

HADLEY AIR FIELD, NEW BRUNSWICK. NEW JERSEY

By Jim Walker

Early air mail service in the New York area used an assortment of air fields on Long Island. Hazlehurst Field was the one in use at the commencement of Transcontinental Air Mail Service in 1924 and was deemed inadequate due to smoke from city industries and ocean fog.

A new location was found at John R. Hadley's seventy-seven acre farm five miles from New Brunswick, New Jersey. Located at what is now Route 529 and Hadley Road in South Plainfield, this grass field became the Eastern Terminus of the new Transcontinental Air service. On July 1, 1924, Hadley became the official air field for all New York Metropolitan air service. It remained such until September 8, 1930, when the Eastern Terminus was transferred to Newark Airport and all air mail routes serving New York City began using this facility. Hadley was abandoned as an air mail dispatch center.

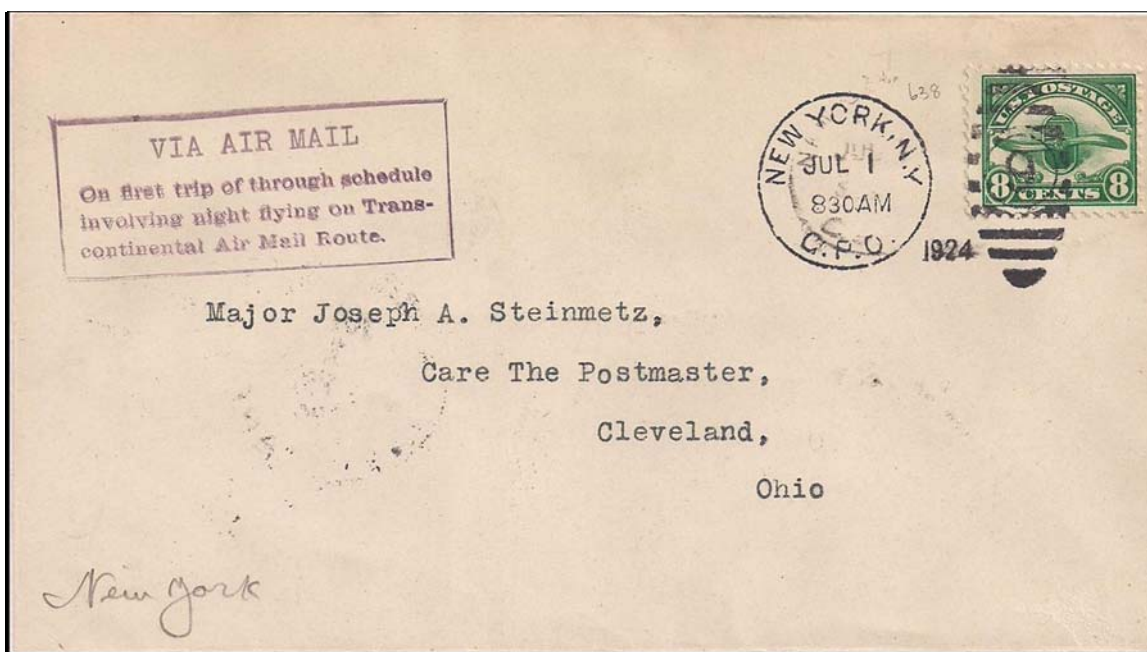


Fig. 1: U.S. Gov. Flight #166, July 1, 1924.

This cover was flown on the first day of service of the Transcontinental route. The Scott's #C4 eight cents stamp pays the single zone rate New York – Cleveland; it carries a boxed cachet marking the occasion. It was mailed at a New York post office at 8:30AM on July 1, 1924. All air mail was trucked to Hadley in time to make the flight. It is back-stamped at the Cleveland Air field upon arrival, 4PM July 1st.

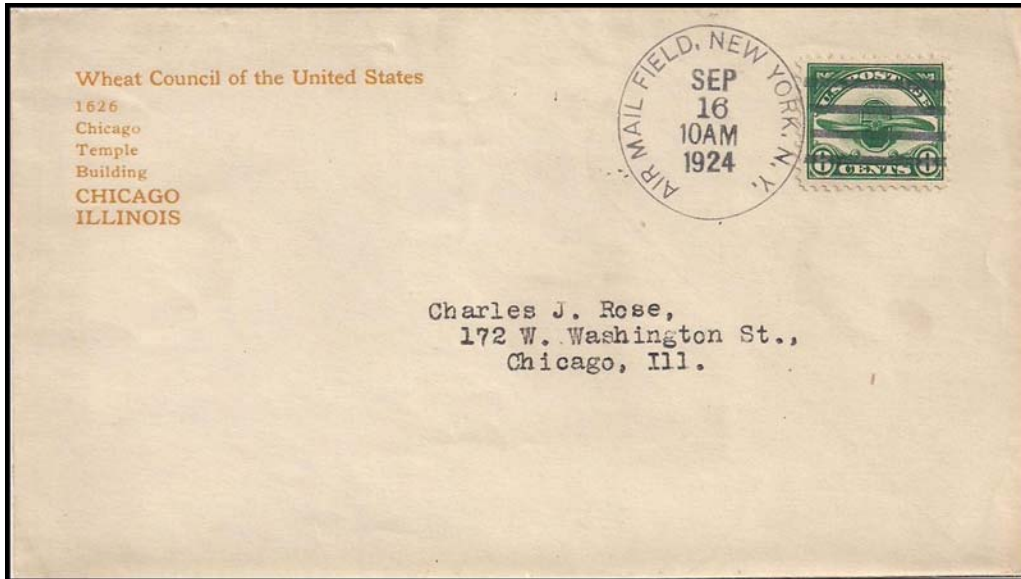


Fig. 2: This commercial air mail cover addressed to Chicago and franked with #C4 is postmarked with AAMC¹ cancel NYC #1. Type 1 was in use exclusively at Hadley Field. The listing of this cancel and NYC #2 Type R4a , (discussed later) has caused some confusion among collectors.



Fig. 3: U.S. Gov. Flight #176, posted in Brooklyn, NY at 2AM July 1, 1925. It arrived in Chicago at 7AM on July 2.

On July 1, 1925, the Air Mail Service began an additional service on the eastern leg of its Transcontinental route, overnight service between New York and Chicago with intermediate stops at Bellefonte, PA, Bryan, OH, and Cleveland, OH. This overnight service required two cents extra, as the postage on this cover illustrates. On the first day of service, covers also received the three-line cachet at the upper left. This cover was posted at Brooklyn at 2AM on July 1 and, as noted on the cover, it was receiver at 10AM on July 2. It is also back-stamped Chicago 7AM on the 2nd. It's not email but not bad for the day!



Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

Fig. 4: U.S. Air Mail workers transfer Chicago-bound mailbags into a de Havilland DH-4 at Hadley Field, New Jersey ca. 1925.



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Fig. 5: Sorting air mail at Hadley Field, New Jersey ca. 1926.



Fig. 6: New York to Boston service began July 1, 1926, a part of the Contract Air Mail service using private carriers. This cover was mailed on July 15, with the addition of Hartford to the route.

Private carriers, Contract Air Mail (CAM for short) began flying the mail on February 15, 1926. CAM Route #1 New York - Boston began July 1st. This cover was mailed on the first day of service from Hartford, a stop along this route. Prepared by Rudolph Dinnebie, an active collector-dealer of air mail covers, this cover mentions Hadley Field prominently in both the cachet and the address. I believe Dinnebie's idea here was to pick up the covers at the air field where they would receive an air field back stamp and avoid having them forwarded to New York City with the commercial mail and risk an overstrike cancel.

The following information is from the U.S. Highway Post Office Cover Catalog by the Mobile Post Office Society March 2004.

EXPERIMENTAL HPO* ROUTES – PRIOR TO 1941²

9E. HADLEY FIELD AND NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. February 1928 to February 1930. (By Bryant Alden Long) The Hadley Field & New Brunswick was established in February, 1928 (exact date unknown) a full year before the first German HPO began and 13 years before the Wash & Harris HPO No. 1 (the first permanent route, it still deserves that number). It was established and manned by Railway Mail Service personnel, just like later HPOs (unlike similar Post Office-operated Miami truck which sorted air-mail later) and not by officials, but by three farsighted clerks detailed to Hadley Field from the Penn Terminal RPO in New York. Normally, they sorted the incoming air-mail at the Field (designated the Transfer Office, New Brunswick) in the wee hours of dawn, for connection by ordinary truck to the N.Y. & Wash and N.Y. & Pittsburgh (PRR) RPOs at New Brunswick. But when trains were late, there was no time, so they set up a sorting-case on the truck-partition behind the driver, and sorted the mail enroute over their historic seven mile run on "late-plane" days.

*Highway Post Office – This "experimental" route served Hadley Field on "late train days," sorting mail en route to Hadley Field.

The HPO operated for two years and was discontinued in February, 1930, when the last of the commercial airlines were transferred to Newark Airport from Hadley Field.

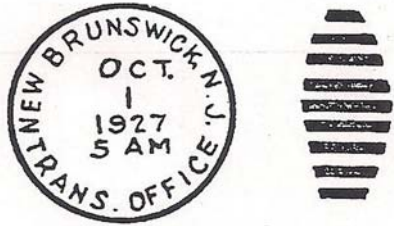
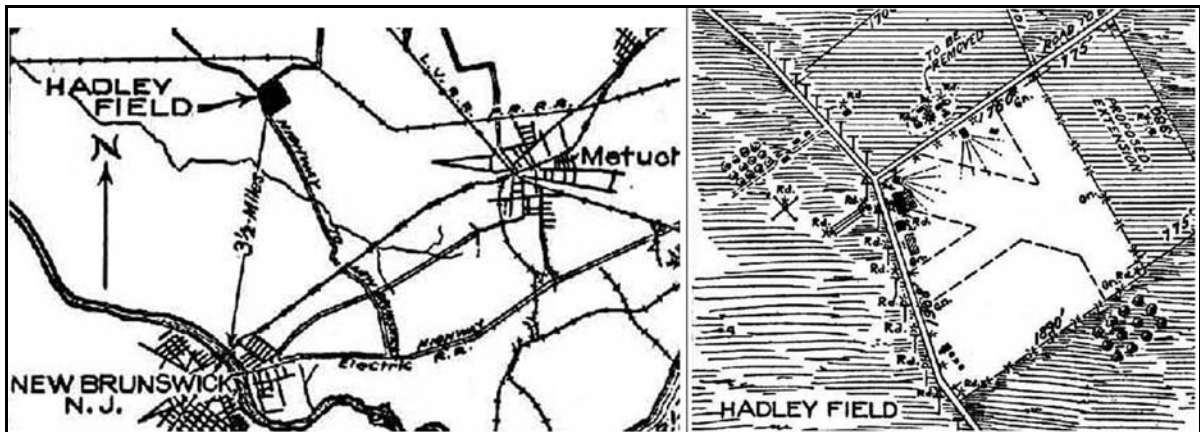


Fig. 7: Normally mail was sorted at Hadley Field, but when time was short (due to late trains), mail arriving for air mail service was sorted and cancelled en route in the truck transferring the mail.

The clerks -- W.D. Ugriss, M.A. Pence and E.J. Donnelly -- used the airfield postmarker on their HPO trips. This read, "NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. TRANS. OFFICE," because the clerk distributing unit was originally a small transfer office in the baggage room, PRR Station, New Brunswick; as airmail increased it was moved to Hadley Field. The HPO truck left Hadley Field at 4:20 AM, and arrived at New Brunswick station around five, and was owned by Bradley & Peterson Co. No mails were sorted on the return trip. The letter case had twenty pigeonholes, while wire hooks were hung in the truck's mesh screen to hold open pouches; pouch mail was dumped on the floor for distribution. A small stool was nailed to the floor and used by the letter clerk!

Whenever one of the planes of those early days crashed in the general vicinity, the HPO was diverted from its route and rushed to the scene -- and the lengthy detour was put to good use, as the ill-fated craft's mail cargo was sorted on the way back. Once, hitting a bump in the wretched road, all mail was flung out of the case in a shower on the floor, and had to be resorted. Again, during a snowstorm which blocked roads, the mails had to be transferred to sleds commandeered from kids living near the airport. Even with all their ingenuity they could not manage to set up distribution facilities on the Flexible Flyers; but Donnelly is rumored to have enjoyed a record belly-whopper down one hill. Sorting in the truck was continued after arrival, if trains were late.

Police of New Brunswick and Raritan Township helped speed the truck through to the station, little dreaming it was our first HPO. Even the clerks didn't know it was -- the phrase had not been invented. Of the crew, Mr. Pence became Assistant General Superintendent, PTS, (Air) at New York, while the others became clerks in New York AMF.



Courtesy of David Brooks on "Abandoned and Little Known Airfields: NE New Jersey" web site³

Fig. 8: Location and layout of Hadley Field, from a 1927 Commerce Department Airway Bulletin.



Fig. 9: A press photo of National Air Transport hanger and planes September 1, 1927 at Hadley Air Field promoting Air Express service.

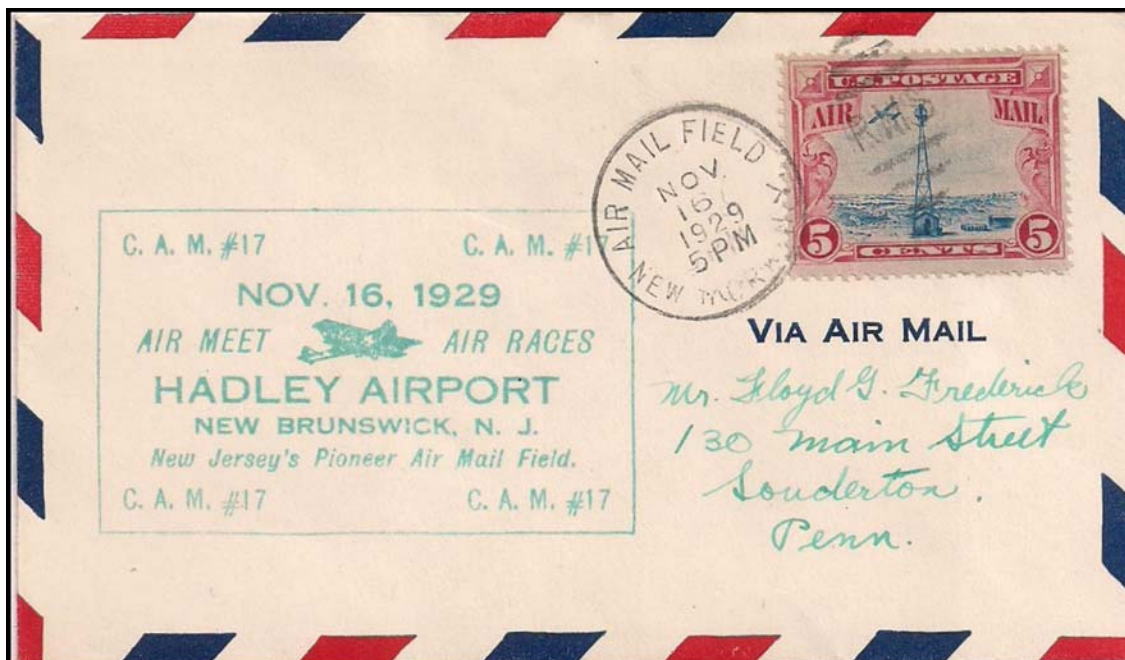


Fig. 10: Hadley Airport Air Show November 16, 1929. #C11 five cent "beacon" stamp tied by the new air field cancel # NYC#2 Type R4a used at Hadley beginning in 1928.



Fig. 11: Used a day after the above cover, this cover bears #NBR #1 Type 1.

This cover carries the same cachet as the previous cover with a date changed to the 17th, franked with C11 and canceled with the elusive Air Mail Field, New Brunswick, N.J. #NBR #1 Type 1. Little is known of this cancel. AAMC lists this cancel as used between 1928 and 1930 but examples are known as early as September 1926 used on CAM 13 New York - Philadelphia.



Fig. 12: On August 20, 1930, Greenfield, N.C. was added as a stop on CAM #19. This cover #R19N18 to Greenfield by southbound plane was canceled at Newark Air Field. However, Hadley Field was still the terminus for New York.



Fig. 13: September 7, 1930 saw the last official air mail flight of CAM #17 leave Hadley canceled with NYC #2 Type R4a.



Fig. 14: Newark Municipal Airport became the terminus for all Air Mail Routes serving the New York area as of September 8, 1930. Hadley Field was abandoned as an Air Mail dispatch point.

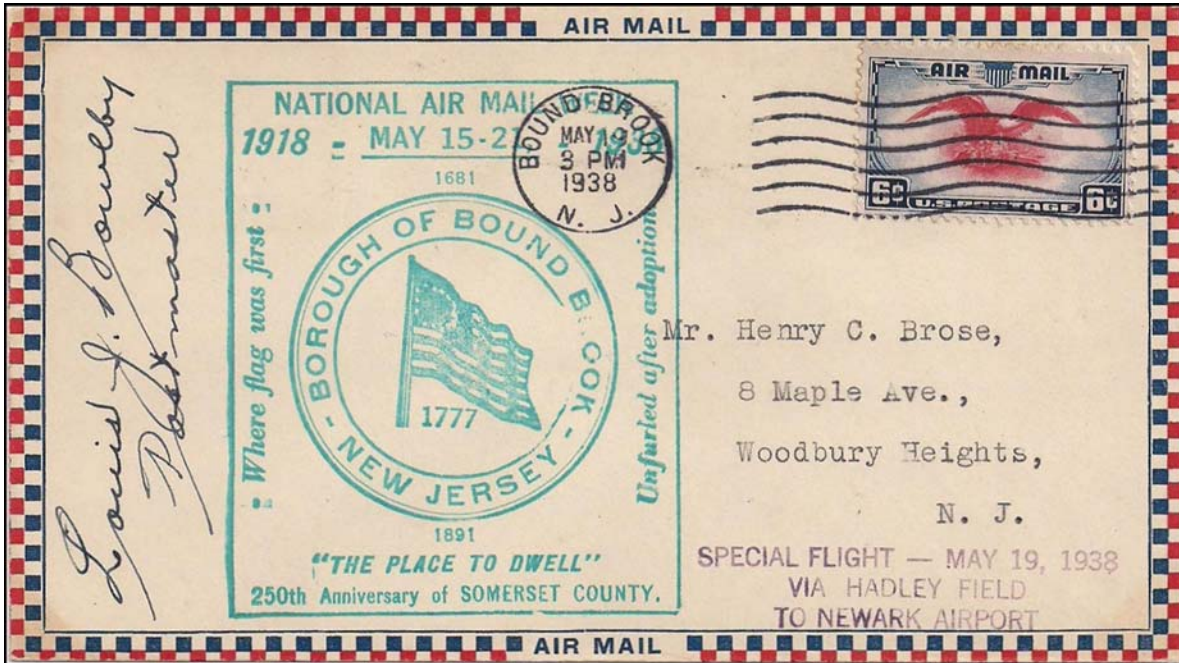


Fig. 15: An Air Mail Week cover from 1938, using Hadley Field.

Hadley Air Field assumed the status of a small local airport. As Figure 15 (above) shows, the airfield was pressed into service again in 1938 for National Air Mail Week

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Fig. 16: A December 1952 blotter advertising the services at Hadley Field.

This blotter advertises air taxi and package delivery service in December 1952. The Airport was closed in 1968 after forty-four years of service. The property was sold and developed and all that's left at the intersection of Route 529 & Hadley Road is an engraved memorial shown in Figure 17.



2007 photo by Jack McKillop at the site of Hadley Airport.⁴

Fig. 17. Hadley Airfield Memorial at intersection of Route 529 and Hadley Road, in South Plainfield.

ENDNOTES & REFERENCES:

¹ *American Air Mail Catalog* 5th Edition Volume 1,2,& 5 1974-77, 6th Edition Volume 1, 1998

² *United States Highway Post Office Cover Catalog*, 2nd printing March 2004, published by the Mobile Post Office Society, <http://www.eskimo.com/~rkunz/mposhome.html>

³ Web site: Abandoned and little known airfields: Northeastern NJ at http://www.airfields-freeman.com/NJ/Airfields_NJ_NE.htm#hadley

⁴ Web site: Abandoned and little known airfields: Northeastern NJ, op cit. Jack McKillop reported in 2007 that “part of the old airport is now a Holiday Inn.”

Additional references:

New Jersey Aeronautical Heritage... A Concise Chronology by H.V. Pat Reilly 1982

See also: <http://www.airmailpioneers.org/history/HadleyField.htm>