

# The Varney Airgram: An Introduction

Walter T. Varney, owner of Varney Air Lines based in Boise, Idaho, was awarded the contract to provide Contract Air Mail Service on CAM Route 5. This route had been established between Elko, Nevada and Pasco, Washington by way of Boise, Idaho (435 miles). Varney was compensated by the piece flown being paid 80% of the revenue received by the Post Office—established at 10¢ per ounce or part thereof for CAM5.

Varney Air Lines inaugurated contract air mail service with a 6:20 am flight from Pasco to Elko by way of Boise on Tuesday April 6, 1926. Service was discontinued effective April 10 to allow installation of more powerful engines on the Swallow aircraft. Air mail service was resumed on June 1.

Postal Bulletin 14124 announced payment to Varney Air Lines would be placed on a weight basis effective July 9, 1926. Compensation would be \$3 per pound flown. 40 letters per pound at 10¢ revenue per letter formed a basis for this change.

Postal Bulletin 14268 announced effective February 1, 1927 the air mail postage rate would be 10¢ per ½ ounce or portion thereof regardless of distance flown or provider of the air mail service (advertising card seen at right).

With these two changes Varney determined if he could provide a blank letter of some sort weighing almost exactly ½ ounce that the public would use for letter correspondence the weight of 40 letters would increase to 1¼ pound. Compensation to Varney Air Lines for 40 flown letters would increase 25% from \$3 to \$3.75.

Varney created the Varney Airgram to be that ½ ounce blank letter.

The Varney Airgram is important as an item that represents both postal and aeronautical history in the Pacific Northwest. It should be considered a forerunner to the unfranked (formular)

Air O Gram (1932-Thailand) and pre-franked Air Mail Letter Card (1933-Iraq)—blank letter forms developed to control the weight of a letter intended to be serviced through air mail.

Note these later letter forms were designed to reduce the weight of air mail letters while Varney developed the Airgram to increase it.



Left is a commercial cover flown on CAM5 the last day before service was discontinued. Five cents paid the partial zone rate on the government operated route from San Francisco to Elko. Ten cents paid the contract air mail rate from Elko to Pasco. Traveled by rail over the first and last parts of its journey. Above are the transit markings from the back of the cover.



Above is a specimen of the earliest type Varney Airgram. It contained an insert taking it over ½ ounce seen by double weight 20¢ franking.

This exhibit presents results of a special study of the Varney Airgram for use by other collectors.

## Exhibit Outline

- 1) A Letter Sheet
- 2) Early Distribution/Use

## 3) Airgram Type Catalog:

- a. Type 1
- b. Type 2
- c. Type 3
- 4) Interesting Uses
- 5) Copycats
- 6) Successors