

## Pitcairn's Air Mail

Contributed by Administrator  
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Pitcairn's Air Mail Western Pennsylvania was witness to an early experiment in air mail in the pioneering days of aviation. It began when Dr. Lytle S. Adams of Irwin, Pa. realized that the problem with airmail delivery to small towns like his own was the long delay occasioned by take-offs and landings. He devised a system like that used by speeding trains that could snatch a mailbag that from poles along the tracks. In his system the mail bag was suspended from two 40-foot poles so that a low-flying plane could snag the mail bag with a hanging hook. This system was so successful that in the 1940s it was widely used to deliver mail to small town airports scattered throughout western Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Early experiments with Dr. Adams's system were conducted at airports in Monroeville and Pitcairn. The following is an account by an unknown author of the first air mail delivery system in 1940 made for the Pitcairn Post Office.

**Pitcairn's First Air Mail Delivery** On December 2, 1940 at 8:00 am a group of people from Pitcairn witnessed a very historical event. It was the first air mail pick-up for a small town with a population of about 6,500 people. This is the first stop on the Pittsburgh to Williamsport route. The flight schedule is as follows: Leaves Pittsburgh at 8 a.m. reaching Williamsport at 3:07 p.m. arriving in Pittsburgh at 5 p.m. This makes the pick-up at Pitcairn 8:06 a.m. and 4:45. "AM Flight" is the route; "21107" is the number of the Stinson plane. The local Board of Trade had charge of the program. The program was opened with the group singing "America." Reverend Clapp then gave the Invocation. The Post Master, Lisle Deviney spoke on "Dreams Yesterday, Facts Today." Mr. Charles Decker, Secretary of the Board of Trade, spoke on "after the Ceremonies...What?" Mr. William Smith, the Junior History teacher of the Pitcairn High School was talking about the progress in mail carrying when the airplane came in sight and interrupted his talk. The poles used to mark the place of pick-up are bamboo, 20 feet high and a 60-foot loop is placed in a triangular shape between the poles. The pouch with 1,000 pieces of mail was attached to the loop and the bag was placed on the ground. The airplane had a 15-foot arm attached to the tail. He flew about 30 feet above the ground. An unfortunate thing happened: after picking up the pouch the rope broke. This made it necessary for the pilot to drop a note saying to go to Johnston's airport, a local field with the hook and he would repair the rope and return for the mail. After he left, the ceremonies were closed by singing "God Bless America." Everyone returned to their cars and waited for about twenty minutes for the return of the plane. He came back and made a successful pick-up and then went on to his next stop. It is a very important step in the progress of our town and the people of Pitcairn should be proud that we were the pioneers of Air Mail Pick-up for small towns. I am lucky enough to live about one mile from the place of pickup. The ship flies a direct route over my house and I enjoy watching his flight and accuracy in schedule very much. This postscript was added by the author: The Air Mail Pick-up is now at Bucks Airport above Pitcairn. The poles now have three sections, two of which are aluminum, the third or top part being bamboo. They are painted in wide bands of international orange and white to improve visibility. Two smudge pots are part of their standard equipment. The time of flight changes with the time of year.