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Article Summary: For Air Mail Week in 1938 more than two hundred Nebraska communities created their own commemorative designs for airmail envelopes, and the result is a study in local pride.

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Photographs / Images: cachets from Nebraska communities (Jansen, Neligh, Harrison, McCook, Stuart, Dakota County, Gordon, Malmo)

Like many anniversary celebrations, National Airmail Week, May 15–21, 1938, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of official airmail service in the United States, was a great commotion, but quickly forgotten.

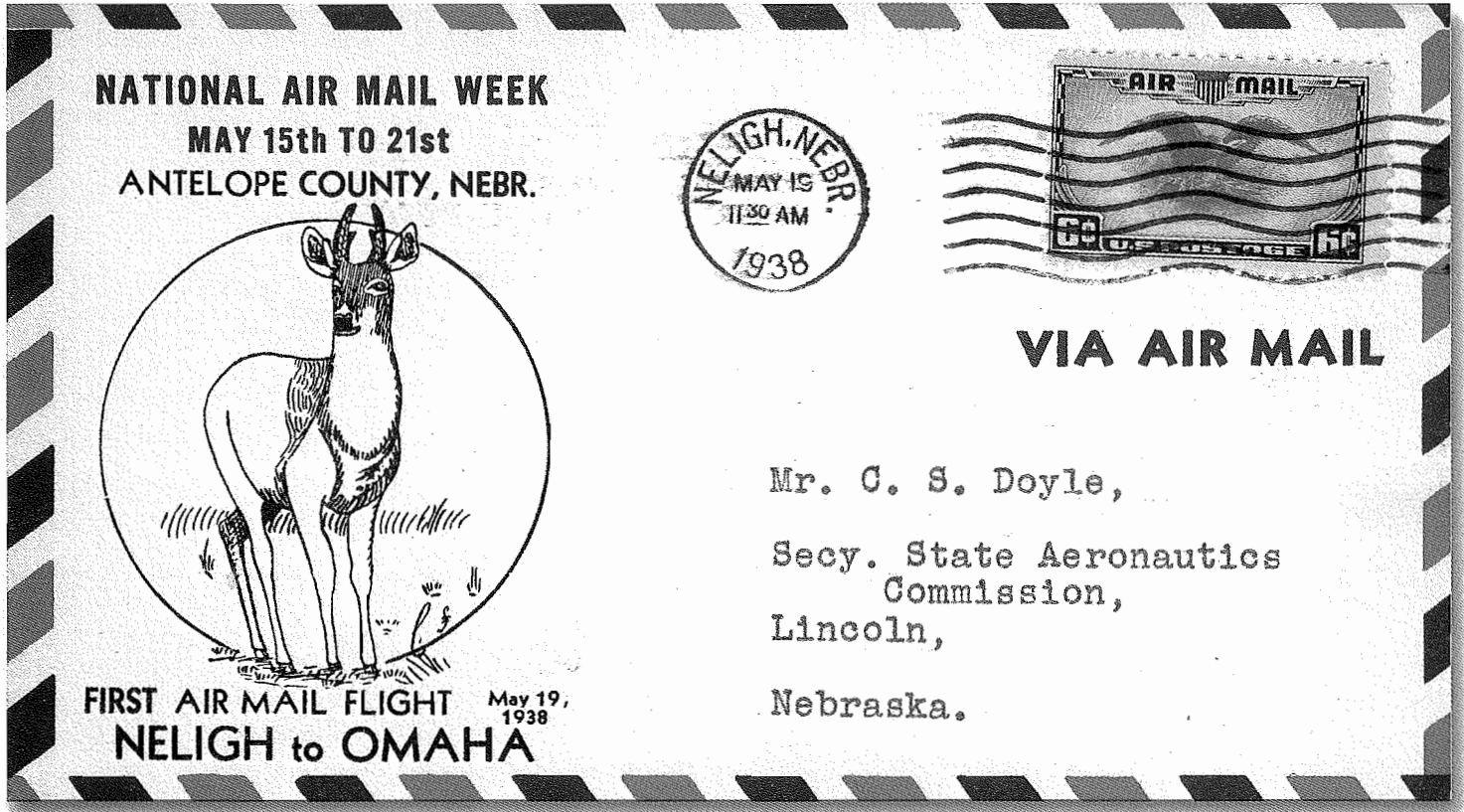


LANDMARKS ON PAPER

BY JOHN CARTER



BUT UNLIKE SOME ANNIVERSARY celebrations National Airmail Week left a fascinating residue. The crowning event of the celebration on May 19, was originating airmail flights from as many towns as possible throughout the nation. Participating communities were encouraged to develop local cachets—commemorative designs stamped or printed on their airmail envelopes.



Examples of most of the cachets were mailed to the Nebraska State Aeronautics Commission, the Nebraska State Historical Society, or the Omaha postmaster, and were later transferred to the Nebraska State Historical Society as pseudo-artifacts of the event. The term “pseudo-artifact” is not uncharitable, simply descriptive of the memorabilia often created for anniversaries—the

fiftieth anniversary coffee cup, the centennial coin, the commemorative plate. Because of the self-conscious way they are created—artifacts made solely to be artifacts—such objects rarely illuminate or enhance our understanding of the past.

John Carter is Senior Research Folklorist with the Nebraska State Historical Society.

AIR MAIL FROM HARRISON, NEBRASKA



County Seat of

SIoux
COUNTY

The Home of the

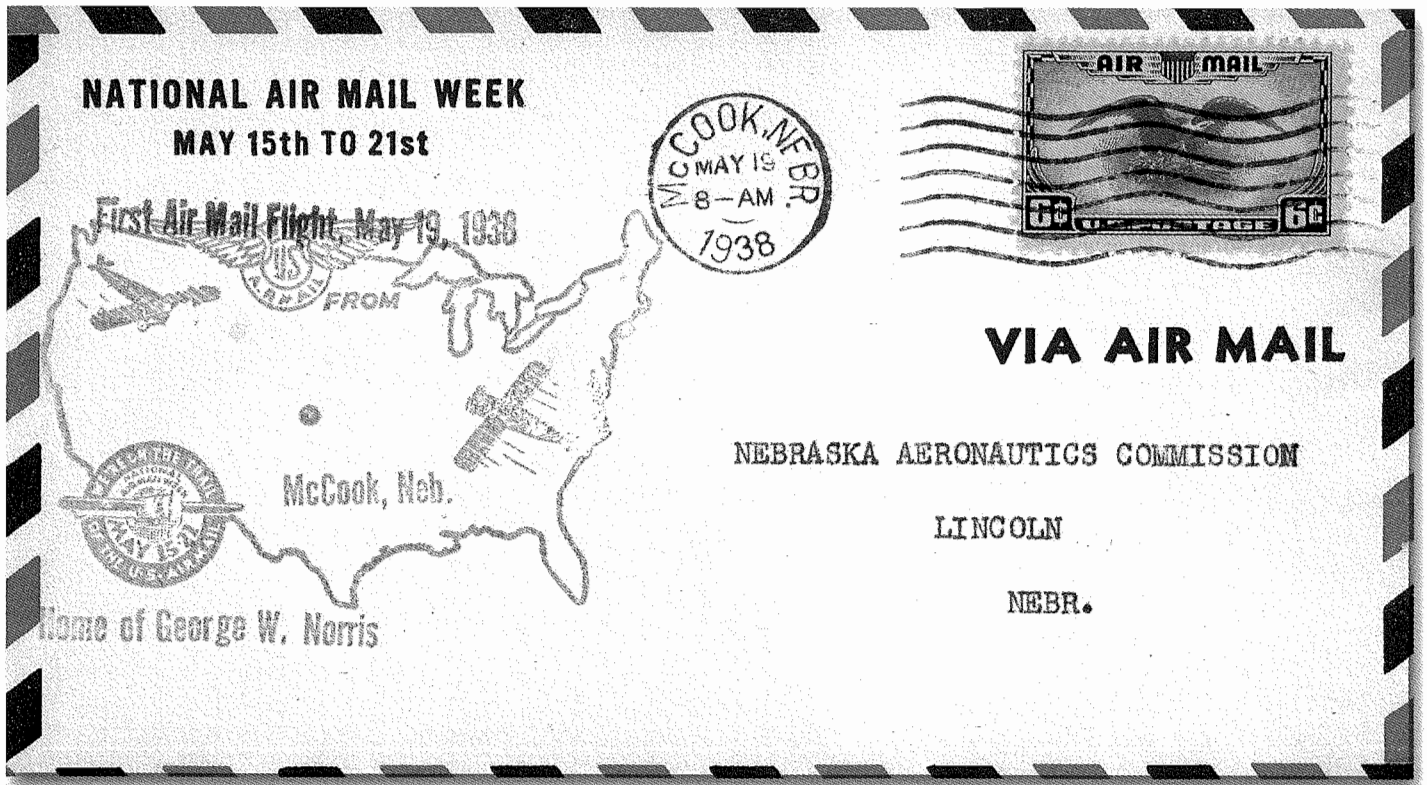
BEST HEREFORD
RANGE CATTLE
IN THE WORLD

They Always Top the Market!

The Air Mail Week cachets, however, are historically interesting. Nebraska was participating in a national event that captured the public's imagination, and the cachets took on a mixed public-private role similar to that of picture postcards: They carried private communication, but

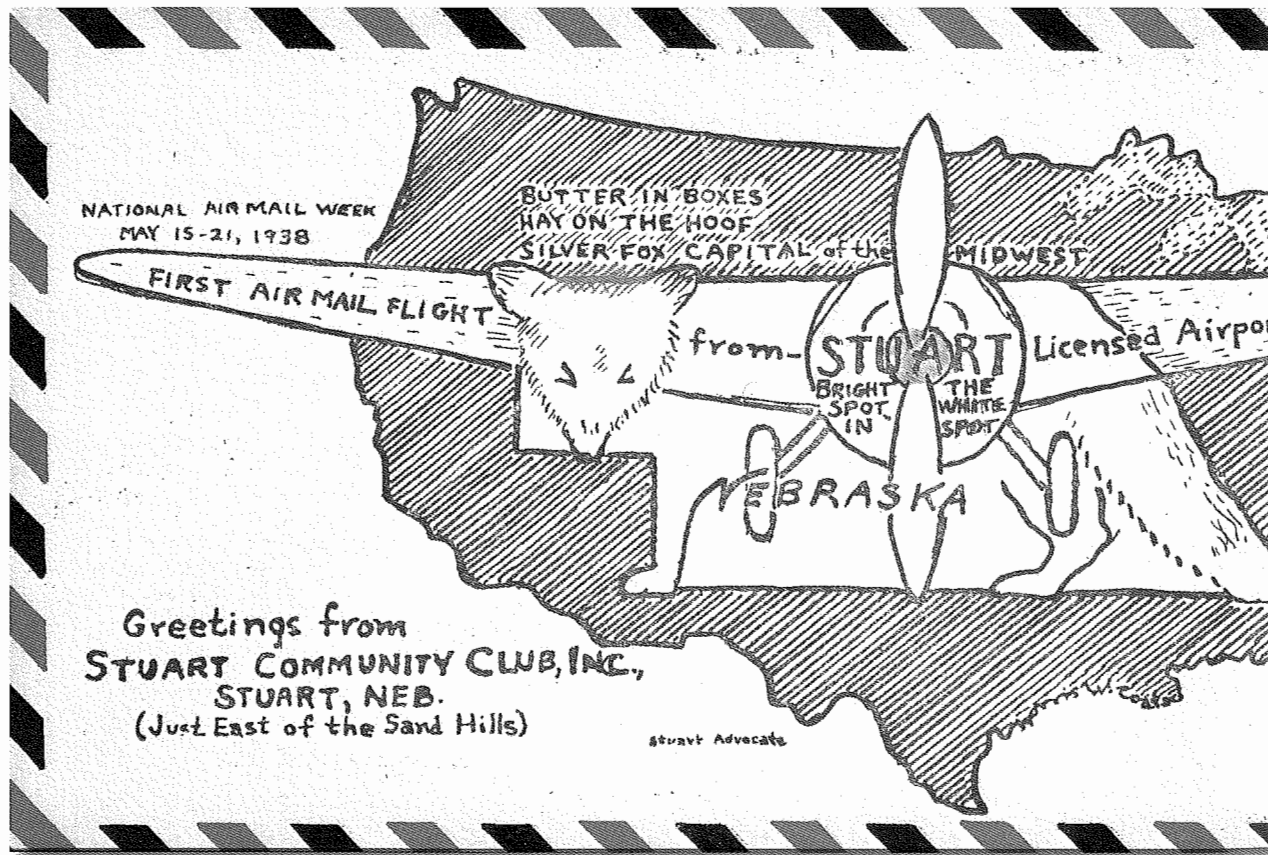
were expected draw public attention and even be read by many. Thus the more than five hundred cachets in the Historical Society's collection are not simply commemorative, but also reflective of the self-image and sense of identity of the communities that created them.

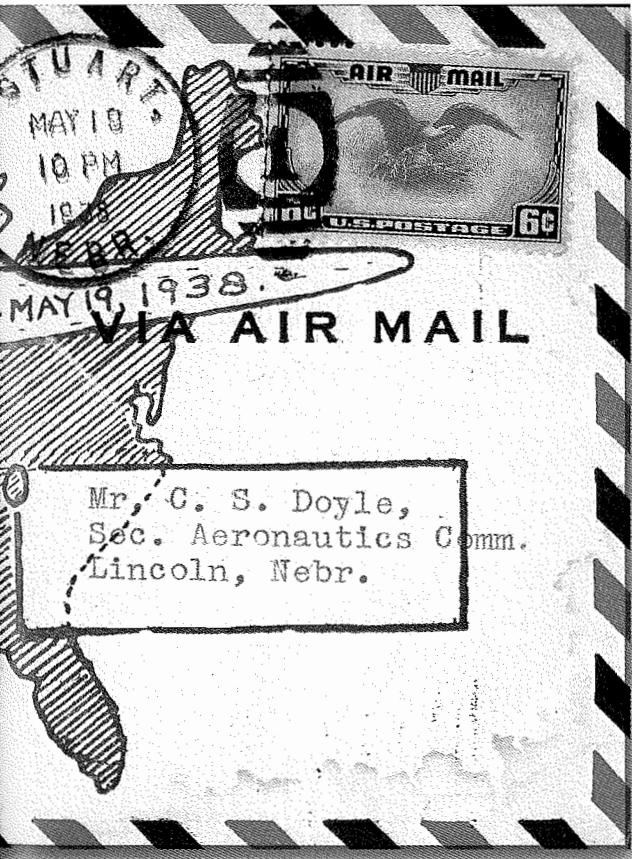
The largest group is made up of envelopes that locate the point of origin on a map of the United States. By participating in this national event, individuals and towns were declaring themselves part of the greater American community: "I'm writing from McCook, USA—this dot right here in the middle of map."



"I'm writing from McCook, USA—this dot right here in the middle of the map."

A subset of that group features a map of Nebraska on which the originating town or county is highlighted. Like the towns locating themselves on the national map, these communities were also announcing themselves to the world, often with an additional point of pride or two added—a landmark on paper that announced county and state pride, and often, as on the Dakota County cachet, overtly declared itself to be worthy of notice with an additional illustration and a slogan: “The Agricultural Center of America. A Sure Crop County.”

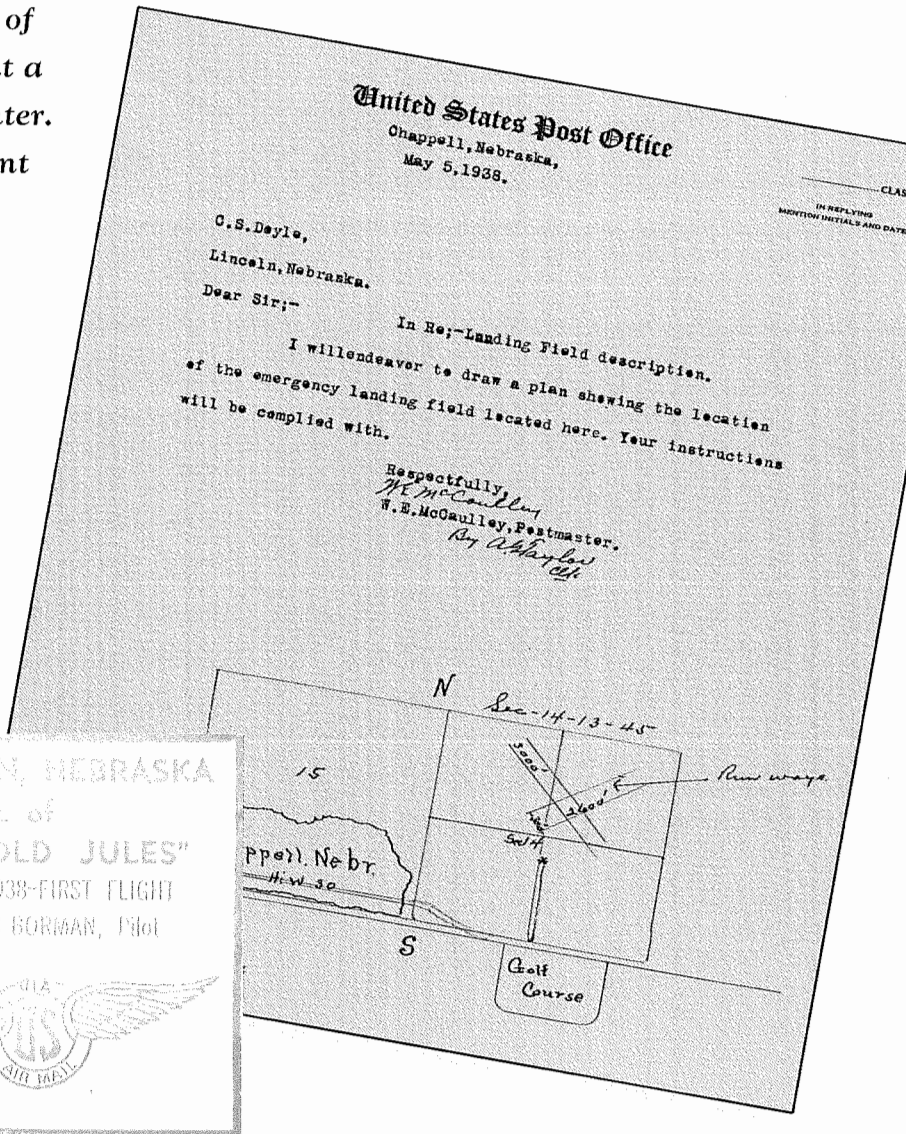


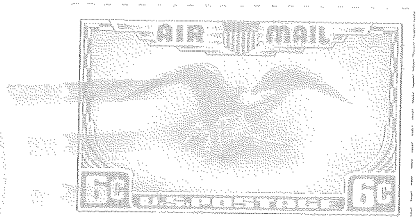
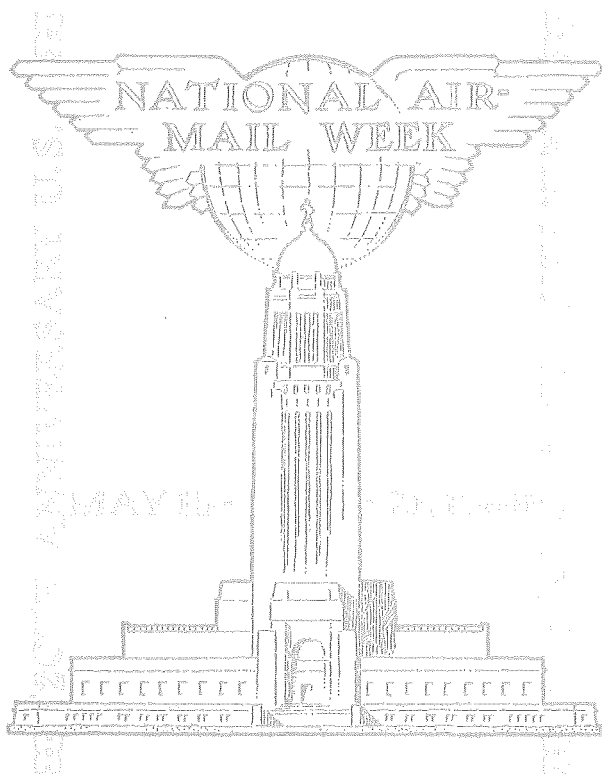


A similar boast claims for Nebraska the title "White Spot of America." The description was created for a state promotional campaign touting Nebraska's low taxes: In 1938 the state had no individual income taxes, no sales tax, and no debt. There was no "red ink," thus Nebraska was a white spot. Stuart, with one of the most elaborate cachets in the collection, takes the boast a step farther, calling itself "The Bright Spot in the White Spot" (adding, in a tour de force of figurative language, "Butter in Boxes, Hay on the Hoof, Silver Fox Capital of the Midwest.")

Town and county booster cachets abound. Some brag about distinctive local industries: Louisville its limestone quarries, Cherry County its "Million Cattle." Others focus on their history or distinctive features. All promote community strengths and points of pride. A few spotlight a famous son or daughter. Noteworthy is one sent to Nebraska State Historical Society Superintendent A. E. Sheldon by Mary Sandoz of Ellsworth. The back of the envelope is stamped, "Rushville, Nebraska, The Home of Old Jules"

That was, of course, Jules Sandoz, made famous by his daughter Mari's book, Old Jules, published only three years earlier. Mary was Mari's mother. Interestingly, the cachet from Gordon, fifteen miles east of Rushville, also claims Old Jules.





Mr. C. S. Doyle, Secretary,
State Aeronautics Commission
Lincoln, Nebraska.

Josephine L. Leary, Postmaster
First Air Mail Flight May 19, 1938
From MALMO, NEBR.

**“Nebraska. . .a state proud of
its past and its present.”**

The scale of National Airmail Week in Nebraska (it was one of the states with the highest per capita participation) and what can be read between the lines in the Nebraska cachets show a state proud of its past and its present, and eagerly anticipating the future. In thirty-four years aviation

had progressed from the Wright Brothers to airmail and the beginnings of commercial air travel. For communities celebrating their first—and many their only—air pick-up, the event had a meaning well worth celebrating.