

Darius and Girėnas

Crossing the Atlantic

From the collection of David Kiehn — dakiehn@comcast.net

Most everyone knows the story of Charles Lindbergh flying across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. There were other fliers who crossed the Atlantic before Lindbergh but he was the first to fly solo and non-stop in an aircraft named *Spirit of St. Louis*.

What about those who followed? The first woman to fly across the Atlantic was Amelia Earhart. She flew as a passenger in June of 1928 and then soloed in 1932. But her solo flight never reached the intended destination of Paris. Mechanical issues forced the flight to terminate in Ireland.

Steponas Darius emigrated from Lithuania to the United States in 1907. He lived in New Jersey for a short time but moved to Chicago in 1909. *Stasys Girėnas* left Lithuania in 1910 and settled with relatives in Chicago. Both men became U.S. citizens and both became accomplished pilots.

Darius and *Girėnas* first met in 1927 and began to plan a non-stop flight from New York to the city of Kaunas, Lithuania. At the time, Kaunas was the temporary capital of Lithuania.

In 1933, *Darius* and *Girėnas* flew an aircraft named *Lituanica* across the Atlantic. The aircraft lacked navigational equipment yet the flight was considered one of the most precise in aviation history. It also carried the first trans-Atlantic airmail consignment in history.

Unfortunately, the flight had a tragic end. *Darius* and *Girėnas* took off July 15, 1933 from Bennett Field in New York. They crossed the Atlantic but weather conditions caused a change in course. They reached Germany by way of Scotland and the North Sea rather than via Ireland, London, and Amsterdam. They crashed, killing both pilots, in Germany shortly after midnight on July 17, 1933 just 400 miles short of their destination Kaunas, Lithuania. An investigation never determined what caused the accident.

Darius and *Girėnas* became national heroes. It was estimated 60,000 people attended their funeral services in Kaunas. Streets were named or renamed in their honor. Monuments were erected and their images appeared on Lithuanian currency which remained valid until Lithuania converted to the Euro in 2015.



Crash site monument near Soldin, Germany now Pszczelnik, Poland



Monument Marquette Park, Chicago, IL



Charles Lindbergh
1998 - #3184m



Spirit of St. Louis
1927 - #C10



Amelia Earhart
1963 - #C68



1934 - #C79



Darius (l) and Girėnas (r)
2013 - #1006



1934 - #C81



Coats of Arms
Lithuania - Kaunas
1992 - #433 1998 - #609



1934 #C83



Lituanica
1934 #C80



1934 #C84



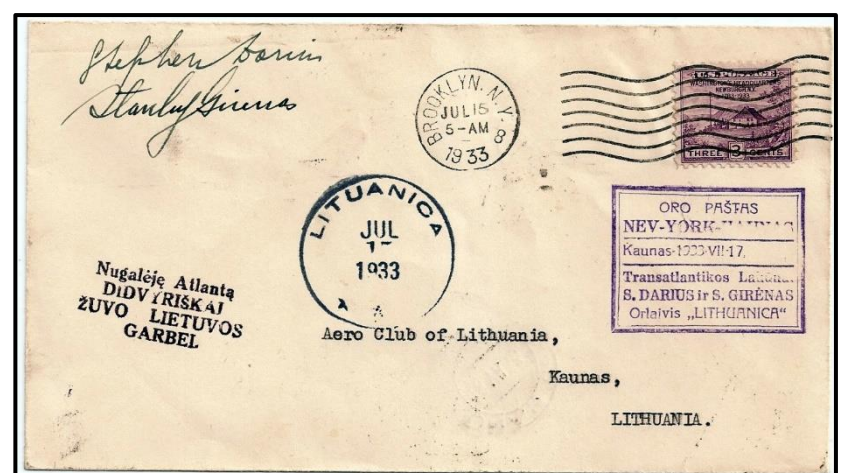
75th Anniversary - 2008 #870



Dark Angel of Death
Crash of the *Lituanica*
1934 #C82



60th Anniversary - 1993 #458



Autographed cover with cancellation July 15, 1933 the day of departure from New York. We do not know if this letter was on the flight and recovered from the wreckage.

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10-Litas commemorative coin (1993) and bank note (1991/2001)



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