Update on the “D.w.” Covers—Part 1

Chris Hargreaves


To review, the mystery of the “D.w.” handstamp has been studied and published in two articles published in the September 2010 and June 2011 issues of The Canadian Aerophilatelist. At one time, the handstamp was thought to be a pilot’s mark, but it did not match the pilot’s initials: The pilot for the Winnipeg-to-Pembina flight was AE Jarvis. Another theory is that it is a private collector’s mark, such as some people use in approval books. Trelle Morrow has seen a cover with the return address of WC Diment, Sintaluta, Sask, and suggested the “D.w.” endorsement might be that of Mr Diment. However, it seems strange that a collector would place a mark partially over a stamp, when there was ample “white space” on the cover, as occurred on Figure B.

Don Amos, who worked in the Winnipeg Post Office after World War II, suggested the handstamp was a Post Office marking that stood for “Delayed-Weather”. It seems odd that the Post Office would use a handstamp of just “D.w.”, as Post Office handstamps normally state the reason for which they are applied.

Figure A. “D.w.” WINNIPEG - PEMBINA First Flight cachet postmarked WINNIPEG FEB 2 1931. (Figure 9 from original article in BNA Topics 2012Q3)

Figure B. “D.w.” mark on First Day Cover of overprinted air mail stamp, Sc# C3. Postmarked WINNIPEG FEB 22 1932. (Figure 2 of original article in BNA Topics 2012Q3)

Keywords & phrases: Airmail covers, first flight, postal markings

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People also questioned why there would be a marking for “Delayed Weather”, when flights were also delayed for other reasons? Also, when abbreviations are used, the letters are normally the same size.

The two articles in *The Canadian Aerophilatelist* illustrated and studied fourteen covers with the “D.w.” handstamp. All fourteen were mailed between 25 March 1930 and 22 February 1932. They were mailed by three or more people, (based on return addresses), in Canada (10), Germany (2), Newfoundland (1), and England (1). The covers were to twelve different addresses in three provinces in western Canada; Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Seven were Canadian First Flight Covers, one was a Newfoundland First Flight, and one had a Zeppelin cachet.

Two were from the Amos-Siscoe First Flight to different addresses, and two were from the Winnipeg-Pembina First Flight to different addresses. There were covers from both legs of the Amos-Siscoe First Flight to the same address, and two covers were from different flights (and countries) and addressed to AB Stuart in Estevan. E Symons in Rocanville was the addressee of Figure A, and the return addressee on another cover. It was also learned that Ihor Rudyk, a dealer in Calgary, once sold some Post Office facing slips with a “D.w.” handstamp on them.

The articles in *The Canadian Aerophilatelist* were 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 the July-September 2012 issue of *BNA Topics*, journal of the British North America Philatelic Society. A compendium of the articles is now posted on the CAS website [1]. These articles led to new discoveries and more covers with the “D.w.” handstamp, which gives us more information about its use.

To avoid confusion, in this article we are continuing the numbering sequence of figures from the original article in *BNA Topics*. Figure numbers below 15 are from the first article.

![Figure 15. “D.w.” new find from Denny May.](image)

Figure 15 was received from Denny May who commented:

“All is another one!! Also mailed during the time period mentioned. Similar to cover 12 but addressed to Bertha Crowhurst, Binscarth, Manitoba and backstamped there on 4 February.

We do know that this particular flight was delayed by weather. However, that being the case, almost every cover flown between 1918 and 1939 should be similarly stamped - weather was rarely kind to pilots and planes. I have to question, too, if this was the handstamp of a collector why were the D.w. stamps placed in different locations on most of the covers?—I have other covers with collector’s personal stamps—usually on the back, but always in the same location. This suggests to me they were, in fact a PO marking for some reason.”

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Denny’s cover would have been flown from Winnipeg to Pembina on the First Flight, (which was delayed to 3 February due to fog, but the covers had been postmarked in anticipation of the flight leaving on schedule), then been flown from Pembina back to Winnipeg, where it was put in the regular mail to Binscarth in Western Manitoba.

Figure 16 shows the third known “D.w.” cover from the opening of the Winnipeg-to-Pembina air mail route; however, over 17,000 covers were carried on the First Flight and most didn’t get a “D.w.” handstamp.

Neil Hunter, who submitted the cover in Figure 16, commented: “Here is my only example, a Commercial Cover that would likely be of no interest to a collector.” The cover is postmarked WINNIPEG 2AM May 11 1931 and is addressed to Vancouver. It is the first example of a “D.w.” cover sent to British Columbia.

Figure 17 was sent in by David Reynolds in New Zealand, who thinks it came from an auction in Melbourne about 1998. It is a First Day Cover for the 6¢ overprinted air mail stamp, postmarked WINNIPEG 7AM FEB 22 1932. David notes in his write-up that “Prairie Air Mail Service Westbound left Winnipeg 21.00 hours, arrived Regina 23.40.” The cover is backstamped JANSEN FEB 23 32 SASK.

Figure 18 was purchased on eBay from a seller in Texas. It is another 6¢ Airmail First Day Cover, like Figure 17, but was postmarked later in the day: WINNIPEG 9 AM FEB 22 1932. There is no backstamp.

Figure 18 is almost identical to Figure B, above, which was also addressed to Captain Emslie in Calgary and was also postmarked WINNIPEG 9 AM FEB 22 1932. However, I
also have in my collection two other Airmail First Day Covers from Winnipeg, neither of which has a “D.w.” handstamp. One of these covers is to Lethbridge, Alberta with a postmark WINNIPEG 7 AM FEB 22 1932, backstamped LETHBRIDGE 11.30 PM FEB 23 1932. The other is to Regina, postmarked WINNIPEG 12.30 PM FEB 22 1932 and has no backstamp.

My thanks to Dale Speirs and Gray Scrimgeour for sending me some information about Captain Emslie to whom Figures 2 and 18 were addressed. They wrote:

Captain Emslie was a stamp dealer, who started in Edmonton, and then went to Calgary in 1930. He was the first full-time stamp dealer in Calgary, and traded under the name Emslie & Co. He was an early member of the Calgary Philatelic Society (founded 1922) and was elected Honorary Life Member #4 in 1937. In the mid 1940s he wound up in Vancouver.

Gray added that a couple of BC friends remember buying from Emslie about 1945.

Figure 19, from Jim Miller, is postmarked CHATHAM 8.30 AM JUN 7 1930 ONT and addressed to Yorkton, Saskatchewan. All the “D.w.” covers so far have been mailed during the period in which the Prairie Air Mail Service operated: 3 March 1930 to 30-31 March 1932. The Prairie Air Mail service initially operated a nightly service between Winnipeg and Calgary via Regina, Moose Jaw, and Medicine Hat; and a daytime service between Regina, Saskatoon, North Battleford and Edmonton. Lethbridge was added in January 1931. There were no airmail flights south or east of Winnipeg, until the Winnipeg to Pembina route opened in February 1931, connecting the Prairie Air Mail Service with the United States airmail system. Since Figure 19 was mailed in Ontario on 7 June 1930, it would have arrived in Winnipeg by rail, and then been flown to Saskatchewan.

Figure 20, from the collection of the late Murray Heifetz, is a First Flight Cover
from Embarras Portage to Fort Chipewyan. It is postmarked EMBARRAS PORTAGE DE 17 31 and is addressed to Minnedosa, Manitoba. The cover is backstamped MINNEOSA January 1st 1932. The routing of this cover is intriguing.

In May 1931 the Canadian government had begun cutting air mail services to save money during the Depression. In August, the routing of the Prairie Air Mail Service was changed. Instead of separate routes from Winnipeg to Calgary, and from Regina to Edmonton, there was now a single route from Winnipeg via Calgary to Edmonton. The new route, and most of the Canadian airmail network, can be seen in Figure 21, which was part of a pamphlet distributed by the Edmonton Post Office in September 1931. Embarras Portage was added as a new Post Office on the Fort McMurray to Aklavik airmail route in December 1831. Figure 20 would have flown north on the First Flight from Embarras Portage (EP on Figure 21) to Fort Chipewyan, then flown south from Embarras. The cover was then flown from Portage to Fort McMurray, and then travelled by train to Edmonton. It continued from there and was flown to Winnipeg, whence it travelled by train to Minnedosa (M on Figure 21). Minnedosa is located approximately 200 kms west of Winnipeg; 400 kms east of Regina.

The following four covers were all mailed in the United States. Their routes can be traced on the map in Figure 28. They would each have travelled by US air mail routes to Chicago. The covers were flown from Chicago via Minneapolis, then to Fargo, Pembina, Winnipeg, and finally flown west from Winnipeg on the Prairie Air Mail service.

The Illustrations for Figures 22, 23, and 24 were sent to me by the late Murray Heifetz. Figure 24 is from Kevin O’Reilly. Figure 22 is an Air Tour cover with a handstamp, THIRD ANNUAL MICHIGAN AIR TOUR JUNE 18-27, 1931 SPONSORED BY G.R ASSN OF COMMERCE RETURN.
1927 and operated from Cleveland to Pittsburgh via Youngstown. Akron replaced Youngstown on this route on 8 June 1931.

Figure 24 is postmarked, LONG BEACH CALIF, JUL 23 1931. The cover is addressed to Moose Jaw, Sask. This is the only example I’ve seen with two strikes of the “D.w.” handstamp. The route for this cover is on the southern part of the map (Figure 21) produced by the Edmonton Post Office in September 1931.

Kevin O’Reilly writes:

I’ve attached a scan of that mysterious D.w. marking, on an incoming airmail cover from the US to an RCAF pilot doing aerial survey work in northern Manitoba in 1931. There are no backstamps or transit markings. It looks like the D.w. and "Via Air Mail" markings were applied at the same time using the same violet ink.

The next cover, Figure 25 is also from the collection of the late Murray Heifetz. It is postmarked CLEVELAND OHIO 5, JUN24 1.30PM 1931, addressed to Flying Officer Louis H Brooks, Cormorant Lake, Manitoba. It is endorsed at bottom left: “Mile 42 Hudson Bay Railway, Please Forward.”
Cormorant Lake is shown on the map in Figure 26. In the summer of 1931, a Canadian Airways Ltd aircraft was stationed there, as part of a forestry patrol contract with Manitoba.

Figure 27 is addressed and has a return address of “WC DIMENT, SINTALUTA SASK.” This is the only “D.w.” cover I have seen that can be linked to WC Diment! Barry Countryman did some research and sent me the following biography and conclusions.

“William Charles Diment was born in London, England on 14 October 1890. In January 1910 the Lemberg, Saskatchewan resident applied for 160 acres under the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, but didn’t fulfill the homestead obligations. He was in Stanley with his brother Frank in 1916 and working as a clerk in September when he enlisted at Indian Head in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The 217th (Qu'Appelle) Battalion sailed from Halifax to England aboard the SS Olympic on 2 June 1917. Charles served in France and Belgium. On 1 November 1923 he married Vera Nellie Luker. They had two sons and three daughters. Charles was the assistant postmaster in Sintaluta (about 85 km east of Regina) 1923–37, then postmaster till retirement in 1956. In Sintaluta, Charles participated in the usual duties of a prominent citizen: town council, Anglican church warden and a Master of the Orange Lodge. After retiring, on his 66th birthday, Charles and his wife moved to Regina, where he died on 12 February 1970.”

I originally researched WC Diment to determine if he died at a relatively young age, thus unable to stamp a monogram on these air mail covers when they eventually came on the
market. Although he died at seventy-nine, I don’t believe it is his “D.w.” marking; he used the name Charles, and no stamp collector would cancel a stamp (Figure B) that he/she might need for an album or for trading.

When the cover was included in a presentation during last year’s Day of Aerophilately in Toronto, there was considerable discussion as to whether the “D.w.” handstamp on Figure 25 was above or below the postmark. Although only a photocopy of Figure 25 was available, the actual cover shown in Figure A was part of the presentation and was examined by many people.

The meeting was held at the Vincent Greene Foundation, where Garfield Portch very kindly examined Figure A using the Foundation’s newly acquired Foster & Freeman VSC6000/HS Video Spectral Comparator. This is a very impressive piece of equipment that can examine material under very high magnification, and/or using an extremely wide range of wavelengths of ultraviolet, infrared and filtered visible light. (There is a neat video describing the VSC6000 [2].) However, the results of the analysis depended on which part of Figure 9 one looked at!

On the screen of the VSC6000, the “D.w.” handstamp was changed to a bright pink (Figure 29), so that it stood out from the postmark. A copy of this article with illustrations in colour will be posted on the CAS website [1]. The postmark was also turned into different colours, and where the cancellations overlapped, it always looked like the postmark was above the “D.w.” stamp. However, when the images were enlarged to extreme magnification, (about 200× the original size), there are places where one gets a pink outline around the edge of the postmark. There are also places where there are traces of a pink line – where the edge of the postmark should be, but the ink isn’t.

The explanation for this pink line seems to be that the postmark was applied first, and the edge of the postmark cut slightly into the paper. Later, the “D.w.” handstamp was applied on top of the postmark, at which time some of the pink ink was absorbed, where the paper had been cut, and ran along the edge of the postmark (Figure 30). Given the ongoing debate about other aspects of the “D.w.” covers, it seems ironic but fitting that a high-tech analysis is also inconclusive!

(To be continued.)

Please send any comments about the new and/or old information on the “D.w.” covers to the Editor or to Chris Hargreaves, 4060 Bath Road, Kingston, ON K7M 4Y4.
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References and endnotes

Update on the “D.w.” Covers—Part 2

Chris Hargreaves


There is still no consensus as to the purpose of the D.w. handstamp (Figure 1)! In this article, I am going to present additional covers and suggestions I have received. I am still hoping that, as more information is available, someone will have an idea or memory that provides the solution to the mystery.

Figure 2, Cover #27 is postmarked HAMILTON ONT, 3 JUL 1931. The cover is addressed to Revelstoke YMCA, BC with a two-line handstamp “INSUFFICIENTLY PREPAID.” The basic Canadian airmail rate had increased to 6 cents and 2 cents Postage Due was charged. (The rate changed on 1 July 1931.) There is also an endorsement ACROSS CANADA AIR TOUR at left. A faint D.w. handstamp was applied over the typed endorsement.

Cover #27 is from Dick McIntosh, and illustrates two of the basic questions regarding the D.w. handstamp:

Keywords & phrases: Airmail, postal markings, handstamp

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If it was a collector’s mark, why was it applied over the endorsement?

If it was a Post Office marking, why wasn’t its purpose stated, as with the INSUFFICIENTLY PREPAID handstamp?

Cover #28 (Figure 3) is the latest-recorded cover with a D.w. handstamp found so far.

Cover #29 (Figure 4) is from Gray Scrimgeour, who also commented on one of the other basic questions regarding covers with a D.w. handstamp: Why did some covers on a particular flight or day receive a D.w. handstamp, while other covers to a similar destination on the same flight or day didn’t?

Gray is one of several people who have suggested that covers were often bundled together, and that the D.w. handstamp was applied to the top cover in the bundle, or to a facing slip on the top of the bundle. Gray’s suggestion comes from his own experience working in a major Post Office in the 1950s.

It is noteworthy that when Gray was working at a sorting table, (and putting lots of letters into bundles), he never used rubber stamps. If the Winnipeg Post Office in the 1930s operated the way the Vancouver Post Office did in the 1950s, (which seems highly likely), it raises the question: At what stage in mail processing would a D.w. handstamp have been applied?

Although there are still many unanswered questions regarding the D.w. covers, the enquiry is definitely making progress!

Cover #30 (Figure 5) is from Air Mails of Canada, 1925–1939 by George Arfken and Walter Plomish. The book (published in 2000) describes the cover this way:
“the new 6c rate was properly paid with a 6c Scott C3. Posted in Winnipeg on February 23, 1932, the cover went by air to Pembina and Chicago, CAM 8. The cover then went by air to Salt Lake City, CAM 18, and to Seattle, CAM 5. Air service to Vancouver and Victoria at this time is uncertain. The alternatives were train and ship. Trelle Morrow has suggested that the strange boxed D.w. handstamp is the monogram of a certain collector whose last name began with a D and whose first name began with a W. About a dozen of these D.w. covers have been noted.”[1]

(1) Thirty of these D.w. covers have now been noted.

(2) The collector “whose last name began with a D and whose first name began with a W” was named by Trelle as WC Diment [2]. WC Diment has turned out to be a minor figure in this enquiry. He is only linked to one of the thirty covers, and Barry Countryman established that he used the name “Charles”[3].

(3) The consensus of opinion in correspondence I have received recently, is that the D.w. handstamp is probably a Post Office marking, not a collector’s mark. In addition to Don Amos’ original concern about why a collector or dealer would apply a handstamp over a stamp when there was lots of open space on a cover, (referring to Cover #2, Figure 6); the D.w. handstamp has only been found on Air Mail covers that passed through Winnipeg during the period 1 March 1930 to 31 March 1932 when the Prairie Air Mail service was operating. It is also only found on covers to the Prairie Provinces and BC, but it occurs on covers to a variety of addresses within these provinces. This pattern of use is much more likely to have occurred if the D.w. handstamp was applied in the Winnipeg Post Office than if it was a private collector’s mark.

(4) The D.w. handstamp has not been found on any covers addressed to the US or eastern Canada. This indicates that cover #30 did not travel from Winnipeg by air to Pembina and Chicago, but flew from Winnipeg to Calgary on the Prairie Air Mail Service, and then continued to BC by train.

(5) However, while D.w. seems to have been a Post Office marking, there are still questions as to what it stood for, and what it indicated.

Don Amos suggested it stood for “Delayed weather”, and several of the covers (like #26) are from the Winnipeg - Pembina First Flight. This was scheduled for 2 February 1931, but was delayed by fog until 3 February. However, the D.w. handstamp has only been found on covers which returned to Winnipeg with incoming mail from the USA and were addressed within the prairie provinces.
Barry Countryman has researched some of the other covers with the D.w. handstamp, including Covers #4 and #5. Cover #5 (Figure 7), (Foam Lake, Sask., Oct. 17/30 backstamp) was scheduled when inclement weather intervened. A blizzard hit Saskatchewan and Alberta 15 -16 October and was headed towards Manitoba. Air travel was suspended and many trains were delayed (Figure 8).

Further research by Barry Countryman uncovered Cover #11 (Figure 9). The “Graf Zeppelin” was in Munster, Germany on 16 August 1931 and then returned to base the next day. I believe that the Prince Albert date slugs are misplaced. The backstamp should read 28 August.

Ice forced the Winnipeg-Regina-Moose Jaw plane to land 27 August in Manitoba. Bad weather also kept the Winnipeg-Moose Jaw plane in Manitoba the day before (See Figure 10). A deadly tornado struck Estevan and southeast Saskatchewan the evening of 26 August.
Cover #11 is listed in the *Air Mails of Canada and Newfoundland* as Newfoundland FF-42, with a note: This flight was scheduled for 24 May, but was held up until 26 May.

The clipping (Figure 10) was sent to me by Barry Countryman and gives no indication that the flight was likely to be delayed. Bill Beaudoin, who sent me the cover, included a comment that *Newfoundland Air Mails* by CHC Harmer did not give a reason for the delay. Regarding the end of the cover’s journey, Barry commented on Cover #13 (Figure 11): “Don't know why “D.w.” was applied. Prairie weather was fine.” The cover would have been flown from Winnipeg to Moose Jaw, and then continued by rail to Estevan. I also received a comment from Bob Dyer that, “This is the first Newfie cover I recall seeing with the “D.w.”.

Cover #4 (Figure 13) is a First Flight Cover postmarked SISCOE on 28 October 1930 and addressed to Grande Pointe, Manitoba. He commented that:

1. The Prairie air routes had excellent weather for at least the first five days of November.
2. Grande Pointe was less than 20 miles from Winnipeg (Figure 12).

Since the airmail route to Winnipeg via Pembina did not open till February 1931, Cover #4 would have arrived in Winnipeg by train, received the D.w. handstamp, and then continued by train to Grande Prairie.
Covers #7 and #8, (Figures 14 and 15), were also from the Amos-Siscoe first flights and would have arrived in Winnipeg with Cover #4. They also received a D.w. handstamp and probably also continued from Winnipeg by train, as Oak Lake is between Winnipeg and Regina (264 km west of Winnipeg, but 310 km east of Regina).

Cover #7 (Figure 14) is addressed to Oak Lake, Manitoba and so is Cover #8. However, Cover #8 (Figure 15) is also from the Amos-Siscoe First Flight, so it should have arrived in Winnipeg with Cover #7. It is addressed to AB Stuart in Estevan, as was Cover #13 (Figure 16), and it is backstamped MOOSE JAW 4 NOV 1930, which indicates it was flown from Winnipeg. But whereas Cover #13 to Estevan received a D.w. handstamp, Figure 16 to Estevan didn’t, even though Covers #4, #7, and #8, which arrived in Winnipeg at the same time, did!

One possible explanation is that all the covers from the Amos-Siscoe First Flights flew from Montreal via Toronto, Windsor, and Chicago to Minneapolis, and then continued to Winnipeg in an “Air Mail bag.” The D.w. handstamp might then have been applied before further sorting. However, the D.w. handstamp is also found on some covers that originated in Winnipeg, (e.g., Covers #26, #28, #29, #30), so at what stage of mail handling was it applied, and why?

A number of people have commented on this puzzle, and/or suggested various explanations as to what “D.w.” stood for. These comments and suggestions are summarized below. I hope they will encourage more people to send in suggestions.

Normally I am careful to give credit for a contribution to the individual who makes it. In this case, however, I am also including comments and questions raised in discussions about some of the suggestions, as I hope these comments will stimulate more ideas. I have therefore not attributed the individual comments below, as I don’t want anyone to feel criticized or to hesitate about sending in a novel idea in the future.

(1) Maybe D.w. stood for Diverted westbound?
(2) or Destination west?
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(3) or Dispatched Winnipeg?

(4) Since the “w” is lower case, “D.w.” more likely means “Delayed (by) weather” than “Delayed (at) Winnipeg.” I think that it would be upper case if it meant Winnipeg.

(5) I believe that the mark was only used at one specific post office (possibly Winnipeg), and was for INTERNAL use only to indicate special handling—i.e., Delayed weather, Delayed work, Delayed waybill, etc, and that the term was understood by all local staff.

(6) Last Saturday at brunch, some of us had a discussion re: “D.w.” We did not come to any satisfactory answers, but one fact came up—that there was no correspondence out of Winnipeg going East. One thought was that “D.w.” stood for Destination west. Perhaps a capital “w” was not available?

(7) Both “weather” and “Winnipeg” start with a “W.” Could it be that the Winnipeg P.O. did not want the blame for delay placed on them when mail was delayed by weather, and so deemed it necessary to use a small “w” when the delay was due to weather? Had the delay been the fault of the Winnipeg PO, a capital W would have been used as all cities begin with a capital letter.

(8) Would the postal chiefs in such places as Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton be somewhat autonomous in what they used as “stamps”? Might one postmaster save ink by using an abbreviation in a handstamp, while another used a text message?

(9) If “D.w.” is a Post Office handstamp, did it comply with UPU regulations?

(10) D.w. covers are scarce. I've been watching for more D.w. covers but no luck so far.

(11) “While doing some eBaying last evening I came across an interesting lot.” (Figure 17.) “It struck me that although the font of the 'Air Mail' handstamp on it is different from that of the 'D.w.'s, the vertical size, line thickness and ink colour are very similar. My understanding is that this 'Air Mail' handstamp was a post office issue. If correct, could that be a link between the two?”

After seeing the eBay illustration, I bought this cover to examine it. The “Air Mail” handstamp does indeed look very similar to the D.w. handstamp.

I have a number of other covers with the boxed Air Mail handstamp, and I hadn't thought about a similarity to the D.w. handstamp before. Then again, Murray Heifetz researched both handstamps, and he never suggested a connection either. The

Figure 17. eBay lot with same font as “D.w.”
“Air Mail” handstamp was indeed a post office marking, but he thought the handstamps may have been produced locally, rather than have been “issued from Ottawa” [4].

(1) “My guess is that the D.w. handstamp was applied in the Winnipeg post office. It was possibly applied to the top cover in each bundle of airmail dispatched westbound.”

(2) The only reason why mail is sent by air is to speed it up. If flights are delayed, there is little difference with rail transport, which is cheaper. Flying in those years was still largely by Visual Flight Rules, and any kind of bad weather would delay the plane taking off. In order to stop an avalanche of complaints about slow delivery of airmail, the Winnipeg post office put on this handstamp, basically saying “Not our fault.” I believe the D.w. stands for “Delayed. weather.”

This has worked out very well, as aerophilatelists have generally assumed the marking was related to airmail service and the flight. However, a couple of readers from the BNAPS community have focussed on other issues, particularly the railway mail service:

The D.w. article sparked my interest as I collect Alberta related flight material. While I do not have any “D.w.” covers on hand, I strongly support the notion it is a Winnipeg post office marking and related to the first Prairie Flights. This is mainly because the dates that “D.w.” markings are found neatly fit the start and end dates of the Prairie Flights; which began on 3 March 1930 and were terminated on 30 March 1932.

I collect commercial covers on these routes, on the Alberta legs. There were two changes that affected the Alberta legs. On 15 January 1931 Lethbridge was added to the Winnipeg-Calgary route. On 1 July 1931 the route from Winnipeg to Calgary was extended to Edmonton; and at the same time the Regina, Saskatoon, North Battleford, Edmonton route was terminated. However throughout the 1930–1932 period, there were many adjustments to the schedules. These schedules are now available online via the Monthly Postal Guide Supplements for the dates in question.

I suspect the many changes in the schedules were in part due to ease the burden on the carrier; but also to better match the train schedules. While the first Prairie Flights were in operation a person could sent a letter airmail to eastern Canada at 5 or 6 cents, but the letter still had to be carried by train east of Winnipeg to Ontario.

My suspicions are that the “D.w.” marking was used by the Winnipeg PO for bundled mail related to meeting a schedule and thus putting a priority on the bundle. The fact that the “D.w.” has been found on facing slips tends to support such a notion, but it is pure supposition. I don't know what the initials may mean but it may have been coded on purpose. It seems that this Prairie Air scheme was not a paying proposition. Matching the train plane schedules with the plane schedule was a bit of a challenge and perhaps the post office did not want to advertise the misses. Delayed or Detained at Winnipeg comes to mind, both of which are negative in the promotion of the air service so why spell it out? Regardless it is a most interesting aspect of this period.

(Continued on p 42)
An earlier comment also mentioned “fault.” Perhaps the handstamp was intended to tell postal employees in Regina, Calgary, etc, that the slow delivery was the railway’s fault, and that the mail had missed a connection in Winnipeg because the train was late arriving in Winnipeg? But if so, why is it found on covers that originated in Winnipeg?

Might D.w. mean “Day (train) west”? Perhaps it indicates that once the covers reached Winnipeg, they were being sent to their destinations further west by train and not by air.

Could air mail out of Winnipeg have been sent (infrequently) by train for whatever reason? I recall seeing somewhere, not in Canada but in the USA, I think, that some railway post offices used the initials dw to mean day train west, dn to mean day train north, etc.

I asked a friend, a railway-philatelist to look into the use of “Dw” for me. He replied:

“I am unable to find any references to DW in the Railway Study Group newsletters. The word DOWN is used on some cancels but usually it’s just N or S or E and W. Good luck with your research—we have our own mysteries involving strange sets of letters showing up on covers.”

I also received some other suggestions, which may hold a key to the mystery:

1. “Having spent many years planning aircraft baggage, cargo, and mail loading, and weight and balance, I am acutely aware of the importance of the weight of things stuffed into aircraft. I would think that those handling air mail in the post offices would have been briefed on the importance of the accurate recording of the weights of any mail they submitted for carriage by air. As postal employees processed the mail, and I know nothing of the processes followed in those 1930s post offices, there would at some point have been a requirement to accurately keep a record of the mail accumulating for the airport. Could it have been possible that letters were organized in bundles of a certain weight? Is it possible that the top letter in each bundle was stamped D.w. to indicate that the weight of that bundle has been recorded in a total? Could the ‘w’ have stood for weight? Could the D. have stood for daybook or diary or ….”

2. “I have a suggestion to make by analogy to practice in the UK. The UK post office had a wide variety of marks that are generically known as inspector’s marks. They are often strange symbols or one or two letters within a frame. The frame could be circular, oval, rectangular, etc. These were applied by an inspector in the post office and authorised the treatment of the letter in some way. Often each inspector had his own distinctive mark. Maybe the handstamp is the mark of an inspector in the Winnipeg office.”

The suggestion of an Inspector’s mark revisits one of the earlier lines of enquiry. The concern at that time was what sort of post office employees would apply their handstamp over special instructions, as on Covers #26 and #27, or a postmark as on Cover #6 (Figure 18.)
However, the letter below also revisited an old question: how many handstamps were there? The more I look at the covers in *Topics*, the more I see different handstamps. Look at Cover #5: both parts of the D have a surge or extension. In Cover #6, the D has a serious indent in the upright and the “w” appears as separate strokes. For Cover #3 (Figure 19) and #4, the righthand stroke of the “w” appear different. Clearly, however, the “surge” around the periods appears to move around within each box. Some are to the left at, say 10 o’clock (Cover #4), some at 11 (Cover #7), some at 12 (Cover #3), some, none, or very little (Cover #3). Even the boxes are different. Cover #1 is missing a junction in the lower right, Cover #2 is overly fat at that same place, In Cover #3, the lines are overly thick; Cover #7’s lines appear flexible, while in Cover #5 the upper right is bent out. In Cover #8 an extra line appears. It is interesting to note that Cover #10 (Figure 20) and #11 appear identical, bent out top right and amiss in bottom right.

I wonder about a “homemade” kit-type device. I remember as a child, in the ‘40s, having a rubber type set we could use to “manufacture” our own rubber stamps. Tweezers fit the individual letters into a wooden holder. My best guess is that it is a home-made, personalized stamp Any professionally-created stamp would have been consistent, even if there were more than one made from a proper mould. All the “stamps” I saw here in Toronto at our historic post office were in fact made of engraved steel and not rubber, which these appear to be. The following comments are intriguing!

I received another comment regarding the handstamp:

> The impressions illustrated on the 14 covers indicate that the mark was a rubber cancel, subject to inking and pressure application, and probably locally made. Rubber deteriorates with the use of acid inks, so short term use (2/3 years).

Comparing the handstamps is challenging: In addition to normal variations caused by the amount of ink used, the pressure applied, and wear-and-tear on the handstamp, the illustrations provided vary in size and quality. To allow a more definitive analysis, I’ve scanned a number of the handstamps in a single image (Figure 21, below):

But, if there was more than one D.w. handstamp, then the following questions arise:

1. Were they all being used in used in Winnipeg at the same time?
2. Were they used in Winnipeg in sequence after one was worn out and replaced?
3. Or was a D.w. handstamp being used in more than one location, and not just in Winnipeg?
Many thanks to Dale Spiers, Denny May, Don Fraser, Ed Matthews, Ian Macdonald, Julian Burgess, Ken Snelson, Mike Street, Norman Seastedt, Peter Motson, Peter Wood, Rick Parama, Robert Timberg, Ron Barrett, and William Cochrane, whose comments were used in the above anthology, and to everyone with whom I’ve discussed these covers from time to time. If anyone has comments on this article, suggestions, more information, or copies of additional covers with a D.w. handstamp, please send them to Chris Hargreaves, 4060 Bath Road, Kingston, Ontario K7M 4Y4 or e-mail: <hargreavescp@sympatico.ca>.

References and endnotes


