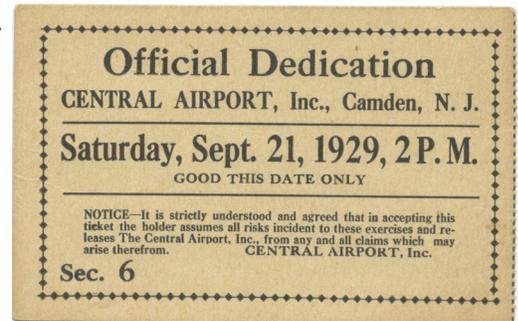


Part II: A Short History of Camden's Central Airport in Postcards and First Day Covers, 1929 - 1940

Harlan B. Radford, Jr.

Some newly acquired materials prompt this update to the original Camden Central Airport article posted on the Historical Society of Riverton website in 2013. Each item depicted features an explanatory and descriptive statement.

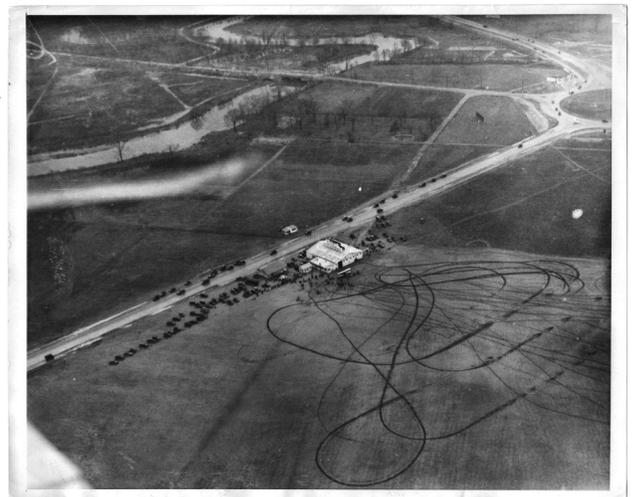
The scan at right shows an actual Admission Ticket for the Official Dedication and Opening of the Camden Central Airport on Saturday, Sept. 21, 1929 at 2 P.M.



Camden Central Airport, November 1929

Taken in November of 1929 just two months after the opening of the Camden Central Airport, the photo at left shows the expansive hangar with doors open, a wind sock indicating the wind direction, three vintage bi-planes with single propellers, and numerous men, women and even some dignitaries perhaps assembled and awaiting the arrival of some important person or some new airplane service of noteworthy importance. In the foreground the viewer can readily see the trench-like marks left in the soil made by the trailing tail skids of aircraft that have come and gone.

Camden's Airport at right a 60 acre landing field includes runways, hangars and ten planes. According to the wire service caption attached to the back of this photo, we see a portion of the crowd attending the airport dedicatory ceremonies with spectators examining some of the new planes at the field. The meandering Cooper River and a portion of the so-called Airport Circle lie in the upper portions of this early photograph.



Aerial view, Camden Central Airport, November 1929



Tri-State Aircraft Show commemorative covers

Five months later, in April 1930, the Camden Chamber of Commerce hosted a Tri-State Aircraft Show at the newly inaugurated Central Airport. This was the first of a number of air shows that would become very popular and attract many spectators during the decade of the 1930s.

The three air mail stamped envelopes shown at left were prepared on the different dates during that event and were specifically designated New Jersey Day (April 24), Pennsylvania Day (April 25), and Delaware Day (April 26) in that order. These postmarked covers all reveal a special pictorial cachet prepared by the Chamber of Commerce commemorating the Tri-State Aircraft Show held at Camden Airport between April 18 - 26, 1930.

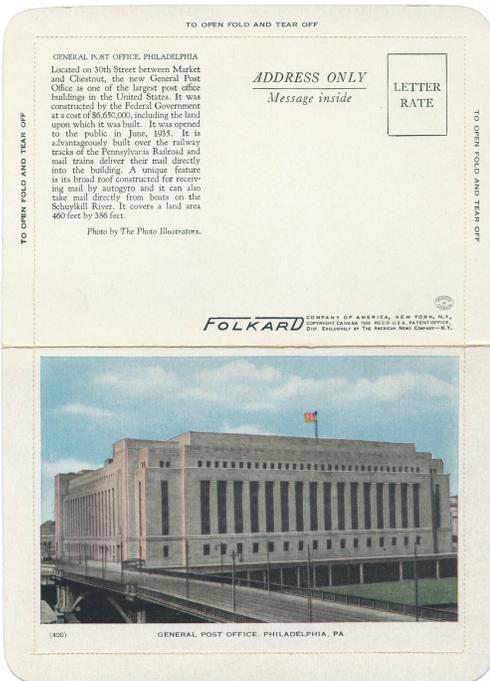
The May 25, 1935 cover depicted at right was actually carried on the first “outbound” air flight that took off from the roof of the new Philadelphia General Post Office via autogiro. Interestingly, the cachet imprint in black ink was prepared for the occasion of the actual date of dedication



Philadelphia Post Office dedication cover

and proudly heralds the facility as “the only post office in world accessible by water, sail, motor and aerial transportation” and providing “first roof garden airport for autogiro’s landing.” That’s certainly quite a notable capability for a postal facility in that era of early aviation development!

The un-mailed vintage fold-over “Folkard” at left shows the Philadelphia General Post Office that was opened to the public in June of 1935.



1935 Folkcard Philadelphia General Post Office

Another aerial photo of Camden’s Central Airport taken in February 1936 looks west toward the City of Camden, the Delaware River and Philadelphia. This is about the time that Camden



Aerial view, Camden Central Airport, February 1936

Airport was gaining in its notoriety and becoming a major air depot and one of the most important transport fields in the East. The Cooper River flows across the landscape, and near center is the airport with its sprawling runways, terminal and hangar facilities. Five major roadways converge at the Airport Circle, and in the distant background are Camden City Hall, the Delaware River, Delaware River Bridge, and Philadelphia City Hall.

Built in 1925, the infamous Airport Circle, appears near right center of another February 1936 aerial view of the Central Airport at left. Route 130 on the west, Routes 38 and 70 on the north, the Cooper River on the south, and Browning Road on the east, bounded this short-lived world famous airfield.



Aerial view, Camden Central Airport, February 1936



1938 National Air Week

The air mail envelope at left promotes National Air Mail Week during May 15-21, 1938 at Camden, N.J. The printed 4-part cachet in blue ink notes key transportation events and some 80 years of progress of the Postal Service from coast to coast: (1) The Pony Express - 14 Days; (2) The Wood Burner - 7 Days; (3) The Mogul - 88 Hours; and U. S. Air Mail - 21 Hours from Camden, N.J. Airport.

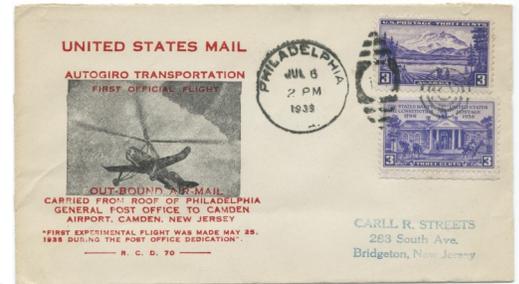
Postmarked JUL. 6, 1939, the cover at right is a standard red and blue barber pole air mail envelope flown on board the “First Official Flight”



in-bound autogiro cover

commencing regularly scheduled autogiro air service. This cover was flown "in-bound" and carried from Camden Airport (see machine-applied postal cancellation containing A.M.F., meaning Air Mail Field) to the roof of the Philadelphia General Post Office.

The cover at right, bearing a hand-stamped Philadelphia postmark, also dated JUL 6, 1939, was flown on the first official autogiro flight service "out-bound" and dispatched from the roof of the Philadelphia General Post Office to Camden Airport, Camden, New Jersey.



out-bound autogiro cover



The two attractive envelopes at left each bear both a J.W. Clifford commercially prepared cachet in red and blue ink as well as the official U. S. Post Office cachets in purple or green ink and flown in each direction on July 6, 1939 using rotary-wing autogiro aircraft. One very important feature of the autogiro was its ability to conduct extremely short take-offs and landings.



Scans at the right show both the picture side and the address side of a real photo post card mailed from Philadelphia on OCT 13, 1939 and showing a Kellett Autogiro flying U.S. Mail from the roof of the Philadelphia Post Office ferrying air mail to the nearby Camden Central Airport, just a few minutes away across the Delaware River. This item bears a typed message on the address/stamped side stating that "This card sent on the occasion of the dedication of Roof Post Office during visit of members of National Association of Postmasters to Philadelphia, October 13, 1939" and personally signed by Elsie Lansten.



RPPC (real photo post card) Kellett Autogiro



"First Day Postal Service" cover

Another variation of a cover commemorating "First Day Postal Service" and postmarked in Philadelphia on OCT 13, 1939 is this colorful airmail stamped cover at left with a small photograph of the Philadelphia General Post Office.

Bearing a Philadelphia postmark dated JUN 5, 1944, the postally used real photo post card at right shows the Main Post Office and Pennsylvania Railroad Station at Market and 30th Streets. Note the autogiro aircraft lifting off from the roof of the post office. Perhaps this photo might actually have been snapped on the actual day (July 6, 1939) of the first or inaugural flight of such autogiro service between Philadelphia and Camden Airport.



RPPC Main Post Office & PRR Station



Kellett Autogiro photo

Displayed at left is photo of the historic Kellett Autogiro (Registration No. NC14742) parked at an unknown airport. A radial engine in the front drives the propeller driven as well as three large rotor blades for lift on the upper part of the fuselage. This two-seater has only two small fixed wings at the rear of the craft. This particular aircraft was the First Kellett Air Mail Autogiro” that was operated by Eastern Air Lines. Emblazoned in bold lettering along the side of this craft is the following: “First Roof Top Flight Made In This Autogiro - Chicago Post Office 1938” and “First Flight Daily From Philadelphia Post Office Roof To Camden Airport 1939-1940.”

Nearing the end of this chapter in the history of Camden Central Airport, we provide the following excerpt from a book entitled “Tracks Across The Sky: The Story of the Pioneers of the U.S. Air Mail” by Page Shamburger published in 1964, which answers the obvious question —What became of this innovative method of transporting mail?

Signed by President Roosevelt, an air mail act passed through Congress authorizing the Postmaster General to experiment with new and supplemental means of transporting mail by air. Postmaster Farley, against radical ideas, procrastinated until Congress forced his hand with a joint resolution ordering him to delegate routes in 1938.

Eastern Air Lines was awarded one contract. They used Kellet Autogiros to connect with trunk-line airlines at Camden Airport from the top of the post office building in downtown Philadelphia. During their year’s experiment, one of the Autogiros fell off the roof, right in the middle of busy 30th Street. The Post Office Department wasn’t too pleased with that, and Eastern unhappy over the financial loss with the short route, agreed that one year of the experiment was sufficient.

