

## Synopsis

**Exhibit Title: The United States National Air Mail Week of 1938**

**Exhibitor: Clem Hegarty, Dublin, Ireland**

### ***“Receive To-morrows Mail To-day!”***

For an entire week in 1938, the United States of America celebrated airmail.

It was 1938, and a nation in the midst of the Great Depression decided to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of airmail with a weeklong celebration.

The brainchild of Postmaster General James A Farley, the National Air mail Week ( NAMW) encouraged every U.S citizen to send an airmail letter during the celebration, which ran from May 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> 1938.

The campaign had a catchy title: “Receive To-morrow’s mail to-day!”, and a new six-cent airmail stamp featuring a “spiffy” eagle. There were essay and poster contests (child star Shirley Temple entering the children’s competition section), and rousing speeches. Each town across the vast nation was invited to create its own cachet, a commemorative design or slogan that would be printed on the envelopes mailed on May 19<sup>th</sup> , the highlight of the celebration. On that Thursday, airmail service would be provided to even the most remote locations, when pilots all over the country were asked to donate their services, and be sworn in as government employees for 24 hours.

Only one of the special flights crashed, and the New York state’s Northern Star newspaper informed readers

that the New York pilot was unhurt, and that “after the crack-up at Lowville the airmail from the northern offices was taken to the post office ..... and continued onto Syracuse later.”

The Californian state postmaster, Leon L. Dwight, noted in his official report that “it was the most successful campaign ever in the history of the postal department in the Great Golden State of California, with some four and one half million air mail letters sent, and 3,200 airmail packages. In the instance of the memorial day, May 19<sup>th</sup> , there were 90 special flights, with 129 pick-up points covered, and the actual mileage flown was 5193 miles. Six of the 90 pilots, who were ably co-operated , were women.”

This Exhibit entitled “The United States National Air Mail Week of 1938” is presented in five sections, each endeavouring to show how the ordinary citizens of America embraced the spirit and aspirations of this special week.

1. Pioneering days in US aviation: This section needed to be brief, and does not truly reflect the contribution the United States has made to the early developments in air travel.
2. The Vision and Visionaries of NAMW”: There is no doubt that President Franklin Roosevelt’s own passion for philately and Postmaster General James’ A Farley organisational strengths and political connections were hugely significant in making this week the success that it was..
3. Postmasters, Pilots and Airlines: So many unsung heroes are found in this section, their names live on.
4. Methods of Postage: The various means by which the mail was delivered is documented here.
5. The Envelope says it all”. In the world of Philately the story that each “workhorse” envelope undertook during this special week is shown.

### **Subject Treatment and Philatelic Importance of this Exhibit.**

The story of The National Air Mail Week of 1938 is a key part in the story of the development of the airmail service within the 48 states as there were then in the United States of America. The involvement of the ordinary citizen, as they experienced the vastly increased speed of delivery and reception of mail did much to establish airmail as part of the fabric and culture of the country. The benefits of spending of the 6c rate as against the surface rate of 3c were felt by many in the nation.

Some 10,000 towns joined in during the week in explaining who they were and in promoting themselves as a holiday destination or a commercial possibility in the special cachets they produced.

Items considered significant have been indicated by appropriate key (red box), the more important of which are;

1. Involvement of President Roosevelt and Postmaster Farley in the NAMW.
2. The section documenting the involvement of pilots.
3. The use of Pick-up mail during the week.
4. The various enclosures displayed in the Exhibit.
5. The use of Poster Labels on the various covers.
6. The rarity of the returned mail covers.
7. The inclusion of the NAMW covers that were sent Internationally.

#### Bibliography:

1. NAMWHS Journal, Wisconsin . National Airmail Week May 15-21, 1938
2. Edited by Datz & Sine, "North America -The World Air Mail Catalogue – Published by Sanabria, Co, USA
- 3.. Henry R Lehrer. "Flying the Beam: Navigating the Early US Airmail Airways, 1917-1941
4. . Farley, James A. "Behind the Ballots: The Personal History of a Politician". 1938. Published by