

NPL

Northwest Philatelic Library

Portland, Oregon



Book Reports

August 2010

Volume 7, Issue 3



NPL Research
**CUBAN AIR MAIL STAMPS –
THE KEY WEST CONNECTION**
Charles Neyhart

Havana, Cuba and Key West, Florida are separated by a mere 98 miles across the Florida Straits. This tantalizingly short distance has long promoted cultural, social, and economic exchange and ties between the two locales. That distance also prompted early air flights between the two cities – flights that have been commemorated by the Cuban Post Office Department. These air mail stamps and the events they memorialize are discussed below.

On May 17, 1913, Spanish-born **Domingo Rosillo** piloted a French Morane-Saulnier monoplane between Key West and Havana and won a prize of \$10,000 as the first aviator to successfully cross the Florida Straits. The 5-centavos *C30* was issued to commemorate the 25th anniversary of this fight. The stamp was printed using plates from Cuba's first



air mail stamp. For *C30*, the color was changed to dark orange and it was overprinted 1913 and 1938 in the upper left and right corners, respectively; a larger ROSILLO in the center; and Key West – Habana across the bottom of the stamp. All overprinting was done in black ink.

Two days later, **Augustin Parla**, born of Cuban émigré parents living in Key West, flew a seaplane between Key West and Mariel, Cuba, a seaport town near Havana. He navigated with only a compass [Rosillo had used a running naval escort] and, as the story goes, carried a Cuban flag belonging to the late Cuban patriot Jose Marti. When the Aviation Corps of the Cuban Army was created in 1913, Parla was named Captain and he is considered to be the “Father of Cuban Aviation.” A memorial bust of Parla stands at the Key West Airport. *C61 and C62*, shown on a FDC below, along with four matching souvenir sheets were issued July 22, 1952 to commemorate the 39th anniversary of his flight. The 8-centavos *C61*, printed in black, shows a biplane superimposed over a map of the southern tip of Florida and the northern coast of Cuba, with a line showing the route between Key West and Mariel. The



25-centavos C62, printed in ultramarine, shows a portrait of Parla with the image of a biplane in the background.



In July, 1927 Pan American Airways was awarded the U.S. contract [FAM 4] to transport by air between Key West and Havana all U.S. first-class mail addressed to Cuba. PAA, in turn, separately contracted with Cuban postal authorities to carry return mail between Havana and Key West. Regular daily service from Key West commenced October 28, 1927. [The first U.S. air mail carried between Key West and Havana, over “Route 1,” was by Aeromarine West Indies Airways. Unlike, Pan American, however, Aeromarine failed to secure a return trip agreement with Cuban postal authorities and the service ceased in 1924. Consequently, Cuba did not issue any stamps nor did it postally recognize this venture.]

General Gerardo Machado, President of Cuba, ordered a special air mail stamp to commemorate the first return flight from Havana to Key West. A 5-centavos stamp was designed locally by Oscar Acosta showing a seaplane over the Gulf of Mexico with Havana’s Malecon seawall and roadway and the El Morro lighthouse visible in the design. The die for the stamp was engraved and the printing plates manufactured by Security Bank Note Co. of Philadelphia. The stamp was printed in Havana. The dark blue *CI* was issued November 1, 1927.



Unfortunately, the stamp was not ready for this October 28, 1927 first return flight to Key West; instead, first flight covers bear the 5-centavos definitive stamp, Scott 276, or other denominations from this series. [The actual flight was rain-delayed until October 29; first flight covers, however, had already received an October 28 cancel.] Note the special first flight marking, 1^{ER}

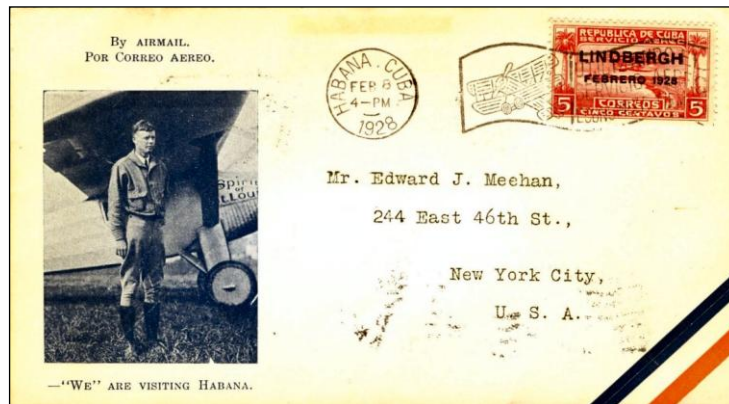


VIAJE HABANA-KW, added to the cancel in the cover above.

C1 was first used on the November 1 FAM 4 flight, but there are no postal markings calling specific attention to a first day usage.



In late 1927 and early 1928, Charles Lindbergh took the *Spirit of St. Louis* on a goodwill tour of Central and South America and the West Indies – a survey flight that would lead to Pan American Airways securing the FAM 5, 6 and 7 routes in those regions. Lindbergh was scheduled to arrive in Havana on February 8, 1928. To commemorate the forthcoming event, the Cuban post office, using plates from *C1*, ordered a special printing of 500,000 stamps. These were printed in carmine rose and overprinted LINDBERGH and FEBRERO 1928 in black on two lines. *C2* was issued February 8, 1928.



The cover above, franked with a first-day usage of *C2*, was carried from Havana on the regular Pan American service via FAM 4. [Lindbergh only carried mail from Santo Domingo to Havana via Port-au-Prince.] The story goes that the *C2* covers were postmarked at 4:00 pm to correspond to the exact time the *Spirit of St. Louis* touched down at the army's

Camp Columbia outside of Havana. This cover received a February 8 Key West and February 10 New York backstamp.



The final Cuban air mail stamp to commemorate the Key West connection, *C172*, was issued October 28, 1957 – 30 years after the inaugural flight from Key West to Havana and return via FAM 4. The 12-centavos stamp design again superimposes an airplane [a monoplane in this case] over a map showing the Key West – Havana route. The stamp was printed in dark red brown and blue.

A first day cover for *C172*, supplemented with a 1-centavo postal tax stamp, *RA34*, shows PRIMER DIA within a three-bar cancel. The additional cacheted marking on the front of the cover was applied in purple ink by handstamp.



In 1929, Pan American Airways secured rights at Dinner Key near Miami adjacent to Biscayne Bay and proceeded to renovate former Naval Air Station facilities on site. [Later, as international seaplane traffic became obsolete, Pan American purchased an orange grove west of Miami and built a land-based aircraft airfield - now the site of Miami International Airport.] On September 15, 1929, Miami became the start-end terminus of FAM 4 with Key West remaining as an intermediate stop between Miami and Havana. Then, on December 4, 1929, Key West was dropped entirely from the FAM 4 routing.



PAA Facilities – Key West [ca. 1928]

TAGGING ... CONTINUED

The June 22 program “Tagging U.S. Stamps” by **Steve Chown** and **Charles Neyhart** drew a raucous, inquisitive crowd, and generated outstanding comments and questions. The program was, admittedly, ambitious - to review the purpose of tagging; highlight early U.S. efforts [the Dayton experiments]; visually distinguish tagging types; stress the role of stamp paper in tagging interpretations; show UV equipment options; and discuss the identification and catalog treatment of tagging errors and varieties. A range of relevant NPL resources was exhibited. Up against a time limit, Steve and Charles decided to carry over some audience questions for further consideration. These will be featured in a **Q&A** in a forthcoming issue of *Book Reports*.



Photo by Barry B. Frankel

Northwest Philatelic Library, Inc.

President - *Charles Neyhart*, Secretary – *Orlie Trier*, Treasurer - *Wayne Holmes*, Directors: *Darlene Lengacher*, *Janice Weinstock*, *Grant Williams* and *Greg Alexander*. Director of Sales – *Larry Spray*. Secretary Emeritus - *Tom Current*.

Contact: P.O. Box 6375, Portland, OR 97228-6375
(503) 284-6770

nwpl@qwestoffice.net

www.nwpl.org

Northwest Philatelic Library, Inc. is a nonprofit, tax exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Any contributions to NPL may be deductible as charitable contributions on the donor's tax return.



1546-204454

