

Test Cover Gone Astray

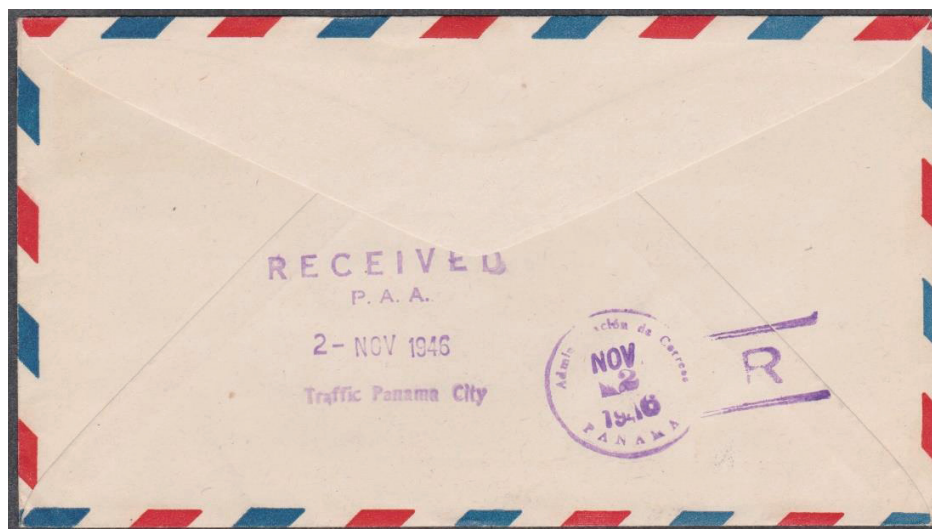
By Patrick Crosby

After reading Dave Gehringer's article on his presentation "Pan American Test Covers" in the March 2023 *Post Boy*, I wondered if I had any such covers. I was surprised to find out that I had just purchased two last year, but I didn't know their background.



These test/philatelic/advertising covers were to be mailed November 1, 1946, by anyone at any U.S. post office, but one of mine was postmarked October 31, 1946. Perhaps the sender thought it wouldn't be canceled until the next day, but it was canceled at 4:30 p.m. This didn't stop the cover from receiving the full treatment all test covers were to receive at each of the Pan American Airways' 28 Caribbean, Central American, and South American offices. Included in the test:

- 1) Mark the cover "Return to Sender," accomplished here with a pointing hand. Many times this was just handwritten.
- 2) Draw a line through the address.
- 3) Stamp the back of the envelope with the date received. This is the "P.A.A." (Pan American Airways) marking. There is also a Panama post office "R" (received) back-stamp.



4) Place proper airmail postage on the front lower left of the cover. A Panama 8 centesimos airmail stamp (Sc. C6C) pays the airmail rate back to the sender and a 1 centesimo Panama Postal Tax Stamp (Sc. RA16) was also applied, both courtesy of Pan Am.

5) Promptly return to the local post office, in this case in Panama City, Panama, who canceled the new stamps with a “DE” (depart) handstamp.

Wait a minute – did I say “Panama”? This cover is addressed to Porto au Prince, Haiti! The test was to demonstrate the speed and dependability of airmail service to our southern neighbors. Whoops!

Although the U.S. airmail rates to some of the test countries was lowered to 10 cents beginning on the test day, November 1, 1946, the rate was already at 10 cents for Panama and Haiti and proper U.S. postage had been paid. I paid \$3 or \$4 for my test covers, but most I see are \$8 -\$10. There are also many covers mailed a day later, November 2, 1946.

References:

Lingen, Roy, “Pan Am Air System Test of 1946” (8-15-2009) Stamporama.com (select Articles).

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal stationery, stamps, and postcards with an emphasis on postal history.
