a method that the general reading public will appreciate; furthermore, they need not be scholars to enjoy its content. The book is a valuable addition to any comprehensive collection of works on Pennsylvania.

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Aerial Pioneers: The U.S. Air Mail Service, 1918-1927.
By William M. Leary.

A comprehensive and scholarly treatment of the United States government airmail service has been long overdue. With William M. Leary's Aerial Pioneers, we at last have such a study. Leary, a professor of history at the University of Georgia, traces the development of the government airmail from its shaky beginnings at the dawn of aviation to its last transcontinental flight in September 1927. Included are the political and administrative problems faced by those who got the experimental New York-to-Washington route off the ground in 1918, as well as the operational difficulties encountered when the service expanded westward across the Alleghenies in 1919 and finally inaugurated twenty-four-hour coast-to-coast airmail in 1924. Recognition of this achievement came when the airmail service received the prestigious Collier Trophy for the most significant contribution to aviation in 1923 and 1924.

Leary skillfully fleshes out his narrative with details on the key figures involved with the government airmail. Second Assistant Postmaster General Otto Praeger committed himself and the post office to the service despite political opposition and doubts that aviation technology had advanced to the point of making such an undertaking practicable. The pilots who flew the line risked their lives on an almost daily basis. Their planes, often surplus military models, were not well-suited for the demands placed upon them by regularly scheduled flights. But the fliers pushed the mail through regardless of the bad weather, crude instruments, and modest navigation facilities. One of the best was Wesley L. Smith, who joined the service in 1919 and
assisted with the development of instrument flying before going on to become operations manager for National Air Transport. Far from the devil-may-care, hard-drinking, barnstorming image, the post office aviators were well-trained and disciplined pilots — or they did not survive.

Readers of the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* will be interested in the Pennsylvania aspects of the airmail saga. The New York-to-Cleveland leg of the transcontinental route crossed the northern part of the state, with a major intermediate stop at Bellefonte in Centre County. There were emergency fields strung out from Tamaqua in the east to Brookville and Clarion in the west, along with beacons placed at intervals through the rugged, wooded mountains to guide night fliers. Philadelphia's Bustleton Field was the post office’s repair and maintenance base until its phaseout in the economy moves of 1921. While there were periodic proposals to tie Pittsburgh into the national airmail network, they did not materialize until after private contractors began to fly the mail in 1926-1927.

Leary's thesis is that the government airmail was a milestone in the history of commercial aviation. While a handful of heavily-subsidized European airlines hauled a few well-heeled passengers from city to city, the American airmail spanned the continent with astonishing efficiency and relative safety. (Although thirty-four pilots died flying the mail, the safety record was better than the average for aviation as a whole during the twenties.) The airmail service also provided valuable administrative lessons for commercial airlines, and the infrastructure of navigation aids built up in the 1920s enhanced the subsequent operations of the nation’s first scheduled air carriers.

*Aerial Pioneers* is a valuable contribution to the growing scholarly literature on commercial aviation. It is clearly written, exhaustively researched, and thoroughly documented. The illustrations are excellent, although the maps display an amateurishness that is uncharacteristic of Smithsonian Institution publications. This book should be read by everyone interested in aerospace history.

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