International Civil Aviation 1979

JUNE 1980

Official magazine of international civil aviation
AVIATION COMMEMORATION: Postage stamps reflect the brief history of multilateral co-operation in civil aviation

Although relatively few in number, they still record many of the steps taken to bring nations together for the continuing development of international air transport...

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FOR THE DISCIPLINED postage stamp collector, there is an interesting, relatively economical, but limited area of aeronautical philately which is concerned with the many historic—and, in early days, frequently futile—attempts of nations to come together and to reach agreement for the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation.

Of course, the aeronautical philatelist may be interested in airmail postage alone, or that commemorating aviation pioneers, or publicizing aircraft, airlines, airports, aeroplane rallies, or industrial aviation exhibitions. All are available to the collector in enormous variety, volume and cost.

But the urge to collect everything related to a subject can be extremely expensive. Some single airmail stamps will cost as much as US$100,000. The collector’s rationale then changes from interest in postage to one of investment and speculation.

However, there is a surprising feasibility inherent in the more limited enterprise—so few postage stamps commemorate the important international aviation efforts. Such a complete collection is small enough for convenient management, and economical enough to avoid burdensome cost on a continuing basis.
Early events not honoured

The earliest instance of governments seeking agreement and/or co-operation related to international flight involves a conference held in Paris during 1889 concerning the activity of hot-air balloons. In the following 20 years (1889-1909), there were six international air conferences sponsored by various European governments. None of these achieved the honour of a single postage stamp.

In 1919, under the auspices of the League of Nations, the Paris International Air Convention created ICAO's earliest model by establishing, in 1922, the International Commission for Air Navigation (ICAN/CINA) with 33 Member States. Much like the League of Nations itself, ICAN did not survive the events of the 1930s and disappeared with the outbreak of the second world war.

However, in that interim period, from 1919-1939, there were numerous and varied government-sponsored international conferences to develop civil aviation co-operation in almost every region of the world. The few postage stamps issued to commemorate such events are reproduced here (facing page):

- **U.S.S.R., September 1927;** issued by the Soviet Government to commemorate the first International Conference on Air Mail which was proposed by the Netherlands and the U.S.S.R. and was sponsored by the Universal Postal Union. The Conference was attended by delegations from 36 nations at the Hague.

- **U.S.A., December 1928;** issued by the United States Government for the International Conference on Civil Aeronautics, sponsored by the U.S. Government as part of its celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first engine-powered flight (1903). The event was attended by delegations from 39 nations in Washington, D.C.

- **Arab Republic of Egypt, December 1933;** issued by the Egyptian Government for the International Civil Aviation Congress in Cairo. The meeting was attended by delegations from 26 nations interested in air routes through the Mediterranean and Middle East region for flights with Asia/Pacific destinations.

- **Peru, September 1937;** issued by the Peruvian Government for the Inter-American Technical Aviation Conference in Lima. This Conference was attended by 12 national delegations from within the hemisphere, together with observers from Europe, and was sponsored by the Pan-American Union.

ICAO postage appeared in 1946

For the collector, it might appear discouraging that a world-wide organization of such importance and stature as ICAO has attracted so little philatelic attention from its 146 Member States.
Many other international agencies and their projects have been commemorated in comparatively vast collections of postage.

With respect and deference for ICAO, one of the principal reasons for its lack of postal recognition is that no strenuous effort was ever launched by the Organization to seek that form of publicity.

Another reason is that all government postal administrations are annually besieged with requests for special issues. These emanate from hundreds of local societies as well as national, regional and international organizations. The Universal Postal Union tries to coordinate and,
thus, control some of these efforts to
concomitantly and publicize events, per-
sonalities and ideas; but the number of
appeals is always far greater than the
practical limits for any government’s
postage issues.

Nevertheless, despite these difficulties,
ICAO has been honoured by a variety of
postage stamps issued during the period
1946-1978:
- Arab Republic of Egypt, October, 1946;
a stamp was re-issued with surprint by the
Egyptian Government for the Interna-
tional Air Navigation Conference in
Cairo. The Conference was sponsored
and attended by the Member States of
PICA, the “Provisional” International
Civil Aviation Organization (as establish-
ed by the 1944 Chicago Convention and
which in 1947 became ICAO).
- Turkey, October 1950; for the Interna-
tional Civil Aviation Congress in Istan-
bul, sponsored by ICAO.
- Italy, September 1952; for the Interna-
tional Conference on Air Law in Rome,
sponsored by ICAO.
- United Nations, February 1955; for the
10th Anniversary of the Chicago Conven-
tion and the establishment of ICAO.
- Canada, February 1955; for the 10th
Anniversary of the Chicago Convention
and the establishment of ICAO.
- Dominican Republic, April 1956; for
ICAO’s 3rd Regional (Caribbean) Air
Navigation Conference in Santo Domingo.
- Belgium, April 1958; issued among a set
of six airmail stamps honouring United
Nations agencies.
- Costa Rica, October 1961; issued
among a set of eight stamps honouring
United Nations agencies.
- Republic of Korea, December 1962;
issued with souvenir sheet for the
Republic of Korea’s 10th Anniversary of
membership in ICAO.
- United Republic of Cameroon, March
1967; for the 20th Anniversary of ICAO.
- Gabon, May 1967; for the 20th
Anniversary of ICAO.
- Republic of Korea, May 1971; issued
among a set of 25 stamps honouring
United Nations agencies and projects.
- Somalia, December 1977; issued with
souvenir sheet for the 30th Anniversary
of ICAO.
- Republic of Korea, December 1977; for
the Republic of Korea’s 25th Anniversary
of membership in ICAO.
- Syrian Arab Republic, May 1977; for
the 30th Anniversary of ICAO.
- Uruguay, October 1977; for the 30th
Anniversary of ICAO.
- United Nations, June 1978; issued in
sets from New York and Geneva for the
30th Anniversary (1977) of ICAO.
- Cyprus, October 1978; for the 30th An-
niversary (1977) of ICAO and the 75th
Anniversary of powered flight
(1903-1978).
- Egypt, December 1978; for the 30th An-
niversary (1977) of ICAO.

By far the most beneficial result that
comes from researching and collecting
international aeronautical philately is the
acquisition of important and interesting
historical information. A modest effort is
rewarded by almost privileged insights
concerning the political, economic and
technical difficulties that invariably
attend international civil aviation con-
ferences, the reasons why certain of these
events and their formal objectives met
success or failure, and an appreciation for
the progress that has been achieved thus
far in the development of the world’s air
transport system.

Because the postage commemorating
these events is scarce and frustrates any
hope for large-scale collecting, it never-
theless encourages increasing curiosity
and research. That, in itself, ultimately
leads to a better understanding and ap-
ppreciation of the necessary activities and
objectives, problems and achievements
of ICAO today.