

Pop Dickinson And His Airline's Short-Lived CAM 9 Service: SYNOPSIS

1. Overview

This exhibit's purpose is to follow the life of Charles "Pop" Dickinson, who partnered in a Chicago farm seed business at age 14, became wealthy, was keenly interested in pioneer aviation and became a licensed pilot, founded and was a twenty-year President of the Aero Club of Illinois, and founded of Dickinson Air Line solely to obtain the CAM 9 air mail contract from the U.S. Post Office Department. **This big event in his life—the first—which was also unofficially the second to last—day of his Dickinson Air Line's CAM 9 operations on June 7, 1926, was the most important part of his aviation career & covers a substantial part of the exhibit.**

The exhibit opens with Pop's seed business, then his sponsorship of early aviation including airshows he backed, transitions to his financial backing of Lawson Air Line—the first commercial passenger airline—then his startup of Dickinson Air Line after he made the lowest bid (48% of cost) to be awarded the CAM 9 contract. Routes, covers flown, planes and pilots, forced landings and a fatal crash all occurred on Dickinson's first day of CAM 9. The mail of that first day extended to June 8 because of those issues, and after June 8, Dickinson Air Line no longer **regularly** carried air mail, but ran **irregular flights**. Dickinson's government contract was terminated September 30. The exhibit concludes with the successful start of Northwest Airways, the new CAM 9 contractor, and Charles Dickinson's retirement from air mail service with the termination of his contract.

2. Purpose

To showcase the life of Charles Dickinson, focusing on his interest in aviation and his creation of Dickinson Air Line, presenting details of the CAM 9 routes, planes and pilots. I have—through my independent research—uncovered previously unknown information about the first day of CAM 9 flights. This information will correct misstatements about those CAM 9 flights that have been previously published. I introduce the CAM 9 successor—Northwest Airways—which despite

having no flight experience, became a major air carrier.

3. Importance

CAM 9 was the ninth federally sanctioned commercial airline route in the U.S. and its Chicago to Minneapolis route was one of five critical air routes in the country's fledgling commercial Air Mail Service started in 1926. Despite Dickinson's failure, his operations opened the door for Northwest Airways success.

My exhibit shows covers that the *American Air Mail Catalog* (AAMC) says do not exist. My research will effect changes to that reference in the future. My independent research also shows that—despite Dickinson's CAM 9 being stated as having ceased on June 8, 1926, they continued CAM 9 in an irregular way through September. I have located the only known covers flown for 3 flights Dickinson made after the failures of June 7.

Charles Dickinson was important in aviation: He established the Aero Club of Illinois—second only to the Aero Club of America in its influence in early commercial and passenger aviation. He was the oldest licensed pilot in the U.S. These frames tell the complete story of his aviation and CAM 9 operations.

4. Challenges

It was challenging to track the details of each failed flight, because that material has not been correctly documented by prior researchers. Investigating source materials (primarily witness statements and news stories), I uncovered the true disposition of the mail after the fatal crash and found covers that were stated to not exist by *The American Air Mail Catalog* (AAMC), including covers mailed from Minneapolis to St. Paul and from St. Paul to Minneapolis. I discovered that Billy Brock—the pilot who took off from St. Paul—flew to Minneapolis, dropped the St. Paul to Minneapolis mail, witnessed Partridge's crash and returned to Minneapolis to load recovered crash mail. He successfully carried that mail to Chicago, where mail terminating there received one set of postmarks (all on June 7) and mail being forwarded onward received a different set (some on June 8). I

have shown that only some of Partridges crash mail was sent by rail after the crash. That mail received a different time stamp. The AAMC stated that all of Partridge's mail was transported by train, but this exhibit—and my own research—shows this is correct. The information I have gathered on the flights that disagrees with the AAMC has never before been published.

5. Organization

The Exhibit is organized chronologically, following Dickinson's seed business, his airshow sponsorship, involvement in the Aero Club of Illinois, and his airline's CAM 9 service and termination. Section 4 shows CAM 9 routes and covers and is organized by flight sequence. All key covers are shown. Individual crash covers, signed covers, and rare covers are displayed. Rates and routes are discussed.

6. Material Highlights

I have presented examples of the only known covers carried from St. Paul to Minneapolis by pilot Billy Brock and of the only known covers

carried from Minneapolis to St. Paul and onward after Partridge's crash.

I have presented the only three known covers carried after the pilots completed their June 7 mail flights on June 8 and Dickinson gave his 45-day notice to the USPOD. Finally, though the AAMC states that Pilot Matty Laird took Pilot Keller's mail from Milwaukee to La Crosse, I have acquired a unique, original card—the only one known typed by Pilot H. Keller to a contemporaneous collector—that explains his role as a relief pilot replacing Dan Kaiser, stating that he (Keller) carried Kaiser's mail to Minneapolis. This shows the AAMC's statement to be incorrect. Relief Pilot Matty Laird never flew mail on June 7 or 8.

I have shown an Elmer Partridge crash cover signed by pilot Billy Brock. Through my independent research on the backstamps applied to the many crash covers that I have studied, I have clearly shown that Brock carried a large quantity of Partridge's crash mail. This disproves previous claims that all Partridge crash mail went by rail to its final destination. I have also shown a Northwest Airway's cover, without cachet, postmarked October 1, 1926—their first day of CAM 9 service.

7. References

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- Libby, Justin. 2012. "North Star Rising." American Aviation Historical Society. Accessed May 21, 2025. <https://www.aahs-online.org/pubs/journals/files/571024.pdf>
- Northwest Airlines History Center. n.d. "Timeline – 1920s." Accessed December 22, 2024. <https://northwestairlineshistory.org/timeline-1920s>
- Young, David and Neal Callahan. 1981. *Fill the Heavens with Commerce: Chicago Aviation 1855-1926*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Wasserman, Dr. Bruce. 2025. "The Little Route That Couldn't: The Short Life of the Minneapolis to Duluth CAM 9 Spur." *The Airpost Journal*. March/April 2025.

Pop Dickinson And His Airline's Short-Lived CAM 9 Service

1: INTRODUCTION

This Exhibit's purpose is to follow the life of Charles "Pop" Dickinson, who started as a Chicago farm seed dealer, became wealthy, was keenly interested in pioneer aviation and became a licensed pilot, founded and was a twenty-year President of the Aero Club of Illinois, sponsored air shows, and eventually founded Dickinson Air Line solely to obtain the CAM 9 air mail contract from the U.S. Post Office Department.

CAM 9 was the ninth federally sanctioned commercial airline route in the U.S. This big event in his life—the first—which was also unofficially the second to last—day of his Dickinson Air Line's CAM 9 operations on June 7, 1926, was the most important part of his aviation career and therefore is a substantial part of the exhibit. The exhibit shows the routes and covers flown, and relevant original ephemera, while discussing the planes, pilots, and following the events of their failed first days of CAM 9.

Air mail service of that first day extended to June 8 due to forced groundings and a fatal crash. After June 8, Dickinson Air Line no longer regularly carried air mail but ran irregular flights, though their government contract was not terminated until September 30. Their successor, Northwest Airways, took over on October 1. The exhibit concludes with the successful start of Northwest Airways and Pop Dickinson's retirement from CAM 9 air mail service.

OUTLINE

Section 1: Introduction, Outline, & Legend.

Section 2: History of Pop's Family Seed Business.

Section 3: Dickinson's early aviation & the Aero Club of Illinois.

Section 4: Dickinson Air Line's CAM 9 First & Last Day Service.***

***Grouped by Westbound Flights (CAM 9W) & Eastbound Flights (CAM 9E)

A: Westbound Flights from Chicago

1. Chicago to Milwaukee
2. Chicago to La Crosse
3. Chicago to St. Paul
4. Chicago to Minneapolis

B: Westbound Flights from Milwaukee

1. Milwaukee to La Crosse
2. Milwaukee to St. Paul
3. Milwaukee to Minneapolis

C: Westbound Flights from La Crosse

1. La Crosse to St. Paul
2. La Crosse to Minneapolis

D: Westbound Flights from St. Paul

1. St. Paul to Minneapolis

E: Eastbound Flights from Minneapolis

1. Minneapolis to St. Paul
2. Minneapolis to La Crosse
3. Minneapolis to Milwaukee
4. Minneapolis to Chicago

F: Eastbound Flights from St. Paul

1. St. Paul to La Crosse
2. St. Paul to Milwaukee
3. St. Paul to Chicago

G: Eastbound Flights from La Crosse

1. La Crosse to Milwaukee
2. La Crosse to Chicago

H: Eastbound Flights from Milwaukee

1. Milwaukee to Chicago

Section 5: Dickinson's CAM 9 After June 7 & the Only Known Covers Carried.

Section 6: Conclusion: Northwest Airlines' Startup & Dickinson Air Line's Demise.

LEGEND

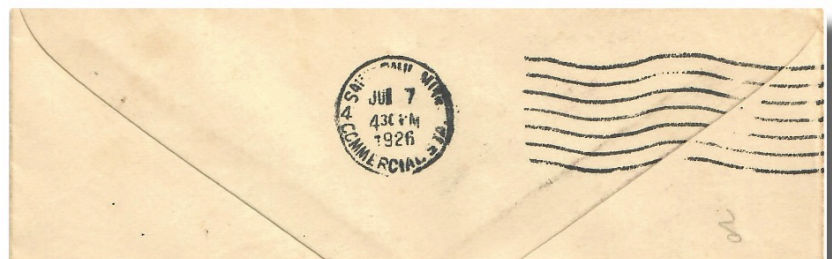
- Key Information is in *italics* in a blue frame.
- Examples of independent research are in dark blue.
- Auxiliary Information is not within a box.
- Rare items are identified with a **Red Airplane**



- *Minneapolis to St. Paul on the Crashed Plane of Elmer Partridge.*
- *Salvaged cover later carried by Pilot Billy Brock.*
- *8-cent Columbian Exposition on 2-cent Columbus & Liberty postal stationery.*



- *American Airmail Catalog states "There were no dispatches from St. Paul to Minneapolis or Minneapolis to St. Paul."*
- Exhibitor's discovery & research: These dispatches occurred. One of six known from Minneapolis to St. Paul.



Back, 75% Scan.