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Contact: Fred Baumann

American Philatelic Center • 100 Match Factory Place  
814-933-3803 ext. 212

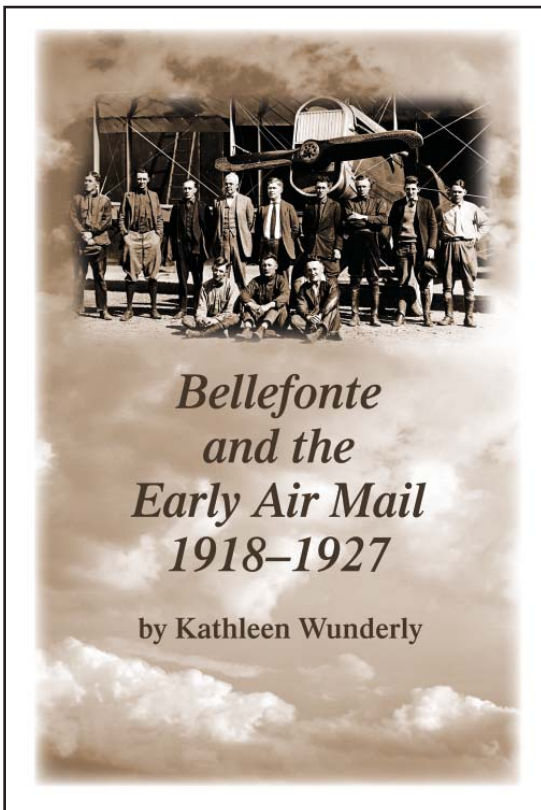
e-mail: [fred@stamps.org](mailto:fred@stamps.org)

• Bellefonte, PA 16823  
814-933-6128 (Fax)

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## When Letters First Took Wing: *Bellefonte and the Early Air Mail 1918-1927*



Late in 1918, air mail in the United States moved from being an novelty at state fairs and aviation meets into the first awkward phases of what would one day be a complex coast-to-coast Post Office Department service regularly moving mail across a continent.

Bellefonte — a small town in central Pennsylvania — was in the right place at the right time, exactly where a refueling stop was urgently needed for the biplanes flying the air mail route from New York to Cleveland. In a matter of months, the Victorian-era town built an airfield and became the only scheduled stop in the state for early U.S. air mail. Early pilots familiar with the region's frequent fogs, mountain terrain, unreliable weather and near total absence of level land for emergency landings nicknamed the route through Pennsylvania east of Bellefonte as "Hell's Stretch."

Written by Kathleen Wunderly, *Bellefonte and the Early Air Mail 1918-1927*, tells the story of Bellefonte's role in the period when the government operated the air mail. It was an era of daredevil pilots, many of them rough and ready veterans of the Great War, who learned their trade when aviation meant wind on the chin and singing through the rigging of a canvas-and-wood biplane, a bygone age when a pilot's eyes and ears were his most reliable instruments by far.

Every pilot flying the eastern sector of the air mail system came to know Bellefonte, and many of them formed ties with the residents. The lives and all too frequent deaths of these brave men mattered very much to their local friends, and left a lasting legacy.

Based on contemporary local newspaper articles and using numerous photographs, many of them published for the first time in more than 80 years, Wunderly recalls the men, the machines and the coming of age of air mail service in America. This book offers a unique, local viewpoint on one of the most exciting periods of national history — when Bellefonte helped fly the U.S. mail.

An American Philatelic Society publication, *Bellefonte and the Early Air Mail 1918-1927* is a 6-inch by 9-inch softcover book that packs nearly 100 photographs into its 102 pages. Seven chapters of narrative are followed by an eighth by Ken Lawrence, detailing U.S. air mail stamps and postal rates, with pricing information on the early air mail. An appendix, included with the kind permission of the American Air Mail Society, includes Bellefonte-related listings from the *American Air Mail Catalogue*

*Bellefonte and the Early Air Mail 1918-1927* is available for \$16 to APS members, a 20-percent discount from the nonmember's price of \$20. To order, send your remittance and your name and address (plus your APS number for members' orders) to the American Philatelic Society, 100 Match Factory Place, Bellefonte PA 16823-1367, or order online at [www.stamps.org](http://www.stamps.org)