

THE INVERTED JENNY POSITION 49

OFFERED ON BEHALF OF THE DESCENDANT OF THE ORIGINAL BUYER IN 1918



SALE 1192A — LOT 644 (SEPARATE CATALOGUE)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2018, AT 1:30 P.M.

Robert A. Siegel
AUCTION GALLERIES, INC.

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SALE 1192—THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2018, AT 1:30 P.M. (LOT 644)

Live auction at 6 West 48th Street (off Fifth Avenue), 9th Floor, New York City

All lots sold subject to an **18% buyer's premium** and
applicable sales tax or customs duty

Please carefully read the Conditions of Sale before bidding

Presale Viewing:

Monday and Tuesday, November 12-13, 10am-4pm
and by appointment (please call 212-753-6421)

Robert A. Siegel
AUCTION GALLERIES, INC.

6 WEST 48TH STREET, 9TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036
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

Siegel International
Dallas (214) 754-5991



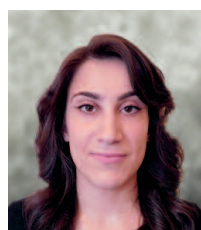
Charles F. Shreve
Director, Siegel International
charles
@siegelauctions.com



Daphne Aitken
Accounts
daphne
@siegelauctions.com



Helen Stewart
VP, Operations
helen
@siegelauctions.com



Jocelyn Weibel
Digital Production
jocelyn
@siegelauctions.com



Andrew Titley
International Specialist
andrew
@siegelauctions.com



Chris Anderson
International Specialist
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 email 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. Email 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 email 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 email will receive a Bid Results report after the sale. Session results are posted immediately to siegelauctions.com

Live Internet Bidding at Siegel Auctions

REGISTERED BIDDERS MAY BID IN THIS SALE USING LIVE INTERNET BIDDING

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.

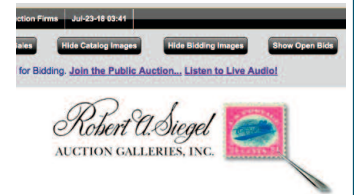
Once you have been approved for bidding, you can listen to the auction and place bids with the click of a mouse.

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

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.

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.'s Sale 1185

Closing on June 27, 2018. [Listen to the Auction.](#)
Contact us by Phone at (212) 753-6421, [Contact us Via eMAIL.](#)

F11 (if using Internet Explorer) toggles full

Lot and Description	Bidding
 United States Inverted Jenny Positions 15 and 6 Lot 91. 24c Carmine Rose & Blue, Center Inverted (C3a). Position 15, the fifth stamp from the left in the second row of the sheet, original gum, deep rich colors, tiny thin spot just below the plane, faint traces of purple ink above the bottom left corner (image)	<input type="button" value="Bid 280000"/> <input type="button" value="Bid 290000"/> <input type="button" value="Bid 300000"/> <input type="button" value="Bid 310000"/> <input type="button" value="Bid 320000"/> <input type="button" value="Bid 330000"/> Send a Message to the Auctioneer
<p>\$ 450,000.00</p> <p>Sold for \$ 270,000.00 Your Bid \$ 0.00</p>	

"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 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 THROUGH A THIRD PARTY, IN PERSON, BY TELEPHONE, FACSIMILE, INTERNET OR BY 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 18% 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, subject to the Galleries' sole judgment, 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 5 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 photos; (v) the color of the item does not match the color photo 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 or on an accompanying certificate.

6. Successful bidders, unless they have established credit with the Galleries prior to the sale, must make full payment in cleared funds 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, 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% non-refundable 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). The buyer waives the right to dispute all credit card charges.**

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 may be resold by whatever means deemed appropriate by the Galleries, and any loss incurred from resale will be charged to the defaulting buyer, and/or the Galleries may seek any other remedy prescribed by law to enforce payment. **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 will be charged for a 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 or change in grade.** Buyers may request a certificate for a lot containing not more than one item, which does not have a P.F. or P.S.E. certificate (dated as above), provided that the following conditions are met: (i) the purchase price must be paid in full, (ii) if submitted by the buyer, the lot must be submitted to an acceptable expertizing service with a properly executed application form within 21 days of the sale, (iii) a copy of the application form must be given to the Galleries, (iv) the Galleries retains the right to resubmit the item for reconsideration, without time limit or other restrictions, for the purpose of obtaining a satisfactory opinion, (v) lots submitted for certification will be considered cleared 90 days from the date of sale, whether or not a certificate has been issued, unless the Galleries issues written approval of a further extension of return privileges, and (vi) in the event the lot is determined to be misidentified or misdescribed, pursuant to 5 and 5(A) of these Conditions, the Galleries will issue a refund to the buyer for the full purchase price and actual certification fees, but the reimbursement for certificate fees (and related costs) shall not exceed 10% of the hammer price of the lot. **Changes to a grade by the same certification service or a different grade from another certification service are not grounds for returning a lot.**

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 may also 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, at any time, 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 (NYC License No. 795952)
N.Y.C. Department of Consumer Affairs
80 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10013
Telephone (212) 577-0111

Revised 9/2018

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.

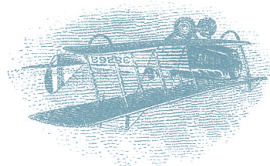
Because of certain pricing inconsistencies in the *Scott Catalogue*—for example, blocks that have no gum, the absence of premiums for Mint N.H. items, etc.—we cannot guarantee the accuracy of values quoted for multiples, specialized items and collection lots. We generally try to be conservative, but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



644 front and back



THE INVERTED JENNY POSITION 49

OFFERED ON BEHALF OF THE DESCENDANT OF
THE ORIGINAL BUYER IN 1918

SALE 1192—THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2018, AT 1:30 P.M.

LOT 644

24¢ Carmine Rose & Blue, Center Inverted (C3a). Position 49, the ninth stamp in the fifth row of the sheet of 100 purchased by William T. Robey on May 14, 1918, original gum in pristine Mint Never Hinged state, extraordinarily rich colors on bright fresh paper, perfectly centered

MINT NEVER HINGED AND EXTREMELY FINE GEM QUALITY. THIS INVERTED JENNY—POSITION 49 IN THE DISCOVERY SHEET OF 100—WAS ACQUIRED DIRECTLY FROM EUGENE KLEIN IN 1918 AND HELD CONTINUOUSLY BY THE BUYER AND HIS DESCENDANTS FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS. THIS STAMP'S EMERGENCE IN 2018 WAS A HISTORIC OCCASION FOR ALL PHILATELISTS. ITS OFFERING IN THIS AUCTION PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE MOST DISCRIMINATING COLLECTORS TO BID ON THE FINEST MINT NEVER-HINGED INVERTED JENNY IN EXISTENCE.

The original sheet of one hundred Inverted Jenny errors was purchased by William T. Robey on May 14, 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. On Sunday, May 19, Robey agreed to give Eugene Klein, a prominent Philadelphia stamp dealer, a one-day option to buy the sheet for \$15,000. Klein exercised his option on Monday, May 20, in a late afternoon phone call, and he confirmed it with a registered letter to Robey sent in the evening mail. The sheet was delivered to Klein's office by Robey and his father-in-law on the following day, Tuesday, May 21, 1918.

No later than Monday, May 20, the day Klein exercised his option, he had arranged to sell the sheet for \$20,000 to Colonel Edward H. R. Green. Half of the \$5,000 profit went to Klein's partners, Percy McGraw Mann and Joseph A. Steinmetz. Klein was then authorized by Colonel Green to divide the sheet into singles and blocks, and to sell all but a few key position blocks.

This stamp from Position 49 was undoubtedly selected as one of the finest centered examples from the sheet and sold by Eugene Klein to a collector in 1918. It remained in its pristine "post office" condition in a bank vault for the next one hundred years. Therefore, the gum is Mint Never Hinged, and, since it was never exposed to light for most of its existence, the stamp's colors are rich and the paper is bright. When this stamp was certified by The Philatelic Foundation in 2018, they assigned a 90 XF (Extremely Fine) numerical grade, but this does not adequately convey the extraordinary quality of this Inverted Jenny. It is certainly the finest Mint Never-Hinged example extant.

Provenance:

From the sheet of 100 purchased by William T. Robey at the post office in Washington, D.C., on May 14, 1918, and sold to Colonel Edward H. R. Green through Eugene Klein. This single (Position 49) acquired directly from Eugene Klein in 1918 and held continuously by the collector and his descendants for the past century.

Certification:

The Philatelic Foundation, Certificate 554665 (2018) states:
CENTER INVERTED, POSITION 49. IT IS GENUINE, NEVER HINGED. GRADE 90 XF

2019 Scott U.S. Specialized Catalogue Value \$850,000.00 for Mint Never Hinged

For the complete history and detailed records of every Inverted Jenny and owners' biographies, go to
[Inverted Jenny.com](http://InvertedJenny.com)



MAY 1918 UNITED STATES AIRMAIL SERVICE THE WORLD'S FIRST GOVERNMENT AIRMAIL SERVICE

The world's first regularly scheduled mail service using airplanes was inaugurated in the United States a century ago 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.

Pioneer Flight Mail—1910-1916

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. After observing additional acceptance flights in July 1909, the U.S. Army completed its first purchase of an airplane. 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.



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

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, known as official Pioneer Flight mail.

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. 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.

Legislative Efforts to Fund Airmail—1910-1918

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.

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.

As the year 1916 came to an end, Postmaster General Albert S. 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 debate 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.

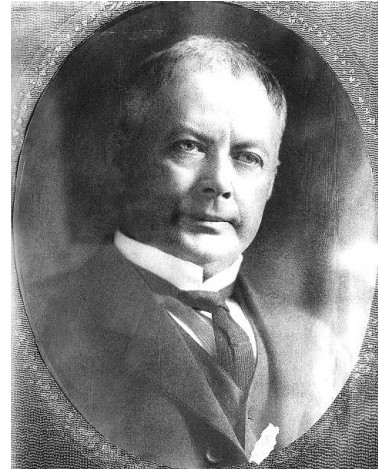
On 1 March 1918 Second Assistant Postmaster General Praeger reached an agreement with the U.S. Army Signal Corps to use Army pilots and planes for the first year. This arrangement was deemed mutually beneficial. The USPOD would have immediate access to experienced pilots and planes, and the daily flights 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 John Morris Sheppard (D-TX) 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 of or demand for airmail. One senator predicted that airmail would be a "two-days' wonder, not a seven-days' wonder." Nevertheless, the airmail postage 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.



PMG Albert S. Burleson



Second Asst. PMG Otto Praeger



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

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.

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.

Curtiss "Jenny" Airplanes Used for Aerial Mail Service—1918

In 1915, the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company 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



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

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.

On 1 March 1918 the Army placed an order with Curtiss 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. 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.

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 for use in designing the stamp was made from one of the regular Jennys, not a modified mail plane.

Historic Flights and Failure—15 May 1918

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 airmail fields in Washington, Philadelphia and New York. In Washington, among those in attendance were the postmaster general and his subordinates, legislators who supported the concept, dignitaries who wished to witness the spectacle, and even President Woodrow Wilson and the 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.



USPOD truck with airmail service sign

off, President Wilson and postal officials posed for still and motion cameras. The video footage can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhzmNvKY-i4>.

With all eyes 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. The crew was ordered to refill the tank. 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.

The pilot was Lieut. George L. Boyle, a novice aviator chosen because he was engaged to the daughter of a powerful government official. After taking off from the Polo Field, Lieut. Boyle turned and flew south instead of north. Minutes later, he landed once in a field to



Lieut. George L. Boyle

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."

The southbound flight that left from New York was the first to complete the inaugural 15 May airmail service. The combined New York and Philadelphia southbound mail—136 lbs. in total—was transferred to Jenny 38274, piloted by Lieut. James C. Edgerton. He reached the Polo Field in Washington at 2:50 p.m. and was greeted by a cheering crowd.

After a frantic effort to assemble the Jennys in time for the inaugural flights, one of the planes was flown by Maj. Fleet from Philadelphia to Washington early in the morning of 15 May. The crowd gathered at Potomac Park Polo Field could hear the Jenny approaching in the distant sky. At 10:35 a.m., nearly two hours after taking off from Bustleton, Maj. Fleet landed Jenny 38262.

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 special mail truck marked "United States Airmail Service" carried the mailbags to the airfield. While waiting for the plane to take



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

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

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.

Design, Dies and Plates—4-10 May 1918

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"

<i>Date</i>	<i>Engraver</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Cost</i>
4 May 1918	Hall, Edward M. "(No credit)"	6h15m	\$9.61
4 May	"Cleaning"—Schuyler	0h30m	.42
7 May	Weeks, Edward	16h15m	
8 May	ditto	14h30m	{ 47.29
	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)"

<i>Date</i>	<i>Engraver</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Cost</i>
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

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



663 (A.C. Die) 24¢ Aeroplane Stamp Border 1918 2 x 3 1/2			
DATE	TIME	COST	
May 7 1918	6:15	9.61	
May 8 1918	3.0	4.2	
May 9 1918	16:15	47.29	
May 10 1918	14:30		
Weeks - Frame			
Weeks - Lettering and numerals			
Steel			
Clair G. Huston, Designer			
Total, \$51.57			

664 (A.C. Die) Border for 24¢ Aeroplane Stamp, Vignette - Aeroplane 2 x 3 1/2			
DATE	TIME	COST	
May 8 1918	18:45	45.72	
May 9 1918	9:15	4.46	
Baldwin - Vignette			
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)

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.

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.

Baldwin, Hall and Weeks are pictured in the group photograph of BEP engravers shown below. 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.



Clair Aubrey Huston, senior designer at BEP



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

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 opposite). Since Hall was never credited by the BEP for his work on the 24¢ stamp, his signature was not sought.

Chronology—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.

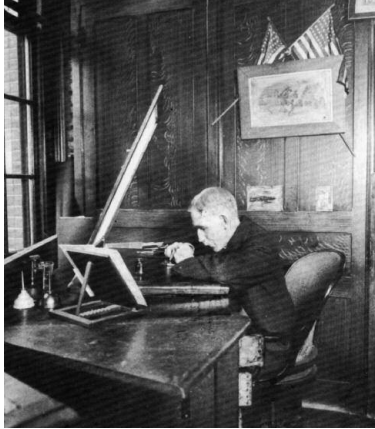
The plane pictured on the stamp is not one of the modified JN-4HM mail planes, which had the forward student pilot's seat replaced by the mail compartment. With magnification, it is obvious that the plane has two seats: the forward cockpit is empty, and the pilot sits in the rear cockpit (see enlarged photo opposite). 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 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

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

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.

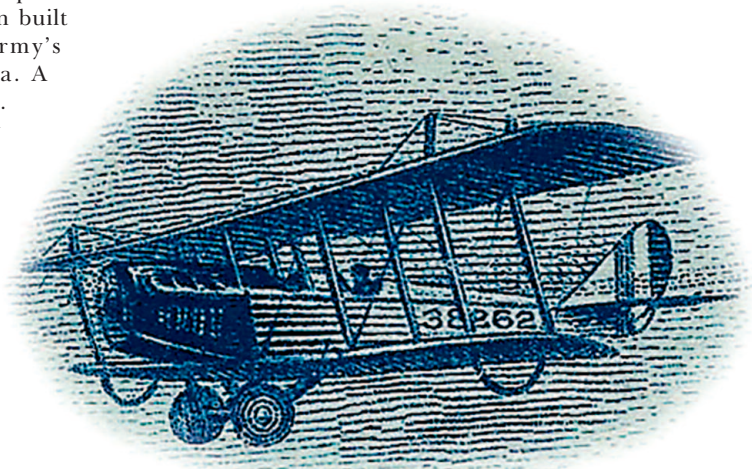
Assuming the stamp design submitted for approval on 7 May 1918 showed an airplane—any airplane—then Huston must have been given the photograph of a plane prior to that date. That is a safe assumption.

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.



The Jenny has two seats and "38262"



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.

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 above 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 on the first day.

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.



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

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 plate 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 above shows the fundamental relationship between the transfer roll and plate subjects.

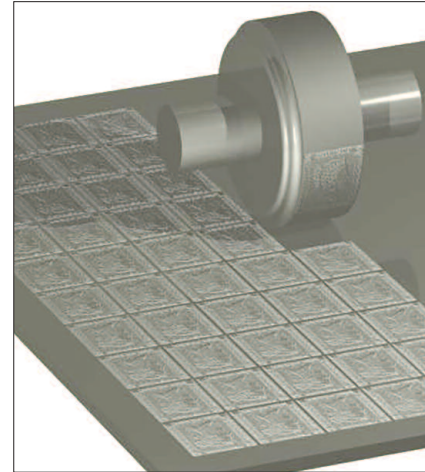
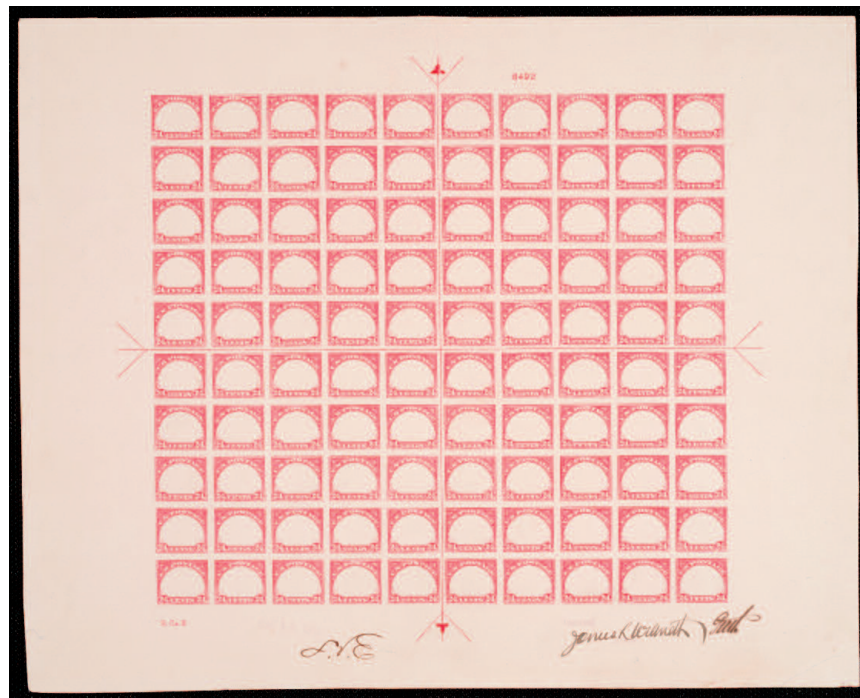


Illustration of transfer roll and plate

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 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.

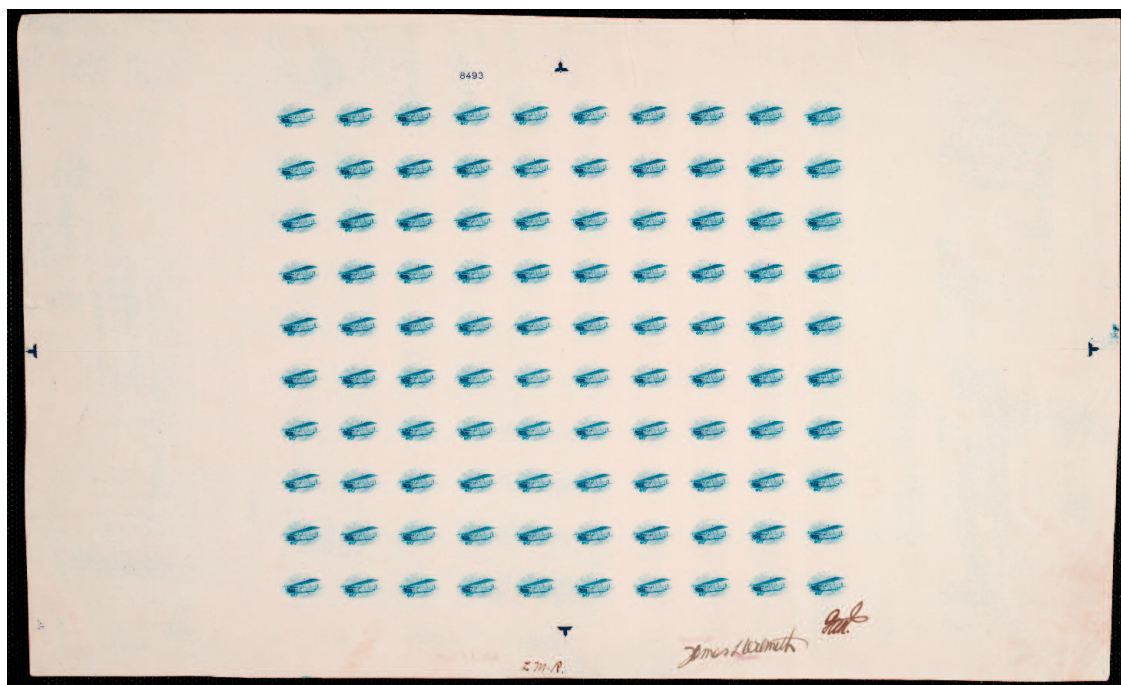
The BEP craftsman responsible for transferring the design from the die to the plate via the transfer roll is known as a siderographer. The siderographer who made the 24¢ plates was Samuel De Binder, whose initials “S De B.” appear in red in the lower left corner of sheets produced before the BEP started 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,”



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

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum



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

Image: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

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.

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.

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 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.

Printing—10-12 May 1918

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>).

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 drying, inspection, and additional production steps

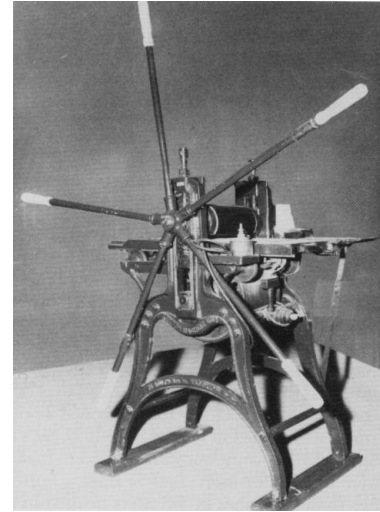
Trimming—At this point it will be helpful to repeat that the printed sheets of the 24¢ airmail stamp were originally trimmed at the top and right, cutting off the plate numbers at the top and the guide arrow at the right (as shown in the photograph on following page). This was done to make the sheets 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.



Positions 63 and 64 with blind perforation

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.



BEP Spider Press

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 "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 at left). 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)

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 oriented. 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 oriented 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.

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 below.



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



Printed from vignette and frame plates with “Top”—this is a Double Top imprint and Fast Plane variety

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 perforations.

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 not on the left, but on the right 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.

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.

Sale Days—13-14 May 1918

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 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 below 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.



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



DISCOVERY OF THE INVERTED JENNY

Robey's Fate and Fortune—14 May 1918

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. (By the time the plane took off in the afternoon of 15 May, Ganser already knew of his friend Robey's great discovery.

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.

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.

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.



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



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."

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.

Dealer to Dealer—14-19 May 1918

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 the colonel 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.

Sold!—19-21 May 1918

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 below), stating that they had received a wire from Robey "yesterday" (Saturday, 18 May), informing them that he had received an offer of \$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?

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 off the press frequently contain errors that are not permitted to go any further.

Consequently when the first aeroplane 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 100 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 aeroplane 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 find to the metropolis.

Robey wired yesterday that he had been offered \$25,000 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.

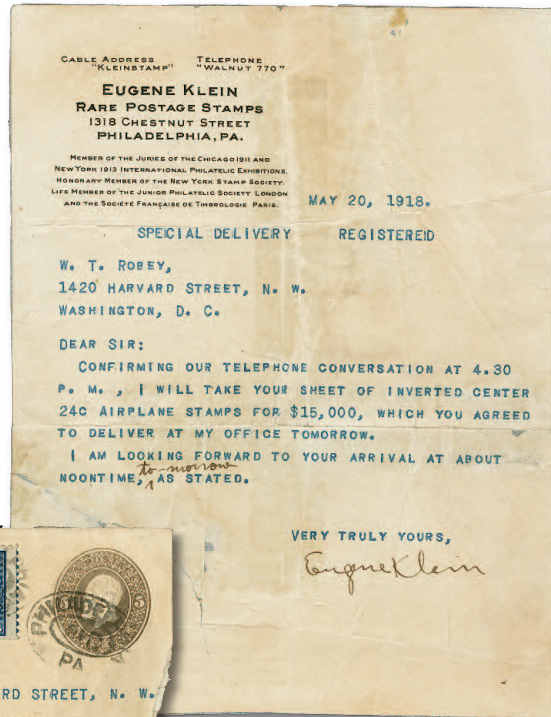
19 May 1918 *Washington Evening Star* article reporting Robey's "Upsidedown Airplane Stamps" and a \$15,000 offer

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 opposite), 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.

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.



Eugene Klein (1878-1944)



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

The Colonel's Inverts—1918

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.

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.

\$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



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 today. 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.

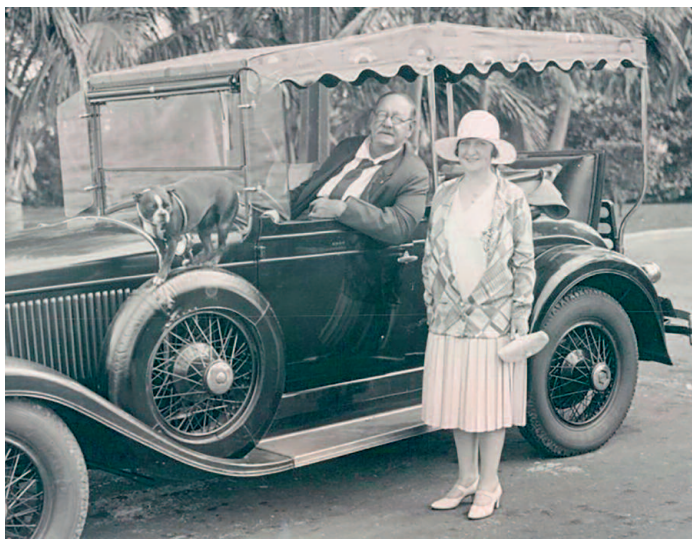
Colonel Green authorized Klein to divide the sheet into singles and blocks, and to sell what the colonel did not retain for his own collection. Before doing so, Klein lightly penciled the position number on the gum side of each stamp, enabling future philatelists to cite every stamp by its exact location 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 were the block of eight from the bottom with the plate number selva, three blocks of four, five fully 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. 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 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. ♦



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