

THE HIGHEST GRADED EXAMPLE OF THE 1918 24-CENT INVERTED JENNY

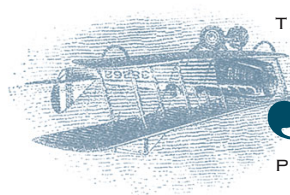
JENNY 95

POSITION 58—GRADED XF-SUPERB 95 BY PROFESSIONAL STAMP EXPERTS



SALE 1128—TUESDAY, MAY 31, 2016—WORLD STAMP SHOW-NY

Robert A. Siegel
AUCTION GALLERIES, INC.



THE HIGHEST GRADED EXAMPLE OF THE 1918 24-CENT INVERTED JENNY

JENNY 95

POSITION 58—GRADED XF-SUPERB 95 BY PROFESSIONAL STAMP EXPERTS



LIVE AUCTION TO BE HELD AT WORLD STAMP SHOW—NY 2016

Sale 1128 — Tuesday, May 31, 2016, at 1:00 pm — Lot 275

Jacob K. Javits Convention Center

Room 1E03 — two levels below show floor

VIEWING AT SUPERBOOTH 1229 DURING SHOW HOURS

Saturday, May 28 — 10:30 am-6:00 pm

Sunday, May 29 — 10:00 am-6:00 pm

Monday, May 30 — 10:00 am-6:00 pm

Tuesday, May 31 — 10:00 am-12 noon

Also at our offices by appointment — please call 212-753-6421

LIVE INTERNET BIDDING AT STAMP AUCTION NETWORK

Go to SiegelAuctions.com or StampAuctionNetwork.com to register and bid

PLEASE READ THE CONDITIONS OF SALE BEFORE BIDDING

All lots sold subject to a 15% buyer's premium and sales tax or customs duty

Robert A. Siegel

AUCTION GALLERIES, INC.

60 EAST 56TH STREET, 4TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

Phone (212) 753-6421 • Fax (212) 753-6429 • E-mail: stamps@siegelauctions.com

Catalogues, internet bidding, resources, archives and the Siegel Encyclopedia at
siegelauctions.com



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siegelauctions.com



Scott R. Trepel
President
strepel
@siegelauctions.com



John P. Zuckerman
Senior Vice President
jzuckerman
@siegelauctions.com



Corey Long
Senior Vice President
clong
@siegelauctions.com



Colleen Stellato
Vice President—Accounts
colleen
@siegelauctions.com



Charles F. Shreve
Director, Siegel International
charles
@siegelauctions.com



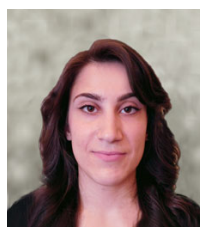
Andrew Titley
International Specialist
andrew
@siegelauctions.com



Helen Stewart
Bids and Inquiries
helen
@siegelauctions.com



Danielle Lenard
Bids and Inquiries
danielle
@siegelauctions.com



Jocelyn Weibel
Digital Production
jocelyn
@siegelauctions.com



Chris Anderson
Siegel International
chris
@siegelauctions.com

Scott R. Trepel Principal Auctioneer (licensed by NYC Dept. of Consumer Affairs, #795952)

Information for Bidders

Bidding

The following means are available for placing bids:

- 1) **Attending the Live Auction in Person:** All bidders must register for a paddle, and new bidders must provide references at least three business days in advance of the sale.
- 2) **Live Internet Bidding:** Instructions for participating as a Live Internet Bidder are provided on the page opposite.
- 3) **Phone Bidding:** Bidders can be connected to the sale by phone and bid through a member of staff. Requests for phone bidding are subject to approval (please contact our office at least 24 hours before the sale). A signed Bid Form is required.
- 4) **Absentee Bids.** All bids received in advance of the sale, either by mail, fax, phone, e-mail or internet, are Absentee Bids, which instruct the auctioneer to bid up to a specific amount on one or more lots in the sale. Absentee Bids sent by phone, fax or e-mail should arrive at least one hour prior to the start of the sale session. Bids entered through Live Internet Bidding will be visible to the auctioneer during the sale. Written bids should be entered legibly on the Bid Form in the sale catalogue. E-mail and internet bids should be carefully typed and double-checked. All new bidders must provide references. We recommend calling or e-mailing to confirm that Absentee Bids sent by mail, fax or e-mail have been received and entered.

Pre-Sale Viewing

Subject to availability, certain lots (except group lots) can be sent to known clients for examination. Requests must be made no later than 7 days prior to the sale. Lots must be returned on the day received. Postage/insurance costs will be invoiced.

In addition to regular viewing, clients may view lots by appointment. Our staff will be pleased to answer questions or provide additional information about lots.

Expert Certification

Individual items offered without a PF or PSE certificate dated within the past five years may be purchased subject to independent certification of genuineness and our description. **Please refer to the Conditions of Sale and Grading Terms for policies governing certification.**

Shipping and Delivery

Procedures and charges for shipping lots are printed on the back of the Bid Form. **Bidders are responsible for all prescribed shipping charges and any applicable sales tax or customs duties.**

Price Realized

Prices realized are sent with each invoice. Bidders with e-mail will receive a Bid Results report after the sale. Session results are posted immediately to siegelauctions.com

Live Internet Bidding at Siegel Auctions

BIDDING FROM YOUR COMPUTER LETS YOU BE PART OF THE LIVE AUCTION FROM ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD!

There's **NO SUBSTITUTE** for following the auction in real time.
Live Internet Bidding lets you bid and buy as though you were right there in the saleroom.
And it's easy.

This step-by-step guide will instruct you how to register, set your browser and use the bidding interface.

Start by following the simple steps to become a registered Live Internet Bidder.
Once you've been approved for bidding, you can listen to the auction and place bids with the click of a mouse.

Registering with STAMP AUCTION NETWORK & SIEGEL AUCTION GALLERIES

Live Internet Bidding is managed by Stamp Auction Network (SAN).
To bid, you must be registered and approved by *both* SAN and Siegel.
To decide what you need to do, choose the description below that best fits you.



I've already registered with SAN and have been approved by Siegel for internet bidding.

I'm a Siegel client, but I'm not registered with SAN.

Go to stampauctionnetwork.com/siegel and click on "Register" at the top. Check the box for Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries (under "R") and submit the form, indicating you are a Siegel client. Once registered at SAN, you're ready for internet bidding.

I've bid through SAN before, but this is the first time I've bid in a Siegel sale.

Then you just need to be approved by Siegel. Go to stampauctionnetwork.com/siegel and click on "Update Registration" at the top. Your SAN account information will be sent to us for approval (you might be asked for other trade references). Once approved by Siegel for bidding, you're ready for internet bidding.

I've never bid with Siegel, nor registered with SAN.

Go to stampauctionnetwork.com/siegel and click on "Register" at the top. Check the box for Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries (under "R") and submit the form with **your trade references** (please, no family members or credit card companies as references). Once registered at SAN and approved by Siegel for bidding, you're ready for internet bidding.

Live Internet Bidding works by allowing registered bidders to observe and place bids.

Live Internet Bidding will work with any browser on both PC and Mac operating systems.

Before bidding by internet for the first time, we recommend finding a sale in progress and listening to the public broadcast or logging in as a registered bidder. This will help you develop a feel for the sale tempo and bidding interface.

Log on to the auction at stampauctionnetwork.com/siegel.

You can also log on at siegelauctions.com

When you're logged on as a Live Internet Bidder, the bidding interface shows a photo and description of the lot, the current bid (and your bidding status), options for placing competitive bids and buttons with bid increments.

- After you click on a bid amount, the auctioneer is immediately notified of your bid.
- Retracting a bid is usually not acceptable, so please bid carefully.
- If you bid and then decide to stop, the "Pass" button will tell the auctioneer you are no longer bidding.
- You can send messages to the auctioneer (for example, a request for extension).
- You can track prior realizations from the bidding screen.



"System Down" or "Lost Connection" events do occasionally happen.

If you have any problems with Live Internet Bidding please call **212-753-6421** for immediate assistance.

Conditions of Sale (please read carefully before bidding)

THE PROPERTY DESCRIBED IN THIS CATALOGUE WILL BE OFFERED AT PUBLIC AUCTION BY ROBERT A. SIEGEL AUCTION GALLERIES, INC. ("GALLERIES") ON BEHALF OF VARIOUS CONSIGNORS AND ITSELF OR AFFILIATED COMPANIES. BY BIDDING ON ANY LOT, WHETHER DIRECTLY OR BY OR THROUGH AN AGENT, IN PERSON, OR BY TELEPHONE, FACSIMILE OR ANY OTHER MEANS, THE BIDDER ACKNOWLEDGES AND AGREES TO ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS OF SALE.

1. The highest bidder acknowledged by the auctioneer shall be the buyer. The term "final bid" means the last bid acknowledged by the auctioneer, which is normally the highest bid offered. **The purchase price payable by the buyer will be the sum of the final bid and a commission of 15% of the final bid ("buyer's premium"), together with any sales tax, use tax or customs duties due on the sale.**
2. The auctioneer has the right to reject any bid, to advance the bidding at his discretion and, in the event of a dispute, to determine the successful bidder, to continue the bidding or to reoffer and resell the lot in dispute. The Galleries' record of the final sale shall be conclusive.
3. All bids are per numbered lot in the catalogue unless otherwise announced by the auctioneer at the time of sale. The right is reserved to group two or more lots, to withdraw any lot or lots from the sale, or to act on behalf of the seller. The Galleries will execute bidding instructions on behalf of clients, but will not be responsible for the failure to execute such bids or for any errors in the execution of such bids.
4. **Lots with numbers followed by the symbol ° are offered subject to a confidential minimum bid ("reserve"), below which the lot will not be sold. The absence of the symbol ° means that the lot is offered without a reserve. If there is no reserve, the auctioneer has sole discretion to establish a minimum opening bid and may refuse an offer of less than half of the published estimate. Any lot that does not reach its reserve or opening bid requested by the auctioneer will be announced as "passed" and excluded from the prices realized lists after the sale. The Galleries may have a direct or indirect ownership interest in any or all lots in the sale resulting from an advance of monies or goods-in-trade or a guarantee of minimum net proceeds made by the Galleries to the seller.**
5. Subject to the exclusions listed in 5(A), the Galleries will accept the return of lots which have been misidentified or which have obvious faults that were present when the lot was in the Galleries' custody, but not so noted in the lot description. **All disputed lots must be received by the Galleries intact with the original packing material within 5 days of delivery to the buyer but no later than 30 days from the sale date.**
(5A) EXCLUSIONS: The following lots may not be returned for any reason, or may not be returned for the reasons stated: i) lots containing 10 or more items; ii) lots from buyers who registered for the pre-sale exhibition or received lots by postal viewing, thereby having had the opportunity to inspect them before the sale; iii) any lot described with "faults," "defects" or a specific fault may not be returned because of any secondary fault; iv) photographed lots may not be returned because of centering, margins, short/nibbed perforations or other factors shown in the illustrations; v) the color of the item does not match the color reproduction in the sale catalogue or website listing; vi) the description contains inaccurate information about the quantity known or reported; or vii) a certification service grades a stamp lower than the grade stated in the description.
6. Successful bidders, unless they have established credit with the Galleries prior to the sale, must make payment in full before the lots will be delivered. Buyers not known to the Galleries must make payment in full within 3 days from the date of sale. **The Galleries retains the right to demand a cash deposit from anyone prior to bidder registration and/or to demand payment at the time the lot is knocked down to the highest bidder, for any reason whatsoever.** In the event that any buyer refuses or fails to make payment in cash for any lot at the time it is knocked down to him, the auctioneer reserves the right to reoffer the lot immediately for sale to the highest bidder. **Credit cards (Visa, Mastercard and Discover only) can be accepted as payment but will be subject to a 3% Convenience Fee, which will be added to the total of the entire invoice (including hammer price, buyer's premium, shipping**

and transit insurance charges and any applicable taxes).

7. If the purchase price has not been paid within the time limit specified above, nor lots taken up within 7 days from the date of sale, the lots will be resold by whatever means deemed appropriate by the Galleries, and any loss incurred from resale will be charged to the defaulting buyer. **Any account more than 30 days in arrears will be subject to a late payment charge of 1½% per month as long as the account remains in arrears. Any expenses incurred in securing payment from delinquent accounts will be charged to the defaulter.** A fee of \$250.00 per check will be charged for each check returned for insufficient funds.
8. All lots are sold as genuine. **Any lot accompanied by a certificate issued by The Philatelic Foundation or by Professional Stamp Experts within 5 years of the sale date is sold "as is" and in accordance with the description on the certificate. Such lots may not be returned for any reason, including but not limited to a contrary certificate of opinion.** Buyers who wish to obtain a certificate for any item that does not have a P.F. or P.S.E. certificate (dated as above) may do so, provided that the following conditions are met: (1) the purchase price must be paid in full, (2) the item must be submitted to an acceptable expertizing committee with a properly executed application form within 21 days of the sale, (3) a copy of the application form must be given to the Galleries, (4) in the event that an adverse opinion is received, the Galleries retain the right to resubmit the item on the buyer's behalf for reconsideration, without time limit or other restrictions, (5) unless written notification to the contrary is received, items submitted for certification will be considered cleared 90 days from the date of sale, and (6) in the event any item is determined to be "not as described", the buyer will be refunded the purchase price and the certification fee up to \$800.00 unless otherwise agreed to in writing.
9. Until paid for in full, all lots remain the property of the Galleries on behalf of the seller.
10. Agents executing bids on behalf of clients will be held responsible for all purchases made on behalf of clients unless otherwise arranged prior to the sale.
11. The buyer assumes all risk for delivery of purchased lots and agrees to pay for prescribed shipping costs. **Buyers who receive lots in the U.S. are obligated to pay whatever sales tax or compensating use tax might be due, and buyers outside the U.S. are responsible for all customs duties.**
12. **The bidder consents that any action or proceeding against it may be commenced and maintained in any court within the State of New York or in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, that the courts of the State of New York and United States District Court for the Southern District of New York shall have jurisdiction with respect to the subject matter hereof and the person of the bidder. The bidder agrees not to assert any defense to any action or proceeding initiated by Galleries based upon improper venue or inconvenient forum. The bidder agrees that any action brought by the bidder shall be commenced and maintained only in a Federal Court in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York or the State Court in the county in which Galleries has its principal place of business in New York. The bidder agrees not to use a public conflict resolution service and not to use any form of social media to publish comments or information about the Galleries and its employees which might harm the Galleries' reputation or business. These Conditions of Sale shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the substantive laws of the State of New York, and shall constitute an agreement that shall be binding on the parties, and their respective heirs, administrators, distributees, successors and assignees.**

SCOTT R. TREPEL, Principal Auctioneer
Auctioneer's License No. 795952
N.Y.C. Department of Consumer Affairs
80 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10013
Telephone (212) 577-0111

Revised 1/2016

Grades, Abbreviations and Values Used in Descriptions

Grades and Centering

Our descriptions contain detailed information and observations about each item's condition. We have also assigned grades to stamps and covers, which reflect our subjective assessment. For stamps, the margin width, centering and gum are described and graded according to generally-accepted standards (an approximate correlation to numeric grades is provided at right). Although we believe our grades are accurate, they are not always exactly aligned with third-party grading terms or standards for all issues. **A lot may not be returned because a certification service grades a stamp lower than the grade stated in the description. Information from the P.S.E. Stamp Market Quarterly and P.S.E. Population ReportSM is the most current available, but lots may not be returned due to errors or changes in statistics or data.**

Extremely Fine Gem (90-100): The term “Gem” describes condition that is the finest possible for the issue. This term is equivalent to “Superb” used by grading services.







Extremely Fine (80-90): Exceptionally large/wide margins or near perfect centering.

Very Fine (70-85): Normal-size margins for the issue and well-centered with the design a bit closer to one side. “Very Fine and choice” applies to stamps that have desirable traits such as rich color, sharp impression, freshness or clarity of cancel.

Fine (60-70): Smaller than usual margins or noticeably off center. Pre-1890 issues may have the design touched in places.

Very Good (below 60): Attractive appearance, but margins or perforations cut into the design.

Guide to Gum Condition

Gum Categories:	MINT N.H.	ORIGINAL GUM (O.G.)				NO GUM
	 Mint Never Hinged <i>Free from any disturbance</i>	 Lightly Hinged <i>Faint impression of a removed hinge over a small area</i>	 Hinge Mark or Remnant <i>Prominent hinged spot with part or all of the hinge remaining</i>	 Part o.g. <i>Approximately half or more of the gum intact</i>	 Small part o.g. <i>Approximately less than half of the gum intact</i>	 No gum <i>Only if issued with gum</i>
Catalogue Symbol:	★ ★	★	★	★	★	(★)
PRE-1890 ISSUES	<i>Pre-1890 stamps in these categories trade at a premium over Scott value</i>			Scott Value for “O.G.”		Scott “No Gum” Values thru No. 218
1890-1935 ISSUES	Scott “Never Hinged” Values for Nos. 219-771	Scott Value for “O.G.” (Actual value will be affected by the degree of hinging)		Disturbed Original Gum: Gum showing noticeable effects of humidity, climate or hinging over more than half of the gum. The significance of gum disturbance in valuing a stamp in any of the Original Gum categories depends on the degree of disturbance, the rarity and normal gum condition of the issue and other variables affecting quality. For example, stamps issued in tropical climates are expected to have some		
1935 TO DATE	Scott Value for “Unused”					

Covers

Minor nicks, short edge tears, flap tears and slight reduction at one side are normal conditions for 19th century envelopes. Folded letters should be expected to have at least one file fold. Light cleaning of covers and small mends along the edges are accepted forms of conservation. Unusual covers may have a common stamp with a slight crease or tiny tear. **These flaws exist in virtually all 19th century covers and are not always described. They are not grounds for return.**

Catalogue Values and Estimates

Unless otherwise noted, the currently available *Scott Catalogue* values are quoted in dollars with a decimal point. Other catalogues are often used for foreign countries or specialized areas and are referred to by their common name: *Stanley Gibbons* (SG), *Dietz*, *American Air Mail Catalogue* (AAMC), *Michel*, *Zumstein*, *Facit*, etc. Estimates are indicated with an “E.” and reflect our conservative valuation in dollars. Reserves will never exceed the low end of the estimate range; they will sometimes exceed Scott Catalogue value for stamps in Extremely Fine condition.

Because of certain pricing inconsistencies in the *Scott Catalogue*—for example, blocks that have no gum, the absence of premiums for Mint N.H. items, etc.—we cannot guarantee the accuracy of values quoted for multiples, specialized items and collection lots. We generally try to be conservative, but buyers may not return a lot because of a discrepancy in catalogue value due to Scott pricing inconsistencies.

Symbols and Abbreviations (see chart above for gum symbols)

⊞	Block	E	Essay	pmk.	Postmark	No.	Scott Catalogue Number
⊞	Cover	P	Proof	cds	Circular Datestamp	hs	Handstamp
FC	Fancy Cancel	TC	Trial Color Proof	var.	Variety	ms.	Manuscript

SCHEDULE OF AUCTIONS AND VIEWING AT WORLD STAMP SHOW—NY 2016

Viewing at Siegel's Superbooth 1229—Auctions in Room 1E03 (lower level)



The William H. Gross Collection of Hawaii *In association with Charles F. Shreve and Tracy L. Carey*

SALE 1126—LOTS 1-77 WSS-NY SHOW AUCTION

AUCTION: SUNDAY, MAY 29—1pm

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUNDAY, MAY 29—10am-12noon



The Steven Walske Collection of U.S.-France Transatlantic Mail, Part Two: France

SALE 1127—LOTS 101-234 WSS-NY SHOW AUCTION

AUCTION: SUNDAY, MAY 29—3pm

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUNDAY, MAY 29—10am-12noon



Jenny 95—The Highest Graded Inverted Jenny

SALE 1128—LOT 275 WSS-NY SHOW AUCTION

AUCTION: TUESDAY, MAY 31—1pm

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUN-MON, MAY 29-30—10am-6pm

TUESDAY, MAY 31—10am-12 noon



2016 Rarities of the World

SALE 1129—LOTS 301-533 WSS-NY SHOW AUCTION

AUCTION: TUESDAY, MAY 31—1:30pm

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUN-MON, MAY 29-30—10am-6pm

TUESDAY, MAY 31—10am-12 noon



Worldwide Stamps and Covers

Offered in association with Charles F. Shreve

SALE 1130 VIEWING ONLY

AUCTION: TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14-15

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUN-FRI, MAY 29-JUN 3—10am-6pm



The Grant Inman Collection of U.S. Stamps Part One: Newspapers & Periodicals Issues

SALE 1131 VIEWING ONLY

AUCTION: TUESDAY, JUNE 21

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUN-FRI, MAY 29-JUN 3—10am-6pm



Confederate States Stamps and Covers *Featuring the "Jefferson" Collection*

SALE 1132 VIEWING ONLY

AUCTION: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22

VIEWING: SATURDAY, MAY 28—10:30am-6pm

SUN-FRI, MAY 29-JUN 3—10am-6pm

Jenny meets Jenny.



Siegel Auction Galleries and Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome are excited to present World Stamp Show–NY visitors with the opportunity to see the original 1918 Curtiss JN-4H “Jenny” and the 24¢ Inverted Jenny stamp together, for the first time ever.

The highest graded Inverted Jenny, Position 58, will be offered at auction by Siegel on Tuesday, May 31—discover its history at

InvertedJenny.com

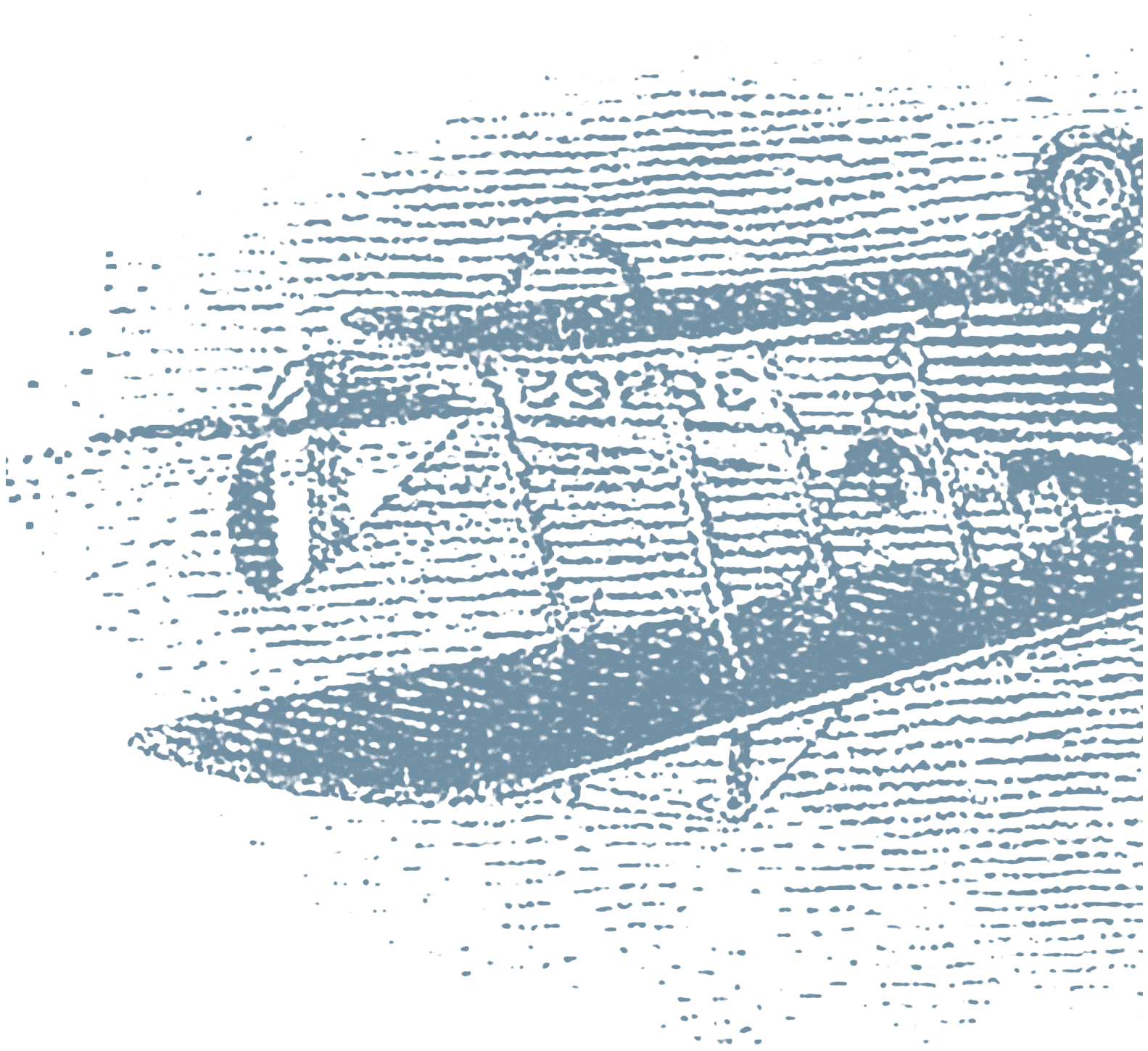
The plane is located in Javits Center main entrance—watch it fly on weekends at Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome—to learn more, go to

OldRhinebeck.org

Robert A. Siegel

AUCTION GALLERIES, INC.

Please come visit us at Superbooth 1229



JENNY 95

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THE 1918 24-CENT INVERTED JENNY

Position 58—The Highest Graded Example

Lot 275° 24¢ Carmine Rose & Blue, Center Inverted (C3a). Position 58, nearly perfect centering, fresh and bright colors, barely hinged at bottom left

EXTREMELY FINE GEM. THIS MAGNIFICENT EXAMPLE OF THE 1918 24-CENT INVERTED JENNY IS GRADED XF-SUPERB 95 BY PROFESSIONAL STAMP EXPERTS. THIS STAMP HAS ALWAYS BEEN REGARDED AS ONE OF THE FINEST FROM THE ORIGINAL DISCOVERY SHEET OF 100. IT IS THE ONLY INVERTED JENNY TO HAVE MET THE RIGOROUS STANDARDS FOR THE XF-SUPERB 95 GRADE.

The original sheet of one hundred Inverted Jenny errors was purchased by William T. Robey on 14 May 1918, the first day the stamps went on sale in all three principal airmail route cities: Washington, D.C., New York and Philadelphia. Robey bought the sheet for its \$24 face value at the New York Avenue Post Office window in the District of Columbia. Soon after, the sheet was sold to Colonel Edward H. R. Green through Eugene Klein, a Philadelphia stamp dealer. Green paid \$20,000 for Robey's sheet, then instructed Klein to divide it into singles and blocks, and to sell all but a few key position blocks.

It is possible to reconstruct the Inverted Jenny sheet with photographs of the singles and blocks (see the reconstruction on page 62). Based on centering alone, most would grade 70 or 75. Only a few stamps could possibly qualify for a Professional Stamp Experts (P.S.E.) grade of VF 80 or better. In our opinion, the centering of the stamp to the right of this one—Position 59—should qualify it for XF-Superb 95, but no others could achieve 95 (or better).

Condition is another factor limiting the grade potential of Inverted Jenny stamps. Despite their great rarity and value, many of the original hundred have been mistreated by collectors over the years. Colonel Green himself allowed moisture to affect some of the stamps he retained. Eight straight-edge copies that Klein was unable to sell and returned to Colonel Green were found in Green's estate stuck together in an envelope (they were soaked and lost their gum). Other examples have become slightly toned from improper storage and climatic conditions. Hinge removal has caused thins and creases in numerous stamps, and one was physically Scotch-taped to an exhibit page. A couple still remain unphotographed, and one was nearly lost to philately forever when it was swept up in a vacuum cleaner. Finally, with the discovery of a third stamp from the stolen McCoy block—recognized by The Philatelic Foundation's expert staff when it was submitted by an auction firm—only one purloined Inverted Jenny remains at large.

The stamp offered here, Position 58, is remarkable for its pristine state of preservation and for its centering. It was originally the lower right stamp in a block of four, comprising Positions 47-48/57-58, which was owned by Eugene Klein, the dealer who bought the sheet from Robey. It was inherited by Klein's daughter, Delores Klein Hertz, who sold it to Robert A. Siegel. Mr. Siegel sold the block to Raymond H. Weill, who placed it with Benjamin D. Phillips in July 1959. The Weills bought the Phillips collection in 1968 for \$4.07 million and sold the block to another collector. According to Raymond Weill, he was asked to divide the block into singles for four different heirs. Position 58 was sold to a Mr. Hoover in 1975, who sold it at auction in 1985 to West Coast collector Bruce McNall. Mr. McNall partly paid for it with an exchange for Position 3.

After Robert Zoellner's first Inverted Jenny fell out of his Scott Platinum album and was sucked up by a vacuum cleaner, he replaced the wounded copy with this stamp, which he purchased in the Superior Stamp & Coin auction of McNall's collection. In our sale of the Zoellner collection (Sale 804), the stamp realized \$192,500 (including the 10% buyer's premium), selling to a private collector. When our firm was asked to offer it in the 2005 Rarities of the World sale (Sale 895), we obtained a P.S.E. certificate with a grade of XF-Superb 95. The stamp shattered the previous record for a single, realizing \$577,500 (including the 10% buyer's premium). It is now offered on behalf of the buyer.

Ex Colonel E. H. R. Green, Eugene Klein, Delores Klein Hertz, B. D. Phillips, Weill (to an anonymous collector), Hoover (according to Weill), McNall, Zoellner (to anonymous collector), anonymous collector to the current owner at Siegel 2005 Rarities of the World sale (Sale 895, lot 374).

With 2005 P.S.E. certificate (graded OGph XF-Superb 95; see photo on page 61) and encapsulated since 2005. The next highest grade in the P.S.E. Population Report is VF-XF 85.

Scott U.S. Specialized Catalogue value for the highest grade listed (VF-XF 85) is \$525,000

P.S.E. Stamp Market Quarterly value for XF-Superb 95 is \$1,600,000



HISTORY OF THE 1918 AIR POST ISSUE AND THE INVERTED JENNY

The following history of the world's first regular airmail service and the most famous error in stamp collecting—the Inverted Jenny—has been written for this catalogue and the launch of InvertedJenny.com on 14 May 1918, the 98th anniversary of William Robey's great find at the post office. It expands and corrects information the Siegel firm has previously published.

We are extremely grateful to Joe R. Kirker for his lifelong contributions to research on the subject, and we acknowledge his assistance with this publication. We are also deeply indebted, as are all philatelists, to George Amick, whose book *JENNY!* set the benchmark for continuing study of the 1918 airmail service and the Jenny stamp.

No other stamp in the world has been sold, stolen, lost, found, traded, donated, hidden, televised, locked, faked, given away and fought over more than the Inverted Jenny. On the occasion of World Stamp Show–NY 2016 and in anticipation of the forthcoming centennial of the 1918 airmail service, the Siegel firm is proud to launch InvertedJenny.com and to offer the finest example of the Inverted Jenny known to philately.

The World's First Government Airmail Service

The world's first regularly scheduled mail service using airplanes was inaugurated in the United States on Wednesday, 15 May 1918. The flights on this day marked the first attempt to fly civilian mail using winged aircraft on a regular schedule, which distinguishes this service from earlier official airmail carried on balloons or on airplanes used for short-term or restricted flights; for example, aviators carried souvenir letters at special flying events from 1910 to 1916, and the U.S. Army First Aero Squadron carried some mail by airplane between Mexico and New Mexico during the 1916 Punitive Expedition against “Pancho” Villa.

On Monday, 12 August 1918, after three months of experimental airmail service under U.S. Army supervision, the U.S. Post Office Department (USPOD) took control of the planes and pilots, and airmail service became a permanent civilian operation, the first of its kind. The last Army-operated airmail flight was on Saturday, 10 August 1918.

With its regular flight times, specific routes and public utility, the 1918 airmail service is regarded by historians as the starting point of commercial aviation.

Pre-1900—U.S. Mail Carried by Balloons

Jupiter Flight—The earliest recorded U.S. official “airmail” flight took place in August 1859. The plan was to carry a mailbag from Lafayette, Ind., east to New York City (or as far as possible) on board the balloon *Jupiter*, piloted by famed balloonist, Professor John Wise. A photograph of the *Jupiter* is shown at right.

The Lafayette postmaster, Thomas Wood, gave Wise a locked mailbag addressed to New York City. Wherever Wise happened to land, he was oath-bound as an official mail carrier to deliver the mailbag to the nearest post office. For this reason, the *Jupiter* flight is considered to be the first postal conveyance by air sanctioned by the USPOD.

On 17 August 1859, after a one-day delay due to a gas leak in the balloon, the *Jupiter* ascended with the mailbag containing 123 letters and 23 printed notices. Weak air currents forced Wise to descend after just five hours and seven minutes.



The balloon *Jupiter*

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum



The only recorded cover flown on the balloon *Jupiter*

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

While aloft, Wise tossed the mailbag overboard with a makeshift parachute, then followed the descending mailbag to its final landing position near Crawfordsville, Ind. After disembarking, Wise carried the mailbag to a Col. Reed, the postal agent on the New Albany & Salem Railroad line, and it was transported east by train. One flown *Jupiter* cover (shown above) with its original letter was discovered in 1957 and is displayed at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum.

Although unsuccessful, the 1859 *Jupiter* flight is still regarded as the first time mail was carried by air with the involvement of a post office. A U.S. commemorative stamp was issued in 1959 to mark the 100th anniversary of the *Jupiter* flight.



Buffalo stamp issued in 1877

and landed at Gallatin, Ten., at 7:18 p.m., 26 miles from its starting point. The letters carried by King were left at the Gallatin post office.

Buffalo Flight—The *Buffalo* was built for Samuel Archer King in 1873 and had a capacity of 91,000 cubic feet and seating for nearly twenty passengers. It made one of its celebrated ascents from the grounds of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia on 4 August 1876.

A *Buffalo* 5¢ stamp was prepared in time for the Nashville, Ten., flight in June 1877. The 5¢ stamps had no postal value, but they were sold for use on letters deposited at the U.S. Signal Service office in Nashville for conveyance on the *Buffalo*.

The *Buffalo* balloon stamp was designed by John F. B. Lillard and engraved in wood by John H. Snively. A total of 300 stamps were printed in blue on gummed white paper by Wheeler Brothers Printers in Nashville. It has been stated that only 23 were used.

The 18 June 1877 ascent from Nashville took place at 5:00 p.m. On board with King were Dr. A. C. Ford of the U.S. Signal Service and five other passengers. The *Buffalo* reached 6,300 feet



Buffalo stamp on cover flown by balloon from Nashville in 1877; the mail was posted at Gallatin Tenn. on 18 June

The flight continued the next morning (19 June) at 8:00 a.m. and reached an altitude of 17,000 feet before descending and landing at Taylorsville, three miles away from Gallatin (source: *The Balloon*, 1879, The American Aeronautic Society of New York).

Three covers with the *Buffalo* 5¢ stamp are recorded. Two have Gallatin postmarks dated 18 June and are known positively to have been flown from Nashville. A third has no postal markings and is believed to have been carried on a different flight. One of the covers postmarked at Gallatin is shown above.

1910-1916—Pioneer Flight Mail

The Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, achieved success with the first controllable, sustainable heavier-than-air flying machine at Kitty Hawk, N.C., on 17 December 1903.

After obtaining a patent on the wing-control mechanism and securing sale contracts with the U.S. and French governments, the Wrights made their first public demonstration flights in 1908. Wilbur flew first in Europe, beginning on 8 August 1908, near Le Mans in France. Orville started his contract acceptance flights for U.S. military officials at Fort Myer, Va., on 3 September 1908.



Historic photograph of Orville and Wilbur Wright's first flight at Kitty Hawk, N.C., on 17 December 1903

On 17 September 1908, Orville and a passenger, Lieut. Thomas E. Selfridge, crashed after a propeller split and cut the control cables, causing the plane to plummet one hundred feet to the ground. Orville suffered severe fractures to his hip, legs and ribs, and Lieut. Selfridge died later that day, becoming the first fatality in a winged-aircraft accident.

After observing additional acceptance flights in July 1909, the U.S. Army completed its first purchase of an airplane, paying the Wrights \$25,000 plus \$5,000 for exceeding the speed requirements (\$1,000 for each mile achieved over 40 mph).

At the 1909 Hudson-Fulton celebration in New York, Wilbur flew up the Hudson River and back in one of the first flights witnessed by the American public.

In 1910 the first legislative bill contemplating airmail service was submitted to Congress, but was never reported by the House committee. In response to this legislative measure and with the encouragement of postal officials, pioneer aviators who conducted display flights at carnivals, fairs and other special events began carrying small quantities of mail as souvenirs. Mail from these flights is classified as official Pioneer Flight mail.

True Pioneer Flight mail has varying degrees of an official connection to the USPOD. At a minimum, the aviator received the approval and cooperation of the local postmaster to fly mail. Some Pioneer Flights were assigned official route numbers by the USPOD in Washington, D.C. A complete list of Pioneer Flights can be found in the *American Air Mail Catalogue*.



Prepared for ship-to-shore flight in November 1910, but both flights were cancelled

Earliest Pioneer Flight—The earliest Pioneer Flight was scheduled to take place on 3 November 1910 in an experiment to test the feasibility of launching an airplane from a platform connected to a ship. The plane would carry mail, small articles and valuable papers from ship to shore. The flight was intended to launch from the Hamburg-American Line's *Kaiserin Augusta Victoria* when the ship was located about 50 miles at sea, opposite the south shore of Long Island.

Due to bad weather conditions, the 3 November flight from the *Kaiserin Augusta Victoria* was cancelled. Another flight was scheduled for 10 November from the S.S. *Pennsylvania*, but it, too, had to be cancelled when the plane's propeller broke shortly before takeoff.

The mail from these aborted ship-to-shore flights was taken off the ships and deposited at post offices in New York City and Rutherford, N.J. Specially printed flight envelopes exist with ordinary postmarks, but they were never flown. Still, they are considered to be the first Pioneer Flight items.



Vin Fiz Flight—The next major aviation event with postal significance was the Great Transcontinental Air Race. The contest was held by William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper publisher, who on 9 October 1910 offered a \$50,000 prize to the first pilot to fly from Boston or New York to Los Angeles or San Francisco (or vice versa) in 30 days or less. The offer was good for one year, through 9 October 1911. Four pilots entered the race—Calbraith Perry Rodgers, Jimmy Ward, Bob Fowler and Earle L. Ovington—but Rodgers was the only one to complete the trip. The others dropped out early in the race.



Cal Rodgers and the *Vin Fiz*
Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

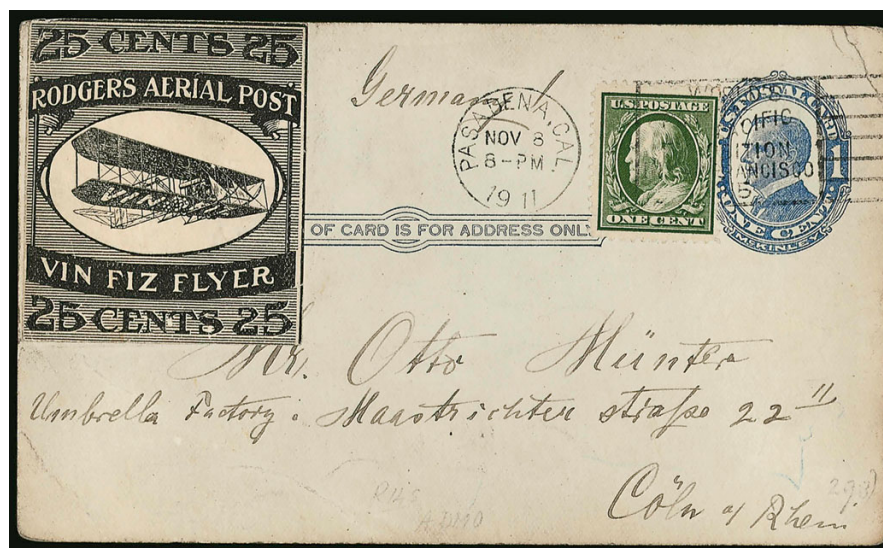
Rodgers flew a Wright Flyer Model EX with the words “Vin Fiz” painted on the bottom of the wings. Vin Fiz was the name of a popular grape soda beverage manufactured by Armour and Company of Chicago, the flight’s sponsor.

The USPOD was not directly involved with any of the Rodgers flights, although local postmasters apparently offered their cooperation. All of the special markings found on *Vin Fiz* mail and the 25¢ adhesive stamp sold by Rodgers and his entourage were unofficial. Rodgers collected letters along the way and flew them between stops or on daily exhibition flights.

Rodgers did not meet the time deadline set by Hearst. After starting from Sheepshead Bay on Long Island, N.Y., on 17 September 1911, Rodgers had flown only as far as Marshall, Missouri, by 10 October, the day Hearst’s offer expired.

Still, Rodgers persevered and completed the transcontinental journey. On 3 November 1911 he reached Imperial Junction, Cal., where the plane’s engine exploded and Rodgers crash landed. He arrived at Pasadena on 5 November, which marked the completion of Rodgers’ coast-to-coast flight. After a delay caused by a serious crash at Compton, Cal., Rodgers landed in Long Beach on 10 December 1911 and touched the Pacific Ocean with his plane as a symbol of achievement.

Rodgers died on 12 April 1912 when seagulls flew into his plane and caused him to crash during an exhibition flight at Long Beach.



25¢ *Vin Fiz* unofficial stamp used on postal card to Germany and carried by Cal Rodgers in 1911

First U.S. Airmail Carrier and Route—The first aviator to carry mail as a USPOD-appointed carrier was Earle L. Ovington. His first official flight took place on 23 September 1911, the opening day of an international aviation meet held on Long Island by the Nassau Aviation Corporation.



Earle L. Ovington receiving mailbag during the aviation meet in Nassau, Long Island, in September 1911

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

Ovington carried 640 letters and 1,280 postcards on the 23 September first flight between Garden City and Mineola in a French-manufactured Bleriot "Dragonfly" monoplane. He continued to carry mail during the event, as weather permitted.

Following the aviation meet, which concluded on 1 October 1911, Ovington planned to fly mail across the country in the Hearst contest, although he obviously could never reach the West Coast by the deadline nine days away. This flight received the first official USPOD airmail route number (607,001). The new airplane Ovington planned to fly across country suffered severe mechanical failure, and, after several attempts, the flight was cancelled on 11 October. There is only one recorded piece of mail that was clearly marked to be carried on this aborted flight (shown below).



Cover prepared for the first official airmail route number 607,001 (James P. Myerson collection)



Year	# Flights
1910	1
1911	11
1912	52
1913	11
1914	6
1915	8
1916	5

The Pioneer Flight Period ended in the U.S. on 3 November 1916 when Victor Carlstrom completed a mail-carrying flight from Chicago to New York in a Curtiss R-7 biplane.

The numbers of recorded Pioneer Flights during each year from 1910 to 1916 are listed in the table at left.

1910-1917—Legislative Efforts to Fund Airmail

The USPOD was funded each fiscal year (1 July–30 June) by a Post Office Appropriation Act of Congress. Each appropriation bill was named for the year in which its applicable fiscal period came to an end; for example, the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1918 covered the fiscal period from 1 July 1917 through 30 June 1918.

There was a set procedure for the introduction, discussion, passage and signing of a Post Office Appropriation Bill. The bill would be introduced toward the end of the calendar year preceding the applicable fiscal year. It would then be referred to the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads. Following discussion within the committee, the bill would be reported to the floor for further discussion. A final vote would occur in the early months of the year that started the fiscal period, and, once approved, the president would sign the Act of Congress into law. For example, the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1918 was introduced at the end of 1916, reported in January 1917, put to a vote in February 1917, and signed into law in March 1917. The money appropriated by Congress covered the fiscal year starting 1 July 1917 and ending 30 June 1918.

Legislation concerning airmail service was first introduced in 1910, but without success. After several more attempts to obtain funding for airmail or to implement service, the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1918 and a follow-up Act of Congress in 1918 (authorizing the 24¢ airmail rate) resulted in the first regular airmail service.



Senator John Morris Sheppard

1910 Airmail Bill—On 14 June 1910 a bill (H.R. 26833) was submitted by Representative John Morris Sheppard (D-TX, later Senator) to the House of Representatives, authorizing the postmaster general “to investigate the practicability and cost of an aeroplane or airship mail between the City of Washington or some other suitable point or points for experiment... in order that it may be definitely determined whether aerial navigation may be utilized for the safe and rapid transmission of the mails.”

Senator Sheppard is often called “the father of airmail service,” but he is better known for his role in passing the Prohibition Act.

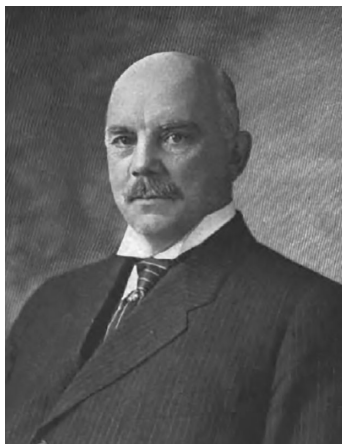
H.R. 26833 was referred to the House Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, but the bill was not reported to Congress. In effect, the first legislative act contemplating airmail service died in committee. However, it inspired aviators to begin flying mail during exhibition flights, which postal officials encouraged as a means to test the process and arouse public interest in the concept.

1913 Appropriation—In November 1911, the same month Cal Rodgers reached California in the *Vin Fiz*, the Second Assistant Postmaster General, Joseph Stewart,

asked Congress for an appropriation of \$50,000 to start an experimental airmail service, to be included in the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1913.

On 17 January 1912, Stewart appeared before the House Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads to persuade its members that airmail service would prove to be beneficial, particularly in regions where the topography made conventional mail transportation extremely difficult.

The Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1913 (H.R. 21279) was reported by the committee without the \$50,000 appropriation, but on 20 April 1912 Representative William G. Sharp (D-Ohio) proposed an amendment to include \$50,000 for the “transportation of mail by aeroplane or other air craft.” Sharp used the same arguments Stewart presented to the House committee to urge his colleagues to vote for the amendment.



Rep. William G. Sharp

Mail." In October 1912 postal officials requested the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) to create a set of twelve designs for the new Parcel Post stamps. The stamps' images were chosen to represent different mail services, modes of transportation, and American manufacturing and agricultural industries.

The design ultimately chosen for the 20¢ value was based on a photograph provided by postal officials, which showed an airplane "at rest." The BEP was asked to add hills, trees and people to complete the picture of an airmail plane in flight, a vision which, in 1912, could only occur at Pioneer Flight events. Government airmail would not arrive for another five and a half years.

Considering the timing, circumstances and the design elements of the 20¢ Parcel Post stamp, the inescapable conclusion is that postal officials produced it to influence public opinion in favor of the development of airmail service.

At the end of 1912 and beginning of 1913, when the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1914 was submitted to Congress (H.R. 27148), Stewart refrained from asking for another airmail appropriation, but Representative Sharp proposed an



PMG Albert S. Burleson

amendment to H.R. 21279, it was defeated in the House by a vote of 43 to 25, and the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1913 was passed and signed without any funding for airmail service.

There were two principal arguments against the airmail amendment: first, that \$75,000 had already been appropriated to the U.S. military for aviation experiments, thus it was wasteful to have two different government departments spending money on the same thing; and, second, that private enterprise should bear the costs of research and development in the aviation field.

1914 Appropriation—Undeterred by congressional refusal to fund airmail experiments, the USPOD continued to give its authority to Pioneer Flights (52 in 1912 alone).

Later in 1912 the USPOD issued a postage stamp with a design that arguably was intended to rally political support for airmail: the 20¢ Parcel Post stamp, which shows an image of a Wright-type airplane with the caption "Aeroplane Carrying



20¢ Parcel Post stamp depicting "Aeroplane Carrying Mail"

amendment to permit "the transportation of mail by aeroplane or other air craft" on routes in Alaska, where winter weather made mail conveyance on rivers impossible.

Sharp's amendment was killed by opponents on a point of order. In response, on 21 April 1913, Sharp introduced a separate bill (H.R. 3393), which authorized the postmaster general "to enter into contracts for carrying the mail by aeroplane or by any other similar device when in his opinion the efficiency, dispatch, or general interest of the service will be promoted..."

1915 Appropriation—H.R. 3393 languished in committee for seven months, but in December 1913 the new postmaster general, Albert S. Burleson, and Second Assistant Postmaster General Stewart provided their support. In addition to seeking general authorization, Burleson and Stewart gave Congress an estimate of \$50,000 for an experimental airmail service in parts of the country where the topography favored air transport. The cost of such service would be incurred in fiscal year 1915.



The House committee reported H.R. 3393 on 10 December 1913. It was introduced as a measure to improve mail service in Alaska and certain western states, and to make the U.S. competitive with European countries where aviation was receiving much greater government support.

Once again, opponents in Congress fired shots at the bill, claiming that flying planes over mountains and in frigid temperatures was an untested and presumably impossible feat. Others complained that it would waste money and expose mail to great risk of damage or loss. Proponents argued that the naysayers knew nothing about aviation and that Congress should defer to postal officials.

The estimated expense, \$50,000, was a trivial amount in the 1915 Post Office budget of \$305 million, but congressional opponents to Sharp's bill spread fear that giving the postmaster general the authority to expand airmail service at his discretion would result in continuing and increasing appropriations well beyond \$50,000. Finally, opponents insinuated that airplane manufacturers were trying to line their pockets by influencing postal officials and House committee members to spend money on the equipment needed for airmail service.

In a vote of 54 to 28, H.R. 3393 was defeated in December 1913. The Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1915 (H.R. 11398), introduced on 12 January 1914, contained no reference to or funding for airmail service.

1916-1917 Appropriations—In their annual reports to Congress at the conclusion of the 1914 and 1915 fiscal years, postal officials continued to seek funding for an experimental airmail service, but they were rebuffed. In January 1916 another request from the USPOD for a \$50,000 appropriation for experimental airmail service (for 1917) was rejected by the House Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, but circumstances were changing, and the winds were shifting in favor of airmail.

One of the major factors that caused opponents to reconsider their position was World War I. As it became increasingly likely the U.S. would have to enter the war, preparedness dictated that the country should raise a large corps of military pilots. Flying the mail offered a practical means of training pilots to fly over different terrain and under a variety of weather conditions, while performing a valuable service.

In March 1915 the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) was established to undertake, promote, and institutionalize aeronautical research. The NACA became an advocate of using airplanes to carry mail, which they believed would advance aeronautics in general.

On 12 February 1916 Senator Sheppard introduced a bill (S. 4417), appropriating \$50,000 "to enable the postmaster general to establish an experimental aerial mail service, by aeroplane or other devices..." It was referred to the Senate Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, but was not reported to the Senate.

Despite the House's refusal to appropriate any funds for airmail service, the Senate committee reviewing the Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1917 (H.R. 10484) recommended adding "aeroplanes" to the modes of transportation covered by the \$1,060,000 appropriation for inland transportation routes. The Senate voted in favor of this amended bill without any discussion, and the House followed in July 1916, making H.R. 10484 the first legislative act to authorize the use of airplanes to carry mail. Despite this legislative success, H.R. 10484 did not produce any tangible results.

Months before its passage, the USPOD had already taken a major first step toward a limited form of airmail service. On 12 February 1916 an official USPOD advertisement solicited bids from private contractors for carrying mail by airplanes on eight routes—one between Nantucket and New Bedford, Mass., and the other seven in Alaska. Postmaster General Burleson had no authority from Congress to initiate an airmail service until the passage of H.R. 10484 and the start of the new fiscal year on 1 July 1916, so his bold move in soliciting bids in February must have been predicated on the likelihood of receiving congressional approval. On the day the advertisement was published, Senator Sheppard introduced his bill appropriating \$50,000 for experimental airmail service (S. 4417), so perhaps the senator and postal officials coordinated a two-pronged effort to break the bureaucratic deadlock.

The logistical problems involved in carrying mail, especially on the remote routes in Alaska, deterred private contractors from submitting bids in response to the February 1916 solicitation. When the time to submit bids expired on 12 May 1916, only one contractor had responded, and even that proposal failed to provide the required bond.



Second Asst. PMG Otto Praeger

1918—Congress Appropriates \$100,000 for “Experimental Aeroplane Mail Service” and Establishes 24¢ Airmail Rate

As the year 1916 came to an end, Postmaster General Burleson and his new Second Assistant Postmaster General, Otto Praeger, renewed their request to Congress for an appropriation for 1918, raising it to \$100,000 and including the use of dirigibles in the experiments.

The Post Office Appropriation Bill for 1918 (H.R. 19410), reported by the House Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads on 2 January 1917, had the following authorization for airmail service:

For inland transportation by steamboat or other power-boat or by aeroplanes, \$1,224,000; Provided, That out of this appropriation the Postmaster General is authorized to expend not exceeding \$100,000 for the purchase, operation, and maintenance of aeroplanes for an experimental aeroplane mail service between such points as he may determine.

When H.R. 19410 was discussed in the House, opponents voiced concerns over Postmaster General Burleson’s earlier suggestion that dirigibles might be used to carry mail. The objection resulted in the entire airmail appropriation being deleted by the House, but the Senate committee restored the original language and reported the bill to the Senate for discussion on 9 February 1917.

H.R. 19410 with the airmail service provision was eventually passed by the House and Senate, and it was signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson on 3 March 1917. One month later the U.S. entered the war against Germany.

In February 1918 Postmaster General Burleson solicited bids for building five airplanes to be used in a “permanent” airmail service, and the route suggested was between Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York City. The service was to commence on 15 April 1918.

The 1918 appropriation specifically authorized the USPOD to purchase, operate and maintain equipment for airmail service, rather than enter into contracts with private operators. Congress and postal officials had decided it would be better to own the operation, instead of outsourcing it, perhaps as a result of the poor results of the previous year’s efforts to obtain bids from the private sector. As it turned out, the USPOD turned to the U.S. Army for planes, pilots and assistance.

On 1 March 1918 Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger reached an agreement with the U.S. Army Signal Corps to use Army pilots and planes for the first year. This arrangement was deemed mutually beneficial. The USPOD would have immediate access to experienced pilots and planes, and the daily flights would provide Army pilots with additional training and experience. The commencement date was moved to 15 May 1918.

On 3 May 1918 the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, passed along executive orders to organize the airmail service to Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, who was then a colonel and assistant director of the Division of Military Aeronautics, just as it was separating from the Signal Corps. The responsibility to equip and man the airmail service was given to Maj. Reuben H. Fleet, chief of U.S. Army pilot training, and Col. Edward A. Deeds and Capt. Benjamin B. Lipsner, both assigned to Air Service Production.

With the arrangements and start-up date in place, Postmaster General Burleson realized that he did not have authority to establish a special airmail postage rate, a power reserved for Congress. On 28 March 1918 Senator Sheppard introduced a bill (S. 4208) authorizing the postmaster general to charge 24¢ per ounce for mail carried by airplane.

When S. 4208 was reported to the full Senate on 6 May 1918 and debated on the floor, a few senators expressed lingering doubts about the feasibility or demand for airmail. One senator predicted that airmail would be a “two-days’ wonder, not a seven-days’ wonder.” Nevertheless, the bill passed and was signed by President Wilson on 10 May 1918, just five days before the first flights were set to take off from Washington, D.C., and New York City.

Engravers at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had already started working on the new 24¢ airmail die, days before the legislative act authorizing the stamp had been passed. There was no time to waste on formalities.



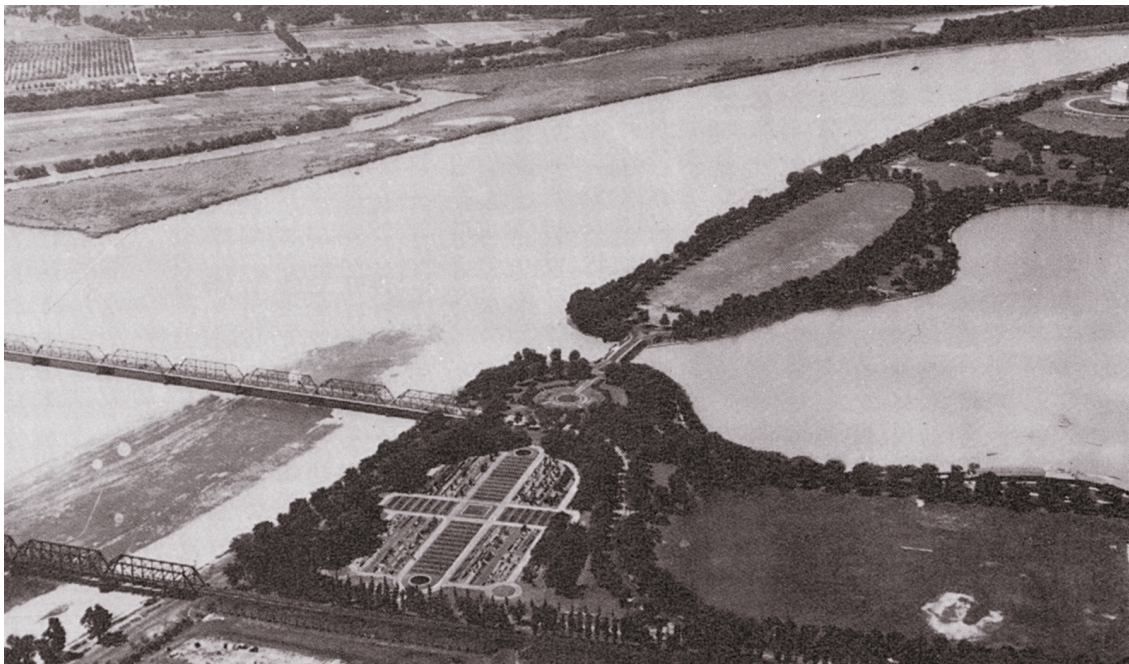
May 1918—First U.S. Airmail Route and Schedule

The first regular airmail route between Washington and New York was measured at a distance of approximately 225 miles, with an intermediate stop at Philadelphia. The reported distances varied, but the USPOD official reports calculated the Washington-Philadelphia leg at 135 miles and the Philadelphia-New York leg at 90 miles. Four intermediate emergency landing locations were established at Baltimore and Havre de Grace, Md., Wilmington, Del., and New Brunswick, N.J.

Postal officials and Maj. Reuben H. Fleet, the U.S. Army officer in charge of the actual flight logistics, selected airfields near each of the three principal cities.

Washington, D.C.—For the airfield in Washington, D.C., postal officials chose the Potomac Park Polo Field, a grassy area between the Tidal Basin and the Potomac River, near the Lincoln Memorial. The Polo Field's proximity to the main post office suited postal officials. However, the field was small and surrounded by trees, making it problematic for takeoffs and landings. Maj. Fleet objected and recommended using the Army airfield at College Park, Md., but he was overruled by postal officials.

Before the first flight from the Potomac Park Polo Field, Maj. Fleet requested park authorities to cut down an obstructive tree. When he was told it would take weeks or months to obtain approval for tree removal, he ordered his men to cut it down. When protests reached up the chain of command and Maj. Fleet was confronted over his decision, he said he did what he had to and did not care about procedure. Satisfied with that answer, his superior let the matter drop.



Aerial view of the airfield at Potomac Park Polo Field in Washington, D.C.

Image: Flying the Mail, page 42

New York—At the New York end of the route, Maj. August Belmont Jr. offered the government use of the open field at Belmont Park Race Track on Long Island. Belmont, at the age of 64, had received a commission as quartermaster in the American Expeditionary Force. Since the airmail service was a military operation, not civilian, he felt duty-bound to make his race track a free contribution to the war effort. Belmont Race Track was far from the New York City main post office, but trucks and a special Long Island Railroad train link to Pennsylvania Station would be used to shuttle the mail back and forth.

Concerned about his age and duties abroad, Maj. Belmont also auctioned off a large number of his prized yearlings, including one he had held in high regard—a handsome red thoroughbred his wife had named to reflect the times, the legendary Man o' War.

Philadelphia—Bustleton Field, located near the railroad station in a suburb of Philadelphia, about fifteen miles northeast of Center City, was chosen as the intermediate airfield where the relay flights would operate between Washington and New York. Surrounding telephone and telegraph wires presented dangerous obstacles, but the 130 acres of flat open field were ideal for takeoffs and landings.

Schedule—Flights were scheduled to run six days a week, Monday through Saturday, leaving simultaneously at 11:30 a.m. from Washington and New York. The announced flight time from start to finish, including a few minutes to transfer the mail between planes at Philadelphia, was three hours. The airmail arrival times were coordinated with train departures from the main post offices, so that letters sent by airmail would be hours ahead of the regular mail.

The scheduled flying time was one hour and fifty minutes between Washington and Philadelphia (128-135 miles) and one hour between Philadelphia and New York (85-90 miles). According to the plan, the northbound plane would depart from Washington-Potomac Park at 11:30 a.m. and arrive at Philadelphia-Bustleton at 1:20 p.m. The northbound “through” mail to New York would be transferred to the relay plane, while mail addressed to Philadelphia and other places served by that city’s distribution office would be carried by truck to the post office. The plane from Philadelphia was expected to reach New York by 2:30 p.m.

Simultaneously, the southbound plane would depart from New York-Belmont at 11:30 a.m. and arrive at Philadelphia-Bustleton at 12:30 p.m. The southbound “through” mail to Washington would be transferred to the relay plane, and the Philadelphia mail would be trucked to the post office. The plane from Philadelphia was expected to reach Washington by 2:30 p.m.

The flight times reliably reported on the first day were 1hr22m for the northbound Philadelphia-to-New York flight (Lieut. Culver’s report) and 1h36m for the southbound Philadelphia-to-Washington flight (Lieut. Edgerton’s report).

The speed for the period from 15 May to 31 December 1918 averaged 72 mph (depending on which flight statistics are used), which is about 3h3m flying time plus six to nine minutes (as reported) mailbag transfer time at Philadelphia. Therefore, the actual overall flying performance in 1918 averaged only slightly longer than anticipated.

1918—Airplanes Used for Aerial Mail Service

On 1 March 1918 the Army placed an order with the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company for 12 new airplanes to be used for airmail service. The order was divided equally between the Curtiss JN-4HM and R-4LM models. The “M” in each instance indicates the basic plane was modified to carry mail. An additional six JR-1B planes were ordered from the Standard Aircraft Corporation in July 1918 for use in the airmail service (the “B” model was a modified version of the Standard JR-1 training plane). The JR-1B’s were delivered on 6 August 1918.



Curtiss JN-4HM mail planes on the field—38274 (left) and 38262 (right)—number 38262 was used on the 24¢ stamp

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum, Benjamin Lipsner Collection



Only the JN-4HM planes were used for the first airmail flights. The model that appears on the 24¢ stamp is an unmodified trainer with two seats. The photograph provided by the War Department to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing was made from one of the regular Jennys, not a modified mail plane.

Curtiss “Jenny”—In 1915 Curtiss began production of a new plane that combined features of the earlier “J” and “N” models used by the Army and Navy. The JN series’ initials gave rise to the plane’s popular nickname “Jenny.”

The JN models began with limited production of the JN-1 and JN-2. After two fatal accidents involving the JN-2, the JN-3 was developed to correct the JN-2’s shortcomings and used during the U.S. Army’s Punitive Expedition against “Pancho” Villa in Mexico in 1916. The further improved JN-4 model was widely used to train military pilots. The “H” in the JN-4H indicated the plane was equipped with an 8-cylinder, 150-horsepower Hispano-Suiza motor, which was more powerful and reliable than the OX-5 motor used in the standard JN-4. The “Hisso” engine gave a Jenny enough power to fly 93 mph at sea level and climb to nearly 13,000 feet.

The Jenny’s frame was made of spruce and covered with a fabric that was doped with a waterproofing material. At approximately 43 feet, the upper wing of the biplane was wider than the lower, and the length from propeller to tail was approximately 27 feet. The narrow width of the Jenny’s landing wheels had caused planes to tilt and hit the ground during landing. To fix this problem, wing skids were added to maintain balance and prevent breakage.

The JN-4HT training model had twin seats and dual controls for the student in front and instructor behind. The six special-order JN-4HM planes—a modified version of the JN-4HT—were produced exclusively for the airmail service. The JN-4HM planes had the forward pilot’s seat and control mechanism removed and replaced with a covered compartment, in which the mail could be placed. The Army’s request for double fuel and oil capacity was met by simply attaching and linking extra 19-gallon gasoline and 2.5-gallon oil tanks.

In early 1919 Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger published a comprehensive report (printed in *Aerial Age* magazine), listing the 18 planes that flew mail for the period from 15 May to 31 December 1918, each identified by serial number, flight data and cost of operation.

Praeger listed six each of the JN-4HM (with Hispano-Suiza 150hp motor, numbers 37944, 38262, 38274, 38275, 38276 and 38278), R-4LM (with Liberty motor, numbers 39362-39367) and Standard JR-1B (with Hispano-Suiza 150hp motor, numbers 1-6).

The table at right lists the six Curtiss Jenny airplanes used to fly mail, identified by serial number with the flight miles and hours from Praeger’s report.

Number 38276, with its relatively low mileage and hours of operation, could be the plane that Lieut. Stephen Bonsal, Jr., crashed at Bridgeton, N.J., on the second day, 16 May 1918, when he flew south from New York to Philadelphia.

Number 37944 has extremely low mileage and does not appear in Praeger’s July 1918 report of monthly operations. These facts, the out-of-sequence number and reports of a two-seated trainer being used during the first few days’ flights suggest that this was not a fully-modified mail plane.

Serial #	Miles Flown	Hours Flown
37944	550	7h19m
38262	6,629	105h47m
38274	12,734	190h16m
38275	7,371½	112h03m
38276	3,401	51h34m
38278	10,583	151h02m

15 May-10 August 1918—Airmail Carried by U.S. Army Aviators

The pilots and planes used for the government airmail service during its first three months were provided and controlled by the U.S. Army, which operated its aviation division under a series of different names throughout this period.

The Aeronautical Division of the U.S. Signal Corps was created in August 1907 to operate lighter-than-air dirigibles and winged aircraft. Its name and command remained the same from 1 August 1907 to 18 July 1914. It was reconstituted as the Aviation Section, U.S. Signal Corps (18 July 1914—20 May 1918), then as the Division of Military Aeronautics (20 May - 24 May 1918). It was again reconstituted as the United States Army Air Service (USAAS—24 May 1918—2 July 1926).

After the Saturday flight on 10 August 1918, responsibility for operating the airmail service was assumed by the USPOD. The first flight under civilian control was on Monday, 12 August 1918.



Major Reuben H. Fleet



Captain Benjamin B. Lipsner



Lieut. Stephen Bonsal, Jr.

Major Reuben H. Fleet (1887-1975), chief of the U.S. Army flight training program, was chosen to be the officer in charge of the airmail service during the period of Army supervision. Maj. Fleet was a skilled and experienced pilot, and he was directly responsible for supervising the pilots and maintaining the equipment used in the airmail service.

After receiving the Distinguished Service Medal, Maj. Fleet resigned his commission in 1922 and went on to become a successful businessman in the aviation industry. In 1961 Maj. Fleet founded the San Diego Aerospace Museum. In 1973 the Fleet family helped establish the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center in San Diego. Maj. Fleet died on October 29, 1975.

Captain Benjamin B. Lipsner (1887-1971) was born in Chicago in 1887. He was not a pilot, but served as a U.S. Army officer in charge of the Lubrication Division of the Aeronautics section. Capt. Lipsner was deeply involved in organizing and supervising the airmail service from the beginning. Maj. Fleet was the ranking officer, but Capt. Lipsner apparently had more logistical responsibility assigned to him by the USPOD.

Capt. Lipsner later claimed that he was the “first” superintendent of the Aerial Mail Service. It is true that on 2 July 1918 Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger sent a letter to Lipsner, appointing him Superintendent of the Aerial Mail Service, effective 1 August 1918, subject to the Army accepting Lipsner’s resignation (<http://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/lipsner-letter.html>). As Superintendent, Lipsner clashed with Praeger over procurement and operation issues, and he resigned on 6 December 1918.

Capt. Lipsner died in 1971, and in 1982 his personal collection of correspondence and philatelic material from his airmail service was donated to the Smithsonian.

U.S. Army Pilots’ Biographies:

Four of the six pilots originally chosen for duty in the airmail service were selected with the approval of Maj. Fleet (Lieutenants Bonsal, Culver, Miller and Webb). The other two, Lieutenants Boyle and Edgerton, were chosen by postal officials and had relatively little flying experience. Lieut. Boyle made two flights that resulted in crashes, and he was replaced with a more experienced pilot, Lieut. Kilgore.

Second Lieutenant Stephen Bonsal, Jr. (1893-1950)—Born in Madrid, Spain, on 3 June 1893, to Stephen and Daisy Bonsal. His father was a well-known Washington, D.C., news correspondent. Lieut. Bonsal, a Yale University graduate, served in World War I and World War II. He flew missions in Algeria, Tunisia and Italy with the Royal Air Force and with the 1st and 15th U.S. Air Force. He retired as a major in 1944 and died in 1950. (Source: Yale University Obituary Record).

Lieut. Bonsal was one of the four U.S. Army pilots originally chosen by Maj. Fleet for the airmail service. He has the distinction of being the second airmail pilot to crash. On 16 May 1918, flying south from New York to Philadelphia, he crashed at the Bridgeton Fairgrounds Race Track in New Jersey.



Lieut. George L. Boyle

Second Lieutenant George Leroy Boyle (birth and death dates unknown)—At the time Lieut. Boyle was recommended by postal officials to be part of the airmail pilots team, he was engaged to Margaret McChord, daughter of the Hon. Charles C. McChord, a judge and chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Judge McChord's position made him a valued ally of the USPOD during the legal battles over the government's Parcel Post service initiative in 1913.

Lieut. Boyle was an inexperienced pilot, with approximately 60 hours of student pilot time. The USPOD's insistence that he fly in the airmail service was viewed by some as a political favor to Judge McChord.

After two crashes on 15 and 17 May 1918, Lieut. Boyle was relieved of duty in the airmail service. He married Margaret on 15 June 1918. After the war Boyle worked as an attorney in Washington, D.C. The couple had children, but later separated. He is reported to have died in 1935. (Source: Amick, *JENNY!*).

First Lieutenant Howard Paul Culver (1893-1964)—H. Paul Culver was born in Eau Claire, Wis., in 1893. He received a degree in mechanical engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology. Lieut. Culver learned to fly at the Curtiss School of Aviation in Newport News, Va., and received his pilot's certificate on 25 August 1916. During World War I, he was a test pilot and instructor in combat flying at several U. S. Army airfields. He was one of the four U.S. Army pilots originally chosen by Maj. Fleet for the airmail service. Lieut. Culver died in 1964. (Source: *Early Birds of Aviation*, CHIRP, December 1964).



Lieut. H. Paul Culver



Lieut. James C. Edgerton and his leather pilot's jacket

Image (Jacket): Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (ID: A19320001000)



Second Lieutenant James C. Edgerton (1896-1973)—Lieut. Edgerton, another inexperienced pilot who was picked by postal officials because his father was the USPOD's purchasing agent, was the first pilot to fly airmail to Washington, D.C., on 15 May 1918. Despite his inexperience, Lieut. Edgerton proved to be an outstanding aviator throughout his service.

When the USPOD took over the airmail service in August 1918, Lieut. Edgerton

continued as a civilian airmail pilot and eventually became superintendent of flight operations. He later supervised installation of the first aeronautical radio stations and became superintendent of the USPOD radio service. He rose to the rank of colonel and served in World War II. After Colonel Edgerton died on 26 October 1973, *The New York Times* published an obituary under the headline "James Edgerton, Airmail Pioneer" (30 October 1973).

The Abercrombie & Fitch leather coat Lieut. Edgerton wore on his historic 15 May flight is on display at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (shown above).



Lieut. Edward W. Kilgore

Second Lieutenant Edward W. Kilgore (birth and death dates unknown)—Lieut. Kilgore, U.S. Army, later captain, replaced Lieut. George L. Boyle in the Aerial Mail Service shortly after Boyle's second crash on 17 May 1918. Lieut. Kilgore flew Army exhibition flights.

First Lieutenant Walter "Max" Miller (1893-1920)—Walter "Max" Miller was born in Oslo, Norway, in 1893. He and his younger brother migrated to the U.S. around 1911. Lieut. Miller served as a U.S. Army aviator near the Mexican border. He was one of the four U.S. Army pilots originally chosen by Maj. Fleet for the airmail service and played an important role in the development of the first New York-to-Chicago airmail route. On 1 September 1920, Lieut. Miller died when he crashed his Junkers-Larsen 6 with his mechanic on board. The plane suffered a midair engine fire over Morristown, N.J., and, after tossing the mailbags overboard and attempting to extinguish the fire with a steep dive, both men perished when the plane crashed into an open field.



Lieut. Walter "Max" Miller



Lieut. Torrey H. Webb

First Lieutenant Torrey H. Webb (1892-1975)—A graduate of Columbia University with a degree in mining engineering, Lieut. Webb was one of four U.S. Army pilots originally chosen by Maj. Fleet for the airmail service. He became the first pilot to complete a leg of the first airmail flights on 15 May 1918, when he arrived in Philadelphia after flying from Belmont Field in New York. Lieut. Webb continued his airmail pilot service and flew the first New York-to-Boston airmail route on 6 June 1918. He later became a vice president of Texaco and lived in Corona del Mar, Cal.

A letter from Postmaster General Burleson to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, published in the September 1918 issue of *Flying* magazine, provides reliable information about the pilots, flights and volume of airmail carried from 15 May to 10 August 1918 (this Saturday was the last flight under Army control). An excerpt from this letter follows.

Excerpt from Postmaster General Burleson's letter to Secretary of War Baker, summarizing 15 May-10 August 1918 airmail pilots and flight statistics:

...Lieutenant J. C. Edgerton made 52 trips on the mail route, with but a single forced landing, due to an accident to a magneto in his plane. His total flying hours were 106, and 36 minutes; and his total mileage was 7,155 miles.

Lieutenant E. W. Kilgore made 39 trips on the mail route, with five forced landings; 85 hours and 50 minutes total flying time, with a total mileage of 5,670 miles.

Lieutenant Walter Miller made 48 trips on the mail route, with four forced landings; 60 hours and 50 minutes total flying time, with a total mileage of 4,975 miles.

Lieutenant Stephen Bonsal made 38 trips on the mail route, with four forced landings; 74 hours and 33 minutes total flying time, with a total mileage of 4,975 miles.

Lieutenant T. H. Webb made 41 trips on the mail route, with but one forced landing; 44 hours and 49 minutes total flying time, with a total mileage of 3,680 miles.

Lieutenant H. P. Culver made 36 trips on the mail route, with but one forced landing; 47 hours and 52 minutes total flying time, with a total mileage of 3,645 miles.

I think it is a high tribute to the Army's training planes and their engines, as well as to the Mechanical Maintenance Department, that out of 270 flights conducted by the Air Section in carrying the United States mail, covering a grand total of 421 hours of flying, there were recorded but 16 forced landings.

From May 15th to August 12th, the period during which the flying operations were conducted by the military authorities, a total of 20¼ tons of letter mail was dispatched between New York and Washington, at a saving of time of from 2 to 2½ hours daily.

From Lieut. Edgerton's logbook it is possible to confirm that he flew Jenny 38274 from the Hazelhurst Field (Mineola) to Belmont, then from there to Bustleton Field in Philadelphia.

Accounts of this 14 May late afternoon flight of the three Jennys state that Lieut. Culver flew a second mail plane (38262) and Maj. Fleet flew an unmodified Jenny training plane without extra fuel capacity. It is likely that Maj. Fleet piloted number 37944, because that plane was flown by Lieut. Culver from Philadelphia to New York on 15 May. On this 14 May southbound flight, Maj. Fleet was forced to land twice in fields between New York and Philadelphia, in order to refuel with whatever small amount of gasoline he could locate. The report that this Jenny ran out of fuel between New York and Philadelphia indicates that the plane was not equipped with the extra gas tank.

When Maj. Fleet made his second landing, on a golf course a short distance from Bustleton (presumably at the Philadelphia Country Club), the wheel was damaged and he was unable to take off. Maj. Fleet found a ride to Bustleton and told his men to head to the golf course with gasoline and a replacement wheel. Lieut. Culver either went alone or with Lieut. Edgerton; there are conflicting accounts. After fixing the wheel, Lieut. Culver piloted the Jenny back to Bustleton in the dark, possibly with Lieut. Edgerton, if there was a second seat still installed. By the time Lieut. Culver approached the landing field, it was dark. Earlier, people at the field had used their automobile headlights to light up the field, but by the time Lieut. Culver arrived, they were gone. Unable to see clearly, Lieut. Culver landed in a neighboring field with freshly-tilled soil, which caused the propeller to hit the ground and break.

As Tuesday turned into Wednesday, 15 May, the day of the inaugural airmail flights, the pilots and Maj. Fleet worked furiously to fix the damaged plane and ready the Jennys for their historic mission. At 8:40 a.m., number 38262—the plane made famous by the stamp—was ready to fly. Maj. Fleet assumed the task of flying it to Potomac Park Polo Field in Washington, while Lieutenants Edgerton and Culver remained at Bustleton with 38274 and 37944, awaiting their turns to fly the northbound and southbound relays.

Lieut. Edgerton would fly 38274 to Washington with the Philadelphia southbound mail and the “through” mail that arrived from New York. Lieut. Culver planned to fly 38262 to New York after it arrived from Washington with the northbound “through” mail, to which he would add the Philadelphia northbound mail.

As Lieutenants Culver, Edgerton and the crew at Bustleton watched Maj. Fleet fly Jenny 38262 in a southwesterly direction toward Washington, they must have felt a mix of excitement and apprehension. The past 48 hours had been stressful. Mechanical problems and time pressures had conspired to potentially delay or disrupt the first flights. Now, with Maj. Fleet on his way to the nation's capital, the two pilots had a few hours to make final inspections of the planes, perhaps drink some coffee and rest, and, of course, pray that nothing else would interfere with their mission. If any prayers were made, they were ignored.

15 May 1918—Historic Flights and Failure

As the commencement date approached, there had been great anticipation of the new airmail service among government officials and the public. Newspapers ran stories. People who received admission tickets to the airfields cleared their schedules. Stamp collectors put money aside to buy the new 24¢ airmail stamp when it went on sale on 14 May, in time to be used on First Trip mail.

By May 1918, only a decade had passed since the Wrights had revealed the capability of their flying machine in public display flights. During those ten years, amateur aviators had flown planes in many places throughout the world. Nations' armies were using planes to great effect in World War I. Aeronautic societies and the government's new aviation commission were advocating and analyzing the use of airplanes in all aspects of civilian and military life.

Now, after years spent pleading for money to create an airmail service, postal officials gathered with others on the Potomac Park Polo Field. In attendance were the postmaster general and his subordinates, legislators who supported the concept, dignitaries who wished to witness the spectacle, and even the President and First Lady. All of them, together with curious spectators, eagerly awaited the opening ceremony and hand-waving when the first plane departed north with the country's first airmail bags.

Attempted Northbound Flight from Washington (15 May)—A crowd of hundreds had already gathered at Potomac Park when the sound of the Jenny piloted by Maj. Fleet could be heard approaching in the distant sky. At 10:35 a.m., nearly two hours after taking off from Bustleton, Maj. Fleet landed 38262 on the Polo Field as spectators watched.



USPOD truck with airmail service sign

The northbound flight was scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Mail was accepted for the flight up to 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. and postmarked with a special “First Trip” marking. A mail truck marked “United States Air Mail Service” carried the mailbags to the airfield.

In attendance were President Wilson and his wife, Edith, who arrived by car shortly after 10:00 a.m. to greet honored guests, postal officials and the pilot, Lieut. Boyle. The President’s left hand was bandaged; he had recently burned it on a tank’s hot gun barrel while posing for photographs during a military display at Fort Rucker, Va.

Also present were Postmaster General Burleson, Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, Senator Sheppard (who introduced the Senate bills authorizing airmail service), and a youthful Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was then Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Roosevelt was standing firmly on his legs, three years before paralysis would strike. The future president, an avid stamp collector, must have been fascinated by the philatelic aspects of the day’s events.



President Wilson and the First Lady with dignitaries at the inaugural flight ceremony in Washington, D.C., 15 May 1918

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum



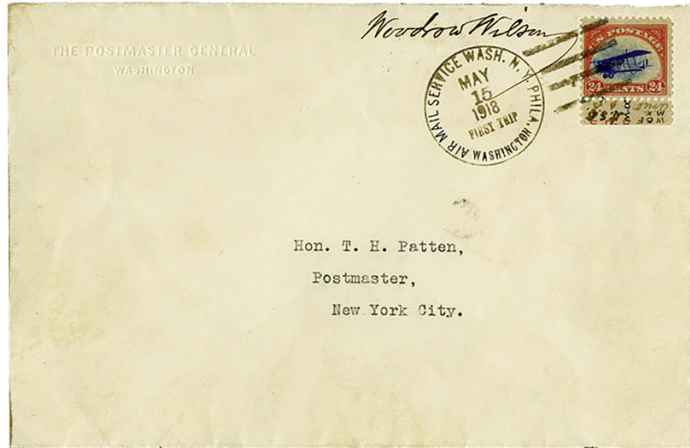
President Wilson holding the special first flight cover

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

Among other dignitaries was a Japanese government official erroneously described as the “Postmaster-General of Japan” in news reports and subsequent accounts. In fact, the gentleman was KAMBARA Kushiro, Chief of the Planning Section of the Communications Bureau, a sub-division of the Communications Ministry (source: *Japanese Philately*, Vol. 12, No. 7).

President Wilson and postal officials posed for still and motion cameras. The archived video footage of the ceremony and takeoff can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzhmNvKY-i4>

With the crowd watching and the camera rolling, President Wilson presented an autographed first flight envelope bearing one of the new 24¢ stamps with its selvaie attached, on which six postal officials had



First flight cover with 24¢ Jenny signed by President Wilson
Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

signed their initials. The unique signed presidential envelope (shown here) was addressed to New York Postmaster Thomas G. Patten (whose middle initial was misspelled “H” on the envelope). It contained a letter from Postmaster General Burleson.

This presidential First Trip souvenir was the brainchild of Noah W. Taussig, president of the American Molasses Company and a stamp collector, who pledged to place a starting bid of \$1,000 on the envelope when it was put up for auction to benefit the Red Cross. On 11 June 1918, at The Collectors Club of New York, the auction conducted by J. C. Morgenthau failed to produce another bid.

The envelope was later rediscovered among the Taussig family’s possessions and, in 1977, Richard S. Taussig donated it to the National Philatelic Collection at the Smithsonian Institution. It is now displayed at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum (see <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/autographed-airmail-envelope.html>)

While President Wilson posed for pictures, talked to officials and discussed the flight with Lieut. Boyle, Maj. Fleet and his crew positioned the plane for its 11:30 a.m. takeoff.

All eyes were on the Jenny. Sgt. E. F. Waters yanked on the propeller blade to start the engine. Nothing. He tried again... nothing. Several more attempts were made without success. The engine would not turn over. They checked the fuel gauge. It read full. A mechanic cleaned the spark plugs, but still there was no ignition.

Eyewitness reports depict President Wilson as irritated. Someone said they overheard him tell the First Lady, “We’re losing a lot of valuable time here.” Whether or not these accounts are reliable is uncertain, but as the minutes passed beyond the 11:30 a.m. scheduled departure time, postal and military officials responsible for the new airmail service must have been embarrassed in front of President Wilson and the large crowd assembled on the Polo Field.

Capt. Lipsner or Maj. Fleet (or someone else) soon realized that the plane’s fuel gauge was designed to provide an in-flight reading when the plane was level. With the plane in a tilted starting position, the gauge inaccurately showed full. It is hard to imagine that this anomaly of the Jenny’s fuel gauge was never noticed before, under other circumstances.

The crew was ordered to refill the tank, but they discovered that there was no gasoline supply at the field. Which supervising officer was responsible for this oversight? Years later, the two aging veterans, Maj. Fleet and Capt. Lipsner, would argue over that question, each blaming the other.

After siphoning gas from other planes on the field and refilling 38262’s tank, Sgt. Waters pulled on the propeller, and the engine came to life.

Lieut. Boyle revved the Hisso motor and began accelerating down the field. The plane slowly ascended and cleared the trees that surrounded the Polo Field. Spectators cheered and waved. At 11:46 a.m. (or 11:45 or 11:47, depending on which report is used), the first airmail from the nation’s capital was in flight, ushering in an exciting new era of aviation.

The archived video footage of the ceremony and takeoff can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhzmNvKY-i4>

Capt. Lipsner watched the plane as it faded into the distance. Where is he going? he wondered. Lieut. Boyle was flying south.



Jenny 38262, piloted by Lieut. Boyle, taking off on 15 May 1918



For whatever reason, the first northbound airmail was flown in the wrong direction. Some would blame it on the novice pilot's inexperience or incompetence, while Lieut. Boyle and others said the plane's compass was unreliable, which was certainly true. The rudimentary compass used by Lieut. Culver and later donated by his widow is on display at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (shown at right).

Minutes after takeoff, Lieut. Boyle landed once in a field to get his location, then took off. When he grew concerned that his bearings were still off, Lieut. Boyle tried to land again, but the field he chose was too soft, and his Jenny nosed over upon landing, causing the propeller to snap and damaging the cabane struts on the wings.

Lieut. Boyle, the upside-down Jenny and 140 lbs of mail he was carrying were stranded about 20 to 25 miles south of the Potomac Park Polo Field, near Waldorf, Md. By coincidence, the field Lieut. Boyle crashed in was near the home of Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger.

Shortly after crashing, Lieut. Boyle called Maj. Fleet by phone to notify him of the problem, and then found someone to drive him back to the airfield. Lieut. Boyle and the mailbags returned to Potomac Park, and mechanics were sent to repair the plane. It was flown back to Washington that night and arrived at 8:05 p.m.

Newspapers reported the mishap the next day. Under the headline "FIRST AIR MAIL IN WASHINGTON IN 200 MINUTES", *The New York Times* ran a smaller headline, "Flier Bound from Washington Lands in Maryland."

Southbound Flight from New York to Washington via Philadelphia (15 May)—The southbound New York-to-Philadelphia flight was scheduled to depart Belmont Field at 11:30 a.m. with Lieut. Torrey H. Webb flying Jenny 38278 and carrying 144 lbs of mail, comprising 2,457 letters plus packages and newspapers.

Among the letters was one from New York Postmaster Patten to President Wilson and Postmaster General Burleson, congratulating them on the inauguration of airmail service (cover shown below).

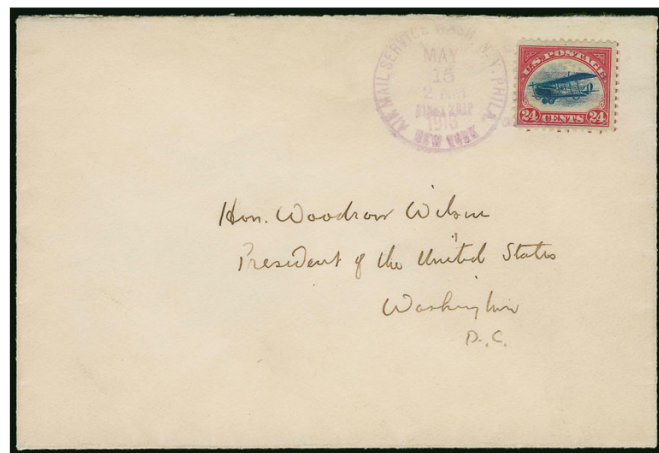


Compass used by pilots in the early years of aviation
Image: © Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (A19680559000)



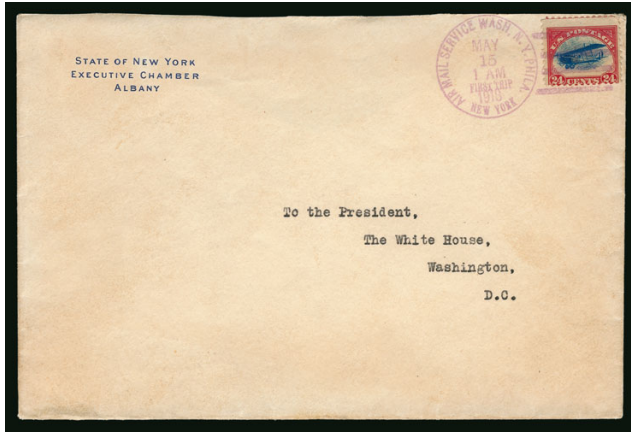
Headline in *New York Times*,
16 May 1918

Image: © *The New York Times*



NYC postmaster Patten handing mail to Lieut. Webb, which contained this cover from Patten to the President

Image (at left): Smithsonian National Postal Museum



15 May flight cover from NY Governor Whitman to President Wilson

There was also what *The New York Times* described as “the first letter postmarked for air delivery” from Governor Charles S. Whitman, assuring President Wilson of the state’s support for the forthcoming Red Cross fundraising campaign.

When Lieut. Webb touched down at Bustleton Field in Philadelphia, after flying approximately 90 miles from New York, he became the first pilot to complete a flight for the new U.S. airmail service. The letters he carried, bearing the “New York” version of the special airmail datestamp, are the true “First” of “First Trip” letters from this historic event.

From today’s perspective, one would expect that accurate records of these inaugural flights would have been made, and various contemporary and later historical accounts would correlate to the record. However, as usual for these early airmail flights, contemporary reports are filled with misinformation, and there are discrepancies among different accounts of the departure, arrival and flying times of the southbound flights by Lieut. Webb (New York to Philadelphia) and Lieut. Edgerton (Philadelphia to Washington).



Lieut. Webb taking off from Belmont Race Track on 15 May 1918

Image: *Flying the Mail*, pages 45-46

Most New York-based sources report Lieut. Webb taking off from Belmont precisely at the scheduled 11:30 a.m. departure time. The *New York Times* story (16 May) with the “200 minutes” headline reported that Lieut. Webb took off at 11:30 a.m. and arrived in Philadelphia at 12:30 p.m., and that Lieut. Edgerton landed in Washington at 2:50 p.m. The same story reported that the two pilots flew a total of 200 minutes after “deducting the six minutes’ intermission” at Philadelphia, but this account conflicts with other more reliable reports, and it even has internal inconsistencies.

Lieut. Webb’s Pilot’s Daily Report records his takeoff from Belmont at 11:29 a.m. and arrival at Bustleton at 12:58 p.m., for a total of 1h29m flying time (89 minutes), somewhat longer than average for this leg. Lieut. Edgerton’s logbook records his takeoff from Bustleton at 1:14 p.m., his arrival at Potomac Park at 2:50 p.m., and the total flight time for this leg of the trip was 1h36m (96 minutes).

The pilots’ official records must be considered extremely reliable, and Lieut. Edgerton’s 2:50 p.m. arrival in Washington is corroborated by all sources. Based on their reports, the total flying time was 3h5m (185 minutes), with an additional 16 minutes between relay flights at Bustleton (201 minutes from start to finish).



Therefore, the *New York Times* “200 minutes” reporter must have been in error when he calculated flying time for Lieut. Webb at 60 minutes and Lieut. Edgerton at 140 minutes, excluding the bag transfer time of six minutes.

The *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (15 May) reports Lieut. Webb arriving at Bustleton at 1:00 p.m. after a 75-minute flight (1h15m). That would point to an 11:45 a.m. departure from Belmont Field, fifteen minutes past the scheduled time and other reports, including Lieut. Webb’s own record.

The time between Lieut. Webb’s landing and Lieut. Edgerton’s takeoff, during which the mailbags were transferred from Jenny 38278 to 38274, is reported variously from six minutes to nine minutes, but it must have been about 16 minutes. One possible reason for a longer-than-usual transfer time in Philadelphia is that the mailbags Lieut. Webb carried in Jenny 38278 had to be ceremoniously turned over to the Philadelphia postmaster.

With the crowd of dignitaries and spectators watching, Lieut. Webb handed the mailbags to Philadelphia Postmaster John A. Thornton. The “through” mail (460 pieces) was loaded onto Lieut. Edgerton’s Jenny 38274. The mail for Philadelphia and points serviced by its post office (182 pieces) was in a separate bag that was immediately given to the mail clerk for transport by truck to the distributing office.

After Lieut. Edgerton took off from Philadelphia at 1:14 p.m. and was en route to Potomac Park—probably sometime between 1:30 p.m. and 2:00 p.m.—orders were telephoned from the Washington-Potomac Park airfield, instructing Lieut. Culver, who was waiting at Bustleton, to fly the Philadelphia mail north to New York, rather than wait for the Washington mail from Lieut. Boyle’s crashed plane.

At 2:15 p.m. Lieut. Culver flew north from Bustleton, carrying a mere 20 lbs of mail, comprising 200 pieces for New York City and 150 addressed to places served by the New York distributing office. Lieut. Culver flew Jenny 37944, which must be the plane that Maj. Fleet flew south from New York to Philadelphia on 14 May.

Curiously, Lieut. Edgerton’s logbook entry for the 15 May flight from Bustleton to Washington states that his mail load was 20 lbs, but obviously that entry is incorrect. Lieut. Edgerton carried 136 lbs of mail, the net weight after mail was removed and added to Lieut. Webb’s 144 lbs carried from New York. Lieut. Edgerton was evidently told the wrong amount when he made his logbook entry.

While Lieut. Culver was in the air north of Philadelphia, Lieut. Edgerton began his descent toward the Potomac Park Polo Field. Some of the people who had gathered for the morning departure of Lieut. Boyle’s plane remained on the field to witness the arrival of the first airmail delivered to the nation’s capital. Lieut. Edgerton touched down at 2:50 p.m., twenty minutes behind schedule.

Lieut. Edgerton’s sister, Elizabeth, who had come with their mother to congratulate him, presented her brother with a bouquet of roses, and the two posed for a photograph (shown at right). In this historic image, the young pilot is beaming with pride as he stands with his kid sister in front of the Jenny. Lieut. Edgerton would eventually achieve the best record among the original U.S. Army airmail pilots.

The special airmail postal truck transported the 136 lbs of mail from Potomac Park to the main post office. From there, nearly 200 Boy Scouts on bicycles delivered letters addressed to local residents—special delivery service was included in the 24¢ airmail postage—while letters for other places were sorted by clerks and sent on their way.



Lieut. Edgerton and his young sister after he successfully completed the southbound flight from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., 15 May 1918

Northbound Flight from Philadelphia to New York (15 May)—In her account of the first airmail flights, Lieut. Culver's wife claims that he was deeply disappointed when the call came from Washington, informing him that Jenny 38262, the plane he had flown from New York to Philadelphia the night before, had crashed and would not be available for him to fly to New York with all of the northbound mail.

Instead, Lieut. Culver flew in plane 37944 with 20 lbs of Philadelphia mail, comprising 200 letters for New York City and 150 addressed to places served by the New York distributing office. At 2:15 p.m.—more than an hour behind schedule—Culver took off from Bustleton, bound for Belmont Field.

Around 3:30 p.m., as Lieut. Culver approached Belmont Field, he was joined by two planes that had taken off from the nearby Hazelhurst airfield, and they flew in formation for the final approach. Lieut. Culver landed at 3:37 p.m. and was greeted by a crowd of onlookers who pushed forward, dangerously close to his moving plane.

With the band playing "The Star Spangled Banner," and the crowd cheering and waving American flags, the mailbag was removed by a postal employee, Harvey L. Hartung, and put on a truck bound for the nearby Long Island Railroad station. From there a special train carried it to the Pennsylvania Station Post Office.

By the end of Wednesday, 15 May 1918, the first day of regular airmail service had produced mixed results. The southbound flights had gone smoothly, with the mail for Washington arriving at 2:50 p.m., only 20 minutes late. The arrival of the northbound plane in New York was celebrated as a historic event, even if it was more than an hour late and the Washington mail was missing. Newspapers reported the misadventures of Lieut. Boyle and the missing Washington mail, but the press and the public were generally forgiving, recognizing the challenges of airplane navigation at this time.

16-17 May 1918—More Problems

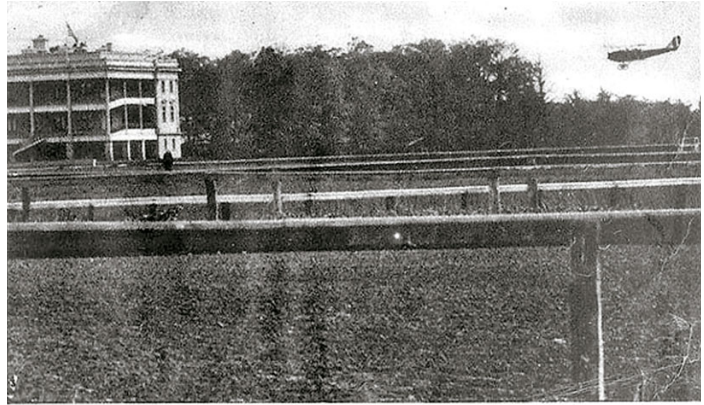
On day two of the new airmail service, Jenny 38262 was grounded for repairs in Washington, D.C. Lieutenants Edgerton and Boyle were also there with 38274, which Lieut. Edgerton had flown with the mail the previous day. Lieut. Webb was in Philadelphia with Jenny 38278. Lieutenants Bonsal and Culver were in New York with 37944, which Lieut. Culver had flown with the mail from Philadelphia to New York the previous day.

The two planes that were not flown in the 15 May relay—38275 and 38276—were presumably still at Hazelhurst or Belmont at the end of the first day. Lieut. Miller evidently flew one of the Jennys (probably 38275) from New York to Philadelphia before the afternoon of 16 May, but the exact time of his flight is not currently known.

Northbound Flight from Washington to New York via Philadelphia (16 May)—The undelivered Washington mail from Lieut. Boyle's crashed Jenny was carried on the second day of service, and both dates—15 and 16 May—are considered to be First Trip mail. In fact, the words "First Trip" were reinserted into the special datestamp with the 16 May date and used to postmark some of the mail.

The airmail letters deposited at the Washington, D.C., post office after 11:00 a.m. Wednesday, and up to and including 11:00 a.m. on Thursday (16 May), were postmarked and added to the mail brought back from Lieut. Boyle's wrecked Jenny 38262. Evidence that the 16 May 11:00 a.m. timestamped mail was flown on that day is a cover with a 16 May 4:30 p.m. receiving backstamp. All of this mail was flown north from Washington by Lieut. Edgerton on Jenny 38274.

Once again, misinformation and conflicts between sources make it difficult to provide a definitive statement concerning the number of pieces and total weight of the first airmail to reach New York from Washington on 16 May 1918. However, the northbound flight from Washington to New York via Philadelphia was successful, and the flight times reported are accurate.



Lieut. arriving at Belmont Race Track with a small bag of mail, because the Washington was on the plane Lieut. Boyle crashed

Image: © National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution (A-5388-A)



The New York Times (16 May) reported that Lieut. Boyle received “four sacks of mail” on Wednesday (15 May), including “three for New York and one for Philadelphia, weighing in all 150 pounds.” Other reports stated that Lieut. Boyle carried 140 lbs of mail on this unsuccessful trip.

The next day’s *Washington Herald* (17 May) reported that Lieut. Edgerton flew from Washington on 16 May carrying “7,360 pieces of mail for New York and 570 for Philadelphia” (total 7,930 pieces). According to the same article, “Of the New York mail 3,630 pieces were for delivery in New York City, and 3,739 for distribution in New York State and New England” (there is a slight discrepancy of nine pieces). This large load comprised the original mail received for the 15 May crash flight and the additional mail posted in Washington after 11:00 a.m. on 15 May, up to 11:00 a.m. on 16 May.

According to the *New York Times* report (17 May), Lieut. Edgerton took off from Washington-Potomac Park at approximately 11:35 a.m., but did not land at Philadelphia-Bustleton until 1:35 p.m. Lieut. Edgerton’s own report states that he took off at 11:25 a.m. and arrived at 1:33 p.m. The flight time of more than two hours was unusually long. The delay was attributed to Lieut. Edgerton’s approach at a high altitude of 8,000 feet, which caused him to fail to see the markers on the hangar at Bustleton Field. After overshooting the mark, he circled back and landed. The article noted that if he had landed on his first pass, Lieut. Edgerton would have made the trip in 1h40m (landing at 1:15 p.m.). The same article reported that the mailbags were quickly transferred to Lieut. Webb’s plane and in three minutes he took off for New York, at 1:38 p.m. The number of the Jenny that Lieut. Webb flew north on 16 May must be 38278, the plane located at Bustleton at the end of the first day of flights.

Lieut. Webb’s Jenny came into view at Belmont airfield at 2:55 p.m., and he landed at 2:58 p.m. According to *The New York Times* (17 May), he carried “118 pounds of mail from Washington and 5 pounds from Philadelphia, a total of 3,490 pieces,” but this conflicts with the *Washington Herald* report (17 May) that there were 7,369 pieces of mail bound for New York on board with Lieut. Edgerton when he left Washington.

Attempted Southbound Flight from New York to Philadelphia (16 May)—A serious crash landing marred the second day of airmail service on Thursday, 16 May. This time, it was the southbound plane from New York to Philadelphia, with Lieut. Bonsal at the controls.

The New York Times (17 May) commented that Lieut. Bonsal was flying a “new airplane.” The Pilot’s Daily Report left the number blank. However, evidence suggests that the plane Lieut. Bonsal crashed was number 38276. The photograph of the wrecked plane does not show the number clearly. However, it does show that there was only one pilot’s seat, with a mail compartment in place of the forward seat. The 1919 report by Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger lists 38276 with relatively low mileage and flying time (3,401 miles, 51h34m), which indicates the plane was out of use for a period of time.



Lieut. Bonsall’s crashed Jenny at Bridgeton, NJ, 16 May 1918

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

Based on a compilation of accounts, Lieut. Bonsal took off from Belmont at 11:29 a.m. with 17 lbs of mail (237 pieces). Lieut. Bonsal had been instructed not to fly below 5,000 feet for 40 minutes. Steering by compass in foggy conditions and running low on fuel at 85 mph, Lieut. Bonsal realized he should have been close to the airfield at Bustleton and was off course.

At approximately 1:10 p.m. he located a suitable landing field at the Bridgeton Fairgrounds Race Track at Bridgeton, N.J., about 150 miles south of New York and 40 miles south of Philadelphia. Lieut. Bonsall’s first attempt to land was thwarted by a herd of grazing horses. On his second attempt, the plane struck a fence. The propeller was smashed and one of the wings was badly damaged, but the pilot and mail were unharmed.

According to an article in the *Bridgeton Evening News* (18 May), Lieut. Bonsal "was badly shaken and nervous but was not injured except for a cut on his hand." The pilot was quoted as saying "he had used this machine but once before, having had a trial trip of about twenty minutes the night before" (source: njpostalhistory.org/media/archive/180-nov10njph.pdf).

George R. Elwell, a local rural mail carrier, drove Lieut. Bonsal and the mailbags to the post office. The mail was taken to Philadelphia on the 3:05 p.m. train, and later that evening the Jenny was trucked to Bustleton.

At 5:45 p.m. Lieut. Miller took off from Bustleton with the New York and Philadelphia mail for Washington, probably in 38275, which he would have flown south from New York (without mail) sometime earlier in the day. About 25 miles out, Lieut. Miller experienced engine trouble and turned his Jenny around. After Lieut. Miller's return to Bustleton at 6:30 p.m., Lieut. Edgerton volunteered to take the mail in Jenny 38274. He took off from Bustleton at 6:40 p.m., and he arrived at Washington, D.C., at 8:30 p.m.

Shown below is a rare cover carried from New York on the 16 May southbound flight that crashed at Bridgeton, N.J., and a mail facing slip that accompanied the letters from Philadelphia to Washington that were flown by Lieut. Edgerton on 16 May.



Cover flown 16 May 1918 on Jenny piloted by Lieut. Bonsall, which crashed at Bridgeton, NJ; the facing slip at left was on a bundle of mail flown from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, on the same day





Attempted Northbound Flight from Washington to Philadelphia (17 May)—The third day of airmail flights—Friday 17 May—presented Lieut. Boyle with another opportunity to fly the mail from Washington to Philadelphia, but again he veered off course in the same Jenny, number 38262, and crashed the plane before reaching Bustleton Field.

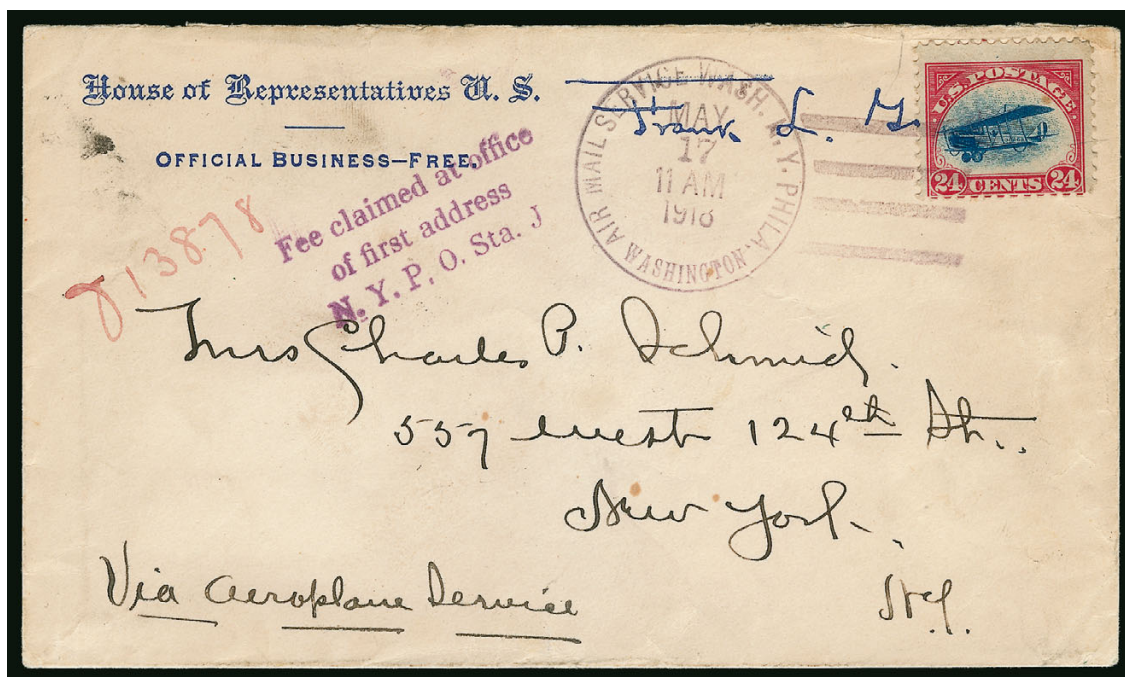
Lieut. Boyle took off in 38262 from Potomac Park Polo Field at 11:30 a.m., carrying 168 pieces of mail, with Lieut. Edgerton in 38274 flying as his escort for part of the flight, to ensure he was headed in the right direction. Lieut. Edgerton returned to Potomac Park Polo Field at 12:15 p.m. (according to the Pilot's Daily Report).

After reaching Baltimore at 7,000 feet, Lieut. Boyle signaled "O.K." to Lieut. Edgerton, who turned his plane around to return to Washington, confident that his fellow airman was "headed on [the] correct course." Once on his own, Lieut. Boyle somehow turned his plane south. He had been instructed to "keep the Chesapeake Bay on your right." He followed instructions, despite the fact that a southbound course could put Chesapeake Bay on his right. After flying down the Chesapeake Bay in the wrong direction, Lieut. Boyle saw his fuel supply was running low and landed at Cape Charles, Va., at the mouth of the river, about 125 miles south of Washington. This occurred at approximately 2:45 p.m. After refueling and determining his location, Lieut. Boyle took off and flew north. One report states that he departed Cape Charles around 4:15 p.m.

Bustleton Field lies approximately 200 miles from Cape Charles. As Lieut. Boyle approached—around 7:10 p.m., shortly before sunset at 8:07 p.m. that day—his plane was once again running out of gas. He decided to land on the golf course of the Philadelphia Country Club, located near the Schuylkill River, about 15 miles south of Bustleton. Upon landing, the plane struck an obstacle. Lieut. Boyle was thrown from the cockpit, but unharmed. Jenny 38262 suffered extensive damage to the two upper wings, the left lower wing, the landing gear, center section and various struts and wires. After repairs were made, 38262 returned to service on 10 July 1918.

After crashing, Lieut. Boyle quickly retrieved the mailbags from the wreckage, and one of the country club's members drove him to Bustleton Field. The mail was taken to the central post office and sent by train to New York. One of the 168 pieces of crash mail from the 17 May flight is shown below. The NYC post office applied its receiving datestamp with the day/time set to 18 May, 2:30 a.m.

At Maj. Fleet's request, Lieut. Boyle was relieved of duty in the Aerial Mail Service and reassigned to other duties in Washington, D.C. On 15 June 1918, one month after his first ill-fated flight, Lieut. Boyle married Margaret McChord, the daughter of Judge Charles C. McChord, chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission.



Cover carried on Lieut. Boyle's second attempted flight from Washington, DC, 17 May 1918—he crashed again

Northbound Flight from Philadelphia to New York (17 May)—On the morning of Friday, 17 May, Lieut. Webb flew one of the Jennys from New York to Philadelphia without any mail (probably in 37944), and Lieut. Culver carried the southbound mail in another Jenny (probably 38278). At a certain point in the early afternoon, Lieutenants Webb, Culver, Bonsal and Miller—four of the six pilots—were all gathered at Philadelphia-Bustleton, while Lieut. Boyle was lost in the air over Chesapeake Bay and Lieut. Edgerton was in Washington.

When Lieut. Boyle failed to arrive at Bustleton, Lieut. Webb was ordered to fly the Philadelphia mail (4.5 lbs) to New York. The plane number is not recorded. *The New York Times* (18 May) reported that Lieut. Bonsal, who was in Philadelphia after the previous day's crash, flew in Lieut. Webb's plane as a passenger, which must mean it was a two-seat Jenny trainer (possibly 37944). If this is correct, Lieut. Bonsal carried the light mail bag on or below the passenger seat.

Lieutenants Webb and Bonsal arrived at Belmont at 3:48 p.m., which points to a 2:30 p.m. departure time from Bustleton. The newspapers reported that the Washington mail had gone astray, and only the Philadelphia mail was brought to New York.

Southbound Flight from New York to Washington via Philadelphia (17 May)—While Lieut. Boyle was having his second round of troubles on Friday, 17 May, the southbound flights ran on schedule.

Lieut. Culver carried two bags of mail from New York, one for Philadelphia and a “through” bag for Washington, in Jenny 38278. He took off at 11:24 a.m. and landed at Bustleton around 12:45 p.m. The Washington “through” mail and another bag of mail from Philadelphia were quickly loaded onto another Jenny (38275) and flown by Lieut. Miller to Washington, where he arrived at 2:35 (or 2:40 p.m. by another account). He carried 210 lbs of the combined mail from New York and Philadelphia.

If the available reports are correct and have been analyzed accurately, at the end of the day, 17 May, Lieutenants Webb and Bonsal were in New York with one Jenny, number 37944. Lieutenants Culver and Boyle were in Philadelphia with a functioning Jenny, number 38278, and two damaged planes, 38276 (crashed by Lieut. Bonsal on 16 May) and 38262 (crashed by Lieut. Boyle on 17 May). In Washington, D.C., Lieutenants Miller and Edgerton were with numbers 38274 and 38275.

18 May Successful Flights—The next day of service, Saturday 18 May, was the first without any problems. Lieut. Bonsal flew a round-trip from New York to Philadelphia (11:23 a.m. departure, 12:38 p.m. arrival), then back to New York (1:45 p.m. departure, 2:52 p.m. arrival), bringing the mail from Washington and Philadelphia. He would have to have flown Jenny 37944, at least for the New York-to-Philadelphia leg of the trip, since that was the only plane in New York at the end of the day, 17 May. On the return trip from Philadelphia to New York, Lieut. Bonsal could have flown 38278, which was in Philadelphia.

There are conflicting reports about the Washington-Philadelphia relay. In advance of the flight, the *Washington Herald* (18 May) stated that Lieut. Edgerton would fly from Washington, and he was there at the end of the day, 17 May. However, *The New York Times* (19 May) reported that Lieut. Culver brought the mail from Washington to Philadelphia, and returned to Washington with the New York and Philadelphia mailbags.

If the *New York Times* report is correct, then Lieut. Culver must have flown Jenny 38278 from Philadelphia to Washington in advance of the Saturday morning northbound flight. On Friday (17 May) he brought the mail from New York to Philadelphia in the morning, and Lieut. Miller flew the Philadelphia-to-Washington leg. Based on other reports of pilots and planes being shuttled between the three airfields, it is possible that Lieut. Culver was in Washington on the morning of Saturday, 18 May, although it would seem unnecessary since Lieutenants Miller and Edgerton were there with two operational planes, and there was only one operational plane in Philadelphia and one in New York.

Further research based on the Pilot's Daily Report records might help sort out some of the confusion surrounding pilots' and planes' locations on 18 May.

15 May-15 June 1918—Performance During First Month

In an article published in *Flying* magazine (“Remarkable Record of One Month of Aero Mail Creates Demand for Extension,” Augustus Post, July 1918), the flight statistics for 15 May-15 June 1918 were tabulated. The columns headed “Percentage of performance” and containing arrival times at Washington and New York provide useful data to analyze the performance of airmail service during its first month of operation.



#	Date	Miles Flown	Hours Flying Time		% of Performance	Arrival Times	
			Hrs	M		Wash	NY
1	15-May	339	4	7	75%	2:50 PM	3:37 PM
2	16-May	500	6	53	75%	8:30 PM	2:58 PM
3	17-May	570	7	10	75%	2:35 PM	3:48 PM
4	18-May	450	6	40	100%	3:20 PM	2:52 PM
5	20-May	315	3	31	75%	6:46 PM	2:40 PM
6	21-May	270	4	22	50%	3:04 PM	4:45 PM
7	22-May	135	2	1	25%	6:30 PM	4:45 PM
8	23-May	450	5	27	100%	3:20 PM	2:25 PM
9	24-May	450	6	50	100%	3:30 PM	2:58 PM
10	25-May	450	9	8	100%	7:10 PM	2:34 PM
11	27-May	360	5	28	75%	4:00 PM	2:34 PM
12	28-May	450	5	59	100%	3:00 PM	2:32 PM
13	29-May	450	8	9	100%	5:00 PM	3:00 PM
—	30-May	No Trips	—	—	By train	6:30 PM	2:52 PM
14	31-May	135	2	31	25%	4:50 PM	4:45 PM
15	1-Jun	360	5	11	75%	4:55 PM	3:25 PM
16	3-Jun	405	5	41	75%	4:25 PM	2:45 PM
17	4-Jun	450	6	35	100%	3:20 PM	2:58 PM
18	5-Jun	450	5	58	100%	3:15 PM	2:28 PM
19	6-Jun	450	6	6	100%	4:15 PM	3:40 PM
20	7-Jun	270	4	11	50%	3:55 PM	2:45 PM
21	8-Jun	340	4	55	75%	9:15 PM	3:05 PM
22	10-Jun	450	6	31	100%	4:07 PM	2:35 PM
23	11-Jun	360	6	57	75%	3:45 PM	3:47 PM
24	12-Jun	450	7	46	100%	6:05 PM	3:12 PM
25	13-Jun	450	6	43	100%	3:22 PM	2:54 PM
26	14-Jun	450	6	46	100%	4:30 PM	2:23 PM
27	15-Jun	450	6	23	100%	3:10 PM	3:10 PM

The data from the *Flying* magazine report are summarized in the table above.

From 15 May through 15 June 1918, there were 28 days when airmail service was scheduled (excluding Sundays). No mail flights occurred on 30 May, according to this source, leaving 27 days on which airmail flights took place during the first month of service.

The “Percentage of Performance” column is based on the four legs of the northbound and southbound trips. For each leg completed, 25% is counted. **The 100% completed flight days are highlighted in green.**

About half of the 27 flights (14 total) were 100% complete for all four legs. One-third (9 total) were 75% complete, meaning one of the legs was not successfully flown; either the pilot was downed, there were mechanical problems, or the weather conditions did not permit flying. Two flights were only 50% complete (two legs flown), and two flights were only 25% complete (one leg flown).

The “Miles Flown” column can be correlated to the “Percentage of Performance” column to show which legs were successfully flown. The New York-Philadelphia leg was counted as 90 miles (both directions at 180 miles), and the Philadelphia-Washington leg was counted at 135 miles (both directions at 270 miles). Therefore, when the flights were 100% completed, the mileage totals 450. Since some of the flights involved flying off course, the mileage is higher for those flights, including the partly completed flights.

Looking at the arrival times, 59% of the southbound flights arrived more than one hour late in Washington, D.C. (16 total). Flying in the northbound direction, only 26% of the flights arrived more than one hour late in New York (7 total).

The weights of “airmail” and “ordinary” mail were provided in the *Flying* report, but the basis for this classification is not explained.

Production of The 24¢ 1918 Air Post Issue

With the arrangements and start-up date for the new airmail service in place, Postmaster General Burleson realized that he did not have authority to establish a special airmail postage rate, a power reserved for Congress. On 28 March 1918 Senator Sheppard introduced a bill (S. 4208) authorizing the postmaster general to charge 24¢ per ounce for mail carried by airplane.

The bill passed and was signed by President Wilson on 10 May 1918, just five days before the first flights were set to take off from Washington, D.C., and New York City. Nearly one week earlier, on 4 May 1918, engravers at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) had already started working on the new stamp.

The story of the first airmail stamp's design and production is also the story of the Inverted Jenny. While many facts are known, there remain several missing elements and uncertain answers to questions that were asked as soon as the Inverted Jenny was discovered on 14 May 1918.

4-10 May 1918—Design, Dies and Plates

The new 24¢ airmail stamp was valid for regular postage, and regular stamps were valid for the special airmail service. Accordingly, the new airmail stamp was labeled "U.S. Postage" without any reference to its purpose other than the symbolic image of an airplane. It was printed in two colors, red and blue, which together with the white paper background created a patriotic color theme during World War I. As late as 9 May 1918, just a few days before the stamps were to go on sale, postal officials had still not decided whether the frame would be in red and plane in blue, or vice versa.

All of the work on the new airmail stamp was performed by the BEP. In 1894, over the protests of the American Bank Note Co., the BEP had been given the responsibility to manufacture postage stamps for the USPOD. The BEP also had responsibility for producing tax stamps and other forms of government securities, including currency and war bonds.

In 1918 the chief postage stamp designer for the BEP was Clair Aubrey Huston (1858-1938), whose portfolio consisted of numerous iconic designs, beginning with the 1903 2¢ Washington "Shield" stamp and including the long-running 1908-1922 Washington-Franklin (Third Bureau) series. Huston had also been responsible for designing the 20¢ Parcel Post stamp with an airplane vignette; it was created in 1912 and issued on 1 January 1913, at a time when the USPOD was lobbying Congress to allocate funds for the development of airmail service.

The BEP official die production records provide details of the work performed to complete the two separate dies for the 24¢ stamp (numbers 663 and 664): the dates and times of the work performed, a general description of the work, the name of each contributing engraver, and the amount charged to the USPOD for the BEP's work (listed below). Images of the original cards are shown on the following page (provided by Joe R. Kirker).



The normal 24¢ 1918 Air Post Issue

Die 663 "24¢ Aeroplane Stamp Border 1918"

Date	Engraver	Time	Cost
4 May 1918	Hall, Edward M. "(No credit)"	6h15m	\$9.61
4 May	"Cleaning"—Schuyler	0h30m	.42
7 May	Weeks, Edward	16h15m	{ 47.29
8 May	ditto	14h30m	
	Weeks—Frame		
	Weeks—Lettering		
	Steel		.89
9 May	Clair A. Huston, Designer		.50
		Total	\$58.71

Die 664 "Center for 24¢ Aeroplane Stamp, Vignette—Aeroplane" "(From photo. taken by the Bureau of Engraving & Printing)"

Date	Engraver	Time	Cost
8 May 1918	Baldwin, Marcus W.	18h45m	\$45.72
9 May	Weeks, Edward	2h15m	4.46
	Baldwin—Vignette		
	Steel		.89
10 May	Clair A. Huston, Designer		.50
		Total	\$51.57



663 (A.Die) 24c Airplane Stamp Border 1918 2 x 3/4			
DATE	TIME	COST	
May 4 1918	6:15	9.61	Steel E.M. 4 1/2 (No credit)
May 7 1918	30	42	Schugler 1/2
May 7 1918	16:15	49.29	Weeks 7 1/2
May 8 1918	14:30		" 7 5/8
Weeks - Frame			
Weeks - Lettering and numerals			
MAY 9 1918		89	Steel
Clair G. Huston, designer			
Total, \$58.71			

664 (A.Die) Center for 24c Airplane Stamp, Vignette-Airplane 2 x 3/4			
DATE	TIME	COST	
May 8 1918	18	45	Baldwin 1 1/2
May 9 1918	2	15	" 6 1/2 1 1/2 7 1/2
Baldwin - Vignette			
MAY 10 1918		89	Steel
Clair G. Huston, designer			
Total, \$51.57			

BEP die production records for the 24¢ 1918 Air Post Issue (images provided by Joe R. Kirker)

There is no official record of the date Huston began designing the 24¢ airmail stamp. He might have started before 4 May 1918, when Edward M. Hall (1862-1939) began preparing the frame die (the earliest entry on the card for Die 663). It was definitely before 7 May 1918, when a reduced stamp-size photograph of Huston's design was submitted by James L. Wilmeth, the BEP director, to A. M. Dockery, the Third Assistant Postmaster General (the artist's model for approval has never been located). The rapid pace of production required an informal expedited approval process, and the USPOD immediately green-lighted the BEP's design.



Clair Aubrey Huston, senior designer at BEP, who created the 24¢

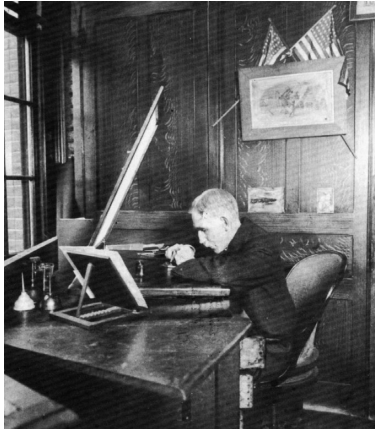
Edward Weeks (1866-1960) began engraving the frame and lettering on the day the design was submitted for approval, 7 May 1918. Weeks finished the following day, 8 May 1918, the same day that work on the vignette die was started by Marcus W. Baldwin (1853-1925). Baldwin finished on 9 May 1918, and, as will be shown, Weeks made a small but significant contribution to the vignette after Baldwin engraved the plane.



BEP engravers: Edward Hall (left), Marcus Baldwin (center), Edward Weeks (right)

Baldwin, Hall and Weeks are pictured in the group photograph of BEP engravers shown at left. Another photograph of Baldwin at work is shown on the opposite page. Baldwin was one of the BEP's most accomplished engravers. His iconic engraving, the "Western Cattle in Storm" vignette on the 1898 \$1 Trans-Mississippi (shown opposite), is considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of American stamp art. Baldwin was 65 years old when he engraved the Jenny vignette for the new 24¢ airmail stamp. Hall was 56, and Weeks was 52.

Marcus Baldwin at work—his finest stamp engraving was the vignette on the \$1 Trans-Mississippi Issue



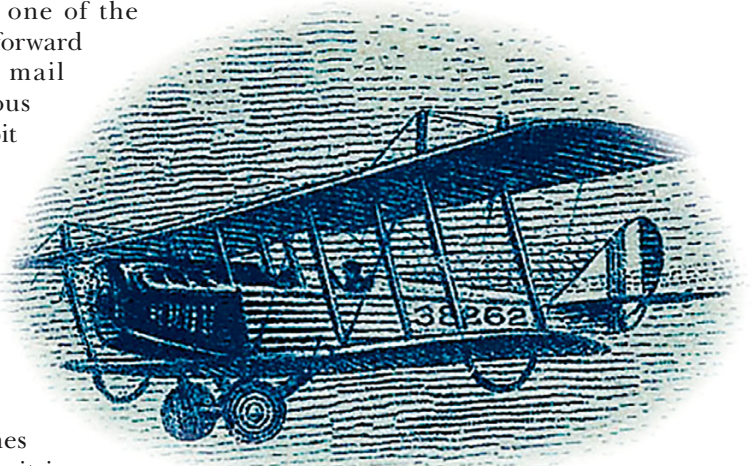
24¢ airmail stamp on cover signed or initialed by Huston, Baldwin and Weeks

The signatures or initials of Huston, Baldwin and Weeks appear on a cover mailed by W. B. Wells in Washington, D.C., to William H. Maple in New York City (shown above). Since Hall was never credited by the BEP for his work on the 24¢ stamp, his signature was not sought.

Chronology of Production—The BEP records state that the War Department furnished a photograph of the plane for use in designing and engraving the stamp. That photograph has never been located or identified.

The plane pictured on the stamp is not one of the modified JN-4HM mail planes, which had the forward student pilot's seat replaced by the mail compartment. With magnification, it is obvious that the plane has two seats: the forward cockpit is empty, and the pilot sits in the rear cockpit. Therefore, the photograph furnished by the War Department to the BEP was made from a standard JN-4 trainer, not one of the six planes specially manufactured for the airmail service.

One detail of the plane engraving that has intrigued philatelists is the serial number on the fuselage. Number 38262 is the actual number assigned to one of the six mail planes purchased from the Curtiss company. In fact, it is the number of the first plane flown out of Washington, D.C., on 15 May 1918.



The Jenny has two seats and "38262"

The question raised by this detail is how could the BEP designer and engravers incorporate number 38262 into the Jenny vignette before the planes were delivered to the U.S. Army's airmail service on 13 May 1918? How could they know the serial number of any of the six planes, let alone the first one to depart from Washington, D.C.?

Based on the BEP record of die production and the facts known about the manufacture and delivery of the mail planes, a plausible sequence of events can be reconstructed. A quick review of the facts will be helpful before presenting a timeline.

On 30 April 1918 Maj. Reuben H. Fleet reported that the planes ordered from Curtiss had been built and would be shipped to the U.S. Army's Hazelhurst aviation field near Mineola. A memorandum dated 8 May 1918 from Lieut. Col. R. M. Jones of the U.S. Army Equipment Division reported that the planes would be shipped on Sunday, 12 May 1918. The six unassembled Jennys were delivered in crates on Monday, 13 May 1918. The planes were numbered 37944, 38262, 38274, 38275, 38276 and 38278.



Assuming the stamp design submitted for approval on 7 May 1918 showed an airplane—*any* airplane—then Huston must have been given the photograph of a plane prior to that date. That is a safe assumption.

The plane in the engraving based on Huston's model was an unmodified U.S. Army JN-4 trainer, not one of the six airmail planes, so the photograph could have been taken at any of the locations where Jenny trainers were used.

The serial number 38262 would not have appeared on the unmodified trainer with two seats. Therefore, the BEP must have been informed of the number before the die was completed. That could have taken place after 30 April 1918, the date Maj. Fleet reported the planes had been built, and before the vignette die was finished. Huston's design model has never been reported or photographed, so we cannot know what number, if any, was on the plane in his original design.

However, it is possible to pinpoint the exact day the number was engraved on the plane, and identify the engraver responsible for doing it. That information might indicate when the BEP was informed that number 38262 was one of the airmail plane serial numbers.

According to the BEP records (the two cards shown previously), work preparing the frame die (Die 663) started on 4 May 1918. A total of 6 hours 45 minutes work was performed that day. The first entry (6h15m) records Edward M. Hall as the engraver, but he has never been given credit for the frame, and the words "No credit" actually appear in the record. The second entry on 4 May 1918 (30m) is for "cleaning" by another employee named Schuyler.

Hall was an accomplished engraver, who started working for the BEP in 1878 at the age of 16. Apparently, his only contribution to the creation of the 24¢ airmail stamp was to prepare the soft-metal die for the work that would be performed by Edward Weeks. Perhaps Hall started the engraving, using a frame design drawn by Huston.

The more important work in engraving the frame details and lettering was performed by Weeks on 7 and 8 May 1918. He worked 16h15m on the first day and 14h30m on the second day, for a total of 30h45m.

Marcus Baldwin started his work on the vignette (Die 664) on 8 May 1918. The BEP record shows just this date and a total of 18h45min. Baldwin's diary states that he worked from 12:00 noon until 10:00 p.m. on 8 May 1918 and "all day" on 9 May 1918. For a 65-year old man hunched over a block of steel, these were extraordinarily long work days.

A significant but heretofore overlooked entry in the BEP record is dated 9 May 1918, the day that Baldwin finished his work on the Jenny vignette. This entry identifies Weeks as the engraver, spending 2h15m on the vignette die.

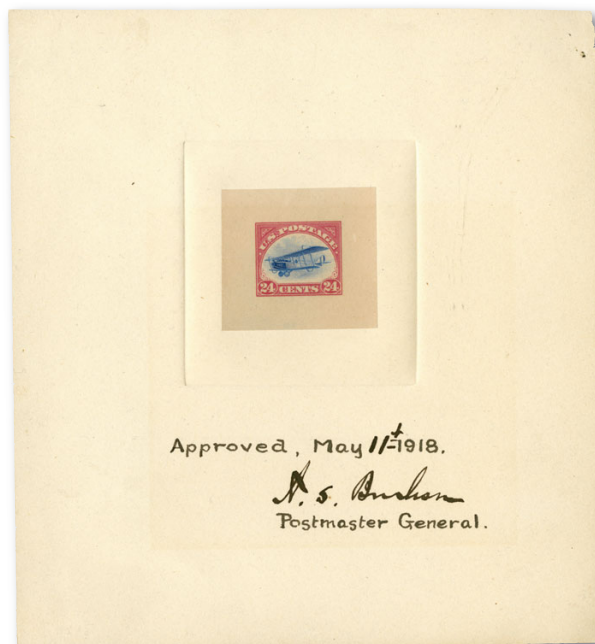
Baldwin's diary entry for 9 May 1918 states "Mr. Weeks did the lettering." This note has previously been misinterpreted by philatelists. Baldwin was not referring to the frame lettering; he was referring to the plane.

Baldwin has always been given full credit for the vignette engraving, and Weeks for the frame. However, the BEP entry for Weeks' 2h15m work on the vignette and Baldwin's diary notation, "Mr. Weeks did the lettering" are evidence that **the serial number was engraved by Weeks, not Baldwin, on 9 May 1918, after Baldwin finished his engraving of the plane.** This date might be the actual day a serial number from one of the six mail planes was reported to the BEP, immediately following Lieut. Col. Jones' 8 May 1918 memorandum that the planes were ready to be shipped.

Before Weeks engraved the number on the plane, the BEP did something significant to document the progress of the die engraving. When Baldwin finished engraving the vignette on 9 May 1918, three die proof impressions of the frame and vignette together were made. One of these, in blue and black, is shown at right. Significantly, this progressive die proof shows the Jenny without the serial number engraved on the fuselage.



Blue and black die proof made on 9 May 1918, showing the plane without the number 38262



Die proof in issued colors approved by PMG Burleson
Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

A letter dated 9 May 1918 from BEP director Wilmeth to Third Assistant Postmaster General Dockery enclosed “two proof impressions,” one with “blue background and red machine” and the other with “red background and blue machine.” The blue-and-black proof shown here was undoubtedly a third proof made at the same time, but not submitted for approval. This letter and the trial color proofs prove that the USPOD had still not chosen the final color scheme for the stamp on 9 May 1918, just days before the stamp’s issue date.

On 16 May 1918 the BEP sent two additional die proofs in the issued color combination to the Third Assistant Postmaster General’s office. Accompanying these proofs was a letter from Wilmeth to Dockery asking the USPOD to approve the final proof “as of date of May 11” (retroactively) and return it to the BEP. One of the proofs signed by Postmaster General Burleson and dated 11 May 1918 is shown at left. This proof has the serial number on the plane, unlike the blue-and-black proof made on 9 May 1918, before Weeks engraved the number.

The choice of 38262 for the stamp was most likely random and coincidental, since no one—not even the U.S. Army officials in charge of the mail service—ever said that 38262 was intended to be the plane to fly ceremoniously from Washington, D.C., on the first day. As explained in the History section, the last-minute assembly and positioning of the planes for the first flights was apparently done without concern for the serial numbers.

The two separate dies, once completed, had to be hardened for further use in manufacturing the plates. The frame die was the first to be hardened, on 9 May 1918, and the vignette die followed on 10 May 1918.

Making the Plates—In intaglio printing, the ink is held in recessed lines in the surface of the plate, and the printed image is transferred when the paper is forced against the plate under great pressure. This method of printing creates the slightly raised or embossed feel of the image or letters.

To produce a right-reading image on paper, a printing plate must have a mirror-image design. Therefore, if one were to examine the original 24¢ Jenny plates (vignette and frame), all of the designs would appear in mirror image. The plane would be flying to the right, and the letters and numbers would be reversed.

To create a plate of uniform subjects, an essential characteristic of high-quality security printing, a transfer roll is used to convey the original die design to each subject on the plate. The transfer roll is a cylindrical piece of steel, upon which a raised right-reading image of the design has been created from the mirror-image engraving on the die. When the transfer roll is rocked onto the plate under enormous pressure, it incises the design into the flat surface of the plate.

In simple terms, a hardened steel die produces the relief image on a softened steel transfer roll. The transfer roll is then hardened and applied to a softened steel plate. Finally, the plate is hardened to make it suitable for printing. The illustration at right shows the fundamental relationship between the transfer roll and plate subjects.

Two plates of 100 subjects (10 by 10) were used to print the 24¢ airmail stamp. Each plate number was engraved above one position in the top row. On a normal

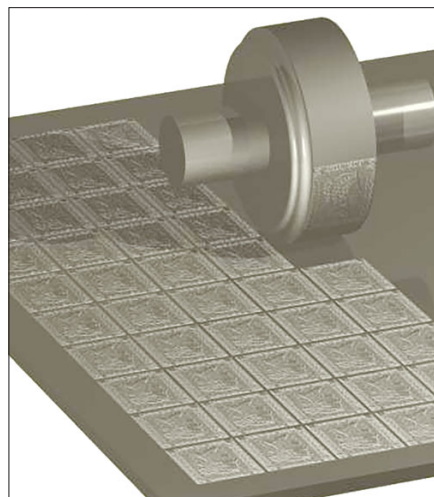


Illustration of transfer roll and plate



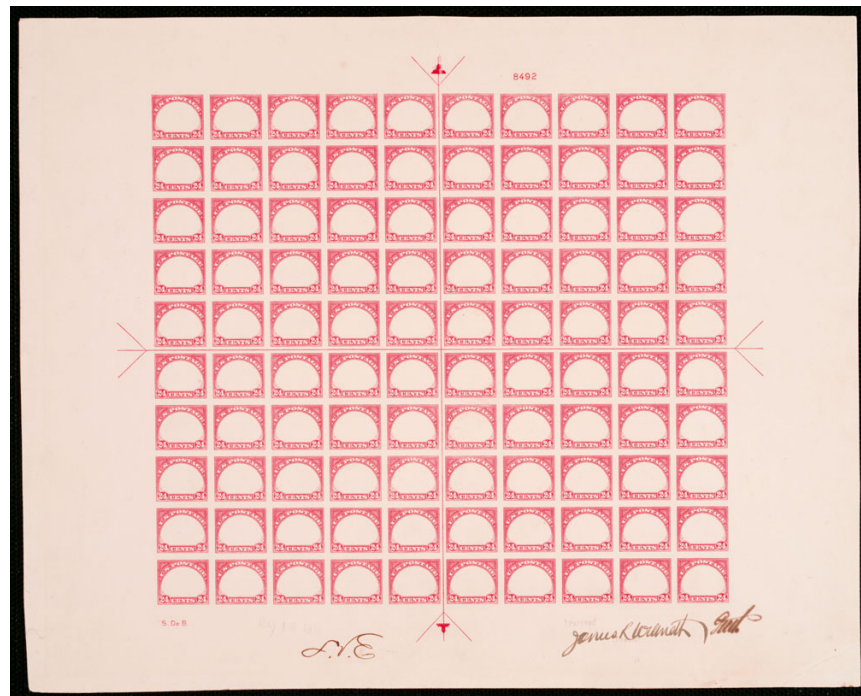
printed sheet with the top selvage intact, they are Position 4 (blue 8493—vignette) and Position 7 (red 8492—frame). On the Inverted Jenny sheet, the blue vignette plate number 8493 was printed in the margin below Position 97 in the bottom row.

The BEP craftsman responsible for transferring the design from the die to the plate via the transfer roll is known as a siderographer. The siderographer who made the 24¢ plates was Samuel De Binder, whose initials “S De B.” appear in red in the lower left corner of sheets produced before the BEP started trimming off the bottom margin. De Binder did not put his initials on the vignette plate.

Samuel De Binder, born in 1864, was 54 years old when he made the two plates for the first U.S. airmail stamp. He started working for the BEP in 1908 and made a total of 149 plates before retiring in 1929. His son Clyde also worked for the BEP as a plate finisher and siderographer. (Source: “Samuel and Clyde De Binder,” Rodney A. Juell and Doug D’Avino, *United States Specialist*, April 2005, digital version available at <http://www.usstamps.org>). According to an article by Clifford C. Cole (*The American Philatelist*, February 1982), De Binder used two separate three-subject transfer rolls—one with the vignette and the other with the frame—to make the two plates. The BEP records state that one transfer roll was made from the frame die and three rolls from the vignette die.

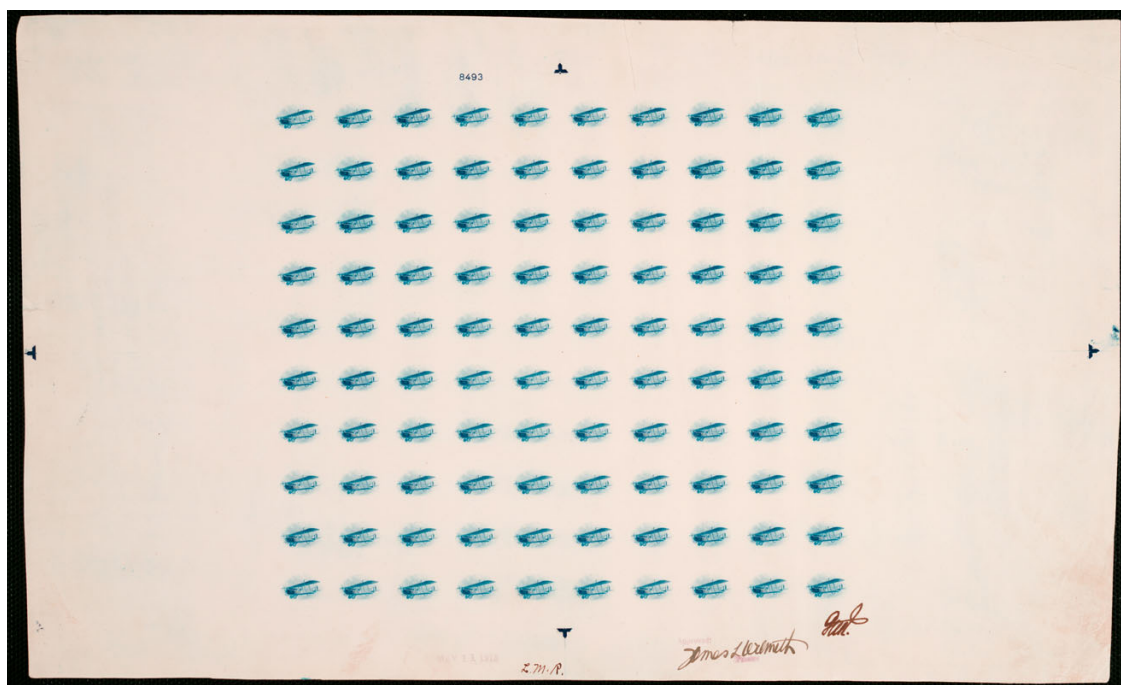
The process of applying pressure with levers and rocking the transfer roll over the plate with a hand wheel required considerable skill to achieve accuracy. The need for precision was even greater in making the two plates for bicolored printing, because the subjects on each plate had to be exactly aligned with each other, or the printed designs would be misaligned. To obtain proper alignment, De Binder made tiny dots on the vignette plate to space his entries at even intervals. The minute dots appear faintly on most of the stamps in a sheet. Another common practice was to use a plate subject as a guide for other relief entries by aligning one of the reliefs on the transfer roll with the recessed entry on the plate, then rocking the other two reliefs in their positions.

Despite De Binder’s skill and best efforts, there was still a slight variation that caused a shift in the alignment between the frames and the vignettes. On a perfectly aligned printed sheet, if the planes in the top row are centered within the frames, they begin to drift progressively downward toward the bottom of the sheet. The proof impressions from the frame and die plates, located at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum and shown here, confirm that the spacing was not precisely aligned between the two plates. This observation made from the proofs on card rules out the possibility that the misregistration found on printed sheets was caused by paper shrinkage during the printing process.



Proofs made from plates 8492 (red frame—above) and 8493 (blue vignette—on opposite page)

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum



De Binder engraved his initials "S. De B." at the lower right corner of the steel frame plate, which produced printed initials in the lower left corner of the sheet. The margin with De Binder's initials was left intact on sheets from the first few days of printing, but after the word "Top" was added to the plate(s) and the sheet-trimming process was modified, his initials no longer appeared on sheets. Since the Inverted Jenny sheet comes from the early production and original trimming format, the "S De B." initials are present on the unique Inverted Jenny corner-margin block of four (shown at right).

In addition to plate numbers and his initials, De Binder created guide lines on the frame plate. These vertical and horizontal guide lines divide the sheet into quarters and have arrow-shaped ends that appear in the selvage. The lines were printed in red between the fifth and sixth vertical columns, and between the fifth and sixth horizontal rows, creating crossed lines at the center, which produced the unique Inverted Jenny centerline block of four (shown below).



Unique corner-margin Inverted Jenny block with "S. De B."



Unique centerline block of Inverted Jenny

The frame plate also has small registration markers at the top and bottom. The same markers were put on the vignette plate at top and bottom, and they were used to check the alignment of the impressions (the alignment is correct when they precisely overlap).

On the vignette plate there are additional registration markers at the sides, a few inches from the stamp subjects. These were not meant to be printed, but were used by the printer's assistant to align a sheet of paper with the printed frame impression with the vignette plate for the second impression.



10-12 May 1918—Printing

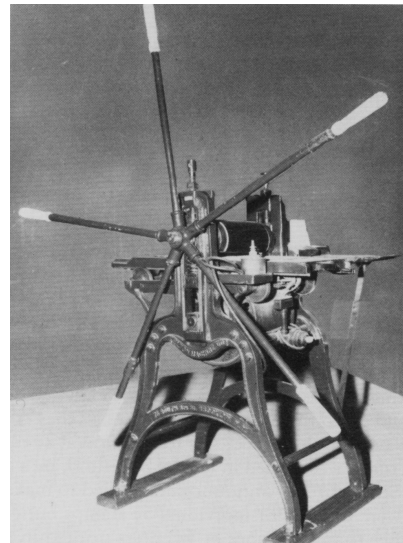
Despite the Inverted Jenny stamp's fame and the attention paid to it at the time of issue, right from the beginning there has been misinformation, misunderstanding and disagreement about how the error occurred.

The potential for a printing error was anticipated as soon as the USPOD announced that the first airmail stamp would be bicolored. The Inverted Jenny's discoverer, William T. Robey, was familiar with the inverts that occurred during production of the bicolored 1901 Pan-American Issue. Before 14 May 1918, Robey wrote to a fellow collector, expressing hope that he might find inverts at the post office when he bought the new airmail stamp.

To determine the most plausible scenario for how the Inverted Jenny occurred, a quick overview of the printing process will be helpful.

Printing Method—Intaglio printing on a hand-operated press is extremely labor intensive. Printing each sheet involves multiple steps, enumerated below, and these steps must be repeated for bicolored printing, with extra attention required to ensure precise alignment of the two impressions.

Because the BEP was under enormous pressure to print large quantities of wartime tax stamps, bonds and other securities, the bicolored airmail stamps were printed on an old Spider Press, so named because the hand-operated turning wheel has long handles that resemble the legs of a spider. A photograph of a Spider Press is shown here, and additional information about its operation may be found on the Smithsonian National Postal Museum website (<http://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/spider-press.html>).



BEP Spider Press

The steps involved in printing one sheet are as follows:

- Remove the plate from the press bed and warm it to allow the ink to spread more evenly
- Apply ink to the plate and wipe the non-printing surface clean
- Return the plate to the press bed
- Dampen the paper and carefully position the sheet on the press (this is done by the printer's assistant, whose hands are kept clean)
- Apply mechanical pressure to create the impression
- After the impression is made, remove the sheet from the press and stack it for inspection and additional production steps.

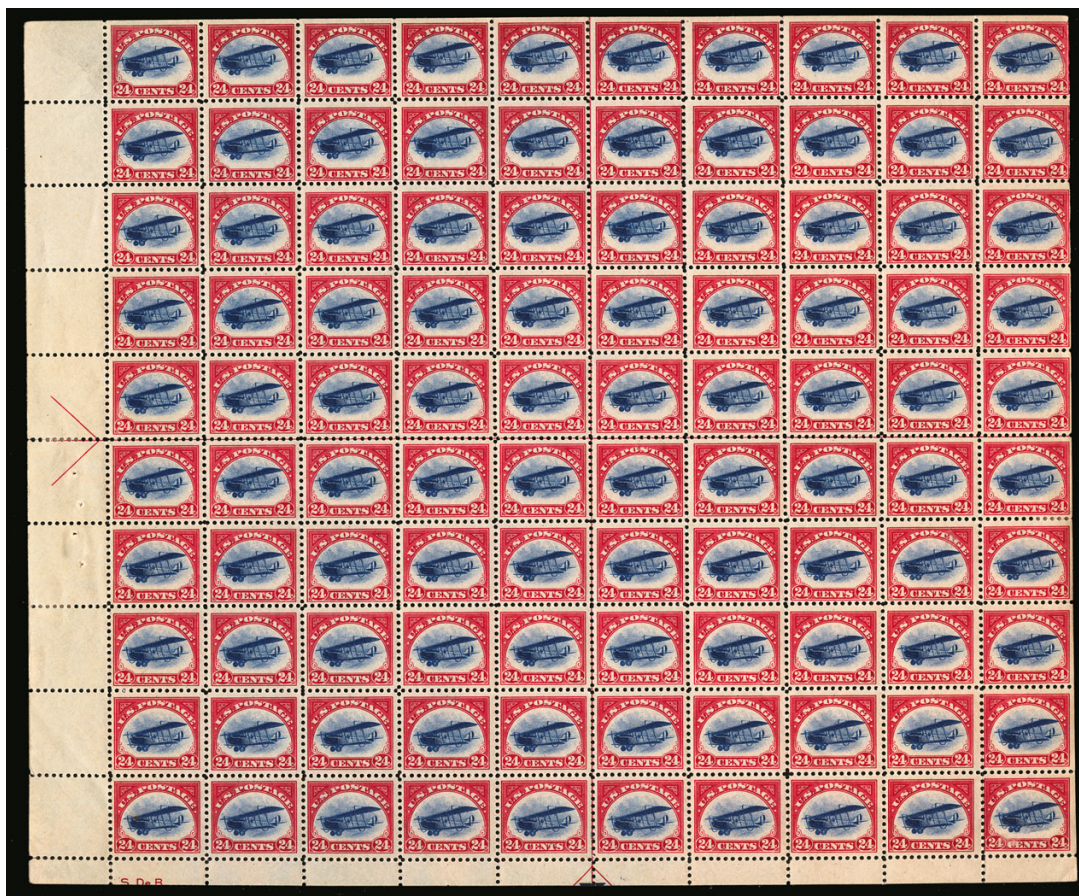
Trimming—At this point it will be helpful to repeat that the printed sheets of the 24¢ airmail stamp were originally trimmed at the top and right, cutting off the plate numbers at the top and the guide arrow at the right (as shown in the photograph on opposite page). This was done to make the sheets fit into post office drawers. It was accomplished by substituting a cutting knife for one of the perforating wheels on the perforating machine. As the sheet was perforated, the cutting wheel trimmed off the excess margin.

A tiny telltale characteristic of the perforating mechanism used to perforate and trim the 24¢ sheets is a single missing pin in the fourth vertical line of perforations. This defect appears as a



Positions 63 and 64 with blind perforation

“blind” (missing) perforation between the third and fourth columns of stamps (its position from top to bottom varies). It is found on Positions 63 and 64 from the Inverted Jenny sheet (shown here). On some sheets, it is transposed and appears between the seventh and eighth columns, indicating a 180-degree change in orientation of the printed sheet and perforating wheels. The missing perforation was apparently repaired at a later point, since it is not present on some sheets.



Trimming format of early sheets—straight edge at top and right, selvage at bottom (note blind perforation in 5th row)

The intact sheet selvage on early-production sheets has the guide arrows at the left and bottom, and the siderographer's initials at the bottom left, but no plate numbers. This trimming characteristic of early-production sheets is a factor in determining how the error might have occurred.

The straight edges at the top and right of early-production sheets are typical of panes of 100 stamps from 400-stamp sheets. For this reason, when the Inverted Jenny error was discovered, it was assumed that the sheet came from a 400-subject plate on one of the BEP's regular presses. Philatelists at the time widely assumed that three other panes of Inverted Jenny errors, cut from the same sheet, were lurking in post offices.

Inversion Error—Given the steps and handling necessary to print a sheet of bicolored stamps on the hand-operated Spider Press, is it possible to determine who made the mistake and how it happened? Unfortunately, not with certainty.

The order of printing was frame first, then vignette. Therefore, sheets with freshly-printed frames would be stacked by the printer's assistant, checked for defects, counted and returned to the press for the second run of vignette impressions.

Because the frames were printed first, there has never been any doubt that the Inverted Jenny stamps are "center inverted" errors, not "frame inverted." However, did the inversion occur because the sheet of paper was turned around 180 degrees? Or, after the vignette plate was removed, warmed and inked, did the plate printer put it back in a 180-degree rotated position?

Official reports and philatelists in general have leaned toward the inverted paper theory, but certain aspects of production actually tip the scale in favor of the inverted plate theory.

Since the sheets were checked after the first pass on the frame plate, the stack of sheets with frame impressions should have been in order and consistently orientated. The printer's assistant had to remove each sheet, dampen it for printing, and carefully position it on the plate, using the two wide-set guides for visual alignment. After the printer made the impression, the sheet would be removed and stacked for drying, pressing and gumming.



In the inverted sheet scenario, the printer's assistant—the only one with clean hands who handled the actual paper—would have to rotate the sheet 180 degrees before it was placed on the plate. Then, the same sheet would have to be rotated 180 degrees again before perforating and trimming. Unless the invert sheet was rotated a second time, the straight edges would be at the bottom and left, rather than the top and right (looking at the sheet with the red frame upright).

The missing perforation found between the third and fourth columns (Positions 63 and 64) of the Inverted Jenny sheet is further evidence that the sheet's orientation was consistent with others with the straight edges at top and right.

Therefore, if one accepts the inverted sheet theory, then the Inverted Jenny sheet sold to Robey was rotated 180 degrees *twice*: once before the blue vignette printing, and again before the perforating and trimming process (gum was applied between printing/drying/pressing and perforating/trimming).

On the other hand, the inverted plate theory eliminates the need for a double-rotation of the paper. In this scenario, after the vignette plate had been removed from the press, warmed, inked and wiped, the plate printer put it back on the press rotated 180 degrees from its normal orientation. While this seems an unlikely mistake for a skilled BEP printer to make, there are a few factors that weigh in favor of a plate rotation error.

First, the design of the plane vignette does not have a clearly defined top and bottom in its shape and appearance. In fact, in 1918 very few people had even seen an actual airplane, so its appearance was unfamiliar. Obviously, the printed Inverted Jenny sheet escaped detection during the handling and inspection steps that followed the printing error. Therefore, it is conceivable that a plate printer, looking at a steel printing plate on the press bed, would not instinctively notice the inverted orientation of the planes.

Second, the plate itself did not have any distinguishing marks to indicate top or bottom, other than the small plate number at the top. Due to their symmetry, the registration markers at top and bottom and wide-set markers at the sides would not provide a visual cue. As far as anyone knows or has reported, the plate did not have notches or another structural feature that would prevent placement on the press bed with a 180-degree rotation.

If, in fact, the sheet of paper remained correctly orientated throughout the entire process, then the invert sheet Robey purchased was the result of the plate printer's mistake, and it escaped detection during the inspection process and handling further down the production line.

Printings—Another technical matter that generates some controversy among philatelic specialists is the division of 1918 24¢ airmail stamp production into first, second and third printings. The three-printings concept evolved from the plate alterations, but no records have been found to support the division of production into three separate printings. Some argue that the three-printings concept distorts the events as they actually unfolded. Therefore, rather than dwell on how *many* printings there were, an explanation of what makes the stamps produced *different* is more helpful.

There is no argument over the dates and characteristics of the earliest sheets printed and issued. According to BEP records, the frame plate 8492 was put on the press on Friday, 10 May 1918. At this point, the frame plate had only a plate number at the top (above Position 7 on the printed sheet) and the "S De B." initials at bottom left.

A supply of sheets with red frame impressions—the exact number is not known—was ready for the second run on Saturday, 11 May 1918, at 4:00 p.m., when the vignette plate 8493 was put on the press (source: Amick, *JENNY!*, page 28). The vignette plate had only the plate number (above Position 4).

It is not known if BEP employees worked on Sunday, 12 May 1918, but by Monday, 13 May 1918, a supply of fully gummed and perforated sheets is reported to have reached the main post office in Washington, D.C.

[Even on this point, philatelists disagree. Some claim that no stamps were available on Monday, 13 May 1918, and that the true first day of sale was Tuesday, 14 May 1918, when the stamps went on sale in the three principal airmail route cities: Washington, Philadelphia and New York. That is the day Robey bought the Inverted Jenny sheet at the New York Avenue office in Washington, D.C.]

The discovery of the invert error on 14 May 1918 was immediately reported to postal officials on the same day. The next day, 15 May 1918, as the inaugural flights were taking off, the BEP took its first step toward preventing the same mistake from reoccurring. To facilitate inspection and make it easier to spot a sheet with the vignette printed upside down, the word "Top" was added to the vignette plate 8493 above Position 3. The trimming procedure was also changed to leave the top selvage and plate imprints intact.



Printed from frame plate without "Top" and vignette plate with "Top"—this type of imprint is known as Blue Top Only

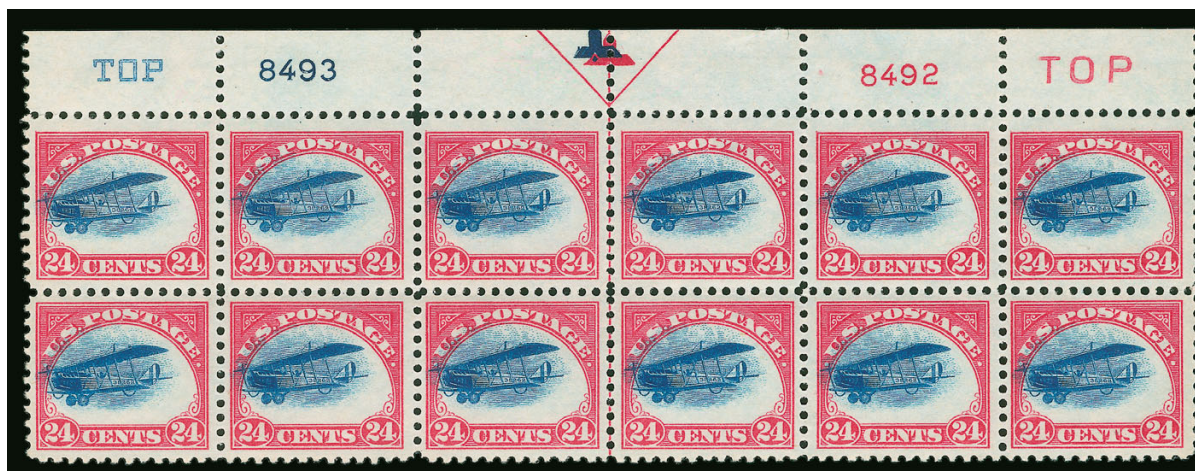
Sheets printed from the modified vignette plate in combination with impressions from the unmodified frame plate have just the blue "Top" and are known to collectors as "Blue Top Only" plate imprints. A Blue Top Only imprint is shown above.

All of the Blue Top Only sheets have the top selvage intact and a straight edge at bottom. The majority of Blue Top Only sheets or multiples have a straight edge at the left and arrow margin at the right, and the blind perforation is between the seventh and eighth columns, which is the opposite of the first trimming format. This indicates a 180-degree change in orientation between the sheet and the perforation.

However, sometime during production of the Blue Top Only sheets, another 180-degree change in orientation must have occurred. On some Blue Top Only sheets and plate blocks, the straight edge at the side is on the right, not the left, as it was on the first sheets produced. The missing perforation also moves from the seventh/eighth columns to the third/fourth columns (again, as it was on the first sheet produced). The Double Top sheets always have the arrow on the left and straight edge on the right.

The next plate alteration was the addition of the word "Top" to the frame plate 8492 above Position 8. Interestingly, the fonts used for the frame and vignette plates are not the same, which suggests they were done at different times by different BEP employees.

When sheets printed from the modified frame plate were placed on the press with the modified vignette plate, the "Double Top" sheets were produced. The vast majority of 24¢ sheets were the Double Top imprint variety. They are consistently trimmed with the straight edge at right and arrow at left. Some have the blind perforation hole, and some do not.



Printed from vignette and frame plates with "Top"—this is a Double Top imprint



Returning to the debate about multiple printings, some specialists classify the three types of sheets as first, second and third printings. This classification implies that the supply of sheets without the “Top” came from a printing that had a beginning and end. Then, the vignette plate was modified by adding the word “Top,” and a second printing occurred with a start and finish. Finally, the frame plate was modified by adding “Top,” and a third printing took place. Three versions, three printings.

Other specialists have challenged this classification and chronology. They say the more likely scenario is that a supply of frame sheets was printed on the first two days of production, 10 May and the morning of 11 May. At 350 sheets per day, the total number of frame sheets without the “Top” imprint would be less than 700. Then, on 11 May at 4:00 p.m., the BEP started printing sheets from the vignette plate. By 12 or 13 May, a small supply of bicolored sheets printed from the unmodified plates—no more than a few hundred—was gummed, perforated and packed for distribution, reaching all three cities for sale on 14 May (and possibly one day earlier at the Washington, D.C., main post office). Included among these early-production sheets was the Inverted Jenny sheet Robey purchased on 14 May 1918.

In this scenario, when the BEP halted production, a stack of sheets with frame impressions only, without the red “Top,” was still awaiting the second stage of printing. Once the vignette plate was modified on 15 May 1918 with the addition of the word “Top,” the frame sheets without the word “Top” were put on the press.

It seems logical that the BEP, rather than discard valuable and needed product, simply used up the existing supply of frame sheets. Even if they knew the word “Top” would be added to the frame plate before more sheets were printed, they would still use the previously-printed sheets.

Finally, when the supply of frame sheets (without “Top”) was exhausted, the modified frame plate with “Top” was put back on the press, and the next group of sheets produced had the Double Top imprint.

The 24¢ Air Post stamp was current for only two months before the airmail rate was lowered to 16¢ and a new stamp was issued in July 1918. In total, 2,198,600 stamps were printed, and 2,134,988 were distributed. A director of the BEP reported to Philip H. Ward, a Philadelphia stamp dealer, that eight other invert error sheets were detected and destroyed. Only one out of approximately 22,000 sheets ever reached the public.

13-14 May 1918—Sale Days

The philosophical thought experiment — *If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make noise?* — has a philatelic corollary.

If the 24¢ airmail stamps went on sale at the main post office in Washington, D.C., on Monday, 13 May 1918, but no one knew about it in advance or bought them, is that day the true first day of sale?

Specialists have engaged in vigorous debates over which day the stamps actually went on sale — 13 or 14 May 1918 — and in the absence of a preponderance of evidence to support one position or the other, it becomes a matter of interpretation and conjecture. The irony of the “first day” debate is that once the 13 May 1918 date was introduced into the historical record, the total absence of 24¢ Air Post covers postmarked on that day was remedied by forgers who produced covers and cards with the coveted 13 May 1918 postal markings. (To simplify the narrative, any general reference to the covers and cards will identify them as “covers.”)

Some of these fake First Day covers were accepted into the collecting community, and a few even received certificates attesting to their genuineness from well-respected expert committees. At least one major collection still contains a 13 May 1918 card, along with the 6¢ and 16¢ first day covers. These items have excellent provenance (ex Philip Silver) and certificates from The Philatelic Foundation, but unfortunately they have been denounced as fakes by the leading researchers in the field (Joe R. Kirker and Ken Lawrence). It seems unlikely they will be authenticated again.

In fact, not one genuine 13 May 1918 cover with the 24¢ Air Post stamp is known. Further, some specialists question whether any of the stamps were actually sold on that day. If any of the stamps were sold on Monday, they could only have been bought at the main post office in Washington, D.C. It was not until Tuesday, 14 May, that the stamps went on sale at other post offices in the District of Columbia and in the two other principal airmail route cities, Philadelphia and New York.

The USPOD put the stamps on sale one day ahead of the scheduled first flights, so that the public could buy them and prepare covers for mailing on 15 May 1918. Most of the covers carried



24¢ used on the first day of sale in Philadelphia, 14 May 1918, and carried on first flight the next day

Image: Don David Price

on the 1918 airmail flights only have the special datestamp and bars cancellation, which was struck from a single “duplex” device. This marking was made for use in the three cities by customizing the devices with the names of Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York. An example of this special airmail datestamp with the “First Trip” designation is shown above on a cover that was first postmarked at the Philadelphia Station C post office on 14 May 1918. This is a First Day of Sale cover—the first day the stamps went on sale in Philadelphia—and it is probably the earliest date that will ever be found.

Another cover with the special airmail datestamp is shown below. It has the Philadelphia “First Trip” datestamp and a privately-produced label found only on covers originating in Philadelphia. The cover is self-addressed by Percy McGraw Mann, who was involved in the sale of Robey’s sheet.



24¢ used from Philadelphia on 15 May 1918 first flight cover to New York City with private “Special Aero Mail” label

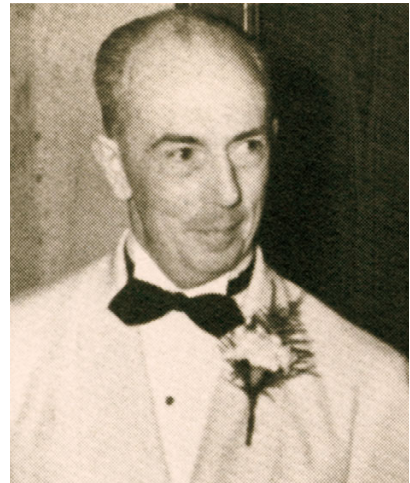


Discovery of The Inverted Jenny

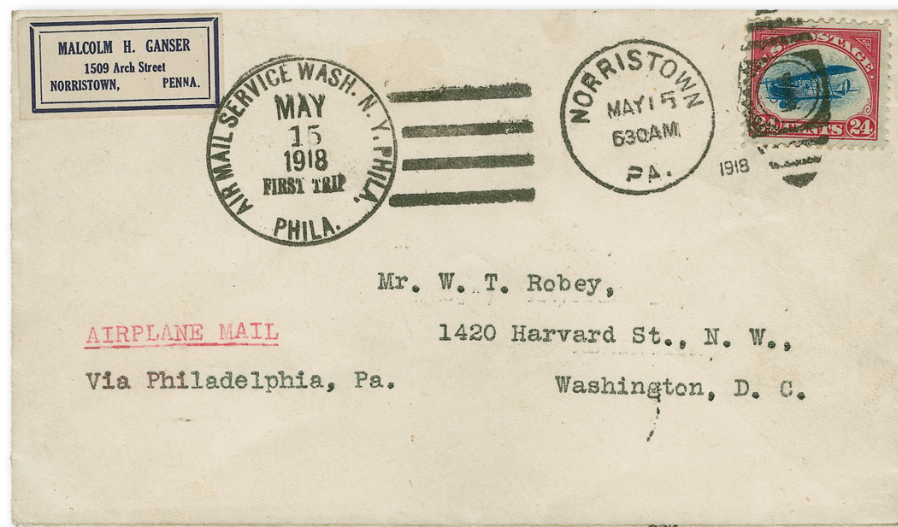
Before 14 May 1918—Robey's Hunch

On 10 May 1918, just days before the new airmail stamps were put on sale, William T. Robey (circa 1889-1949), a stamp collector and employee of the Washington, D.C., brokerage firm W. B. Hibbs and Company, wrote to his friend and fellow collector, Malcolm H. Ganser. Robey had read the USPOD announcement of the new airmail issue and presciently gave Ganser the heads up: "It might interest you to know that there are two parts to the design, one an insert into the other, like the Pan-American issues. I think it would pay to be on the lookout for inverts on account of this."

On 14 May Ganser bought some of the new airmail stamps in Philadelphia, but they were all correctly printed. He used one on a cover addressed to Robey, which was postmarked early in the morning on 15 May at the Ganser's hometown post office in Norristown, Pa., then carried on the inaugural southbound flight from Philadelphia (shown below). By the time the plane took off in the afternoon of 15 May, Ganser already knew of his friend Robey's great discovery.



William T. Robey, discoverer of the Inverted Jenny, in a family photograph taken in 1940 at his daughter's wedding



24¢ used on a cover from Ganser to Robey, flown on 15 May from Philadelphia to Washington, DC

Image: Joe R. Kirker

While Robey sat in his office on Friday, 10 May, dreaming about the possibility of finding an invert at the post office, the vignette plate was already on the press several blocks south at the Bureau of Engraving & Printing. Over the weekend and on Monday, 13 May, sheets were being printed, gummed, perforated and trimmed. Among those sheets from the first few of days of production was the object of Robey's dreams, the Inverted Jenny.

14 May 1918—Fate and Fortune

Robey's employer, the brokerage firm of Hibbs and Company, was located at 725 15th Street N.W. in downtown Washington, D.C. (now called the Folger Building). The New York Avenue branch post office was located just a few minutes away on foot, at 1317 New York Avenue. Early in the morning of Tuesday, 14 May, Robey walked to the post office with \$30 he had withdrawn from his account. There are conflicting accounts from Robey about what happened that day, but the most plausible recollection is that he was dissatisfied with the centering of the few sheets the clerk had available in the morning, and, after being told a fresh supply was expected, he returned at noon.



Contemporary photograph of the New York Avenue branch post office in Washington DC, where Robey purchased the Inverted Jenny sheet—from *Ward's Philatelic News*, March 1931, with a note by Philip H. Ward that Robey himself took the photo "at our request."

As Robey recounted in 1938 in an article he wrote for the *Weekly Philatelic Gossip*, the same clerk was on duty when Robey returned at noon. When asked if new sheets had arrived, the clerk reached down under the counter and offered a full sheet. Robey immediately recognized that the planes were flying upside down. He described his feelings at that moment: "my heart stood still... it was the thrill that comes once in a lifetime."

Robey promptly paid \$24 for the sheet without disclosing the error. He asked if the clerk had any more and was shown three other sheets, all normal. At that point Robey revealed the upside-down airplane errors to the clerk, who urgently left his window to make a telephone call. Concerned that his sheet might be confiscated, Robey left and walked to the Eleventh Street branch office to see if any other errors might be there. He found none and then returned to the Hibbs office to tell his co-workers and notify collector friends and dealers of his discovery.

Robey sent telegrams to a few collectors and dealers in New York and Philadelphia, alerting them that he had discovered an invert error and, for whatever reason, giving them the plate number that was visible on the bottom of the sheet (the top was trimmed).

By 4:00 p.m. on 14 May, sales of the airmail stamps were stopped by postal officials. For the next two hours, clerks inspected the supply for additional error sheets. Sales resumed at 6:00 p.m.

Although Robey had never disclosed his name or address to any of the postal clerks, a co-worker at Hibbs revealed it that afternoon while searching for more errors at one of the branch post offices. According to Robey, on the day he bought the sheet he was visited at his office by two postal inspectors, who attempted to confiscate it. Their efforts were rebuffed by Robey, who stated that he had purchased the sheet for face value at the post office and had as much right to ownership as anyone who had ever purchased other stamp errors over the counter. Frustrated and indignant at Robey's refusal to comply with their demands, the two inspectors left.

14-19 May 1918—Dealer to Dealer

Robey was in his 20s when he bought the Inverted Jenny sheet. He and his wife of five years, Caroline, had an infant daughter and lived in a modest apartment. Although Hibbs and Company paid him a decent salary for his position as an auditing clerk, the prospect of making thousands of dollars on the resale of his Inverted Jenny sheet had life-changing implications. The day Robey bought the sheet, he began soliciting offers from the dealers he knew.

His first call was to Hamilton F. Colman, a Washington, D.C., dealer of some renown. Colman was not in the office when Robey called, and his assistant, Catherine L. Manning, listened incredulously as Robey described his new find. Manning went on to become the first woman outside the sciences to achieve the position of Assistant Curator at the Smithsonian and helped care for the national stamp collection for nearly 30 years, from 1922 to 1951. After learning about the discovery, Colman stopped by Robey's office later in the day, examined the sheet, and made a token \$500 offer for it, which was briskly rejected. After work, Robey met Colman at his office, where a small group had gathered, including Mrs. Manning. Among those present was Joseph B. Leavy, who had been a stamp dealer in New York City before the turn of the century and was, at the time of the meeting, the first "Government Philatelist" in charge of the national stamp collection. Leavy was intimately familiar with the USPOD and BEP operations, and he published frequent reports about new issues and production methods.

The first airmail issue was produced so quickly that Leavy never had time to learn about the production details in advance. Unaware that the stamps had been printed on the Spider Press from a plate of 100 subjects, Leavy observed the straight edges at the top and right of the Inverted Jenny sheet and assumed they were just like those on the quarter-section panes from sheets of 400. Leavy



told the group that three other panes of 100 from a sheet of 400 had to be in circulation. Robey recollected this comment in his 1938 account, and it must have concerned him at the time.

Once Robey notified others about his discovery, dealers and collectors went on the hunt for more invert sheets. The two-hour stoppage of sales from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on 14 May meant that no one in the three cities where the stamps were available could buy them until postal clerks had time to check for errors. By the time sales resumed, the chances of finding an invert sheet were almost nil. The next day, 15 May, the BEP implemented the “Top” imprint strategy to prevent more errors from evading detection. If Robey had known that the small supply of 24¢ sheets in post offices had been thoroughly examined and that more errors were unlikely after the BEP changed the imprints, he might have been more confident that he possessed the only errors. However, most collectors were familiar with market decline that occurred after the 5c Red error (Scott 467 and 505) was discovered a year earlier. As more sheets containing the 5¢ error were found, the price dropped drastically. Leavy’s comment that 300 more Inverted Jenny stamps were waiting to be discovered must have given Robey a greater sense of urgency to sell while the selling was good.

The night of 14 May, Robey nervously walked the streets with his paper fortune in his briefcase. Concerned by the postal inspectors’ aggressive posturing, Robey’s employer refused to allow him to use the company safe to store the stamps overnight. When he finally returned home late in the evening, he and his wife fretted over keeping the stamps in their apartment.

On Wednesday, 15 May, the day of the first airmail flights, Robey mailed a letter to Elliott Perry, a prominent dealer who represented several major collectors in buying and selling. The letter was sent by regular mail early in the morning, and, in an era when a letter could actually travel from Washington, D.C., to Westfield, N.J., in one day, the mail carrier delivered Robey’s letter to Perry at 6:00 p.m. Later in the evening, after attending a dinner party, Perry called Robey and tried to secure the right of first refusal. Whether Robey actually agreed or not is uncertain, but Perry’s letter to Robey with a dollar silver certificate to confirm the agreement was promptly returned.

At the same time Robey reached out to Perry, he contacted Percy Mann, the Philadelphia dealer who used the “Special Aero Mail” labels found on early flight covers. Mann responded on Wednesday, 15 May, asking if he could meet with Robey and examine the sheet. After seeing the intact sheet, Mann offered \$10,000, but Robey turned him down, explaining that he still wished to go to New York to obtain offers. Mann asked for the opportunity to bid higher if his offer was equaled or topped, and Robey agreed. On Friday afternoon, after a day’s work, Robey boarded the northbound train and arrived in New York around 9:00 p.m. He was greeted at the Hotel McAlpin by Percy Doane and Elliott Perry, who had arranged to meet Robey and examine the sheet. The two dealers asked Robey if he had received any offers, and Robey informed them that he had turned down \$10,000. Robey went to sleep that night with a plan to find a buyer the next day.

On Saturday morning, 18 May, Robey walked down to 111 Broadway to pay a visit on Colonel Edward H. R. Green at the colonel’s office. The receptionist informed Robey that Colonel Green was away for a few days, so Robey left, not realizing that the person he had hoped to see would be the ultimate buyer in two days.

Robey’s next stop was the office of Stanley Gibbons Inc., the American company run by Eustace B. Power. After receiving a \$250 offer and a warning from Power that he was negotiating for the purchase of three other sheets, Robey left to visit the office of Scott Stamp & Coin Company. He was told that they did not wish to make an offer, but would sell the sheet for a commission.

Feeling “rather low and disgusted” by his morning of failed efforts, Robey returned to his hotel to find one of the Klemanns of Nassau Stamp Company waiting for him. After examining the sheet, Klemann offered Robey \$2,500. Upon hearing from Robey that someone had already offered four times that amount, Klemann lashed out, saying that Robey was crazy, and anyone offering \$10,000 was also crazy, and off he went.

Robey called Mann on Saturday night to say that he had not received an equivalent or better offer while in New York, but had decided to keep the sheet rather than sell it for \$10,000. Mann asked if Robey would stop in Philadelphia on the Sunday return trip, and Robey agreed to do so. At Philadelphia, Robey was met by Mann, and the two visited the home of Eugene Klein, one of the country’s leading dealers. Days earlier, on 14 May, Klein had prepared envelopes with the new 24¢ airmail stamp and addressed them to colleagues in the U.S. and overseas. They were carried on the 15 May inaugural flight from Philadelphia. The typewritten letter Klein inserted into each cover states that sales of the new airmail stamp started in Philadelphia on 14 May at 12:00 noon, but were stopped at 4:00 p.m.

UPSIDEDOWN AIRPLANE STAMPS TO NET PURCHASER THOUSANDS

W. T. Robey, one of the bright young men who assist W. B. Hibbs & Co. in the conduct of their business, is being congratulated by his friends on a bit of good luck that will unquestionably net him several thousand dollars.

Mr. Robey is something of a philatelist, although having little time to devote to this hobby; but he has learned that first sheets of the press frequently contain errors that are not permitted to go any further.

Consequently when the first airplane postage stamps were on sale he was at the window of a New York avenue branch post office, seeking, and, strange to say, he found.

He purchased one sheet of 10h stamps and two companions each did the same, paying \$24 each for the sheets. After taking his purchase back to the office of W. B. Hibbs & Co., Robey examined the sheet and found that the airplane that forms the center design of the stamps

was upside down. His companions failed to discover anything out of the normal with their sheets.

Collectors heard of the story and bids for the stamps began to come in, for single stamps and for the hundred. The postal authorities heard of it and endeavored to recover the stamps.

Finally the bid price rose to \$10,000 and still Robey refused to dispose of his prize. Understanding that New York is the world's greatest market, he packed his grip Friday and took his bid to the metropolis.

Robey wired yesterday that he had been offered \$15,000 for his prize and was considering it. A New York stamp company wired W. B. Hibbs & Co. an offer of \$100 for each stamp, canceled or otherwise.

In the meantime young Mrs. Robey is hoping that her husband's lucky find will bring the top price.

Swift & Company's Sales of Fresh beef in Washington, D. C., for the week ending Saturday, May 11, 1918, averaged .22.68 cents per pound. Advertisement.

19-21 May 1918—Sold!

The meeting between Eugene Klein and William T. Robey, with Percy Mann as matchmaker, was to have profound effects on the future of philately.

Klein was a seasoned negotiator. No doubt he had been informed by Mann that Robey had turned down a \$10,000 offer, but also that no equivalent or higher offers had been made in New York. Klein asked Robey to set the price, and in response Robey said he would take no less than \$15,000. After consulting with Mann, Klein asked Robey for an option at \$15,000, which would expire at 3:00 p.m. the next day (Monday, 20 May). Robey agreed.

In a curious twist on the story told by Robey and repeated by others, the *Washington Evening Star* published an article on 19 May (shown at left), stating that they had received a wire from Robey "yesterday" (Saturday, 18 May), informing them that he had received an offer of

19 May 1918 *Washington Evening Star* article reporting Robey's "Upsidedown Airplane Stamps" and a \$15,000 offer

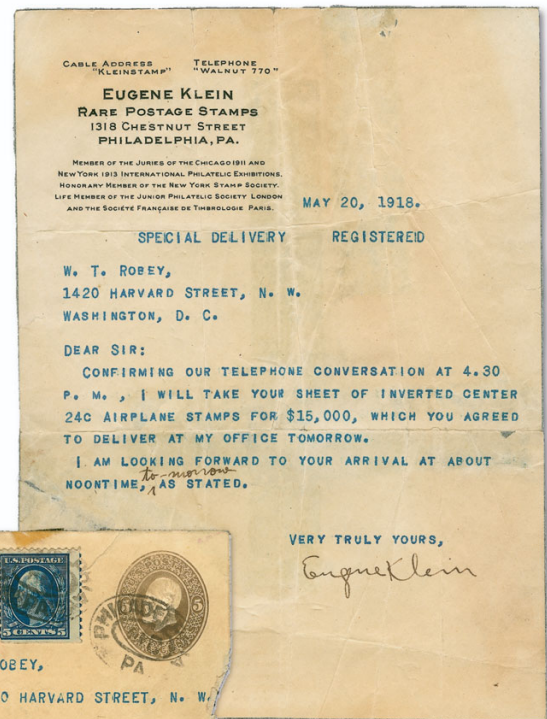
\$15,000 for the sheet and was "considering it." Who made that offer, and when? Robey never mentioned another \$15,000 offer, and the timing of the newspaper article and reference to a wire from the previous day make it impossible for that offer to be the one made by Klein on Sunday. Did Robey deliberately feed the newspaper misinformation on Saturday to generate higher offers?

If so, perhaps it worked. On Monday morning, Robey received a telephone call from H. F. Colman, the dealer who had offered \$500 for the sheet six days earlier. He was now ready to pay \$18,000! Colman was apparently inspired by something or someone to increase his offer by a multiple of 36. Robey could not accept the offer until Klein's option expired later in the day. Whether it expired at 3:00 p.m., as Robey recollected, or 4:30 p.m., as indicated in Klein's confirmation letter to Robey (shown at right), is unclear and not very important. By the end of 20 May, the sheet was sold to Klein for \$15,000, subject to delivery and payment the following day.



Eugene Klein (1878-1944)

Robey and his father-in-law traveled to Philadelphia on Tuesday, 21 May, and delivered the sheet to Klein at noon. Robey was handed a certified check for \$15,000, which gave him a \$14,976 profit on his \$24 post office purchase. One wonders what Robey and Caroline's father discussed on the return trip home, with Klein's \$15,000 check in hand.



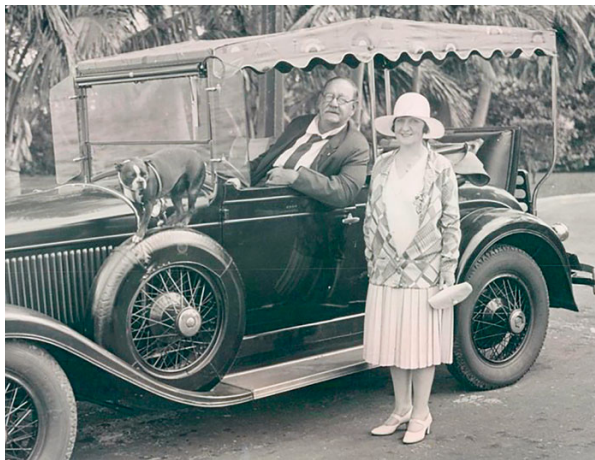
Klein's registered letter to Robey confirming the purchase of the Inverted Jenny sheet for \$15,000
Image: Don David Price



1918—The Colonel's Inverts

The accounts of the sale from Robey to Klein and then to Colonel Green have conflicting details (the Amick book goes into depth on the differing accounts). One aspect of the transactions is definite: Colonel Green bought the sheet no later than Monday, 20 May, the day Klein exercised his option to buy it from Robey. On 21 May 1918, the *New York Times* morning newspaper ran a story announcing that Colonel Green purchased the sheet for \$20,000 (shown at right). The newspaper must have been informed of the purchase on 20 May by someone other than Robey, who could not have known about the resale. It is remarkable that a news story about the \$20,000 resale to Colonel Green was published Tuesday morning, *before* Robey reached Philadelphia to deliver the sheet and collect payment from Klein.

The price represented a \$5,000 profit for Klein, who kept half and shared the rest with Percy Mann and Joseph A. Steinmetz, who had formed a “combine” with Klein for the negotiations.



Colonel Edward H. R. Green with his wife, Mabel (Harlow), and their Boston terrier on the front wheel well

Hetty's son “Ned” was obese and had a prosthetic leg, the result of a childhood injury that was improperly treated with homeopathic medicine. Nonetheless, he was a skilled manager of the family's business affairs and earned Hetty's trust, as opposed to her husband and Ned's father, Edward Green, whose bad investments and excessive borrowing forced Hetty to bail him out when the bank foreclosed.

When Hetty died in 1916, she left an estate variously estimated to be worth \$100 million to \$200 million, the equivalent of \$2 billion to \$4 billion in 2016. Her two children, Ned and his sister Sylvia, shared the estate equally. One year later Ned was free to marry his long-time girlfriend, Mabel E. Harlow, whom Hetty had accepted as her son's companion as long as he did not risk the family fortune by marrying her. Mabel, a voluptuous, red-headed stage performer from Texas, went along with the informal arrangement while Hetty was alive.

With his newly-inherited wealth and freedom from his mother's disapproving view of conspicuous consumption, the 300-pound six-foot-four Colonel Green embarked on a buying spree of unbridled extravagance. By some estimates he spent more than \$3 million on everything from stamps and coins to jewelry and erotic literature. At one point he owned all five 1913 Liberty Head nickels. Of course, on 20 May 1918 he became the new owner of the Inverted Jenny sheet through the deal arranged by Eugene Klein.

\$20,000 BY COL. GREEN FOR AIR MAIL STAMPS

Sheet with Plane Inverted
Sold Over Post Office
Counter for \$24.

OTHERS WERE CANCELED

Buyer Will Keep Some of His Purchase for His Collection and Give Rest to Friends.

New York Times 21 May 1918 headline announcing the sale of the Inverted Jenny sheet to Col. Green

Image: © The New York Times

Edward Howland Robinson Green (1868-1936) was the son of Hetty Green (1834-1916), one of the wealthiest and most astute investors in American history. Hetty's extreme frugality was exploited by her adversaries and made for good copy in the press, but in reality she was a woman in a man's world, during the era of robber barons and deals done in dark oak rooms with thick blue cigar smoke. Her reputation as the “Witch of Wall Street” was undeserved, and in fact she despised many of the titans of industry and finance for their predatory ways and profligate spending. She sympathized with the average hardworking citizen who had to pay more for basics, because of trusts and monopolies that fixed the costs of goods and services.

Colonel Green authorized Klein to divide the sheet into singles and blocks, and to sell what the colonel did not retain for his own collection. Before doing so, Klein lightly penciled the position number on the gum side of each stamp, enabling future philatelists to cite every stamp by its exact location in the sheet. Klein initially advertised fully perforated singles from the sheet for \$250 and straight-edge positions (top or right) for \$175. He then withdrew the offering, giving the disingenuous explanation that he had placed the sheet privately, and asked prospective buyers to apply for a price. As the facts show, the sheet had been sold to Green before Klein even took possession of it. Klein and Green discussed pricing and changed the prices over the next three months. As Klein reported, by the end of July most of the singles without straight edges had been sold for prices ranging from \$250 to \$325.

In the series of 28 auctions held from 1942 to 1946 to disperse Colonel Green's stamp collection after his death in 1936, 38 different Inverted Jenny stamps were offered. Included in this total



The Locket Copy (Position 9) given by Colonel Green to his wife, Mabel

were the block of eight from the bottom with the plate number selvage, three blocks of four, five full perforated stamps and 13 of the original straight-edge stamps. The 18 extra singles were presumably unsold and returned by Klein to the colonel. Eight of the straight-edge copies were found after the colonel's death, stuck together in an envelope; they were soaked apart and lost their gum before being offered in the Green sales.

Colonel Green was regarded as a somewhat careless custodian of his vast stamp collection. Some accounts report that he had his young female "wards" dismantle collections that had been meticulously written up by leading philatelic scholars. Another story about some Inverted Jenny stamps going down with his yacht is apocryphal. However, the colonel did, in fact, have a locket made for his wife Mabel, which contained Position 9 and, on the flip side, a normal 24¢ stamp (shown at left). The famous "Locket Copy" was left by Mabel to a female friend in 1950, and after the friend's death it appeared for the first time in a Siegel auction in 2002.

While Klein was pulling apart the Inverted Jenny sheet, and Robey and his wife were making plans for what to do with their windfall, poor H. F. Colman—the dealer who raised his offer from \$500 to \$18,000—was trying to find more of the errors. Through an intermediary, Captain A. C. Townsend, he convinced Thomas G. Patten, the New York City postmaster who mailed a first flight cover and letter to President Wilson, to let Joseph Leavy search the supply of sheets contained in the post office vault. Packages of full sheets were opened and inspected, but the all of the planes were flying rightside up. One wonders what would have happened if Colman, Townsend and Leavy had actually found another sheet. Letting a few individuals profit from the special privilege of accessing the post office vault hardly seems like proper civil servant policy.

As for Robey, although he continued to enjoy stamp collecting for another 31 years, he never owned another Inverted Jenny after selling the sheet to Klein. He continued to report other philatelic "discoveries," but none were even remotely comparable to the Inverted Jenny. After witnessing the complete dispersal of Colonel Green's holding of Inverted Jenny stamps, Robey passed away in February 1949.

1918-2016—Position 58

The stamp offered in this auction is Position 58 in the sheet, the third from the last stamp in the sixth row. When Klein broke up the sheet, he retained a block of four containing this stamp, comprising Positions 47-48/57-58, which have the red horizontal guide line between the top and bottom stamps. An old black-and-white photograph of the intact block is shown at right. This exceptionally well-centered block was left by Klein to his daughter, Delores Klein Hertz, the wife of Dr. A. Jay Hertz, a stamp collector.



Photograph of intact block with Position 58 at lower right (47-48/57-58)



As Amick tells the story, based on the recollections of a friend of Delores Hertz, she and her husband were asked to come to Philadelphia to pick up a trunk placed in storage by her late father, who had prepaid the charges and left instructions for the bank to contact his daughter after a certain period of time following his death. When the trunk was opened, the Inverted Jenny block was at the top of a stack of philatelic material.

John A. Fox advertised the block for sale in *Stamps* magazine, 23 April 1955, but it was returned to Mrs. Hertz. Amick reports that Fox bought the block from Mrs. Hertz for \$20,000 and sold it back to her, but it seems more likely that he obtained it on a promise to pay or consignment, then cancelled the deal and returned it. In any case, Mrs. Hertz sold the block to Robert A. Siegel, reportedly for the same \$20,000 price. This transaction probably occurred in 1959, because the block is recorded in the B. D. Phillips inventory as having been purchased in July 1959 from the Weills for \$22,275.

Benjamin Dwight Phillips (1885-1968) was the scion of the T. W. Phillips family, owners of a large natural gas and oil company in Butler, Pennsylvania. Phillips started his stamp collection in earnest in 1946, initially with purchases from Warren H. Colson. Within a few years the Weills had gained Phillips as a client and began representing him in auctions. According to the three-volume inventory of the Phillips collection, many of the Weills' major purchases in auctions during the 1950s and 60s, including the Caspary and Lilly sales, were made directly on behalf of Phillips.

In 1968 the Weills purchased the entire Phillips collection for \$4.07 million, evidently a record for any collection sold up to that time. Phillips died on 23 October 1968, and the Weills advertised the purchase as having been made from the estate of an anonymous collector. However, in a later personal recollection of the acquisition, Raymond Weill stated that he and Roger spent several days at the Phillips home in Butler, valuing the stamps at his request, in order to make a cash offer. When the Weills presented their \$4.07 million offer, Phillips was attired in a hunting jacket and cap with a Purdey shotgun slung over his shoulder. Upon hearing the offer, Phillips responded "Sounds good, boys," and walked out of the room.

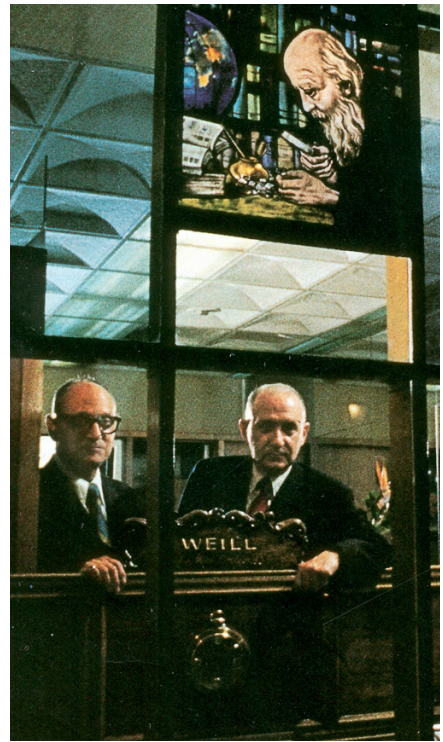
If this account is accurate, the Weills acquired one of the greatest, if not the greatest, United States collections of all time, and the owner went off to shoot ducks. Phillips died soon after accepting the offer, but the estate honored the agreement, and the collection was packed up and shipped from Butler to the Weills' New York representative on 8 November 1968.



Benjamin D. Phillips (1885-1968)

As so often with the Weills' business transactions, the history of the block is a bit hazy between 1968 and the first appearance of singles from the block in 1974. Raymond Weill reported that the block was sold to an "anonymous collector" who requested that the block should be divided into singles for four heirs. Position 57 (lower left) was the first stamp to appear as a single in the 1974 Rarities sale on 24 March (Sale 448, lot 218). Position 47 followed in the Siegel sale held on 8 October 1974. Position 48 was described with tiny thin specks in the Siegel sale held on 25 March 1975 (Sale 468, lot 194). Position 58, the stamp offered in this sale, was reported by Weill to have sold to a Mr. Hoover of Georgia.

It next appeared in the 7 December 1985 John W. Kaufmann sale, where it was acquired by Bruce McNall, former owner of the Los Angeles Kings. When McNall's collection was sold by Superior Stamp & Coin Company as the "Connoisseur" collection on 26 October 1992, the stamp was purchased by Robert Zoellner, who was in the market for an Inverted Jenny after his first fell out of a Scott Platinum album and was swept up in a vacuum cleaner.



Roger (left) and Raymond Weill (right) in the window of their Royal Street store



Robert E. Zoellner (1932-2014)

Bob Zoellner was an investor who specialized in risk arbitrage. Alpine Associates, the firm he founded with his wife, Victoria, continues to thrive. Zoellner built a complete collection of United States stamps, starting in 1985 with the purchase of Inverted Jenny Position 78 and finishing in 1991 with the addition of a stamp of relatively modest value. At that point he owned every regular and commemorative postage stamp listed with a major number in the 1991 U.S. Specialized Catalogue. Zoellner was the first collector to ever achieve this objective, despite inaccurate but often repeated claims that Benjamin Miller reached completeness (Miller was missing at least two 19th century stamps).

When Zoellner discovered that his prized Inverted Jenny, the stamp he coveted as a young collector, was not in its place in his album, he searched the house in vain. Only after a house cleaner informed Zoellner that the room had been vacuumed did the stamp's potential fate dawn on him. After opening the vacuum and emptying the bag, the missing Jenny was found, slightly mangled, but at least not lost to philately forever.

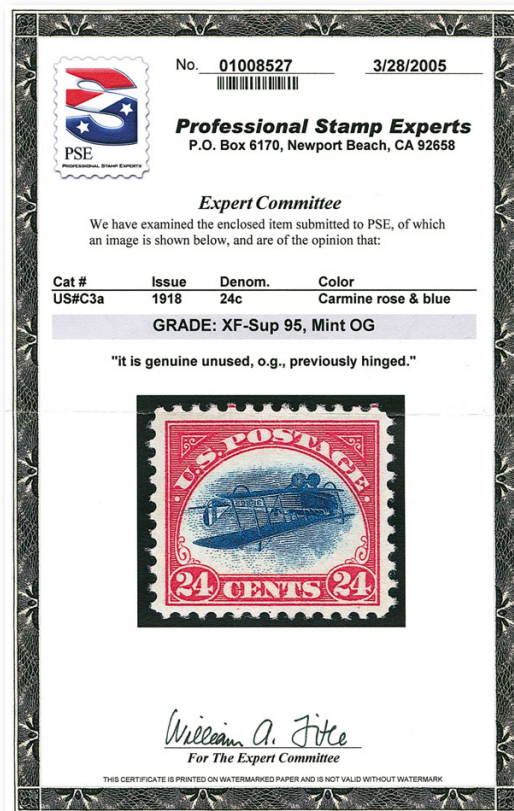
The sale of McNall's Position 58 presented Zoellner with the opportunity to replace his damaged Inverted Jenny with a superb example, which was more compatible with the overall quality of the collection. Zoellner acquired the gem Position 58 for \$143,000, including the 10% premium, a relative bargain that reflected the weak stamp market in 1992.

The Siegel firm sold the Zoellner collection on 8 October 1998 (Sale 804), including the Inverted Jenny. In the Zoellner sale the stamp realized \$192,500, including the 10% premium, selling to a collector in the southwest who chose anonymity, both as a buyer and seller. He consigned the stamp to the 2005 Rarities sale (Sale 895, lot 374). With stamp grading gaining market support, the Siegel firm recommended submitting Position 58 to Professional Stamp Experts for a grade. Under the expert supervision of master grader William A. Little, it received certificate number 1008527, dated 28 March 2005, with a grade of XF-Superb 95 (shown at right).

In the 2005 Rarities sale, several bidders competed fiercely for the stamp, driving the price to a record \$577,500, including the 10% premium. The previous auction record for a single Inverted Jenny was \$198,000, paid for a Mint Never-Hinged example (Position 77) in the 1982 Rarities sale (Sale 596, lot 375).

Following the 2005 sale, the buyer had the stamp protected by having P.S.E. encapsulate it. It has not been handled since encapsulation more than ten years ago, and it is accompanied by the same P.S.E. certificate. There could be no better way to ensure that this stamp is in the same condition and quality as it was when graded by William A. Little in 2005.

On Tuesday, 31 May 2016, during World Stamp Show-NY at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, the finest example of the world's most famous stamp will again be the object of desire and acquisitiveness. Even without the means or inclination to own the stamp, every stamp collector may see it and wonder how William T. Robey felt when the post office clerk handed him the Inverted Jenny sheet 98 years ago.

P.S.E. certificate 1008527 dated 28 March 2005
Graded XF-Superb 95

RECONSTRUCTION OF INVERTED "JENNY" SHEET

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To learn about each stamp, go to InvertedJenny.com

Acknowledgments and Sources

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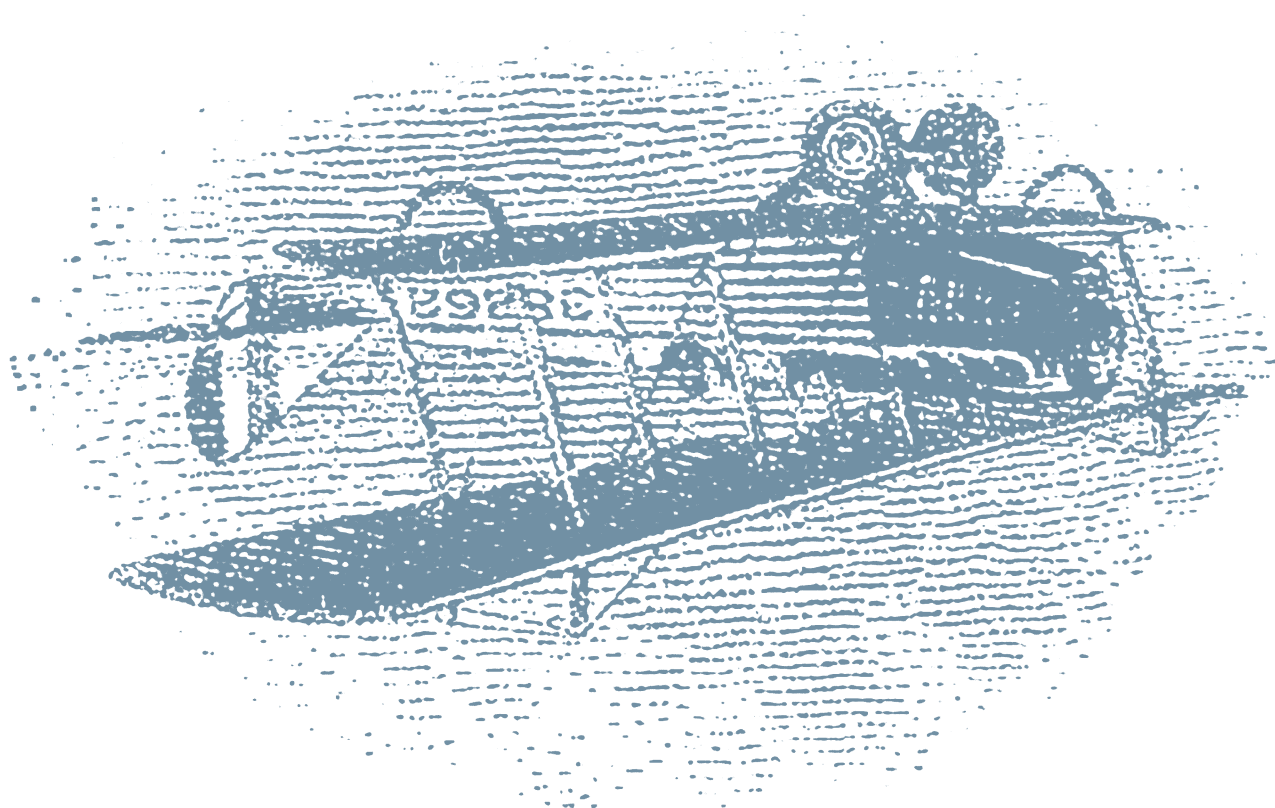
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Prices Realized for

Sale 1128 5/31/2016 Inverted Jenny Position 58, Graded XF-Superb 95

Lot#	Realized
275	1,175,000