

“THE JENNY”

Printing Variations of America’s First Airmail Stamp



Introduction

The stamps in this traditional exhibit illustrate the problems encountered in the production of the first United States airmail stamp: the 24¢ “Jenny”. The bicolor nature of the stamp necessitated the stamp sheet be passed through the press twice: once for the red frame and a second time for the blue “Jenny” vignette. The inverted “Jenny” occurred when the red frame sheet was inserted into the press reversed.

There were three printing stages of the stamp. Changes to the sheet markings were made in the second and third printings as a result of the William T. Robey discovery of the world famous “Inverted Jenny” error on the first day of sale of the stamp.



The Curtiss JN4-H biplane depicted in the stamp vignette, flew the mail on the first US airmail route.

In addition, misalignment problems created several varieties, the most famous of which is the “Grounded Plane” stamp. All known shifted vignette varieties are shown in the exhibit.

The stamp was put on sale on May 14, 1918, for the debut of the government airmail service between Washington, Philadelphia and New York on May 15. The 24¢ airmail rate paid the airmail charge and included a 10¢ special delivery fee.

History

On February 27, 1918, a new airmail service was announced to fly between Washington, DC, Philadelphia and New York. It was supposed to begin on April 15, but was postponed to May 15 because suitable landing fields could not be found near Philadelphia or New York.

There was little time to make all the necessary arrangements. The 24¢ airmail rate was only ratified by Congress days before the flights were to start. The planes were delivered unassembled on May 13, with the first flights scheduled two days later.



“Grounded Plane”
One of the many miss-registration variations of this stamp.

Special Stamp For Aeroplane Mail Service.
OFFICE OF THIRD ASS'T P. M. GEN., WASHINGTON, May 9, 1918.
1. Postmasters and other officers and employees of the Postal Service are notified that the Department is preparing to issue a new postage stamp of 24-cent denomination. It is intended primarily for the new aeroplane mail service, but will be valid for all purposes for which postage stamps of the regular issue are used.
2. A description follows:
The stamp is rectangular in shape, about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch high. The central design is a mail aeroplane in flight. Above, in a curved line of Roman capital letters, are the words "U. S. Postage." Triangular ornaments appear in the two upper corners. Below the aeroplane, in a straight line of Roman capital letters, is the word "Cents," with the numerals "24" within circles in the two lower corners. The border design is red and the aeroplane is blue.
3. To obtain the new stamp, central accounting and direct-accounting postmasters will draw requisition upon the Department on Form 3201, writing the denomination "24" on one of the blank lines, and complying carefully with Sections 27 to 39, 33 and 36, pages 34 and 35, 1917 Postal Guide. Requisitions which disregard these instructions will be returned to postmasters for completion. Requisitions will not be made special, but will be filed in the order of receipt at the Department.
A. M. DOCKERY,
Third Ass't P. M. Gen.

The Official Post Office Department Announcement for the “Jenny”.



Enlargement of the vignette showing the aircraft number “38262”, which is the aircraft illustrated at left that was used on the first flight out of Washington, DC.

The first flights were not without incident. The first plane leaving Washington, DC, ended its flight upside down in a field, 20 miles south, after the pilot took off in the wrong direction. These early efforts by the postal service eventually led to fast, reliable and affordable delivery of US mail by air.

First, Second & Third Printings

The First Printing: Selvedge left and bottom. Siderographer's initials at bottom.

In the first printing, stamp sheets were guillotined into post office panes leaving straight edges at the top and right of the panes. This resulted in the removal of the plate numbers found at the top of the sheet.

Selvedge remained on the left and bottom portions of the pane leaving the siderographer's initials, S. De B. (Samuel De Binder), in the bottom margin.



The first printing was put to press on May 10 for the frame plate and May 11 for the vignette

The siderographer was employed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP). His role was to lay down images from the transfer roll on to the printing plates. By custom the siderographer stamped his initials in the bottom left corner of each plate. For some unknown reason, Samuel De Binder failed to add his initials to the blue plate.

In the second and third printings his initials were removed from the stamp panes when the lower selvedge was trimmed off.

The Second Printing: Blue vignette plate numbers and carmine frame numbers are both inscribed, and the word "TOP" is inscribed only on the vignette plate.



In the second printing, the word "TOP" was struck on the blue plate in serif letters.
Retaining the upper selvedge meant that the lower and the right or left selvedges would be removed.

The second printing was put to press on May 15, 1918. The Bureau of Engraving & Printing (BEP) added the word "TOP" to the blue vignette plate and reset the cutting machines to retain the upper selvedge. This guided the pressmen as to the correct direction of the blue vignette plate.

The Third Printing: Full plate numbers and "TOP" inscribed on both plates.

Marginal Cuttings:

Sheets were trimmed differently from one printing to another.

Printings	Marginal Markings	Cuttings
First	Siderographer's initials on bottom	Top & Right
Second	Plate numbers & blue "TOP"	Bottom & Left or Right
Third	Plate numbers & blue and carmine "TOP"	Bottom & Left or Right



Shortly after the second printing was started the BEP decided to take the additional safety precaution of adding the word "TOP" to the carmine frame plate as well.

Official Flights - Stamps from the First Printing

The First Printing: All stamps used on the May 15, 1918 first flight mails were from the First Printing as the Second Printing was not available on that date.

The Post Office Department instituted a daily round-trip airmail service (Sundays excepted) between Washington, Philadelphia & New York on May 15, 1918. Mail and parcels ("not exceeding 30 inches in length and girth combined") were accepted for delivery in any "city" in the United States, its possessions or postal agencies. The new airmail stamps could frank mail as well any other US stamps combined to make up the 24¢ rate. Airmail could be registered for a 10¢ additional fee.

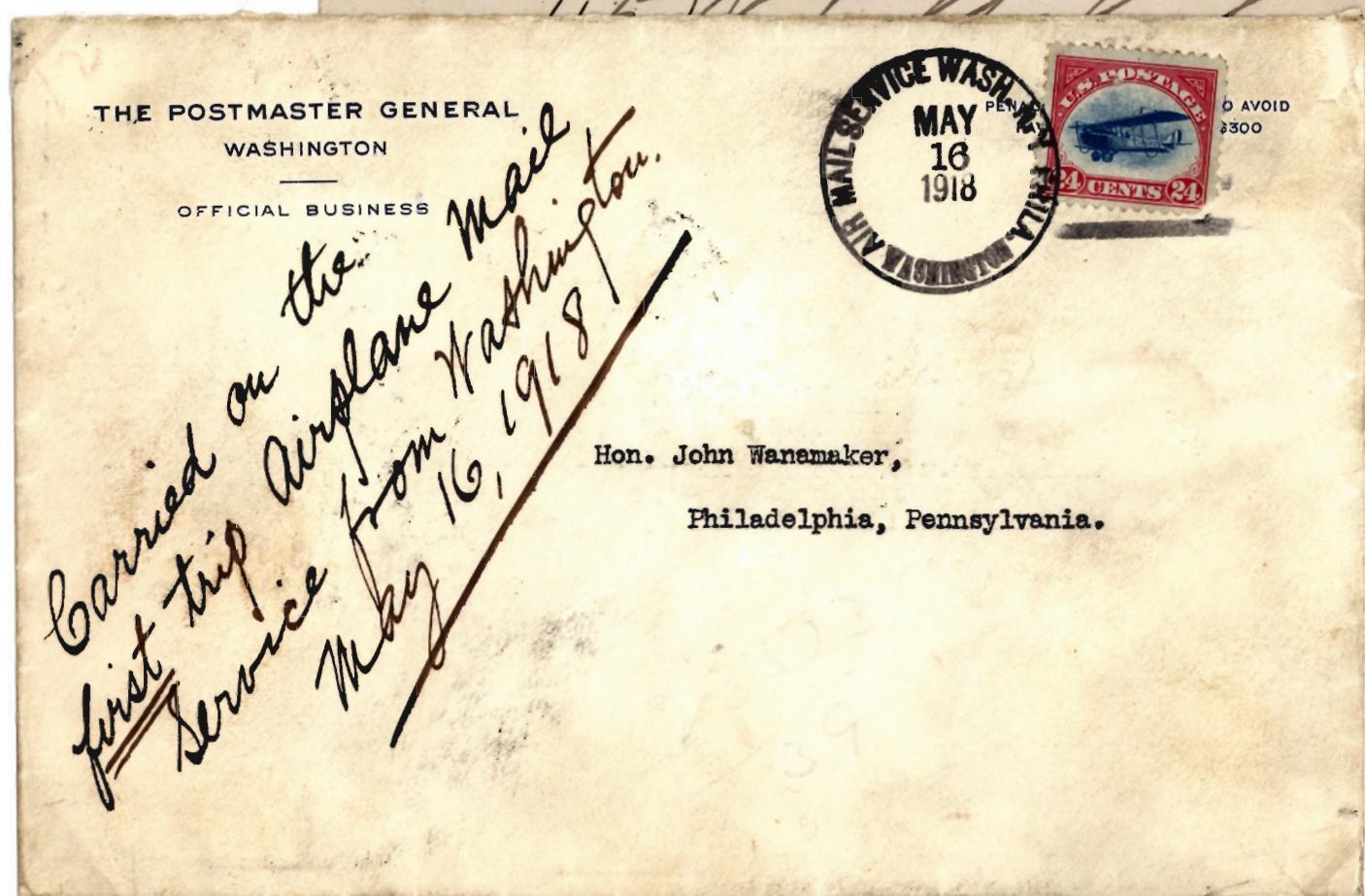


The pilot for the first leg from Washington was Second Lt. George Boyle who is on the right in the photo.

Top: From a top row position.

Top margin straight edge stamps are known only from the first printing.

This cover was carried on the inaugural flight from Washington, DC to Philadelphia.



Top: Position 10.
Only sheet position of the 3 printings to have straight edges on both the top & right sides. Carried on the New York to Philadelphia flight.



From an inner sheet position.
Postmarked on May 15, one day after the first day of issue. Held over for the first flight from Philadelphia to Washington, DC on the following day.

PFC
One of only 4 recorded predate first flight covers.

The top left cover was carried on Lt. Boyle's flight that went in the wrong direction and crashed. After the crash landing they were brought to Washington, DC by automobile and put on the next day's flight evidenced by the May 16 receiving postmark. The sender was the pilot on the "First Trip" from Philadelphia to Washington.

Bottom Left: From an inner sheet position.

This cover was mailed by the Postmaster General John Wanamaker to himself, carried from Washington, DC to Philadelphia, Pa. on the second attempt of the first flight on May 16 from Washington, D.C. The flight was piloted by Lt. James C. Edgerton who had flown the "First Flight" from Philadelphia to Washington on May 15. The envelope was endorsed by Wanamaker as "Carried on the first trip Airplane Mail Service from Washington, May 16, 1918."

The Inverted “Jenny”

The First Printing: Position 28



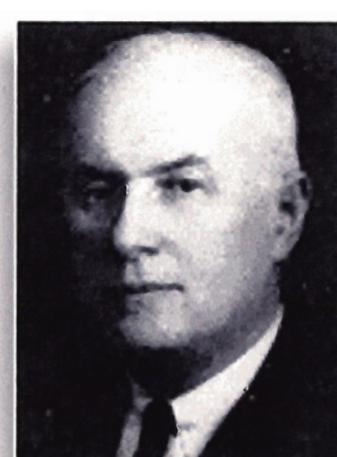
The only sheet of one hundred Inverted “Jenny” stamps was purchased on May 14, 1918, at the New York Avenue Branch Post Office, in Washington, DC, by William T. Robey, an avid stamp collector.

After discovering Robey had purchased an error sheet of the new airmail stamps, Bureau of Engraving and Printing inspectors then recovered and destroyed eight other unsold sheets. Robey’s 100-stamp sheet of Inverted “Jenny” stamps was the only one to ever reach the public.

Within a week, Robey had negotiated the sale of his sheet, intact, to Eugene Klein, the famous Philadelphia stamp dealer, for \$15,000. Klein sold the sheet to collector Colonel Edward H. R. Green for an immediate \$5,000 profit. Col. Green authorized Klein to break up the sheet. Green retained three blocks of four and the arrow and plate number blocks of eight. Green then ordered Klein to sell the remaining copies of the Inverted “Jenny” stamps.



William T. Robey



Eugene Klein



Col. Edward H. R. Green



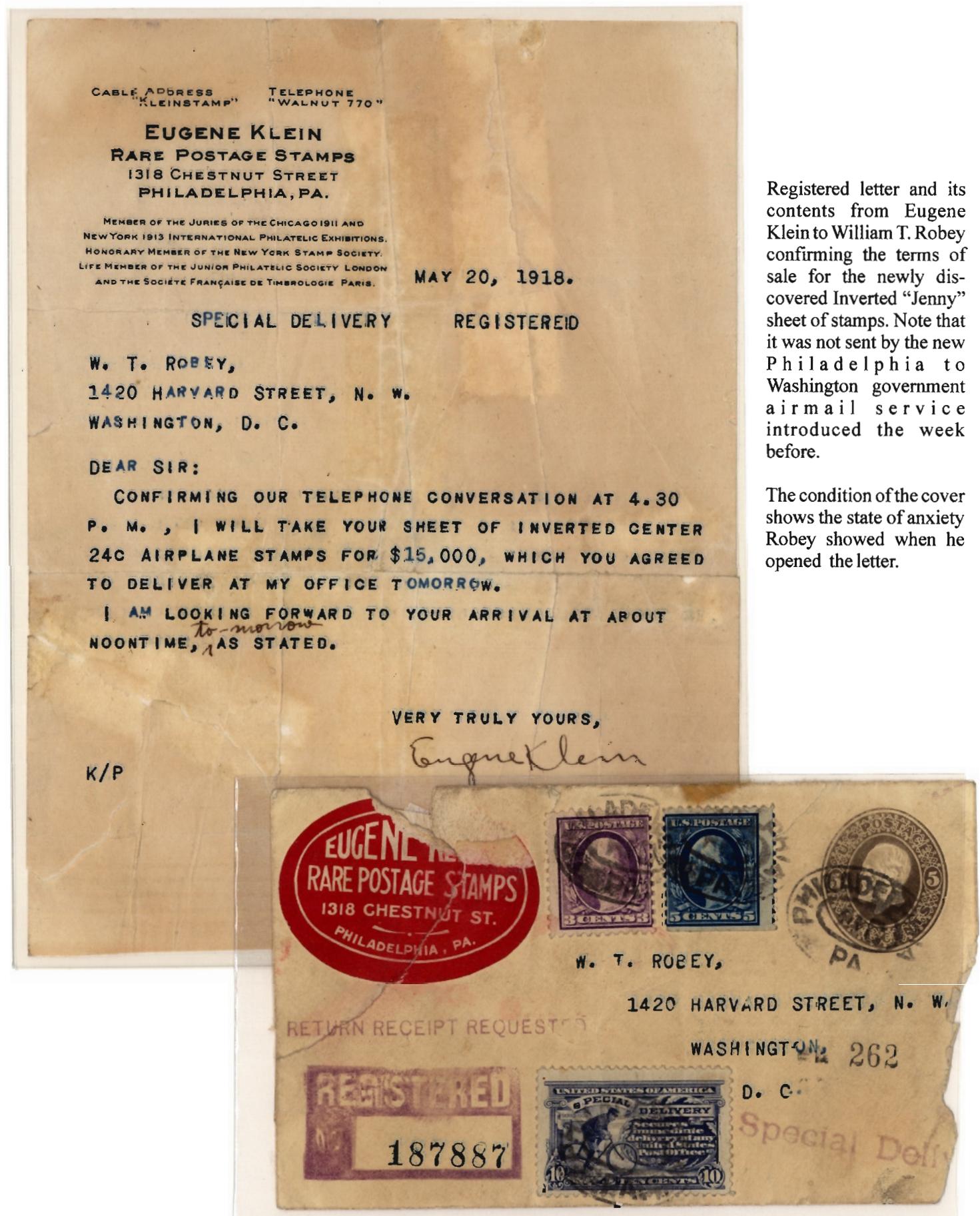
The Blue Guide Dot



The Inverted “Jenny” stamp shows a blue dot in the bottom margin while the regular stamp shows it in the top margin. This dot was a guide that was used by the siderographer to lay down the blue vignette plate.

Provenance - Position 28	
1918 - 1918	William T. Robey
1918 - ?	Col. E.H.R. Green
1936 - 1940	R. M. Ewing
? - 1947	Alberto Perez
1947 - 1950	E. E. Kistner
1950 - 1992	Milton Price
1992 - to date	Don David Price

May 20, 1918 Klein / Robey Letter for the Sale of the Inverted “Jenny” Sheet



Registered letter and its contents from Eugene Klein to William T. Robey confirming the terms of sale for the newly discovered Inverted “Jenny” sheet of stamps. Note that it was not sent by the new Philadelphia to Washington government airmail service introduced the week before.

The condition of the cover shows the state of anxiety Robey showed when he opened the letter.

Displaced Vignettes

Planes of Varying Heights



There are so many different types of mis-registration that it is possible to put together a series of progressively displaced blue vignettes.

Due to hurried production and lax oversight, sheets were often fed into the single sheet Spider printing press incorrectly, leading to multi-directional shifts and creating such varieties as the "Grounded Plane" stamps.

Range of "Grounded Plane" Varieties



Barely grounded

Grounded

More grounded

Totally "Grounded Planes" are found in column 10 of the third sheet.

Less than five cancelled copies are known off cover.

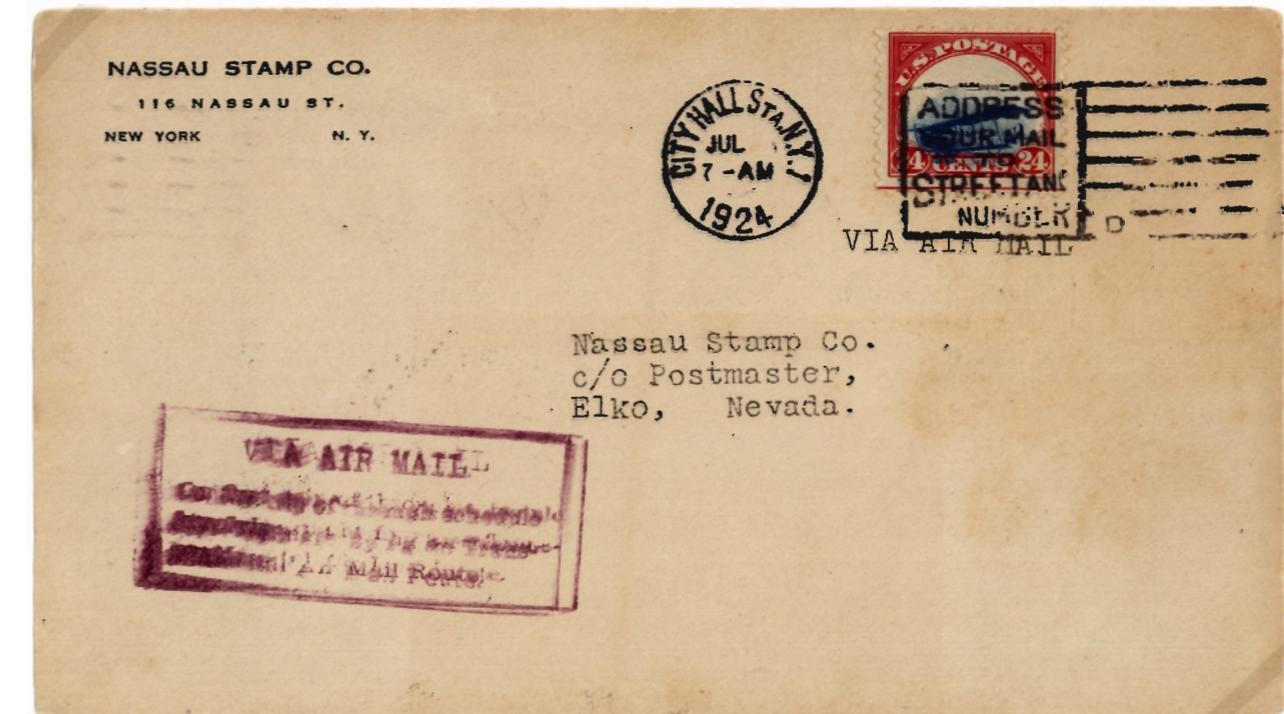
The Third Sheet

Joseph R. Kirker, an aerophilatelic specialist, writing in Linn's Stamp News, April 21, 1986, proved the existence of a third sheet of "Grounded Plane" stamps. Neither the provenance nor the number of "grounded" stamps on that sheet is known.

To be certified by the Philatelic Foundation as a "Grounded Plane" stamp, the wheels of the Curtiss "Jenny" airplane must cut into the word "CENTS" in the bottom of the frame. Three sheets are known to exist; however, not all stamps in each sheet are "Grounded Plane" stamps. The exact number of this variety in existence is unknown.

The "Grounded Plane"

The First or Discovery Sheet



Nassau Stamp Co.
c/o Postmaster,
Elko, Nevada.

The Sanabria "Grounded Plane" Sheet

"Grounded Plane" Stamps Occurred only during the First Printing

The second "grounded plane" sheet came to light in 1946 when it was purchased by Henry M. Goodkind, an aerophilatelic specialist. He sold it at auction in 1964 to George H. Medawar, the publisher of the Sanabria Airmail Catalogue, who backstamped every stamp with the Sanabria logo, and marked each stamp's position on the sheet in pencil as shown at the right.

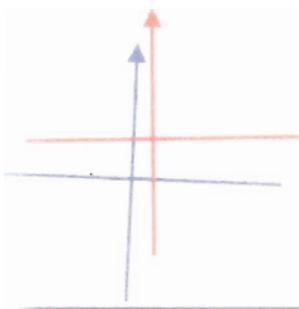


The Philatelic Foundation Analysis Leaflet (ISSN 0196-576X) defining "The United States Grounded Plane" states on page 3: "Examination of photos of the Sanabria Sheet and plating of individual stamps from the sheet indicates that all stamps in the bottom three rows are Grounded Planes, *with the top seven rows being the less pronounced Bottom Shifts.*"

New exhibitor research

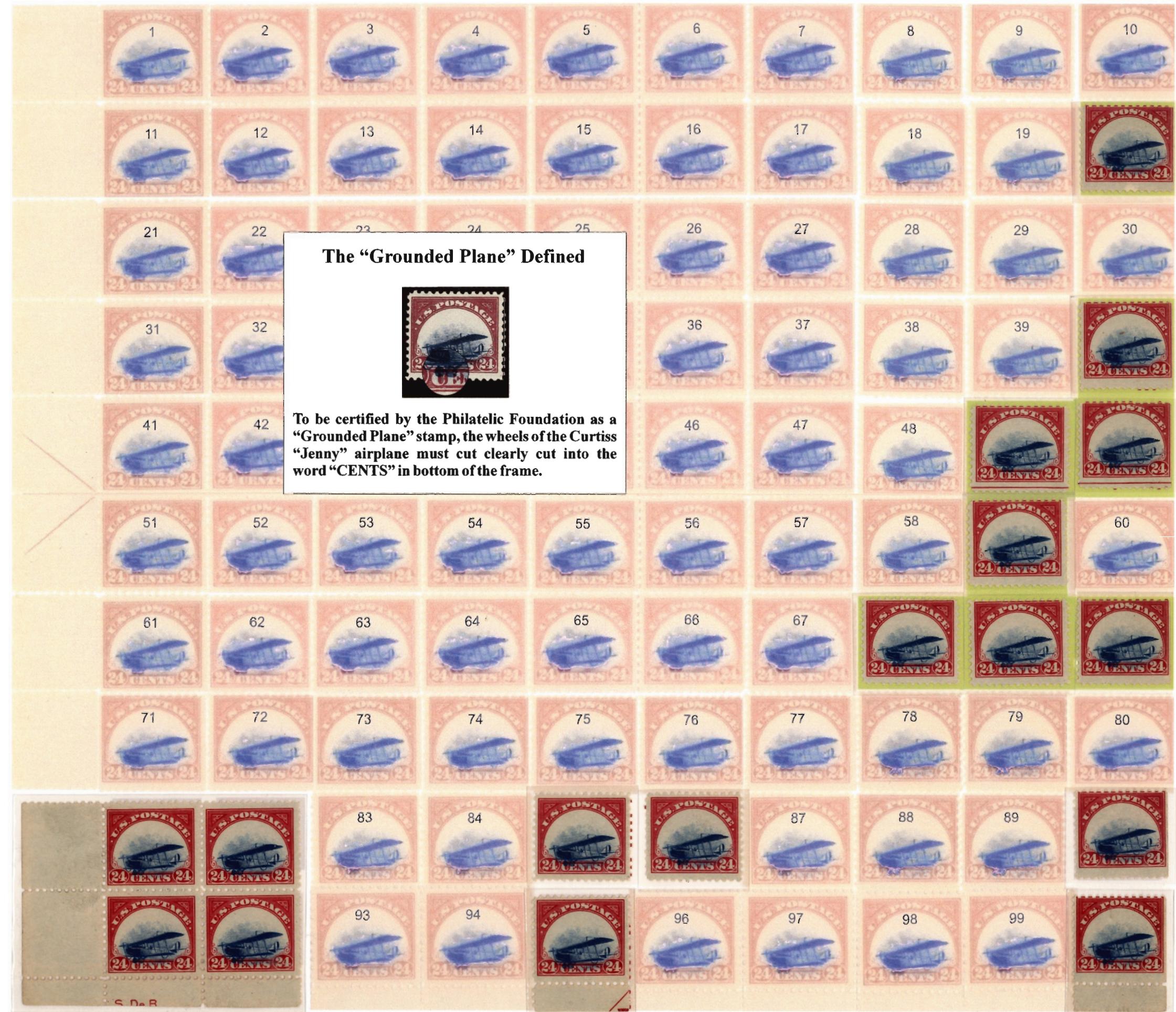
The eight "Grounded Plane" stamp positions (20, 40, 49, 50, 59, 68, 69 and 70) outlined in yellow, and attached on the facsimile Sanabria sheet, disprove the Philatelic Foundation analysis of the "Grounded Plane" stamp locations. These examples illustrate that stamp positions located in the **three far right columns** of the Sanabria sheet should be included in the Philatelic Foundation definition of "Grounded Plane" stamps, rather than only locations in the bottom three rows, as was previously believed.

Orientation diagram Sanabria sheet



Direction of the Sanabria sheet of paper when passing through the Spider press twice: first for the carmine frame, then a second time for the blue vignette. Note the misalignment and downward shift of the vignette.

Positions 81-2/91-2
Only recorded "Grounded Plane" siderographer's block.



Positions 20, 40, 49, 59, 68, 69, 70, 85 and 95 have P. F. certificates.

Planes with Varying Speeds



"Very Fast" Plane

On "Very Fast" plane stamps, the right wing exceeds the carmine frame & breaks into the white margins.



"Fast" Plane

"Fast" plane stamps are typically identified as those on which the right wing of the airplane breaks into the carmine frame.

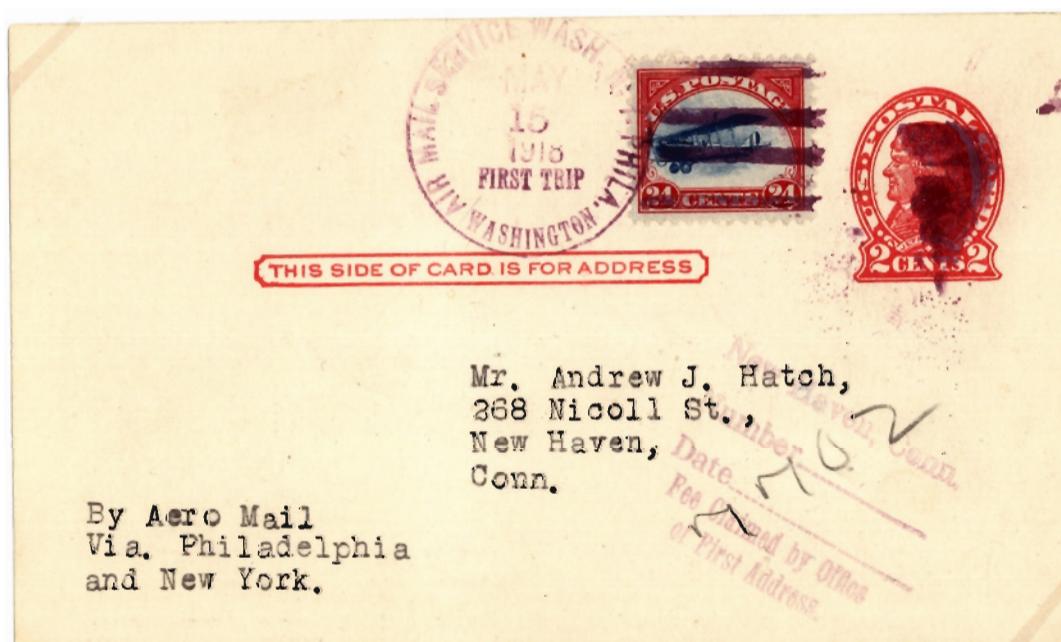


"Slow" Plane

Left is from the 6th row and the right is from the 5th column.



"Slow" Plane
Third Printing
Positions 7-8/17-18.

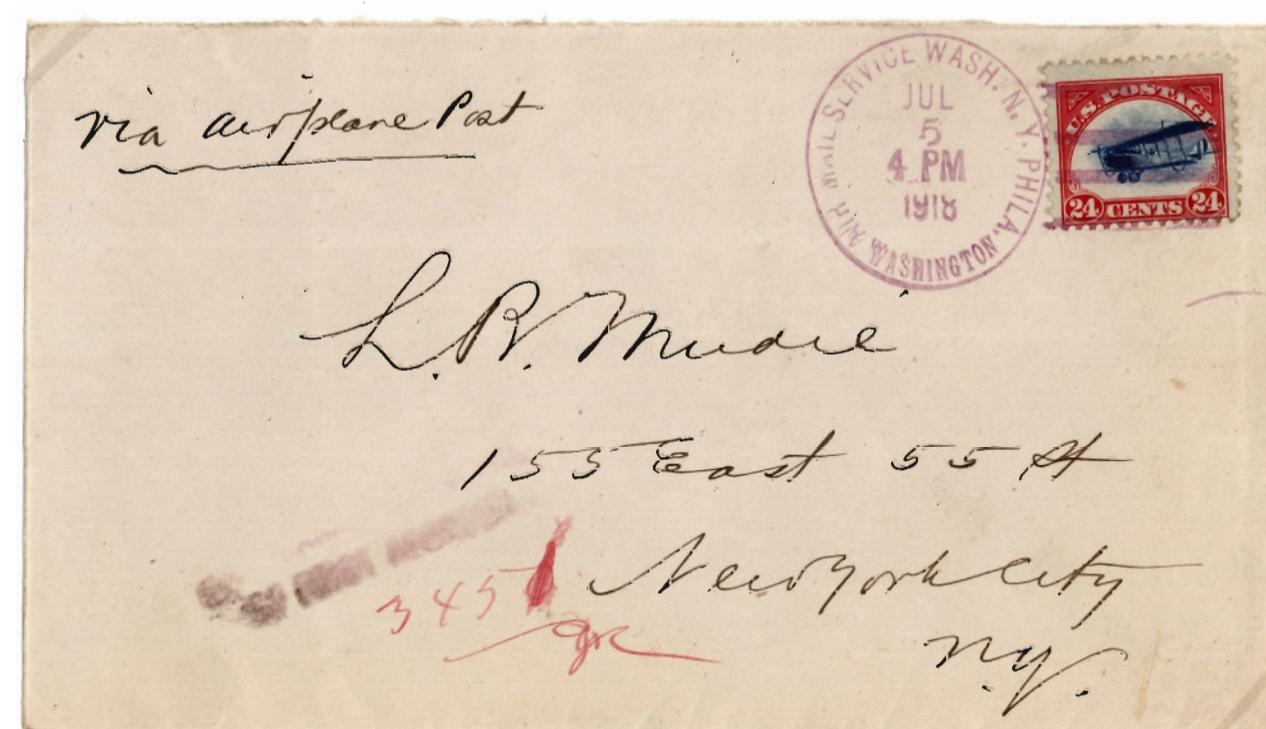


"Fast" Plane

First Flight postcard flown from Washington to New York with a stopover in Philadelphia.

The rate was 24¢ and the 2¢ postcard indicia was overpayment.

Only a few First Trip flown postcards are known.



"Slow" Plane

"Slow-Flying Planes" are those in which the wing tip cuts into the letters "G" or "E" of the word "POSTAGE". Carried on a regularly scheduled Washington to New York flight.



"Fast" Plane
From columns 5 & 6.



"Fast" Plane - Third printing - Positions 3-8/13-18.
The arrow plate marking above positions 5-6 reveals the amount of mis-registration.



"Fast" Plane
From rows 5 & 6.

"Landing" and "High Flying" Planes

"Landing Plane"



First printing - Positions 85-86/95-96.



June 3, 1918, Boston extension flight return leg Boston - New York bearing the unusual Boston three-line commemorative cancellation.



First Printing
Position 31
Sanabria sheet



Some of the stamps on this page, particularly those in the bottom row of the arrow block above, appear to be "Grounded Plane" stamps. However, since they have not been certified by the Philatelic Foundation, they are simply identified as "Landing Plane" stamps.

"High-Flying Plane"



Positions 5-6/15-16.

The misalignment of the arrow selvedge markings is reflected in the vignette being misaligned upwards.

"High-Flying Plane" stamps are those in which the wing tip cuts into the frame adjacent to the "U. S. POSTAGE" lettering.

The End of the 24¢ Jenny

The Post Office takes over
In July 1918, the US Post Office was set to takeover the airmail service. To further encourage the public to use airmail, the rates were reduced to 16¢ on July 15, which effectively ended the use of the 24¢ "Jenny" to prepay a specific airmail rate. A new stamp was issued on July 11 to pay the new rate. It featured the same "Jenny" aircraft but in one color: green.

First day of the 16¢ rate
This cover was among the 34 pounds of mail flown on the first flight from Philadelphia and New York to Washington on July 15, 1918.

