

Yesterday in Mekeel's: **The “Journey of Ingenuity” Collection**

by John F. Dunn

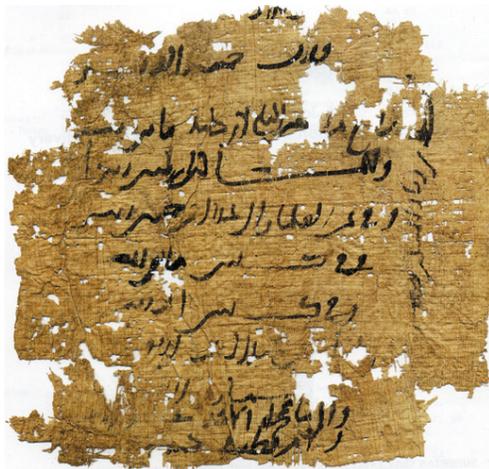
(From *Mekeel's & Stamps*, January-March 2009)

On November 11, 2008, Harmers of London conducted a public auction of the fascinating “Journey of Ingenuity Collection.” Assembled by Paul M. Zatulove, it presented postal history in the form of 4,000 years of written communication and mail delivery. Although the auction consisted of only 122 lots, I selected 40 as meriting viewing, including 12 of the first 13 lots.

All prices quoted here are converted from Euros to Dollars as of the November 11, 2008, sale date and do not include the VAT that was added on to each lot. Regarding the prices realized, I can only think that the Journey of Ingenuity sale was affected by the fact that it was held during the depths of the 2008 worldwide credit crunch and resultant economic crash; thus the lots that did not sell and those that fell below estimates for so many rare or unique pieces.

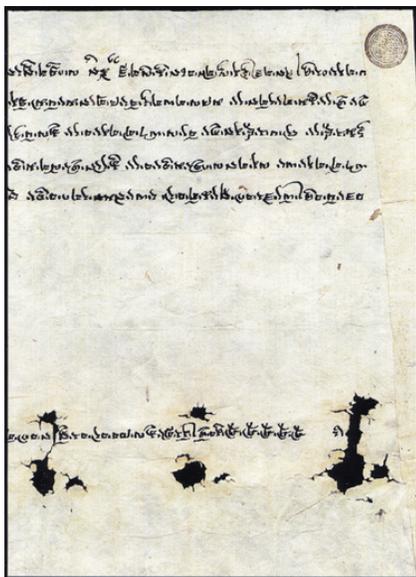
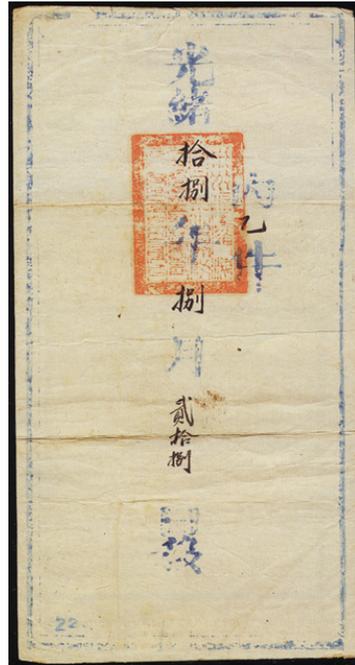
The auction opened with this Sumerian clay tablet, circa 2032 B.C. with cuneiform text on the front, written at the city of Umma. The front translates to “2494 servant girl work days wages for the flour mill from Ur-Nintu” and the back reads “Copy of the Table of Lukalla. The year the boat of Enki was caulked.” Estimated at \$3,941, it did not sell.



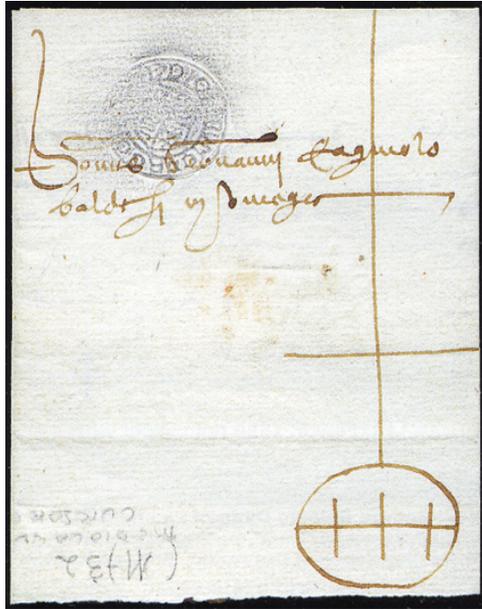


Also not selling, but still a fabulous item, was this Papyrus document, circa 780 A.D., with a message in Old Arabic script. It was also estimated at \$3,941.

Next up for bids, but not selling, was an 1879 China “I-chan” cover, sent from the Customs House at Amoy to the Amoy Naval Patrol. The Customs House large red chop seen here is one of three on both sides of the cover. As explained in the lot description, I-chan delivery service preceded and paralleled to some extent the Customs Post that was responsible for the first issues of China. This lot was estimated at \$394.



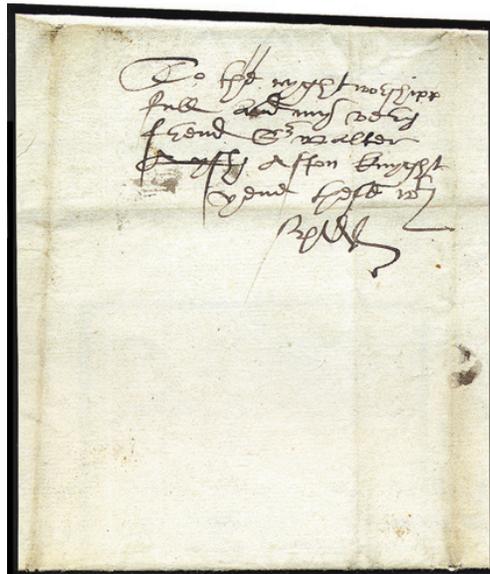
Here is another unusual piece, an 1883 Bhutan “Postman’s Shirt Letter” on native paper scroll, so-called because it was folded down for carriage in a postman’s loose shirt. It was written by the Jongpon of Ponakha in Bhutanese Tibetan script to the King of Nepal, offering to supply beasts of burden to help quell the plunderings of Nepalese traders at Lhasa (Tibet) and is dated “Year of the Water Sheep.” It was estimated at \$788 and realized \$867.



Shown next is a document with what was described as the world's first postmark. Dating back to 1459, it is a courier letter from Milan with an embossed "Cursus Mediolani" (Milan Courier) seal (shaded in pencil for display) and a guild mark showing charges paid. This courier service was established by Simon Tasso, whose family later joined the Torre family, becoming postmasters of Charles V's

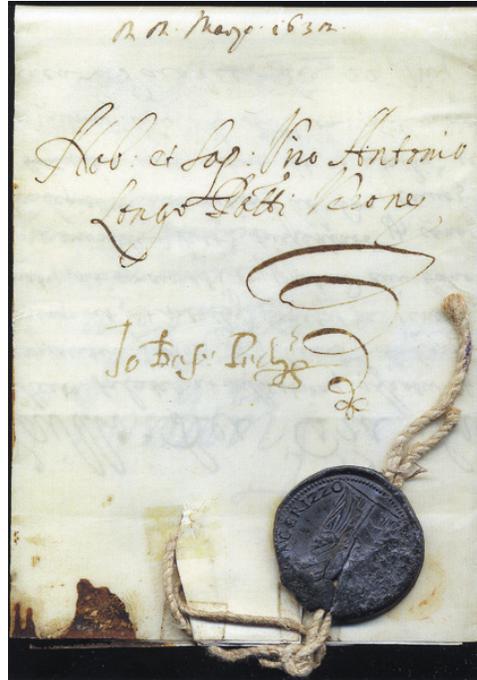
Spain and later the house of Thurn & Taxis in Northern Europe. Estimated at \$1,576, this historic piece sold for \$1,419.

Still another lot that combines world history with postal history, we see here a historic Elizabethan letter, circa 1580, folio sheet with a written warning to Sir Walter Aston that it was imperative to recapture the escaped Papist, Francis Olyver, who had been jailed in response to a law passed by Parliament in 1580 making attempted conversion to the Catholic faith a treasonable offense.



It was written and signed by the Rev. George Boleyn, a relative of Anne Boleyn (wife of Henry VIII and mother of Elizabeth I) and was privately carried as was nearly all correspondence at that time in the realm. This lot did well, selling for \$788, or double its \$394 estimate.

Here we have an example of Venetian Ducal Mail, a 1632 letter on vellum from Francisco Erizzo, Doge of Venice, to his envoy Antonio Longo at Verona, ordering the arrest of a money forger to be hanged “between the two columns of the Divine Martyrs” (the Venetian place of execution), with a rare lead seal, used exclusively on ducal mail, on its original cord. Estimated at \$1,576, this lot sold for \$1,734.



Coming back to the effects of the 2008 worldwide economic recession, this lot had sold previously for \$4,400 in the 2004 Robert A. Siegel Galleries auction of the LeBow Collection, before the economic crunch.



The next lot is a 1693 Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I Imperial letter, a printed document dated December 17, 1692 but docketed received 16 March 1693, signed by Emperor Leopold I and countersigned by his chancellor, T. H. von Staitmann, to Franz Antonini de

Albertis of the Tyrol, regarding recent and future threats to the empire, and convoking a Parliament for April 6 at Innsbruck. Still another fabulous piece, it was estimated at \$788 and realized \$867.

We have displayed Sweden “Feather Letters” before, but to fully present the “4,000 Years” Collection I include this example here. It was one of three covers in a lot that was estimated at \$473 and realized \$788. This letter not only shows the feather and seal, but also has stylized birds to designate fast service.



Here’s another combination of world and postal history: this modest looking



lot was described as “The Bottle Letter that helped provoke a war.” It is an 1806 letter from American seaman who was impressed into service on the British sloop of war *Pethel*. It was corked into a bottle and tossed overboard somewhere in the Caribbean, carried to the coast of North Carolina, found and delivered to Collector of Customs at Baltimore and mailed to the Collector at New York, with a red “Balte. Md. JUN 9” cds and manuscript “34” rate applied.

The text of the bottle letter reads, in part, "...we was brought to by the above Vesel and after undergoing many Species of Insult myself & three others...all native Americans were ordered on board which we refused & on so doing was beaten & Kicked into the Boat, was then thrown into Irons for ten days...[we agreed to enter their service] & Embrace the first Opportunity that Occured to free us from the Slavery in which we was involved..." This unique lot, still another example of mail delivery, is a historic witness to the British impressment of American sailors, one of the principal grievances leading to the War of 1812. However, estimated at \$15,763, it is still another lot that did not sell.



We now come to a lot with two folded letters mailed via an early mail steamer, the *Robert Fulton*, named in honor of the inventor of the *Clermont*. Shown here is one of those letters, from New

York to Portsmouth with "New-York May 21" (1821) circular date stamp (c.d.s.), "SHIP" handstamp and manuscript 20-1/2 rate and endorsed for carriage by the *Fulton* (which made only 18 trips in all among New York, Charleston, Havana and New Orleans). Estimated at \$788, the lot realized \$1,892.

Also in the ship mail section, we view an 1837 folded letter from Calcutta dated Aug. 5, sent to



London per “Berenici Steamer Via Suez”, also with oval “Care of Mr. Waghorn / Suez” cachet and other markings including “Purifée...” and two disinfection slits, boxed “Indies Orien. Par Alexandrie” and Alexandria French Post c.d.s. (27 Oct. 1837). Estimated at \$3,153, this cover fetched \$2,837.



Ship mail included one lot with two folded letters that were carried on the last wooden Cunard steamship, the paddle wheel steamer *Africa*. The letter shown here bears a “Dec 3 1852”

octagonal date stamp, “5” rate handstamp and curved “Paid”. Estimated at \$158, the lot realized \$347.

Now for a very unusual cover, ship mail of a sort, “Canoe Brigade” mail. This 1852 folded letter is datelined “Norway House,” a major trading post at the head of Lake Winnipeg in Canada. It was carried



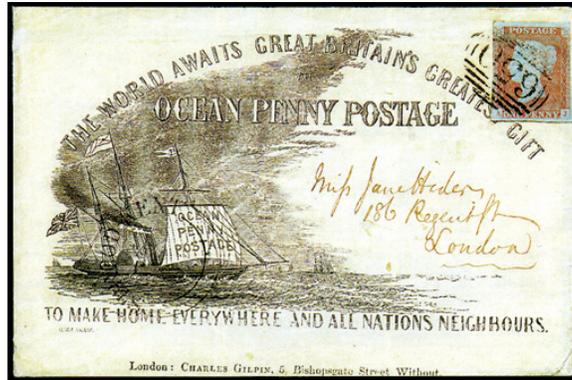
part of the way to Montreal via a group of canoes travelling together for safety over lakes and rivers. Markings include a “Ste Marie / Mich.” c.d.s. applied en route in the U.S., a red Montreal receiver, a manuscript “paid 5d” changed to “10” and a circled “6D” handstamp. This unusual usage was estimated at \$394 and sold for \$504.



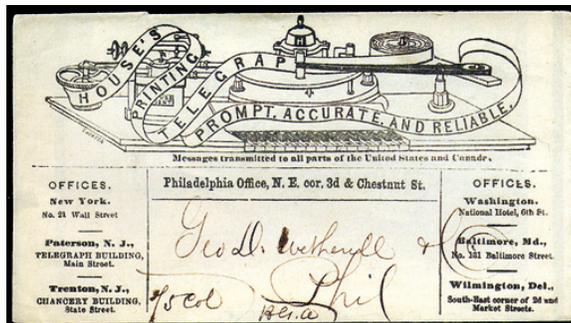
Next we come to Stagecoach mail, one lot being this Argentina circa 1850 folded cover

to Buenos Aires from Santo Domingo with a pictorial strike in oval of the “Mensagerias Argentinas,” and “Franca” in fancy ribbon. Estimated at \$473, it sold for \$599.

The next section was devoted to the adhesive period. After two Penny Black covers, we find this “Ocean Penny Postage” illustrated propaganda cover with the inscription “The World Awaits Great Britain’s Greatest Gift



/ To Make Home Everywhere and All Nations Neighbours.” Estimated at \$473, it realized \$1,182.



Still another form of communication comes to the fore with this 1851 First Printing Telegraph imprinted envelope for House’s Printing Telegraph, from Boston to Philadelphia with “75

col” manuscript charge (25 times the single letter rate). As noted in the lot description it is “an important precursor of many future non-postal means of communication”, which continues today. Estimated at \$315, this piece sold for \$1,103.

Bicycle Mail included three lots of stamps and covers of the New Zealand Coolgardie Cycle Express. The third lot contained three items, this one a cover with a 2 shilling 6 pence



Coolgardie stamp tied by a two-line violet Coolgardie cancel. This 1899 inbound cover via Coolgardie with Western Australia 2d Swan issue, also with an oval cachet of the proprietor of the Bicycle Service on reverse, was estimated at \$7,881, but did not sell.

The Sudan Camel Post was represented by this 1903 “Camel Postman” issue with an inverted “5 Mil-liemes” overprint tied by a Khartoum (14. XII) c.d.s. Estimated at \$788, it also did not sell.



Next up for viewing is one of two rare Cinderellas, Express Mail stamps of W. McCulloch & Co. of Victoria, Australia—this 6d green “Registered C” and a 6d rose “Registered B” stamp—only two of each known. Offered in one lot and estimated at \$1,576, this lot also did not sell.

Shown here is one of three U.S. Western Express lots, a U.S. “Pacific Stage & Express Co. / PAID.” pictorial frank showing a stagecoach with three pairs of horses, three 2¢ Black



Jacks with target cancels partly tied by “Registered” handstamp, San Francisco c.d.s. (13 March 1865). The cover was sent to New York and endorsed “pr. steamer via Panama.” Estimated at \$3,941, it did not sell.

Next we view this 1883 cover carried on the Orient Express with an Orient Express red adhesive (uncancelled, upper left) paying the supplementary fee on a cover franked with a Germany 20pf stamp tied by a K.D.O.P.A. Constantinople fore-runner c.d.s. dated 22.7.1883 at 11-12 A.M.—believed to be the earliest known use of an “Express D’Orient” label. Estimated at \$473, it sold for \$599.



Also selected was this Lady McLeod cover. The stamp was issued by the owner of the steamer *Lady McLeod* for mail carried between the Trinidad ports of Port of Spain and San Fernando. Issued in April 1847, this was the first stamp issued in a British Colony. This folded letter, written July 1, 1847, sold for its presale estimate of \$15,763.

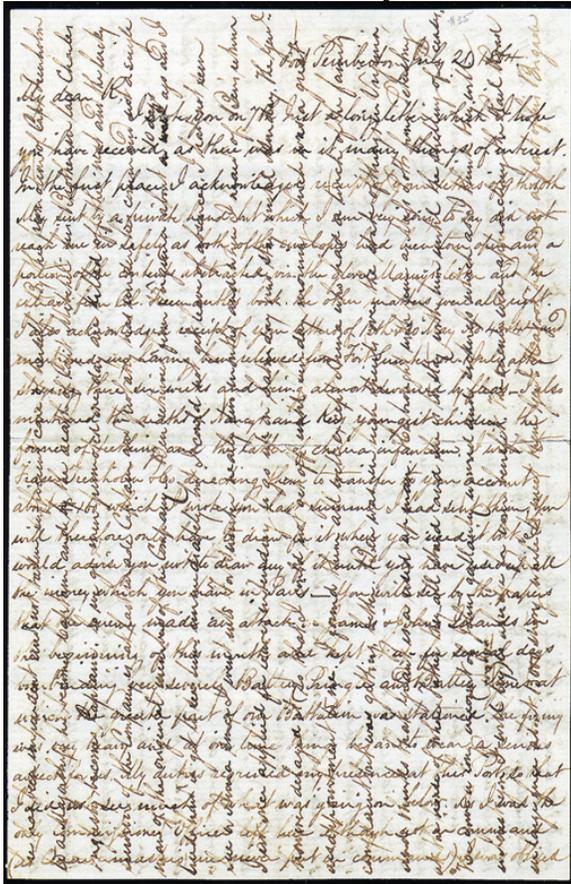
Next is a cover carried “Via Nicaragua Ahead of the Mails.” The cover to Maine bears a pair of U.S. 3¢ 1851 imperfs with a “STEAM / SHIP” cancel, probably originating in San Francisco,



the reverse with a large oval handstamp of J. W. Sullivan’s Newspaper Office (agent for the Nicaragua transit route who supplied the pre-stamped envelopes). The mail start-

ing on the West Coast of the U.S. crossed the 11 miles from the Pacific to the Atlantic across Nicaragua by mule, then by steamer to the east coast of the U.S. This 1850s cover was estimated at \$1,182 but did not sell.

Still another cover evidencing an unusual carriage of the mails is this Civil War Blockade Runner cover. The 1864 cover with original cross-



written contents (to save paper) written at Fort Pemberton, South Carolina on July 21, 1864, addressed to writer's wife care of Liverpool, was carried from Charleston to Nassau, Bahamas on the blockade runner S.S. *Druid Tilton*. It bears a Nassau August 3 backstamp and on the face a Liverpool receiver (12 SP) and handstamp "2/-" rate. The manuscript "No. 35" would have been the writer's sequence; if a number did not

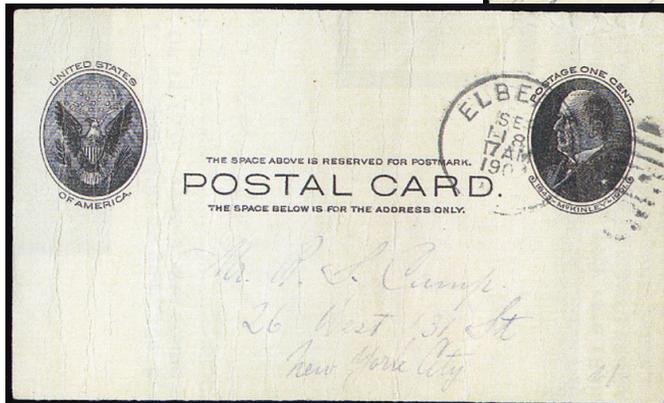
arrive, it would be indicate it had been seized. The letter waited at Nassau for the *Corsica*, which took mail and cotton to New York (recorded arrival Aug. 26) and the letter went on through Boston to Liverpool on the S.S. *Asia*. Estimated at \$11,822, this historic piece did not sell.



Shown here is a German New Guinea Ship Disaster cover. The cover was franked by an unoverprinted strip of four Germany 10pf stamps cancelled 11 April 1891 at Stephansort, sent to Germany aboard the *Ottolie*, which sank

en route, with the mail recovered and forwarded on the steamer *Schwalbe* via Singapore, arriving at Dresden on June 30. By then the unoverprinted “forerunner” stamps were no longer valid, so the cover was charged “T 80” (pf) due (double deficiency). Estimated at \$788, this cover fetched \$1,419.

Next up is a 1¢ McKinley postal card carried by Bottle. The message on the back asked the finder to drop it in the mail with a report of where found. The bottle was dropped from the Staten



This card was thrown over board from the Staten Island Ferry on Monday morning at 11:15 AM. Put on it where time found or and please mail and oblige. R. S. Camp. Wednesday Sept 17 1902 found on the beach near the Elberon Beach Club about 2 p.m. by Miss Annie Kelly. Will you please return it to me as I would like it.

Island Ferry on September 14, 1902. The finder posted the card from Elberon, N.J. two days later. Estimated at \$315, this lot did not sell.

Ship mail of a different sort is shown in the next lot, a “Nordkap” cacheted cover from the 1896 Jeaffreson-Farnham Arctic Expedition. The letter was written and signed by J. Russell Jeaffreson from Amsterdam Island, franked by Norway 20 øre stamp plus



five different Bypost issues (Hammerfest, Spidsbergen, Tromso, Vadso and Vardo), most tied by Advent Bay, Hammerfest or 29 VII 96 Nordlands Post Expedition cancels, the cover also with an August 4 English backstamp. Estimated at \$1,182, this cover realized \$1,576.



Still more fascinating ship mail, this one is a World War I U-Boat Mail cover. This 1917 cover was originally posted at Waiblingen (January 8) and addressed to the U.S., endorsed “Tauchbootbrief nach Bremen” also showing a pictorial “Bremen 1 / D.O.R.”

January 16 circular date stamp (c.d.s.). It also bears a large 3-line “Zurück” handstamp explaining that due to the end of the U-Boat service it was being returned to sender. The U-Boat mail was an attempt to break the Allied blockade of Germany, but due to the deterioration of relations (and imminent resumption of unlimited submarine warfare) the third trans-Atlantic trip of the submarine *Deutschland* was cancelled, and the submarine fee was refunded (evidenced by the “Tauchbootgebuhr erstattet” manuscript at left). Estimated at \$236, this unusual cover realized \$284.

And now for a cover that may be more familiar, a Tonga Tin Can Mail usage. Illustrated here is one of three items in the lot, this cover being a 1938 inward bound cover (much scarcer than outward bound covers) from Buenos Aires. Estimated at \$79, this lot realized \$126.



We now come to flight covers, starting with a Siege of Paris Ballon Monte letter addressed to St. Petersburg, Russia, carried by the ill-fated “General Chanzy” (captured by the Prussians upon landing in

Bavaria, held and later returned) with an 80 centimes Empire issue and December 18, 1870 Paris Rue de Strasbourg circular date stamp (c.d.s.). Estimated at \$1,576, it did not sell.

A related cover is this Boules de Moulins usage, a folded letter with 80c and 20c Bordeaux franking and “30 Dec. 1870 Fresnes-Nor” c.d.s., inscribed “Paris / Par Moulins / Allier,” floated out of Paris in



a hollow ball (boule) on the Seine in another attempt to break the siege. Estimated at \$788, it sold for \$1,025.



Shown next is a rare 5¢ Buffalo Balloon unused vertical tete-beche pair—the complete sheet as printed. This lot also included a piece of the newsprint paper streamer used for a dropped cover, cut from the one at the Gallatin Public Library. These stamps, U.S. Semi-Official airmail Scott CL1, were intended for use on covers carried on the *Buffalo* balloon in 1877. Estimated at \$7,881, the pair did not sell.

Flight of another sort is represented by the next two lots. First we display a Registered cover to Henry Bolitho, a stamp

dealer and principal instigator of the stamps used by “The Original” pigeon mail service, franked by Niue 1/2p, 1p and 2-1/2p surcharges. Estimated at \$315, it sold for \$394.



And here see a New Zealand Great Barrier Island First issue 1 shilling blue Pigeon Post

stamp tied by small cancel in black to complete flimsy (slightly “pecked” as normal), the contents being a list of groceries needed by the next boat. One of four known First Issue flown flimsies, it was estimated at \$4,729 and fetched \$6,699.

Among Pioneer Flights, we view on page 16 a 1906 Arlon, Belgium, “Ballon Pendant” 1910 Mondorf-les-Bains, Luxembourg, aviation week picture postcard of an early box-type biplane with a Luxembourg 5c tied by an or-

nate boxed Champ. d'Aviation date stamp for June 5, the address side signed by aeronaut Lt. Pierson with a 15c Belgium stamp tied by April 18, 1906 c.d.s. Possibly unique with the boxed date stamp, the card was estimated at \$788, but did not sell.



A U.S. Pioneer Flight is displayed next, a 1911 Garden City, N.Y. aviation photo card with 1¢ stamp tied by Sept. 24 "Aeroplane Station No. 1" duplex cancel and "Aerial Special Despatch" straight

line cachet at left, sent to Germany (by boat) with red "Hannover 1 / Porto" receiver and blue manuscript "10" due. Estimated at \$158, it sold for \$410.

Still another form of air carriage is represented by this Ship to Shore Catapult Mail 1928 cover, used for the *Ile de France* first return voyage, with special 10 franc surcharge on the 90c stamp, all tied by "New York au Havre 23 -8 28 D" date stamp, the cover also with a six-line cachet for the catapult flight. The lot, with two similar covers from the same catapult flight, was estimated at \$6,305, but did not sell.



Dirigible flight also was found in the “Journey of Ingenuity” Collection, in the form of this “Norge” Polar flight cover with special label and “NORGE.” handstamp, plus 1.25 lira Italian



franking tied at Ciampino (Rome) on April 8, 1926 and oval “Equipaggio Italiano” cachet, addressed to Leningrad (arrow). This cover sold for its estimate of \$788.

Completing our viewing of this Collection, we present a spectacular example of a 1937 *Hindenburg* crash cover, a large part of a cover with franking including a Hitler miniature sheet souvenir cancelled in Berlin, with violet “On Board” cancels dated “5.5.

1937” (the day before the explosion and fire). The cover addressed to Germany comes with the original U.S. Post Office glassine envelope with two Official Seals. Estimated at \$7,881, it realized \$8,669.

