



## VERMONT PHILATELIC SOCIETY

[www.vermontps.org](http://www.vermontps.org)

Meets annually

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### EARLY FLIGHTS WERE RISKY BUSINESS

In the early decades of the twentieth century, airplane travel was a novelty that only a few had enjoyed. Many early aviators traveled around the country introducing the “aeroplane” to the general public, especially at events such as local fairs and celebrations. This was such a momentous occasion in many communities that special airmail flights and cancellations were used at the local post offices.

There were two such flights in Vermont in 1913 and 1922 where the local post office used special hand cancels. Coincidentally, both ended with fatalities.

On September 2, 1913, Vermonter George Schmidt, 23, flew fifty-seven pieces of mail from the Rutland Fairgrounds, site of the Vermont State Fair, dropping it over the city (*American Air Mail Catalogue Pioneer 74*).

Later that day, he took off with one passenger from the fairgrounds for an exhibition flight. When the flight reached about five hundred feet, the plane began to have engine trouble. Schmidt attempted to return to the fairgrounds, but the plane crashed, instantly killing Schmidt and injuring his passenger, Assistant municipal court judge J. Dryer Spellman, 22, also of Rutland.

An exhibition plane crashed at the dedication of the Brattleboro Air Field on August 18, 1922. Pilot Benjamin Hughes of Mineola, New York, escaped with minor injuries. His five-year-old son and two other passenger died.

The cause of the crash was a wing tip striking a tree limb during take off, causing the plane to make a nose dive into some electric wires where it burst into flames.

Earlier, Hughes had made an airmail demonstration flight (*AAMC Government 151*).

The postal cancel used at the Rutland events seems to be a rubber-stamp. It seems that perhaps not enough letters were available in the same size or font. Notice the different shapes of the As, Ts, and Is. The Brattleboro hand cancel, has a more professional look. ■

