

# First Non-Stop Transatlantic Flight from New York City to Lithuania July 15, 1933.

**Objective:** Exhibit depicts a philatelic story of one of the first non-stop transatlantic flights from North America to Europe which took place on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1933.


**Importance:** Darius-Girenas flight was the second longest distance-wise flight in the history of aviation at the time and fourth longest time-wise. The flight also had tremendous philatelic significance: with permits from both US Postmaster General & Lithuanian Government, it carried the **first official Transatlantic air mail consignment in history**. Despite the tragic ending to the flight leading to death of both pilots, the air mail consignment survived and was delivered to the intended recipients.

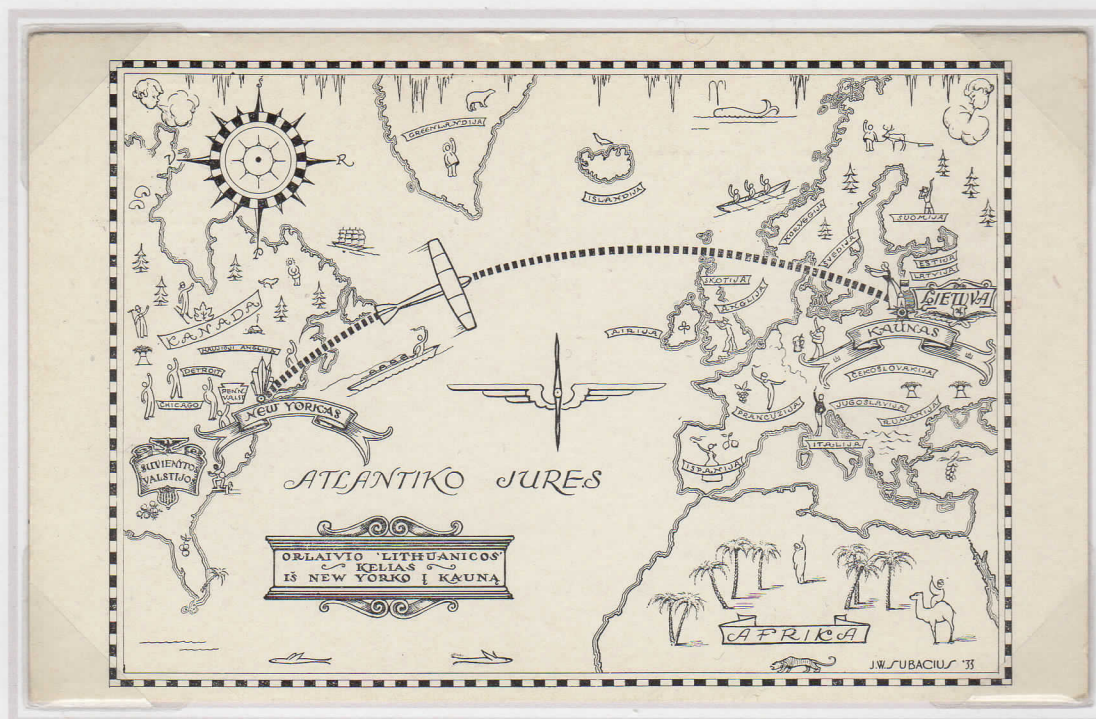
**Historic and Geographic Background:** The Kingdom of Lithuania was created in 1253 and in the 14th—15th centuries it was the largest state in Europe. However, by 1933, Lithuania was just a small Northern European country on the Baltic Sea bordering Latvia, Poland, and Germany with a population of only 2.5 million people. In the early days of aviation, this transatlantic flight helped put Lithuania on the Aeronautic World Map. Two American pilots became instant legends in their native land. Schools, city streets, and squares carry their names both in Lithuania and the US.

**Scope and Organization:** Exhibit covers the timeline starting with preparation for this monumental undertaking, the day of the flight and the immediate aftermath of the tremendous achievement. The exhibit is broken into several time periods as noted in the table on the right and at the top of each page.

## Plan of the Exhibit

- Preparation for the Flight
- The Flight
- Tragedy
- Remembering the Flight
  - > USA
  - > Lithuania
- Epilogue → New Chapter

The following markings are used throughout the exhibit:  Represents original research. Highly significant items are framed in **GREEN**. Important information is highlighted in **green italic** font color. (All items in the exhibit are certified original).



Postcard of the transatlantic route of "LITUANICA" by Captain S. Darius and pilot S. Girenas, 1933. USA



Preparation for the flight



PC issued by "Lietuvos Aero Klubo leidinys" Lithuania, 1933.

Two Lithuanian born American flyers, Stephen Darius and Stanley Girenas, decided to cross the Atlantic in a non-stop flight from New York City to their native land.

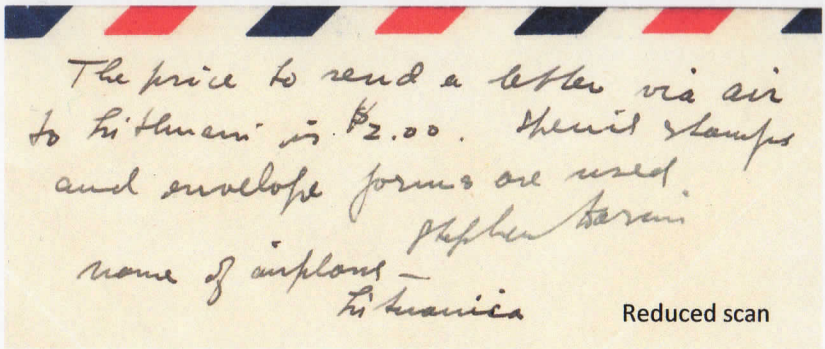
In February of 1933, the pilots received permits from Lithuanian and the US Postal administrations to carry mail. This marked the first official Transatlantic Airmail carry in history.



Forerunner cover to Charlotte, NC dated June 2, 1933 with autographs of both pilots on the front of the cover.

Reverse side of the Forerunner featured above: "The price to send a letter via air to Lithuania is \$2.00. Special stamps and envelope forms are used. Stephen Darius.

Name of airplane — "Lituanica"



Reduced scan

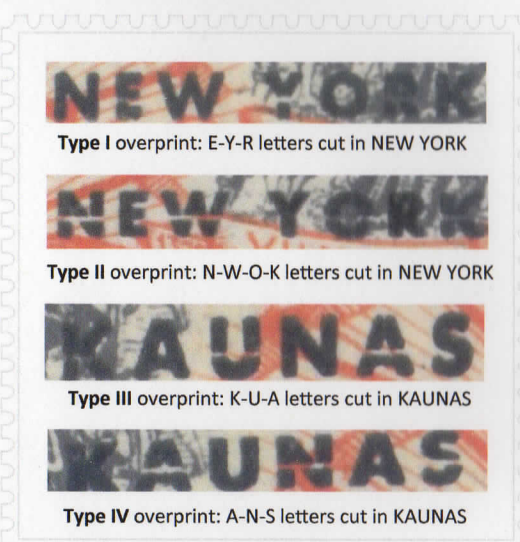
An important revenue source for the Transatlantic Flight Committee was issuance and sale of specially overprinted stamps. It was done with the aid of the Consul General of Lithuania, Povilas Zadeikis, who received the necessary authorization from Lithuanian government for overprinting of Lithuanian issued stamps. Overprinting of five 1932 Lithuanian airmail stamps took place at King Printing Co. in New York City on June 8th 1933 .

Typographic overprint in black ink was applied to blocks of 4 stamps.

**125 blocks of 4 of each stamp were overprinted. For a total of 500 sets.**

As a precaution to prevent forgery of the overprint, every other letter in the printing plate was split in half, creating 4 distinct overprint types/varieties.

Type I overprint variety can be found at the top of each individual block. Overprints type II, III and IV are in right, bottom and left positions respectively.



Enlarged overprint details



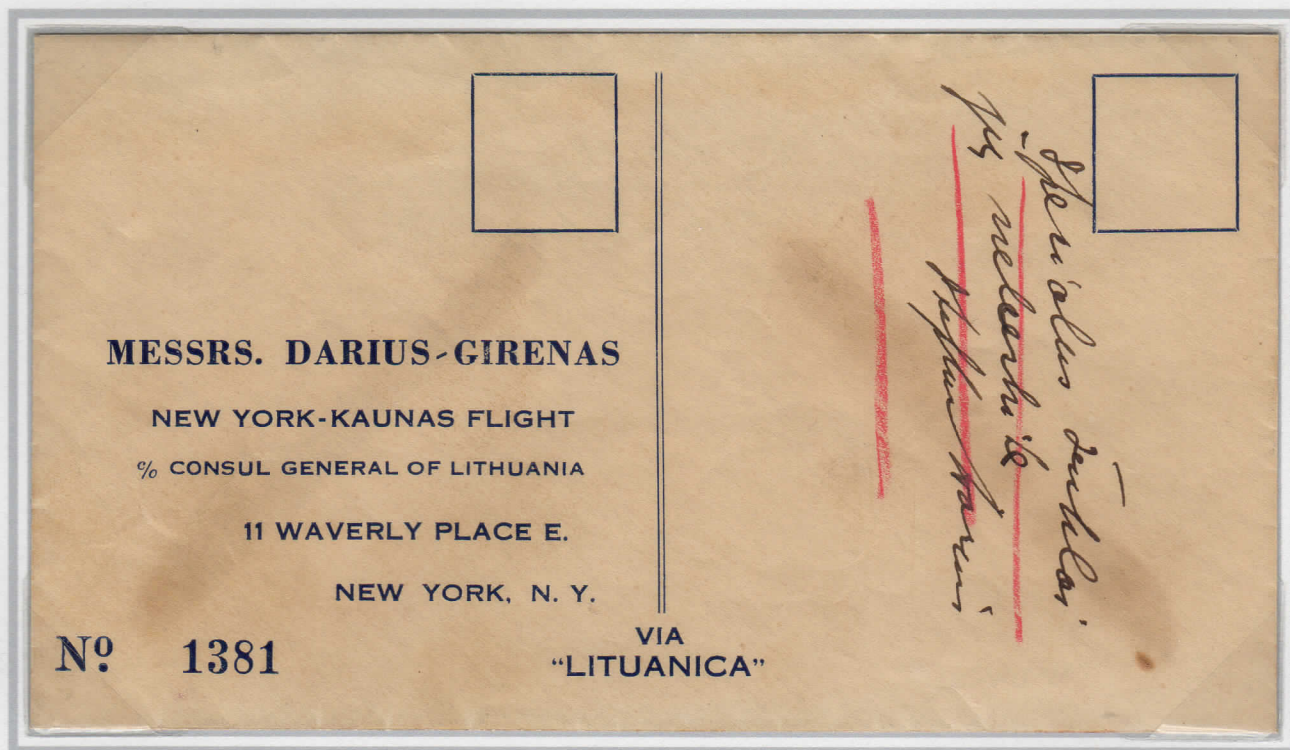


## Preparation for the flight



During the overprinting process, it was officially noted that, by mistake, one block of 4 stamps (60 ct. denomination) was overprinted twice. The double overprints were not destroyed.

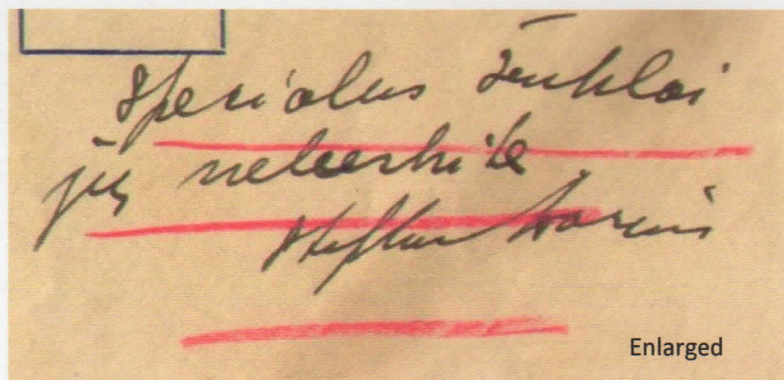
*There could only be 4 double overprinted stamps in existence. One of each type.* Two stamps presented here (Types II and III) are the *only two known* to survive to this day.



Unused flight cachet which was long known to exist but was only discovered and identified in the early 2000s. It was left by Captain Stephen Darius for keepsake with his family before the flight. (1<sup>st</sup> time exhibited)

Handwriting in Lithuanian on the cachet reads: "*Specialus Ženkla! Jų nelieskite. Stephen Darius*" which translates: "**Special stamps. Do not touch. Stephen Darius**"

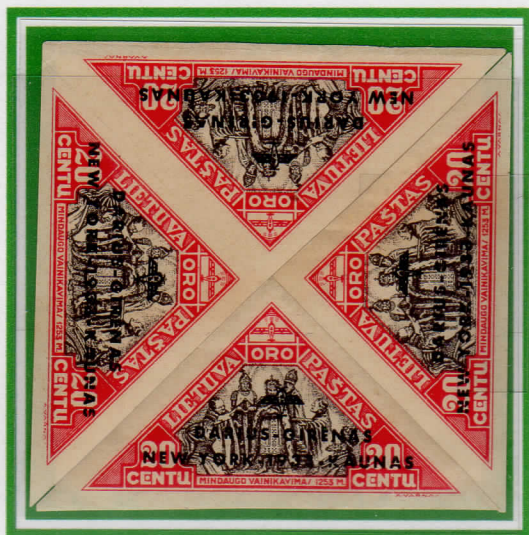
Contents of the envelope included a full set of imperforated overprinted stamps in blocks of 4. (see next page)



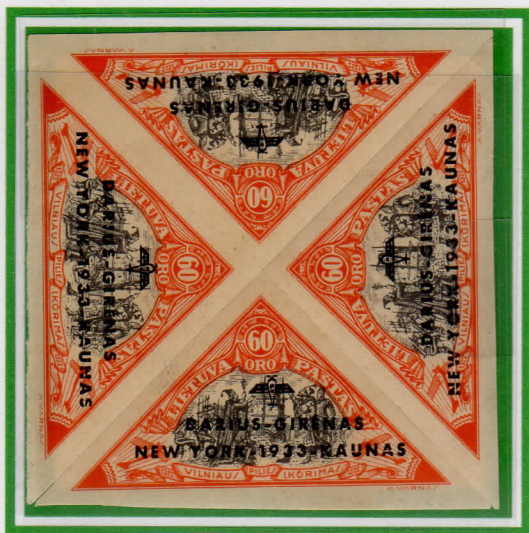
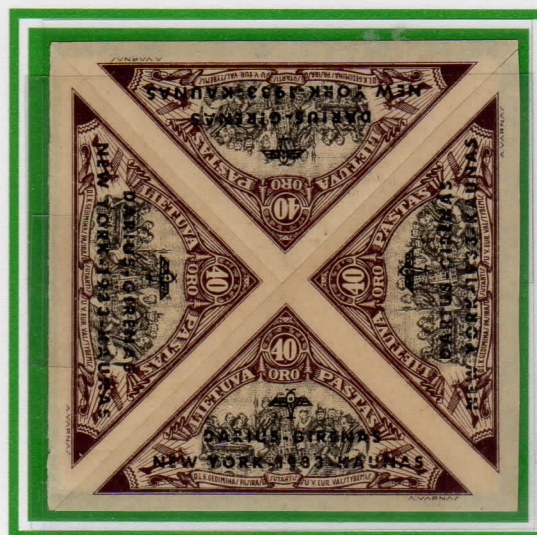
Enlarged



## Preparation for the flight



One of three possible imperforated blocks of 4 featuring all four types of the overprint.



Despite Capt. Darius instructions, the blocks of 4 stamps were cut into one pair and two singles.



At the time of original overprinting, additional 3 blocks of 4 imperforated stamps were overprinted. Done deliberately and not by accident, this created *one of the biggest rarities of Lithuanian philately, of which only 12 full sets could be in existence*. Four out of twelve possible sets (in blocks of 4) presented here were kept by Capt. Stephen Darius, an avid stamp collector himself.



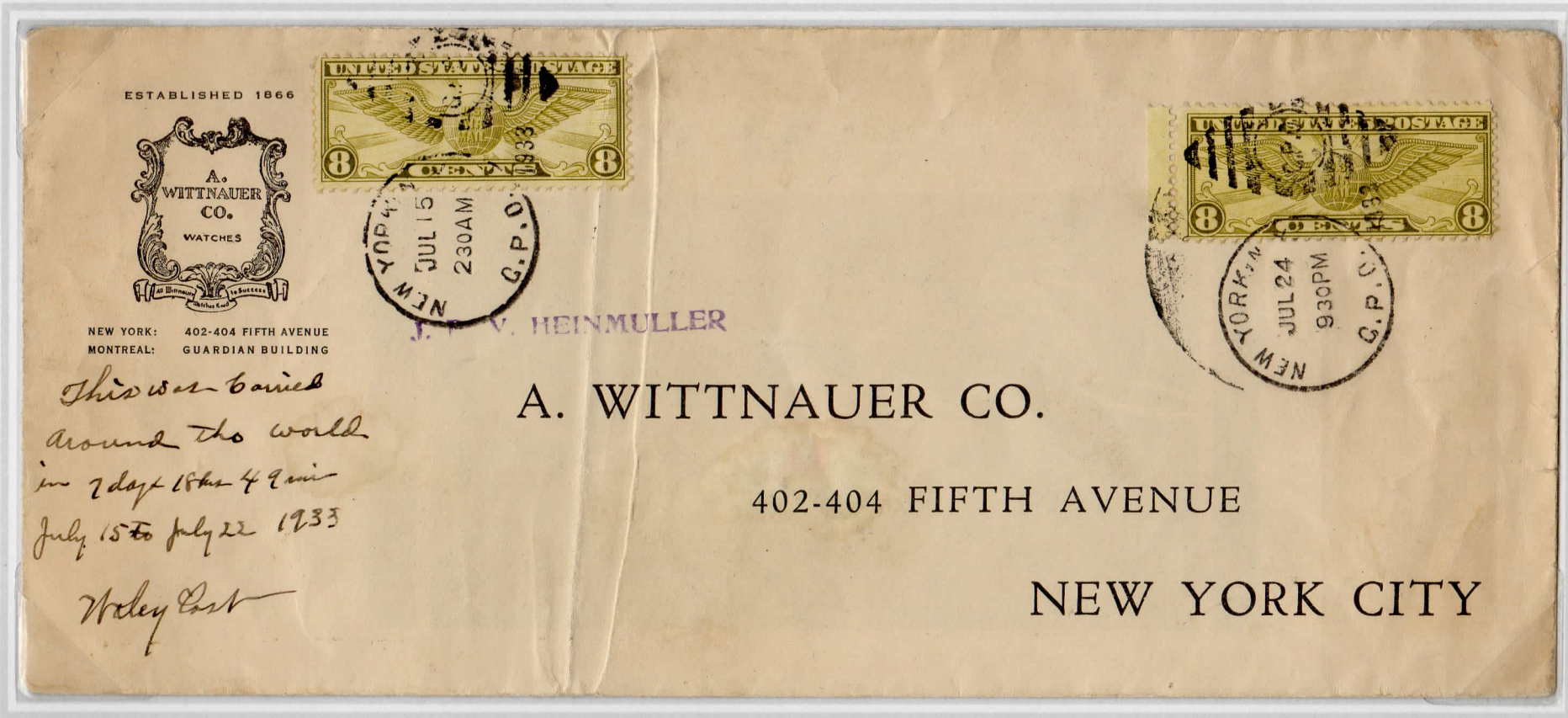
The flight

For several weeks leading to the flight the *Lituanica* shared the hangar #7 at New York’s Municipal Airport (Floyd Bennet Field) with another neighbor — Wiley Post’s *Winnie Mae*.

Wiley Post - an American pilot who made history together with his navigator Harold Gatty in 1931 with their flight around the world on board of *Winnie Mae* in 8 days. This time Post was set to beat his own speed record with the first ever solo flight circumventing the globe.

On July 15th, 1933, an hour before Wiley Post took off from Floyd Bennett Field, a cable came from Paris warning about stormy weather developing over Europe. *Winnie Mae* had state-of-the-art US Army Air Service equipment and average speed of 180 miles/hour. Post figured that he will land in Berlin (his first stop) in 24 hours and well ahead of the storm.

After having witnessed Wiley Post fly off, and just over an hour later, at 6:24 am on July 15, 1933 two Lithuanian flyers took off from Floyd Bennett Field to native Lithuania. Once the bright orange mono-plane *Lituanica* was in the air, 50 specially prepared cachets with the pilots signatures where handstamped with a two line imprint: “DARIUS & GIRENAS HOP OFF FOR EUROPE” and mailed to the intended recipients the same morning from Tremont Station Post Office in New York.



“The first” of only 7 total flight covers known and the only one featuring Wiley Post handwritten note and signature.

In the early morning on July 15, 1933, Wiley Post exchanged good wishes with the two Lithuanian pilots and at 5:10 am *Winnie Mae* took off to Europe.

It had recently been reported that Wiley Post carried only 7 Wittnauer Company stationary covers with him on this historic flight. Upon arrival back to New York on July 24th, he noted on one of the covers (featured): “This was carried around the world in 7days 18 hrs 49 min July 15 to July 22 1933. Wiley Post”. This cover was mailed to the pre-printed addressee on July 24th. The other 6 covers the pilot simply signed with his name. They also received an additional handstamp featuring a text similar to what Post wrote on the first cover. The rest of the covers were cancelled and mailed to pre-printed addressees on August 3rd (12 days after his return).



Rare flight cover with both pilots autographs and overprinted stamp addressed to world renowned philatelist in Italy. Special pre-printed and numbered envelope is not utilized. Rome receiving cancel featured on reverse side.

Most covers carried on the Transatlantic Flight were Philatelic in nature and majority were franked only with US postage. The total number of flight envelopes featuring scarce overprinted triangular Airmail stamps is unknown, but to this date only 63 covers are accounted for.



# The Flight

Five flight covers  
representing en-  
tire set of all five  
overprinted  
stamps





## The Flight



Some of the covers carried by the flyers were self-addressed by either American philatelists or flight sponsors and were designated for a return route back to US. These covers have additional Lithuanian franking on reverse.



Enlarged scan of reverse side

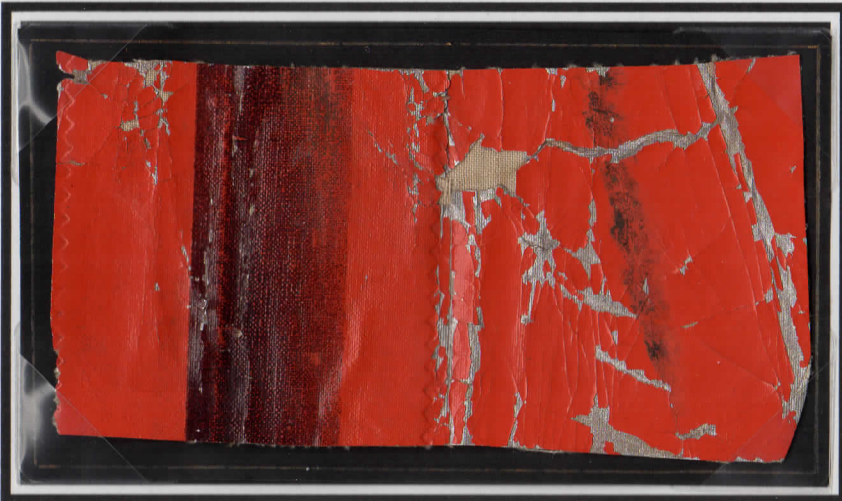
Reverse of the cover (scan above) shows a rare "Kaunas 7 Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas" post office receiving cancel mark. Interestingly, the month in the date of the cancel is "IX" instead of "VII" which must have been a mistake, as it should've taken 2 days and not two months for transit between two Kaunas post offices.

Very few covers on this first Transatlantic flight were private letters mailed to specific addressees in Lithuania. The mailing featured above is an example of the only known non-philatelic cover which carried a personal letter and made it to the intended recipient. It was sent by Capt. Stephen Darius to Reverant Juozas Packevičius who was a personal friend of the flyer and was at that time a part time lecturer at Kaunas University.



## The Tragedy

On July 17th at 00:36 am, while flying with very limited navigational equipment in severe stormy conditions, after having successfully crossed the Atlantic, the *Lituanica* airplane crashed into the woods by the village of Kuhdamm, near Soldin, Germany (60 miles northeast of Berlin).



A small piece of the orange fabric covering the fuselage of the plane.

After successfully flying 6,411 km (4,043 miles), two brave pilots crashed, only 650 km (404 miles) from their destination - Kaunas, Lithuania.



Divided Back Post Card depicting the site of the tragic death of the two Lithuanian heroes.

(M. Smečchausko foto)

A few seconds before the final impact, the mailbag was tossed out of the window. It was found intact in the vicinity of the plane crash and on July 18, 1933 it was delivered to the Central Post Office in Kaunas

## Remembering the Flight (USA)



Shortly after the tragic crash of *Lituanica*, by official decree of the Lithuanian Consulate in New York and in order to help raise funds for construction of the monument to the heroes, additional overprint was applied (in blocks of 4) to the previously overprinted and unsold stamps.

*The only known proof of the overprint* in black ink. Dated in pencil 14/X - 33. With approval "OK" by Consul General P. Zadeikis





## Remembering the Flight (USA)

On November 14, 1933, additional *circu-  
lar overprint in green color was ap-  
plied to 25 blocks of 4 (100 sets)* re-  
maining from the unsold stamps with  
initial overprint. The inscription reads:  
“LITUANICOS’ LAIMEJIMAS TEGUL  
STIPRINA LIETUVOS. - SŪNŲ DVASIĄ  
NAUJIEMS ŽYGIMAS.” Translates: May  
Lituanicas’ Victory Inspire The Sons of  
Lithuania to New Ventures. *Typography*  
*Handmann-Miller Press, Inc. New York.*

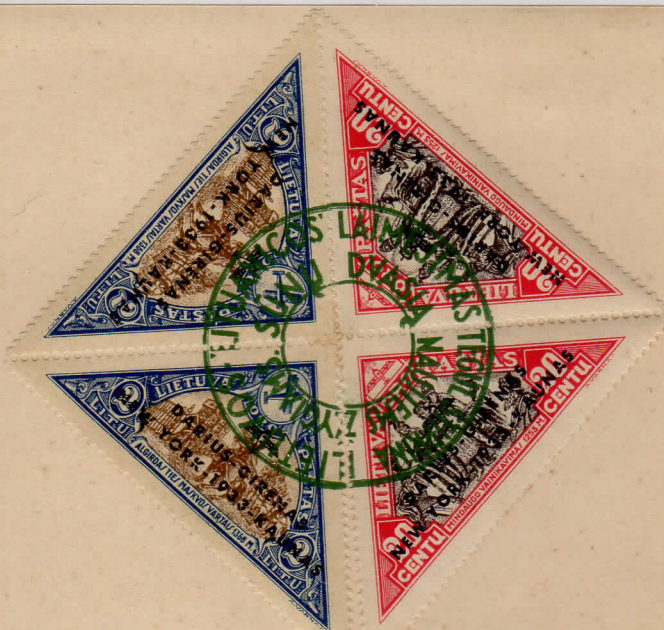
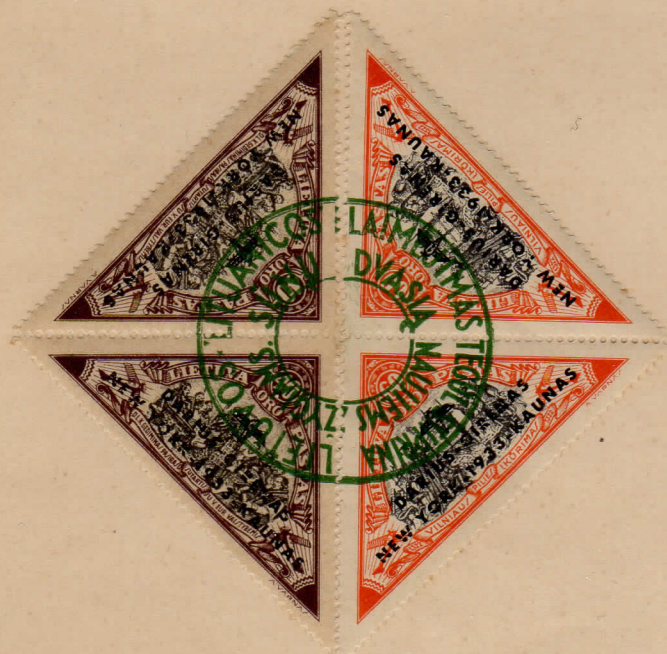




## Remembering the Flight (USA)

- Individual set of 5 newly overprinted stamps or a block of 4 affixed on an official Consulate General of Lithuania stationary were sold by the consulate for \$30 with proceeds going to the Memorial fund to be later used for the construction of the monument to the flyers.

LIETUVOS GENERALINIS KONSULATAS  
CONSULATE GENERAL OF LITHUANIA  
11 WAVERLY PLACE EAST  
NEW YORK CITY  
U. S. A.



*Mrs Skupowiene.*

The Consulate letterhead (above) features 3 blocks of 4 stamps presented for a more generous donation to the Memorial fund.

Name of the donor was written in pencil at the bottom of the stationary.



Remembering the Flight (Lithuania)

Shortly after the devastating tragedy, the Lithuanian Government requested issuance of a set of Airmail stamps to commemorate the Transatlantic Flight of Darius and Girenas. The stamps were engraved and printed by Bradbury and Wilkinson & C<sup>o</sup> Ltd. in New Malden, Surrey, England.

The perforated set of 6 stamps was issued on May 28th, 1934 and became an instant success among Lithuanian people.

Color proof of the 40 cent stamp



Color proof of the 40 cent stamp

Airmail cover to Italian Embassy in Berlin from LEGAZIONE D'ITALIA (Italian Legation in Lithuania — violet cachet)

Mailed on June 3, 1934 (early usage) with same day Berlin C 19:20 receiving cancel on reverse.





## Remembering the Flight (Lithuania) // Epilogue → Next Chapter

Despite the tragic ending to the flight, the two heroes became the pride and instant role models for many generations of Lithuanians to come.

Both in Lithuania and in the US, there are streets and schools, airports and museums carrying their names.

GRAF ZEPPELIN LZ 127  
FLIGHT # 410

10TH South America Flight.  
13th to 23rd of October  
1934 from Kaunas,  
Lithuania to Pernambuco,  
Brazil

The entire set of 6 stamps  
dedicated to Darius -  
Girenas flight is on display.



The two pilots historic flight was repeated by their countryman and US citizen Lieutenant Felix J. Waitkus just two years later.

On September 21st, 1935 Lt. Waitkus took off for Kaunas, Lithuania from Floyd Bennett Field in New York in a solo Transatlantic Flight.

The name of his Airplane was **LITUANICA II**



Issued October 30, 1935 - **The largest existing multiple of the Waitkus Flight commemorative overprint**