



PHILATELIC BULLETIN

Sarasota Philatelic Club

Growth of Air Mail & the 5¢ Beacon Stamp

By Bill DiPaolo

2026

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1929 was a keystone year in the development of air mail service in the United States. The American Air Mail Society Catalog records close to 1,000 commemorated events in that year alone, an increase of 23% over the previous year. It was a total that would not be surpassed until 1933 as the availability of transoceanic mail began to accelerate. Figure 1 shows the growth of air event activity between 1925 and 1930.

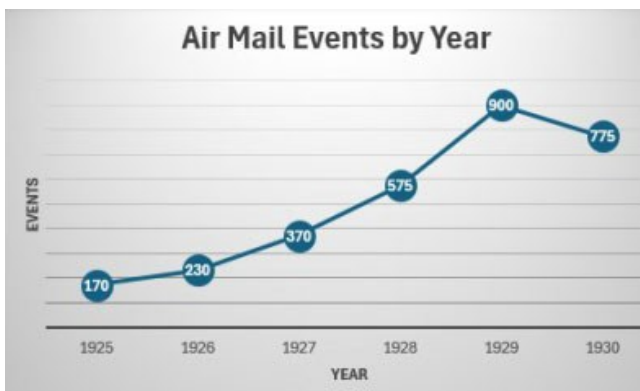


Figure 1. Air mail events between 1925 and 1930. There were almost 1000 events in 1929 alone.

As a result of the 1925 Kelly Act, the country transitioned to commercial transport rather than government transport of the mail. By 1929 there were 47 airlines of various sizes involved with mail delivery. The government was losing money by paying for transport, and the airlines were abusing the system to maximize revenue.

1929 saw rapid Contract Air Mail (CAM) and Foreign Air Mail (FAM) expansion, especially to South America and the Caribbean. Night flights were added, new and larger aircraft developed along with improved safety measures and new airports.

A key element that stimulated air mail growth was lowering the rate for the air mail customer. In late 1928 the cost for an air mail letter was reduced from 10¢ to a uniform 5¢ domestic rate. As a result, air mail volume increased ten-fold from 1926. The pioneer stamp for the rate was the 5¢ beacon stamp. Figure 2 shows the stamp, Scott C11.

Stamp Quiz

Welcome to this month's Stamp Quiz.



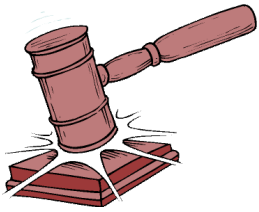
This one will probably require some in-

depth scouring of your catalogue. The stamp is engraved on unwater-marked paper. Here's an obscure clue that will bring out the history buff in you: the stamp is part of a series that was issued the same year and month that Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid robbed their first train together. If you think you know the answer, email me at: centonzevincent@gmail.com. Good luck!



Figure 2. The 5¢ Beacon Stamp (Scott C11) issued on July 25, 1928.

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The Prez Sez ...

Our first meeting at Alloro was successful with xx members attending. The space allowed Frank Blum to bring most (if not all) of his boxes of material for perusal. The audio visual set up worked well, once we figured out how to make the “laser pointer” to work. Dan Walker gave an introductory talk about collecting Indian Native States.

I discovered that some of us don't read instructions very well—please note (this time) that you need a code to open the gate. The code is 0453. If you can't remember this, it is the reverse of their street number, which you can see when “sitting” at the gate wondering what to do next if you look up at the main building!!

Please send thoughts and best wishes to Mark Isaacs who is now residing in assisted living.

Our next meeting is Tuesday May 5th at 5:30PM. I will be providing some type of program, not sure what the subject will be just yet,

Best, Pat

Growth of Air Mail & the 5¢ Beacon Stamp (cont.)

The beacon stamp represents some interesting opportunities for first day collectors. Normally, a first day of use is a single stamp representing the rate it was designed to pay. The beacon stamp was designed to pay a 5¢ air rate but was issued July 25, 1928, when the rate was still 10¢. This means that two stamps were required for a first day cover. Figure 3 shows a first day cover franked with two 5¢ beacon stamps. For many that tried to use only one stamp found their covers stamped postage due. Figure 4 shows one such example of a first day cover franked with only one beacon stamp uprating a 2¢ stamped envelope which still shortpaid the airmail rate; it was charged postage due. Finally, Figure 5 shows a scarce, but available, cover that made it through the mail with a clean solo use.

If you have any interesting usages of the 5¢ beacon stamp that you would like to share, we'd love to hear about them. Good hunting!



Figure 3. Beacon stamp first day cover. When the stamp was issued, the air mail rate was still 10¢ per half ounce or fraction thereof. Therefore, for proper franking, there needed to be two 5¢ beacon stamps on a first day cover.

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Growth of Air Mail & the 5¢ Beacon Stamp (cont.)



Figure 4. Beacon stamp first day cover franked with one 5¢ beacon stamp uprating a 2¢ Sesquicentennial Exposition stamped envelope (Scott U522). The 7¢ total franking shortpaid the 10¢ air mail rate, hence 3¢ postage due was applied.



Figure 5. Beacon stamp first day cover franked with only one 5¢ beacon stamp. This shortpaid the 10¢ air mail rate, but was either unnoticed or ignored by postal clerks and made it through with no postage due added.

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