

Flight of the Buffalo Balloon  
by Bradley Seeman

In its issue of June 17, 1877, the newspaper Nashville Daily American wrote:".. it will be pleasant to speak on the ascension in Nashville of the largest balloon in the world."

They referred to the famous Buffalo Balloon which, on the afternoon of June 18, 1877, made an ascension from Nashville to Gallatin, Tennessee, carrying letters on board. The letters were franked with a semi-official balloon stamp - now listed in Scott's Specialized as CL1 and considered the world's first airmail stamp.

The flight of the Buffalo Balloon (so-named because it was presented by the city of Buffalo to balloonist Samuel Archer King in 1873) had been eagerly awaited for many weeks by the populace of Nashville. The railroads were offering half fare to all those going to the launching.

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The President's Corner

Welcome to the 30th issue of our newsletter. For this issue I shall also be the editor. For the past eight years it has been a rocky road, but the newsletter has always gotten published. We have had four editors so far: Terry Chaney, Helen Bodiford, Chris Freeze, and myself. Each of these people have done an excellent job (I'm not tooting my own horn).

So far this year we have had the installation of new officers, the annual stamp show, 10 club meetings and 3 auctions. We have welcomed 13 new members into the club. If any of the members of the club have any ideas to make the club

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better let us know. Have a good  
Summer!  
Matt Benward, President NPS

The site picked was a vacant lot on the southwest corner of Broad and Spruce streets. The Buffalo Balloon was fitted with seats, and a plank floor on the bottom of the car to prevent sagging. The car was ten feet by four feet and the front sides were gaily decorated with stars and stripes.

That morning, small pilot balloons were sent up to test wind direction and strength. A chemist, Mr. Snively, furnished tests for ozone. The gas main on Broad was turned on at 11:00 and the inflation process began.

Newspaper accounts of the day playfully speculated on who would actually have the courage to ride in the Buffalo Balloon. The Daily American wrote: "The ladies are also going in force. No less than six solemnly protest that they wish to make the voyage and the professor (King) had told them each and all to be on hand. The car is large, the lifting power immense, and if they step up at the appointed time, they will be carried to the sky - free gratis."

The crowd surrounding the lot was so large that police had to be called to keep order. Again quoting the faithful Daily American: "Every five minutes the pressure on the fence would cause some part to break, precipitating its occupants to the ground while the veils of the more fortunate of the crowd attested they appreciated the downfall...The police were constantly busy in keeping the small boy in order and defeating the numberless devices to get a closer quarter than Prof. King wishes him to have."

Toward afternoon the last equipment was loaded on board and seven passengers got on. They included

Professor King, his meteorologist, Dr. A. C. Ford, as well as J. B. Lillard, a reporter (of whom more will be heard later).

The ropes were severed and the Buffalo Balloon sailed into the sky. The first letter delivered occurred over Spruce Street when a passenger, Mr. Dorris, dropped a letter to his wife. It fell in the street and by the next day had still not been delivered.

The reporter of the Daily American carried with him several envelopes inscribed: "Message from the Buffalo Balloon to the Nashville American. Please deliver it to the operator at the nearest telegraph station who will send contents to the American." Each packet contained an ounce of buckshot to speed its downward fall.

It was reported that while passing over Nashville, the music from Professor King's cornet was plainly heard by several persons.

The first dispatch, dropped at 5:30, contained the news: "1800 feet high - Prof. King had a passenger concealed ... He calls him Monsieur something. He intends to drop the Monsieur out in a few minutes with a parachute." It turned out that the "Monsieur" was only a dummy made out of air-tight cloth.

Of the flight itself, the reporter noted: "The country spread out before us presents a fine appearance. The green groves look magnificent. The air is growing cooler and the present state could not be more delightful. The balloon moves so easily that writing is a pleasure. Prof. King doesn't think he can go beyond Gallatin."





Roy McKulan

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Practically all we know about the Buffalo Balloon stamp itself comes from a piece in the Saint Louis Philatelist, by well known dealer E. F. Gambs, June-July 1877.

He reported that the copy he received was on cover with a Gallatin, Tennessee, postmark. He further reported the covers carried on board (and franked with the balloon stamp) were either dropped from the clouds or posted at the conclusion of the flight.

Gambs reported that the design was done by John Lillard and that the engraving was done by Snively. Gambs offered unused Buffalo Balloon stamps at 10c each, commenting: "... every collector should avail himself of this opportunity and secure this curiosity before they are obsolete and cannot be purchased without paying a fancy price..."

The stamp now catalogs at \$1000 unused in the 1972 Scott Specialized.

Only two covers are known franked with the balloon stamp. One, also franked with a 3c green Washington, was recently sold by H. R. Harmer, Inc. as part of the Henry Goodkind collection. The stamp is not tied to the cover.

The other is a fairly recent discovery, having received its Philatelic Foundation certificate in 1958. The process by which the cover was authenticated is well documented in the October 1958 issue of Aereo Philatelist Annals.

Briefly, the cover was measured and the stamp checked to ascertain if the stamp itself was genuine, or if it could have been replaced by another stamp. When these tests proved satisfactory, the next step was tracing the cover itself. The article by Gambs mentioned above, proved conclusively that this cover (for it

is addressed to Gambs and is the one he wrote about) was genuine. The heavy magenta cancel on the stamp turned out to be an office cancel he had applied later.

Finally, as to the Buffalo Balloon's title as the world's first airmail stamp. In an article entitled, " 'Balloon Stamp Earliest United States 'Air' Adhesive," in the Aereo Philatelist Annals of July 1953, Nicholas Sanabria stated that there were many flights on which letters were carried previous to the Buffalo Balloon.

The first was perhaps that of the Philadelphia-Woodbury flight of September 1, 1793. The first known postal markings related to a U. S. balloon flight may be those of T.S.C. Lowe, who ascended at Lancaster, Georgia in 1854. Postal stationary carried on board received a balloon handstamp.

Postmarked mail was carried in balloon ascensions at Cincinnati in 1853 and at Lafayette, Wisconsin in 1859.

However, on none of these flights was any sort of adhesive balloon stamp ever used. Thus, Nashville's Buffalo Balloon airmail of 1877 still holds just claim to the world's first airpost stamp.

#### Bibliography

The Nashville Daily American, June 15 - 17, 19, 1877 Nashville, Tennessee

Aereo Philatelist Annals, July 1953  
"Buffalo Balloon Cover"  
"Buffalo Stamp Earliest Air Adhesive" by Sanabria.

Aereo Philatelist Annals, June-July 1953 "The Buffalo Balloon and Mr. Gambs" by Winthrop S. Boggs.

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\* NASHVILLE STAMP NEWS \*  
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The third annual Vintage Affair honored Jeanette Rudy, a long time member of the Society, on March 25 at the Governor's Ballroom in the Opryland Hotel. Mrs. Rudy was honored for her many activities in the Nashville and Donelson communities over many years. Mrs. Rudy is considered to have the finest collection of Federal Duck stamps in the world.

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Forrest Wise has started a new stamp club in Hendersonville. This club is a branch of the Nashville Philatelic Society. It is meeting on the third Thursday of each month at the Hendersonville Public Library. Good work Forrest!!!

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Russ Liachoff, a stamp dealer from Charlotte, NC, is looking in to the possibility of opening a new stamp shop in Nashville later this year.

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Nancy Roberson is recovering from knee surgery. Get well soon!

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S T A M P F A C T

As of last year, the most popular people on stamps are:

George Washington	283
Benjamin Franklin	122
Abraham Lincoln	45
Thomas Jefferson	40
Andrew Jackson	28



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