



## Provenience, Provenance

I learned a new word recently. Provenience. At first I thought it was a spelling error in a European publication by someone who meant to write provenance. Then I looked it up. While provenance describes the chain of ownership—ex Ferrary Caspary and Lilly, for example—the term *provenience*, ending in “ience,” is the origin point of discovery. It is often used in archaeology as a term for the location where an artifact was found. Applying it to philately, one would say the *provenience* of the Inverted Jenny is Robey’s purchase of the complete sheet of 100 at a Washington D.C. post office on May 14, 1918. The *provenance* continues with Eugene Klein and Colonel Green’s purchase of the sheet, and from that point it follows the ownership for each stamp or block removed from the sheet.

Provenience—what a great word.

In philately, as in archaeology, when significant finds are made, we are really just rediscovering something that was tossed aside or hidden for a long time. We even allude to the archaeological dig by saying such-and-such item was “buried” in a collection or family papers for years.

The *provenience* of the famous Dawson Hawaiian Missionary cover was a factory in New Jersey, where it was plucked from a partly charred bundle of papers. The *provenience* of the largest unused block of the 10¢ 1847 Issue, which we will offer in the Gross U.S. Stamp Treasures auction in October, was the Rives family bible, where it was hiding from the time of issue until shortly before 1912. The *provenience* of the Upright Jenny sheet in this year’s Rarities sale is the post office that sold it to the consignor, one of the 33 or so lucky winners of the great “Post Office Scratch-Off Ticket” lottery, in which 100 Upright Jenny sheet errors were randomly distributed in sealed packages.

A personal favorite in this year’s sale is also a discovery—lot 4, the folded letter to Germany with the rare Northern Liberties News Room Sub Post Office marking. This letter is the only known Northern Liberties cover to a foreign country. It was recently found in a pile of correspondence from a 19th century ship captain’s family. A great item with great *provenience*.

Discovery is the great dream of collectors. And now I know a word to describe it.

— SCOTT R. TREPEL