somewhat strange, it would in fact have been in keeping with the Post Office policy of sending mail by the fastest possible route. - The mail arrived as quickly by rail, and a transfer avoided the risk of delay by a problem with the flight.

When I discussed this transfer with Gray Scrimgeour, he commented that:

"Trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific steamship mail followed the procedure called the "first-packet principle". Mail was despatched by the steamship that would deliver it to its destination most efficiently (quickly). The same should apply to westbound air mail from Winnipeg - by air if it is beneficial, by train if that route is faster."

The "end of air mail" theory also answers several other questions regularly raised with regard to the "D.w." handstamp:

- The use of an abbreviation rather than a text explanation, could be because the Post Office did not want to draw attention to letters that were franked for air mail but were not being flown.
- It explains why use of the handstamp stopped when the Prairie Air Mail service ended, and then resumed after Trans-Canada Air Lines began flying.

Continued

- This type of handstamp would only have been needed at Winnipeg. - Winnipeg received much more mail from the east that needed to be divided into "forward by air" / "divert to rail", than Calgary or Edmonton received from the west.

The theory received a generally favourable response to the article in *The Canadian Aerophilatelist*; and to a report on it in *The Canadian Stamp News*, (July 28th 2015). It was also vigorously discussed during the BNAPS St. Lawrence Seaway Regional Group meeting in October 2015, and during a presentation at the Canadian Aerophilatelic Society's "Day of Aerophilately" in Toronto the following month.

I received a couple of questions on the theme of, "if the covers went by train, why aren't there R.P.O. back-cancels?" - I discussed this with Chris Anstead, who confirmed that:

The R.P.O. cancels were normally only applied to mail posted at the Railway Post Office en route, or to special items such as registered letters. The R.P.O. cancels were not usually applied to mail picked up at stations during the journey as the dispatch office cancel would have been applied. The postal clerks sorted incoming mail into pigeon holes, added a facing slip to the contents of a pigeon hole, tying them into a bundles which were placed into "open bags" that were then fastened and delivered to stations en route. Mail already sorted prior to being placed on board was carried in "closed bags".

I also received a question as to whether I'd checked Ian McQueen's books on JUSQU'A markings. - A "Jusqu'a" marking was one applied at the start of the journey to indicate how far a letter should travel by air, but Ian's books also looked at "end of air mail service" markings. However, the books were largely based on Ian's collection and copies of markings sent to him. Most of the "Jusqu'a" markings stated what service was involved, and most of the "end of service" markings were obliterations like the bars on Figure 7. Since the "D.w." marking was not identified as an "end of air mail service" marking until now, it would not have been included in Ian's books. (Unfortunately Ian died in 2011, so cannot contribute to this enquiry.)

There are still questions as to exactly when in the sorting process the handstamp would have been applied, and why it is sometimes found on multiple covers to the same person or place, but not on other covers processed at the same time to the same destination.

There is also a question as to exactly what "D.w." stood for. - "Diverted in Winnipeg" would be logical, but several people reckon a capital "W" would have been used in the grammatically correct 1930's, and that it therefore stood for "Diverted westbound".

If anybody can provide more information, and/or copies of additional "D.w." covers that can be used to test how well the "end of air mail in Winnipeg" theory fits with additional covers, please contact me.

Acknowledgements:

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