

# A.J. Algate's Concept and Design for the First Two Semi-Official Airmail Stamps of Patricia Airways & Exploration Co. Ltd., 1926

by Charles J.G. Verge, FRPSC, FRPSL

This article will tell the fascinating story of Arthur J. Algate's complex design for the first two semi-official stamps issued by Patricia Airways and Exploration Limited (PAEL), in 1926.

## Arthur J. Algate

Algate (Figure 1) was a graphic artist, cartographer, map printer, entrepreneur and inventor. An active stamp collector from the 1890s until the late 1930s, specializing in early Canada and Newfoundland, he was president of the Toronto Stamp Collectors Club for the 1926-27 philatelic season. During those years he created several PAEL semi-offi-

Figure 1 (right). Arthur John Algate (1883-1858).  
Photograph by Gilbert Alexander Milne (1914-91).

Figure 2 (below). Frank Egerton Davison (1872-1941).  
Mining engineer, President of PAEL and its financial  
backer (reproduction photograph). The original was  
published in *The Globe* of Toronto on March 31, 1927.  
The pilot, Lt. W.N. Cummings is the 6th person from  
the left and Davison is the 7th. Courtesy of the Archives  
of Ontario.





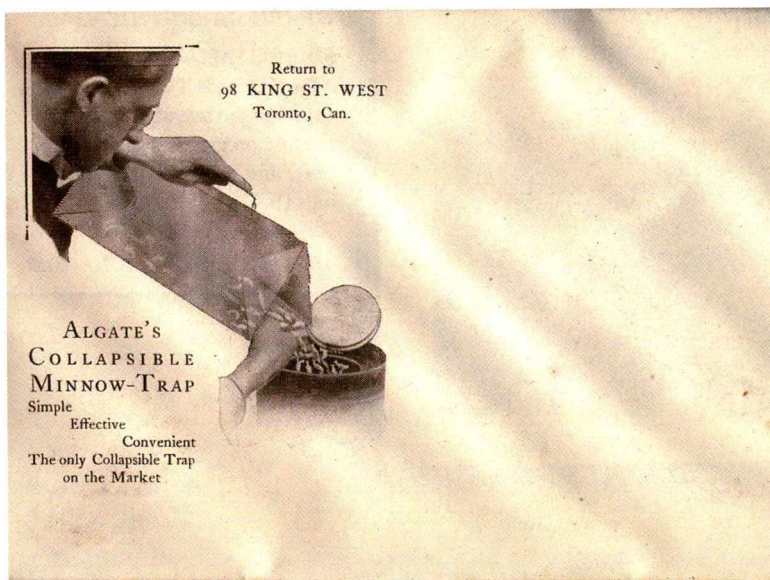
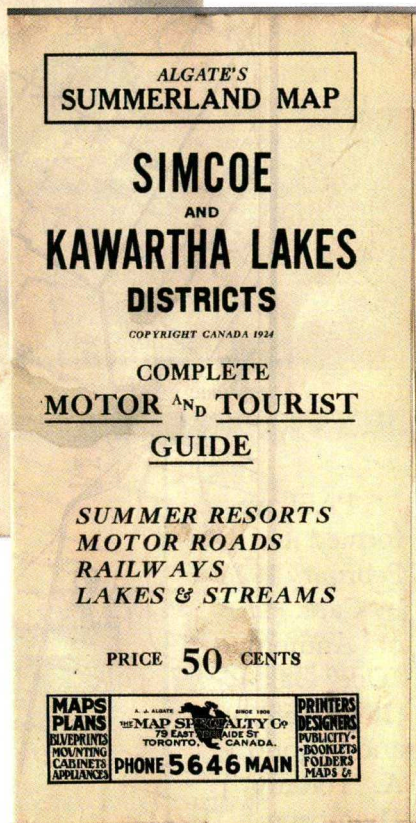


Figure 3 (above). An envelope produced by Algate's firm promoting the sale of Algate's Collapsible Minnow Trap.

Figure 4 (right). One of Algate's many tourist maps. This one for the Simcoe and Kawartha Lakes districts.



cial air mail stamps for the company's President, F.E. Davison (Figure 2).

These, and their many varieties, result in a very complex and interesting area of airmail collecting.

Algate was born in Toronto on March 10, 1883. He loved the outdoors, taking many trips through mid- and Northern Ontario, as well as Algonquin Park. He wrote extensively about his travels in various magazines such as *Rod and Gun* in Canada. He was an avid fisherman and hunter and went on to invent many aids to fishermen, including Algate's Collapsible Minnow Trap, for which he had Canadian and U.S. patents (Figure 3). He started working at the age of 16 and, in 1908, he became sole owner of The Map Specialty Company. His projects included detailed maps of the eastern part of Toronto, as well as gasoline company, regional tourist and railway maps (Figure 4). In 1929, he published *Algate's Fishing Chart* and, in the late 1930s, he formed Provincial Insurance Surveys to provide fire insurance survey and inspections maps for most Ontario cities and towns. In the 1930s and 40s he was a strong advocate for the listing in catalogs of Canada's semi-official airmail stamps. Having created many varieties and covers for PAEL he continued flogging them for many decades after their release at prices that discouraged many collectors. He died on May 28, 1958, leaving a treasure trove of design and production material for the PAEL and Patricia Airways stamps that were retained by his family and unknown to collectors and the hobby until five years ago.

## Patricia Airways & Exploration Co. Limited

Airmail was first introduced to Northern Ontario in 1924 by Laurentide Air Service Limited, which had a short lifespan (like most of the airlines of the time), ceasing operations in 1925. Jack V. Elliott Air Service, Elliot-Fairchild Air Service, Elliot Fairchild Air Transport and Fairchild Air Transport followed from March to October 1926.





Figure 5. PAEL's first aeroplane: a Curtiss Lark. Two photographs showing the use of wheels for landing on grass in the summer (left) and skis for winter landings (below).



PAEL was formed in February 1926 by Capt. Harold Anthony "Doc" Oaks (1896-1968) and Major G. A. "Tommy" Thompson, both former members of

the Royal Flying Corps and the Ontario Provincial Air Service. In addition to Oaks and Thompson, other pilots were J.R. Ross, W.N. Cummings, F.J. Stevenson and H. Farrington. The mechanic for the company was Sam Tomlinson. Head office was in Toronto under the direction of Davison, while operations offices were located in Red Lake and Sioux Lookout. The company took its name from the Patricia District of Northern Ontario – itself named in 1912 after H.R.H. Princess Patricia of Connaught (1886-1974), the popular daughter of Canada's Governor General.



Figure 6: PAEL's second issue affixed to this cover's front, contrary to regulations.



PAEL operated between 1926 and 1927. At first it owned a single plane, a Curtiss Lark (Figure 5). The plane became the main design feature of the stamps created for the airline. By December 1926, the company purchased two Stinson Detroiders. During 1926 and 1927 PAEL flew goods, passengers and mail between Sioux Lookout, its Northern Ontario headquarters, and the goldfields of Pine Ridge, Red Lake, Woman Lake and Birch Lake. In 1927, the second Stinson flew between Haileybury, Ontario, and the gold fields of Rouyn, Quebec. The company was declared bankrupt on Oct. 17, 1927. A portion of its assets was sold to a new company – Patricia Airways Limited, which was also financed by Davison.

Statistics for the airline between its first flight on April 12, 1926, and the plane crash on Sept. 12, 1927, that ended its service are as follows:

<b>Flights:</b>	1,539
<b>Hours Flown:</b>	897
<b>Miles Flown:</b>	77,257 (124,333 km)
<b>Passengers:</b>	750
<b>Freight and Express:</b>	76,276 lbs (24,598 kg)
<b>Mail:</b>	8,416 lbs (3,817 kg)

The Canadian Post Office Department (POD) approved PAEL as a carrier of semi-official air mail. The following timeline (from the Arthur J. Algate papers) explains how PAEL created and issued its first two stamps

- June 24, 1926:** The POD requested that PAEL carry mail franked with Elliott Fairchild stamps (25¢) and indicated that it would pay 25¢ for each letter carried.
- June 24, 1926:** PAEL agreed and the POD issued instructions to concerned Postmasters on July 25.
- June 26, 1926:** The POD sent a letter to PAEL approving the design and rate (25¢) of PAEL's First issue (Red Lake), with a yellow background.
- June 26, 1926:** A telegram from the POD requested that PAEL send its "Air Mail stickers" to the following post offices to be sold: Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Sudbury, North Bay, Cobalt, Temiskaming, Montreal, Haileybury, Sioux Lookout and Red Lake.
- July 2, 1926:** The POD sent a letter to PAEL approving design and rate (50¢) of PAEL's Second issue (Woman Lake), which was printed on blue-green paper. The POD added Oshawa and Rolling Portage to the list of post offices to receive the "Air Mail stickers" for this issue.

The POD also established rules governing the use of PAEL stamps or "Air Mail Stickers," as the POD called them. The same rules applied to virtually all other airlines producing semi-official airmail stamps.

1. Properly prepaid domestic or foreign postage was to be affixed.
2. The words "By aerial mail" were to be written prominently on the address side.
3. The special PAEL "Air Mail sticker" was to be placed on the reverse side of the envelope as proof of payment of aerial service (Figure 6). Universal Postal Union and domestic postal regulations forbade "Air Mail stickers" from bearing numerals or indication of value.
4. The sender was to assume all risks.



## Stamp Production

Algate was commissioned to design stamps by PAEL in May 1926. Upon receipt of his commission he started sketching designs for a proposed stamp for PAEL. His final concept was completed on June 14 of that year and approved by Davison on June 19. There are major differences between his original drawing, shown in Figure 7, and the final design, which omitted the words "Air Service" and "CANADA," as well as the year "1926."



Figure 7: Black and red pencil sketch for the first PAEL issue.



Figure 8: Reproduction photograph of PAEL's Curtiss Lark viewed from the front. Courtesy of the Archives of Ontario.

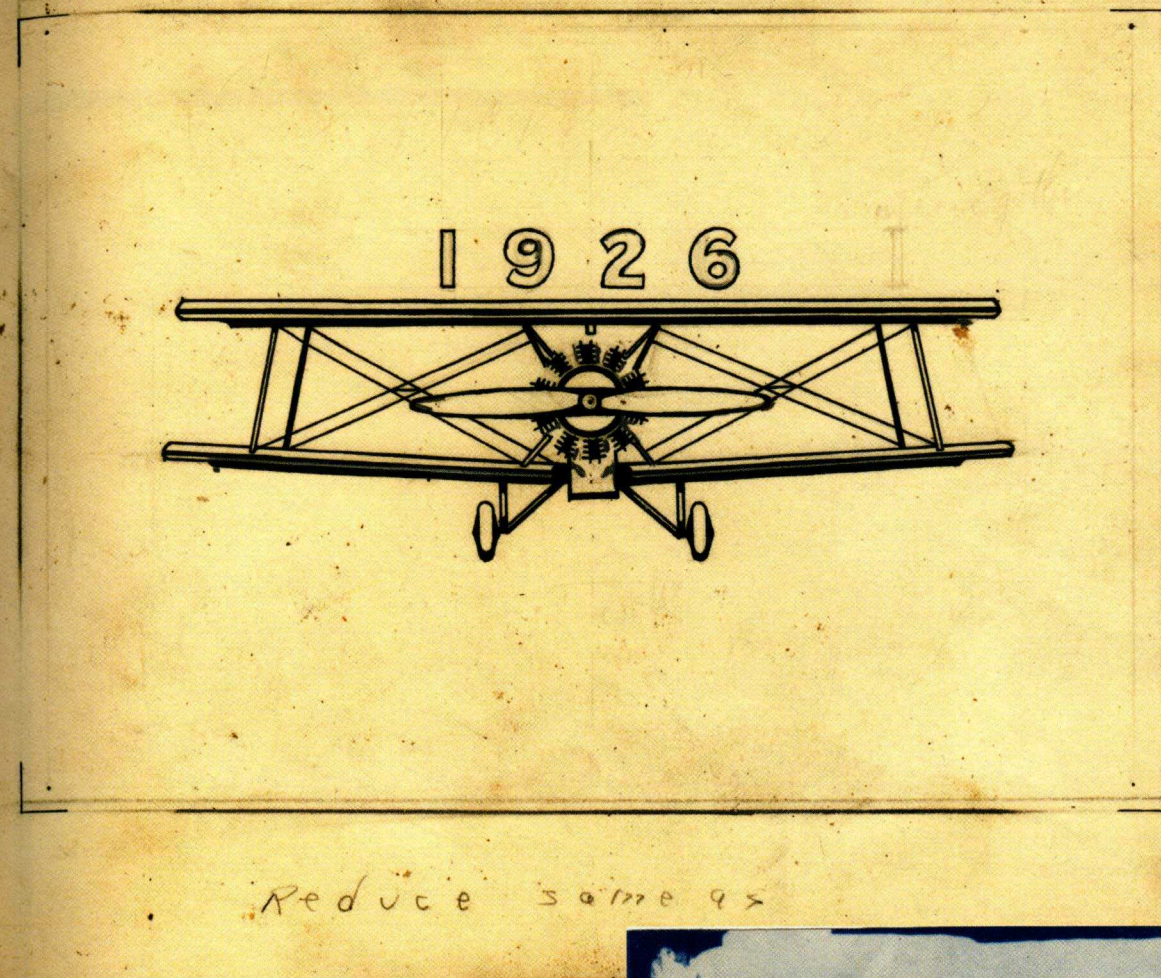


Figure 9 (above). Original black and silver design by Algate for the stamp's vignette.

Figure 10 (right). Cyanotype or "Van Dyke" proof of the frame and the wording "Curtiss Lark."



The main design selected for the vignette was the Curtiss Model 41 Lark, a commercial biplane manufactured by Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Co. of Buffalo, N.Y. It was used by pioneering pilots in the late 1920s and was modeled after the Curtiss Carrier Pigeon. Only three planes of this model were built, all in 1925 – one of these was owned by PAEL.<sup>1</sup> Figure 8 shows a frontal photo of PAEL's Lark.<sup>2</sup> It is likely the photograph that Algate used for his essay for the central part of the vignette (Figure 9).

The stamps for PAEL were printed from four plates using different col-



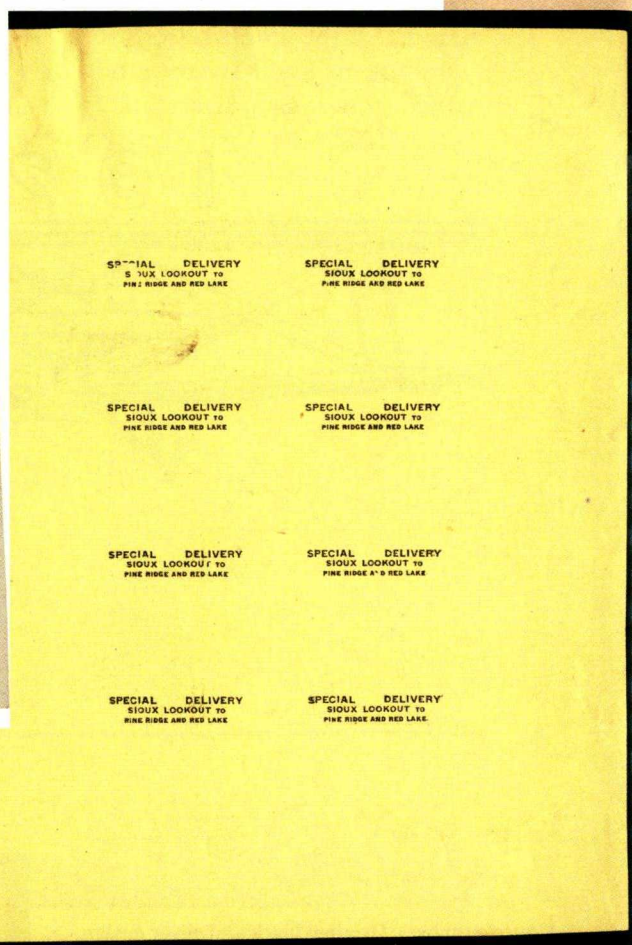
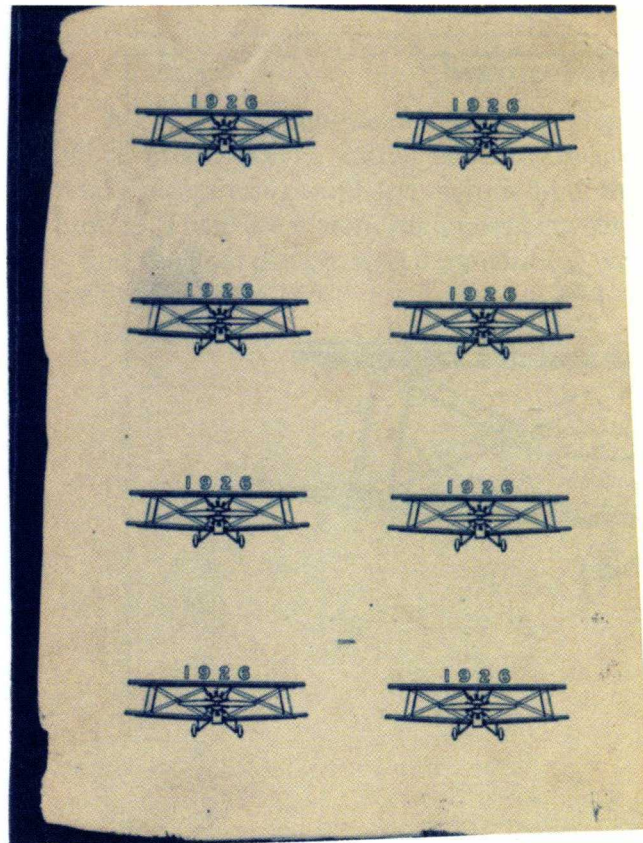


Figure 11 (above). Cyanotype proof of the year and the aeroplane.

Figure 12 (above right). Black proof of the route wording prepared for the Regular routing stamps.

Figure 13 (right). Black proof of what would become the red marginal inscriptions with Algate's initialled note "Try smaller size type."

ors. The sheets were then trimmed and perforated.

The order of printing was as follows, with Algate's names for the colors:

1. The frame and "Curtiss Lark" wording in moss green (Figure 10).

2. The aeroplane in fire red (Figure 11).

3. The route wording: Official stamps in blue – Regular stamps in green (Figure 12).<sup>3</sup>

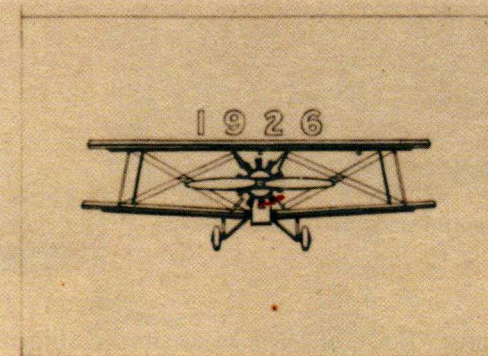
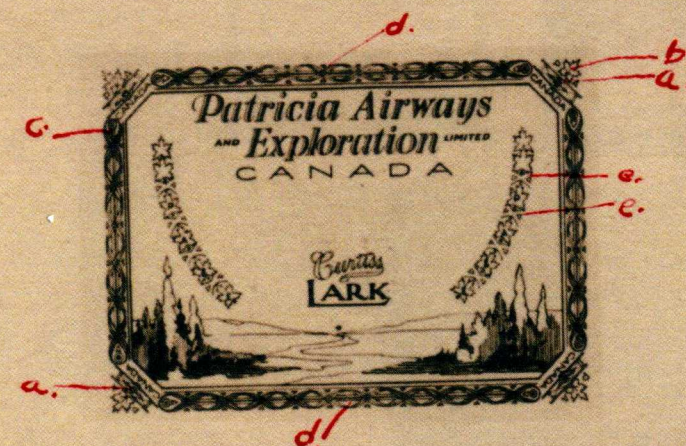
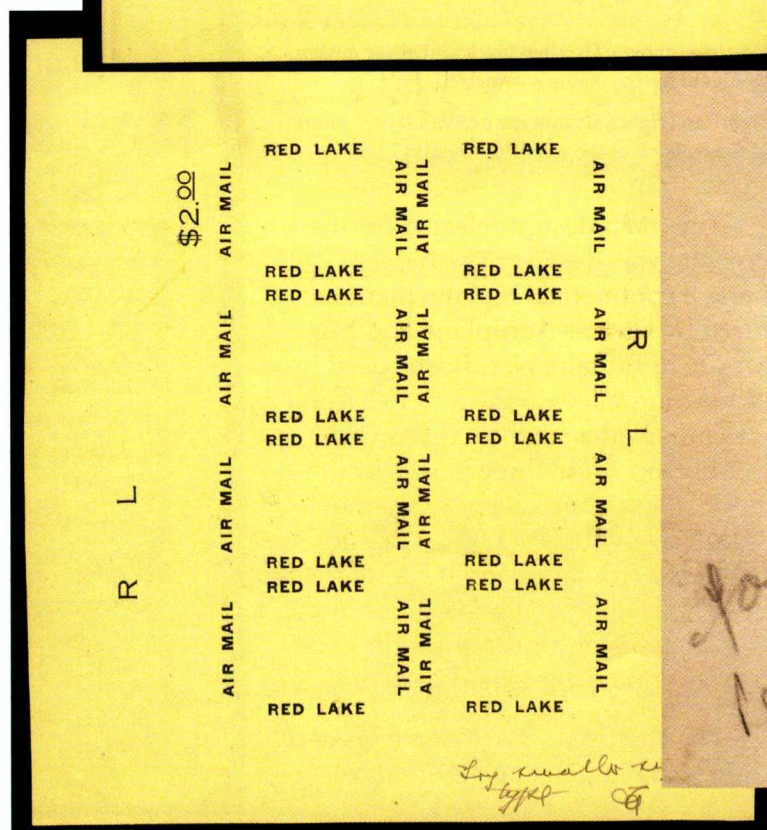


Figure 14 (above). Approved black proof showing the control marks.





Figure 15. Black proof with control marks and Algate's initials enlarged and inset.

#### 4. The marginal inscriptions: "Red Lake Air Mail" in red (Figure 13).

Three type sizes were tried out for the marginal inscriptions, 10 pt.; 6 pt., 15½ mm. narrow spacing; and 6 pt., 15½ mm. wide (lead) spacing.

### Secret or Control Marks

On June 18, 1926, Algate wrote Davison a private memorandum in which he revealed the control marks he had put into the final design. The proof sheet attached to the memorandum for Davison's approval (signed June 19, 1926) is found in Figure 14. It also mentions the dimensions of the stamp's design: 1¾ inches wide by 1⅜ inches high. Figure 15 shows the location of the six Control Marks and of Algate's initials. Algate's narrative for them is as follows:

**Control A:** There are six cylinders in the aeroplane's motor in the upper right corner rather than eight.

**Control B:** The maple leaf in the upper right corner shows three strokes meeting at the bottom of the leaf instead of five.



**Control C:** The upper pearl on the left border is joined by the center bars continuing through instead of ending in a triangle.

**Control D:** The shading of the scroll is lighter at center.

**Control E:** The pearls below the last five maple leaves in wreath are alternated solid / open / solid / open / solid.

**Control F:** There are four and one-half cylinders in the center of the aeroplane's motor.

**Initials:** Algate did not mention that he added his initials below the middle white tree in the lower left corner.

## Other production information

The final sheet format was made up of eight stamps – two columns of four rows.

Two proof sheets printed on golden yellow paper were produced for approval purposes. One was sent to Peter Thomas Coolican (1881-1952), General Superintendent of the Postal Services, for approval. The other was given to Davison who cut it up and gave individual stamps to friends. Two more sheets were used to service covers, of which six are recorded. One of these stamps found its way to the back of an envelope sent on a July 5, 1926, flight, two days before the official flight. It was signed by Capt. Oaks and addressed to himself (Figure 16).



Figure 16. One of six recorded Post Office approval stamps on cover.

Proof sheets with the Regular routing in green were printed on four differently colored papers (Figure 17): canary (8 sheets), buff, (3) green (3) and blue (3).<sup>4</sup> One set of the four colors with the Official routing in blue was produced and it is with the Algate papers. Two stamps were removed from the Official canary sheet and used on covers. One of these is shown in Figure 18.

Printed sheets measured  $5\frac{7}{8}$  by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches (14.92 by 19.05 cm) and were cut down to panes of  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches by  $6\frac{1}{8}$  inches (13.34 by 15.56 cm). They were line perforated 12 by 12, although *The Airmails of Canada and Newfoundland* lists an  $11\frac{3}{4}$  perforation for them. A later series was rouletted.





Figure 17. A full set of proofs on four different colored papers with the Regular green routing information.

## Series Numbers

Catalogs identify the numbers in the upper- and lower-left corners as plate numbers. Algate calls them series numbers and writes, on Jan. 28, 1928, "We numbered each 100 sheets serially- 1, 2, 3 &c., the reason being that this method made it easier to keep check on our supplies, particularly where they were sent to different post offices." Although Algate's series explanation is valid, the "100 sheets" reasoning applied only to later printings that were overprinted with surcharges and route markings, but not to the First and Second Issues. The Series numbers go from 1-20 in the Third series rouletted stamps.

Series No. <sup>5</sup>	O/R Inscriptions <sup>6</sup>	Public Info <sup>7</sup>	Actual <sup>8</sup>	No. of sheets	Final Tally <sup>9</sup>
1	Blue	500	488	61	61
1	Green	12,300	3,584	448	448
2	Green	Included above	4,128	516	516
3	Green	Included above	4,264	533	522
4	Green	Included above	496	62	62
<b>Total</b>		12,800	12,960	1,620	1,609



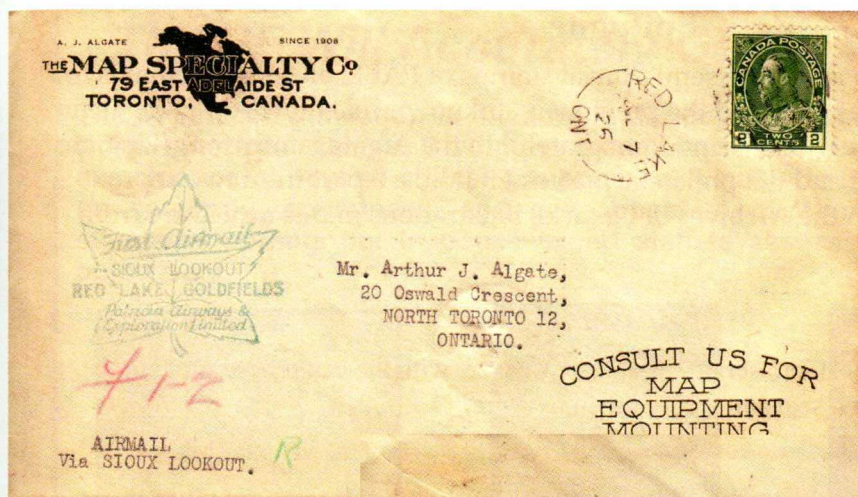
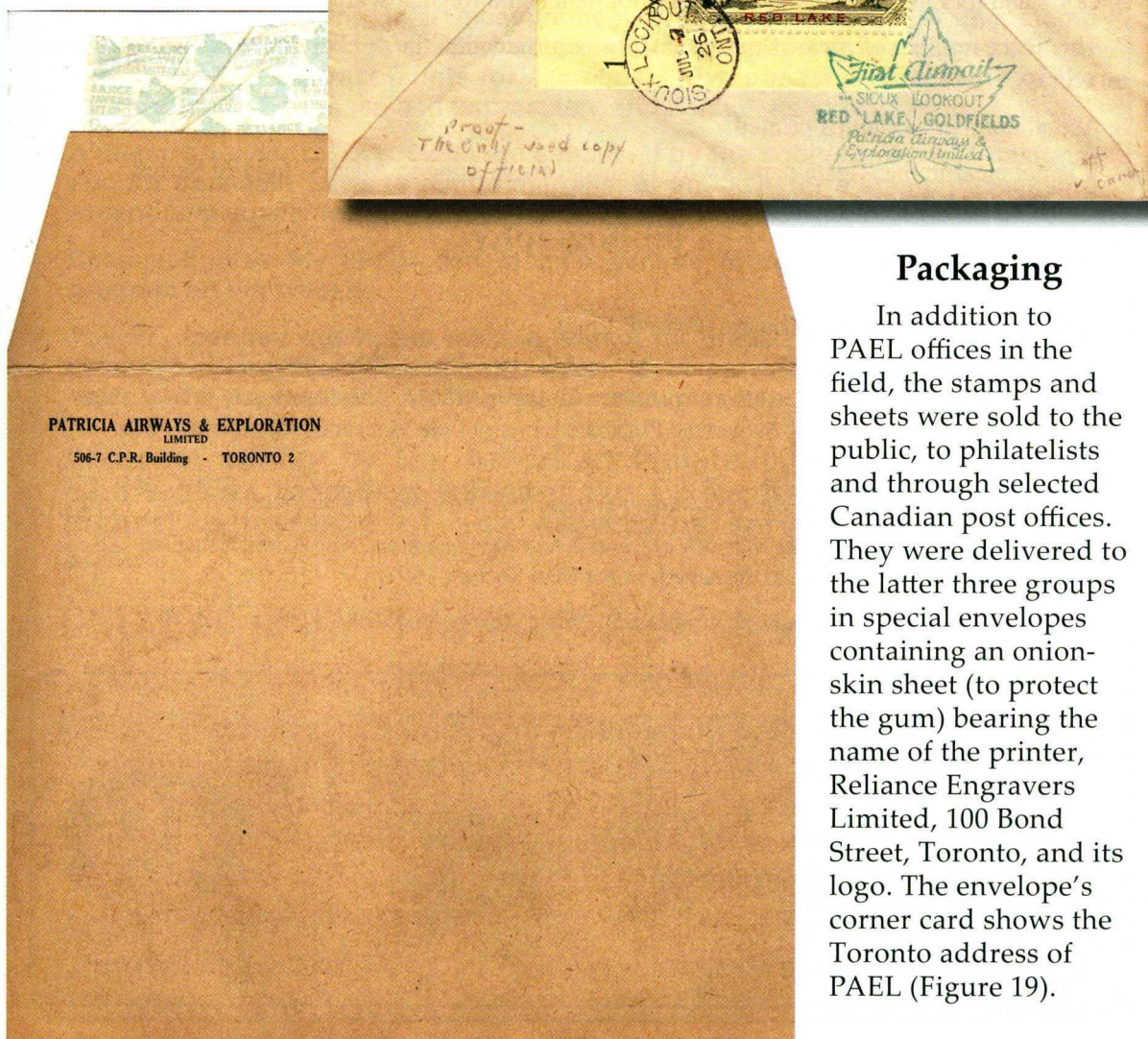


Figure 18 (left and below). According to Algate's handwritten note, this is the only canary-colored proof on cover with the Official blue routing information. It was carried on the first flight of July 7, 1926.

Figure 19 (below). PAEL stamp mailing envelope and its protective onion skin sheet.



## Packaging

In addition to PAEL offices in the field, the stamps and sheets were sold to the public, to philatelists and through selected Canadian post offices. They were delivered to the latter three groups in special envelopes containing an onion-skin sheet (to protect the gum) bearing the name of the printer, Reliance Engravers Limited, 100 Bond Street, Toronto, and its logo. The envelope's corner card shows the Toronto address of PAEL (Figure 19).



## Epilogue

Much has been written about the semi-official stamps of PAEL, and more remains to be explored. This article has explored the previously unknown role of Arthur J. Algate in producing the first two issues of stamps. I am grateful to the Algate family for giving me access to the Algate papers and the philatelic material it holds. Apart from two reproductions of photographs in the Archives of Ontario, illustrations in this article are from the Algate holdings. ☐

## Endnotes

1. The aircraft was once pressed into service as an early hearse, with the cargo needing to be seated upside down in the open seat and secured with haywire.
2. Frank E. Davison Fonds.
3. Figure 12 is a black proof of the route wording prepared for the regular stamps, as it does not show the lower case “t” of the “tO” error found in position 8 on the official stamps.
4. The numbers of sheets quoted are from the Algate papers; however, it is likely that there is at least one extra sheet of the last three colors.
5. The statistics listed in this table are from the Algate papers.
6. O/R stand for Official with blue routing information and Regular with green routing information.
7. This is the number of issued stamps that Algate provided to the public, collectors and the philatelic press.
8. Actual number of stamps printed.
9. It is not clear in the Algate papers why 11 sheets are missing in Algate’s tally of Series.

## Bibliography

Arthur J. Algate papers.

F.E Davison Fonds, Archives of Ontario (Fonds F 1339).

—, *Patricia Airways & Exploration Limited – A. J. Algate’s Airmail Semi-Officials from Concept to First Usages, 1926-1927*. An exhibit prepared for Chicagopex 2016. Printed privately in two copies. One is held by the Harry Sutherland Philatelic Library of the Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation.

The *Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps*, St. Catharines, Trajan Press, 2018.

Malott, Major Richard K., ed., *The Airmails of Canada and Newfoundland*, Ann Arbor, Canadian Aerophilatelic Society and the American Air Mail Society, 1997.

Morrow, Trellé A., *Patricia Airways & Exploration*, Prince George, published by the author, 1975.

**The Collectors Club Philatelist is an international specialty journal serving the needs of hundreds of collectors worldwide. It serves as the journal of record for the CCNY as well as publishing stimulating and helpful articles for collectors of many levels and specialties. The Collectors Club Philatelist strives to publish accurate philatelic information and serves as a forum for communication among members of The Collectors Club.**