

One of Aviation History's Earliest Artifacts Found After More than a Century — to be offered by Siegel Auctions

On December 14, 2023, Siegel Auction Galleries will offer a souvenir postcard flown on the Vin Fiz Flyer, the first plane to make a transcontinental flight.

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, December 5, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On December 14, 2023, Siegel Auction Galleries will offer one of aviation history's earliest artifacts—a souvenir postcard flown on the Vin Fiz Flyer, bearing the rare 25¢ stamp sold by the promoters of this record-breaking transcontinental flight.



A scan of the front of the newly discovered Vin Fiz Postcard with the Vin Fiz stamp

The Vin Fiz Flyer, piloted by Calbraith Perry Rodgers, was the first plane to complete a transcontinental American flight. Only twelve cards are known with the 25¢ Vin Fiz stamp. This example recently came to light in Dallas, Texas, after 112 years. The stamp and card are in excellent condition and expected to sell for \$50,000 to \$75,000.

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Until now only 13 examples of the Vin Fiz stamp were known. The discovery of this 14th known stamp on its original souvenir postcard is extraordinary. It has been hiding for more than a century.”

Scott Trepel, President of Siegel Auctions

The Vin Fiz Flyer and Hearst's \$50,000 Prize

In 1911, just eight years after the Wright Brothers made their famous first flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, William Randolph Hearst offered a prize of \$50,000 to any aviator who could fly a plane from coast to coast in 30 days or less.

Calbraith Perry Rodgers—a direct descendant of the famous American naval heroes Oliver Hazard Perry and Matthew

Calbraith Perry–accepted the challenge and began his journey from Sheepshead Bay, New York, on September 17, 1911.

Adopting a novel approach to product endorsement, his Wright Model EX aircraft was emblazoned with the name of a new grape soda, “Vin Fiz”, and the trip was sponsored and heavily promoted by the beverage maker, the Armour Meat-Packing Company.

“The flight was nothing less than a spectacle,” says John Zuckerman, senior vice president of Siegel Auctions. “He took an erratic path of 4,231 miles with 75 stops along the route. He suffered many mishaps along his journey including a punctured tire and a cracked engine. The gas tank even fell on his neck at one point.”

Rodgers eventually landed in Pasadena, California, on November 5, 1911. Although his flight time of 49 days disqualified him from receiving Heart’s prize, he won something more important: the hearts of countless Americans along the way who experienced the wonders of an airplane for the first time when they saw the Vin Fiz Flyer. But the celebrations were to be short-lived–just a few months later, Rodgers tragically met his end in a plane crash not far from where his historic journey had concluded.

The Vin Fiz Air Post Stamp and Postcards

It was Rodger’s wife, Mabel, who came up with the idea to create postage stamps promoting the Vin Fiz Flyer. Many people along the route had never seen an airplane before, and at each stop, Rodgers would be surrounded by crowds anxious to see the flying machine. Mabel saw this as an opportunity to sell souvenir cards with “air post” service for 25 cents per card or letter.

The Latest Vin Fiz Discovery

“Until now only 13 examples of the Vin Fiz stamp were known, including 10 on postcards, one on an envelope, and two loose stamps,” says Scott Trepel, president of Siegel Auctions. “The discovery of this 14th known stamp affixed on its original souvenir postcard flown by Rodgers, is truly extraordinary. It has been hiding for more than a century.”

The postcard was discovered by Mike Morgan, an aviation collector, who had bought the postcard in an estate sale in 2011. He initially listed it on eBay with a starting bid of just \$9.95. “That is when I started getting significant offers and told my wife I have missed something on this card,” Morgan explained. “That is when I discovered the rarity of the air mail stamp.”

Morgan quickly canceled the auction, and after consultations with stamp dealers and collectors, he made the decision to consign the card to Siegel Auctions. He explains, “I still find it hard to believe this card was just sitting in a photo album for the last 12 years and I had no idea of the value of my ‘Vin Fiz’ postcard.”

The postcard was originally sold by Mabel Rodgers in Sanderson, Texas after her husband was forced to land his plane in a nearby cemetery because the runway was mobbed by 7,000 people. The postcard reads in part, "Wish you could have seen it. It's absurd. They have a special train for the remainder of people with aviator. He stays in car at night."

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