

“THE JENNY”

Evolution of the First U.S. Airmail Stamp

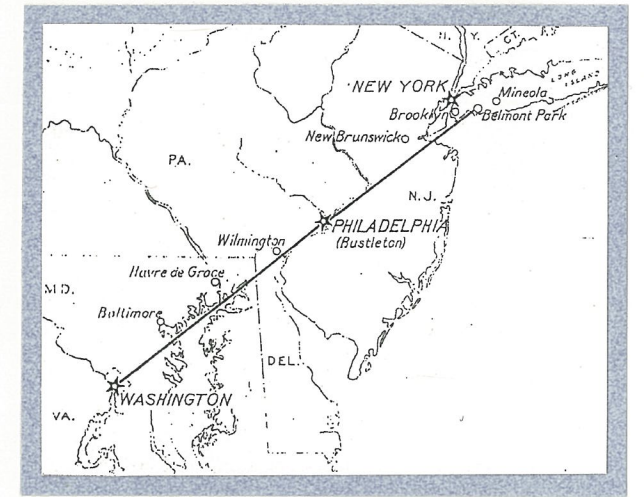


Perfectly Centered
Graded "100"

Complications

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.

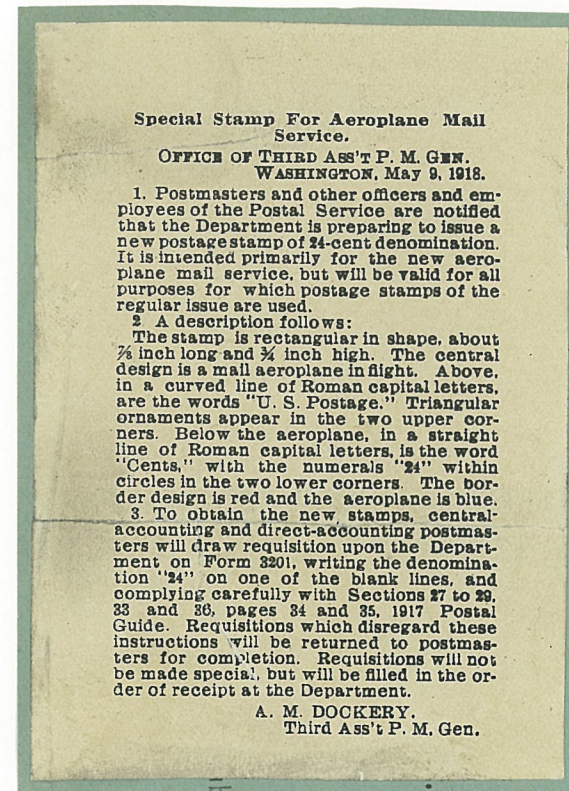


Route of the New Airmail Service

Historical Context

The objective of this exhibit is to illustrate both the challenges encountered and perfect production examples of the first United States airmail stamp in 1918: 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 margin 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 sheet on the first day of sale of the stamp. Position 28, from Robey's discovery sheet of 100 24c *Inverted* "Jenny" stamps, is displayed in this exhibit.



The Official Post Office Department
Announcement for the "Jenny".

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.

Stamps from the First Printed Sheets "Grounded Plane" Variety



The only recorded used multiple

PFC.
reperfed



3rd Discovery Block



Enlargement of the vignette showing the aircraft number "38262", which, coincidentally, was the aircraft illustrated at right that was used on the first flight out of Washington, DC.



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. Numerous shifted vignette varieties are shown in the exhibit.

The stamp was put on sale on May 13, 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.

The "Grounded Plane" variety, where the wheels of the airplane vignette, are so low in the frame as to intersect the word "CENTS", is a misregistration of the frame and vignette. The "Grounded Plane" block to the right has bottom arrow selvage and position 96, a key position known to exist on all three "Grounded Plane" sheets, and only on the first printed sheets of the 1918 airmail issue.

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 "Grounded Plane" was one of the many misregistration varieties, and only occurred during the first printing. Three of the seven recorded "Grounded Plane" blocks are shown in this exhibit.

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.

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 as any other US stamps combined to make up the 24¢ rate. Airmail could be registered for an additional 10¢ fee.



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

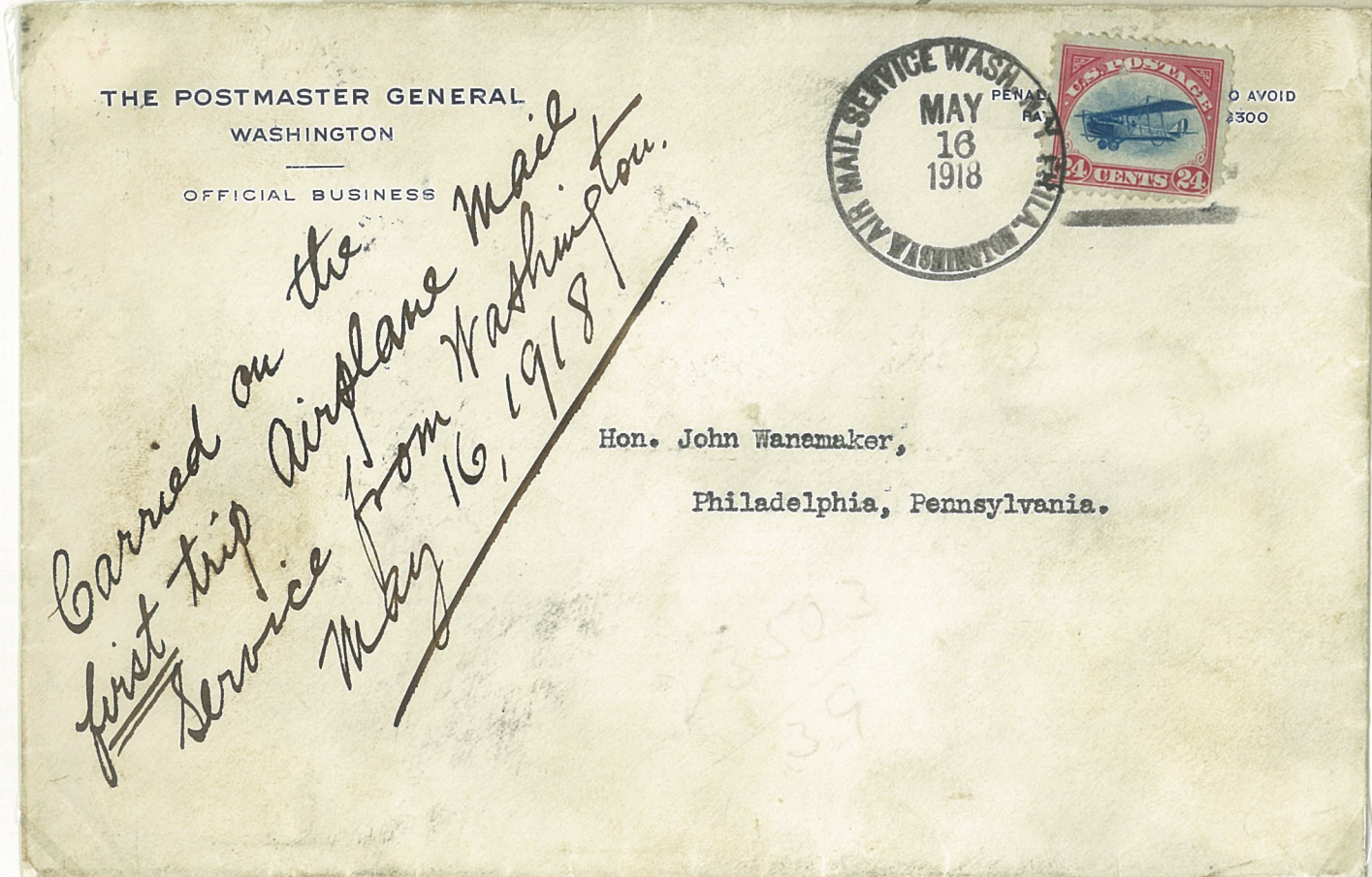
Top: Position 10.

Only sheet position of the 3 printings to have straight edges on both the top and right sides. Carried on the New York to Philadelphia flight.

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.



From an inner sheet position.

Postmarked on May 14, one day after the first day of issue. Held over for the first flight from Philadelphia to New York on the following day.

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 crash landing, they were brought to Washington, DC by automobile and put on the next day's flight as evidence by the May 16th receiving backstamp. 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 16th from Washington DC. The flight was piloted by Lt. James C. Edgerton who had flown the "Frist Flight" from Philadelphia to Washington on May 15th. The envelope was endorsed by Wanamaker as "Carried on the first trip Airplane Mail Service from Washington. May 16, 1918".



May 16th backstamp on May 15th crash cover at top left.

The Inverted "Jenny"

The First Printing: Position 28



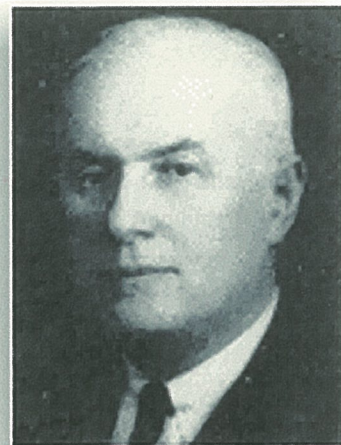
The only sheet of one hundred Inverted "Jenny" stamps was purchased on May 14, 1918, at the New York Avenue Branch Post Office, in Washington, DC, by William T. Robey, an avid stamp collector.

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

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

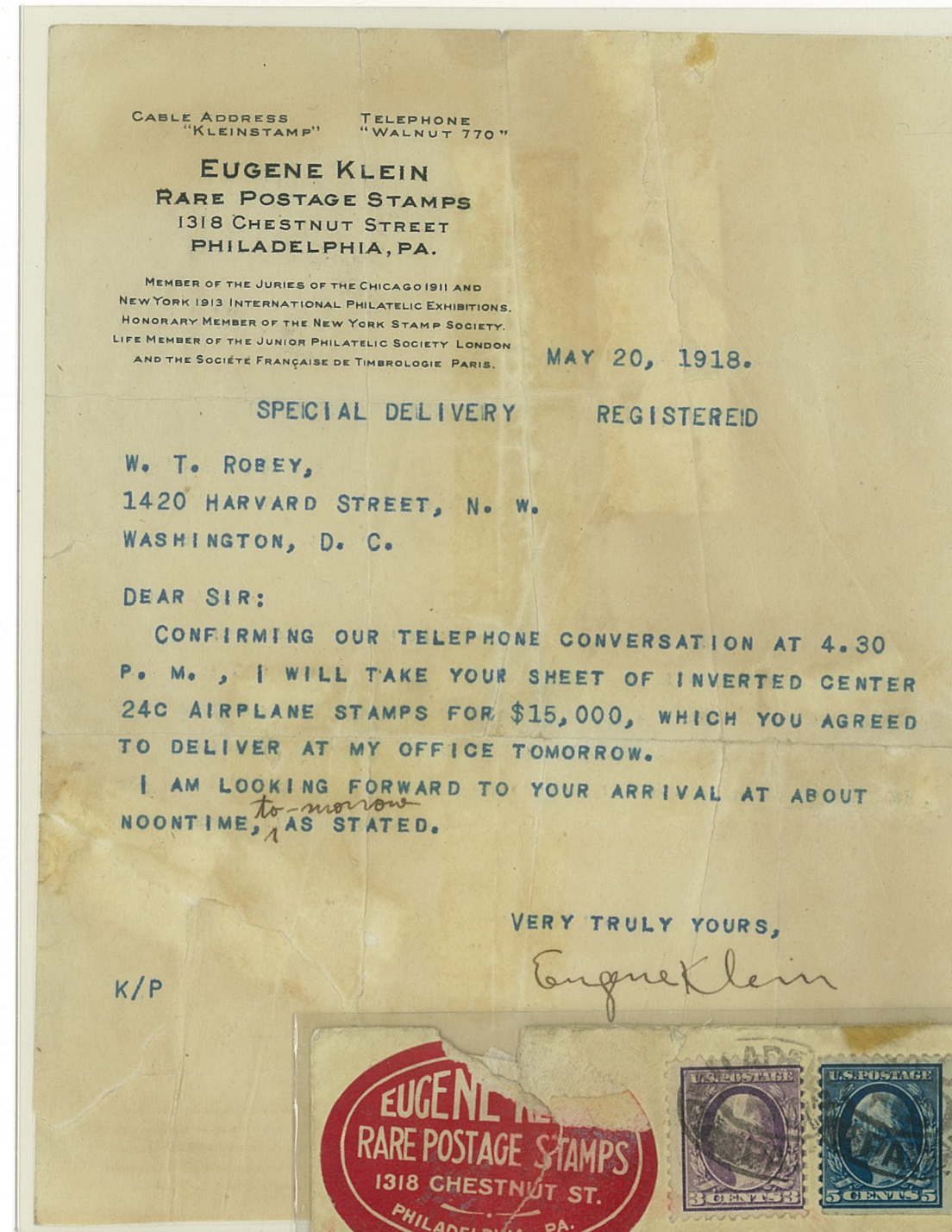


The Blue Guide Dot



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.

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



First printing
Position 95



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.

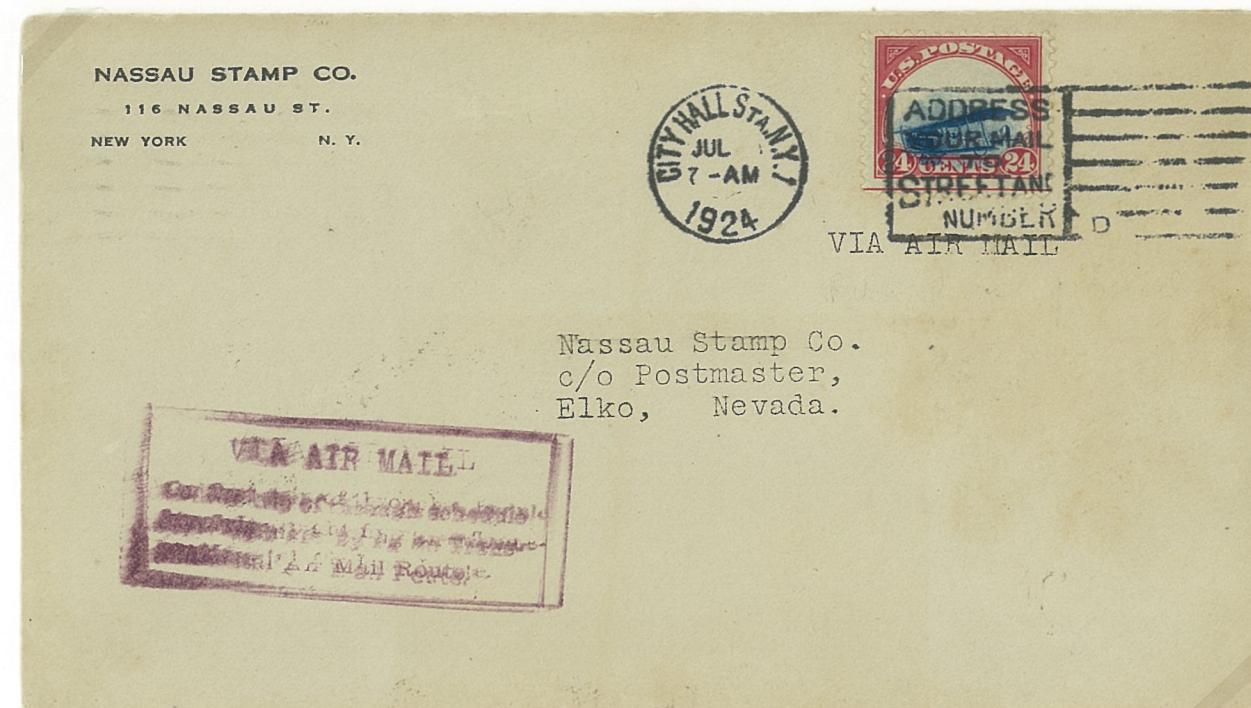


The Third Sheet

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.

The "Grounded Plane"

The First or Discovery Sheet



The first sheet on which "Grounded Plane" stamps were found belonged to Jacob Klemann, owner of the Nassau Stamp Company. He had difficulty selling the stamps so he affixed at least 13 single stamps to covers and mailed them. Three were addressed similarly to the cover above. Others were sent c/o various cities along the route commemorating the first flight of the government-operated Transcontinental Mail Service between San Francisco and New York. All of the covers he mailed were postmarked July 1, 1924, and are the only source of covers using the "Grounded Plane" stamp variety.

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 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.

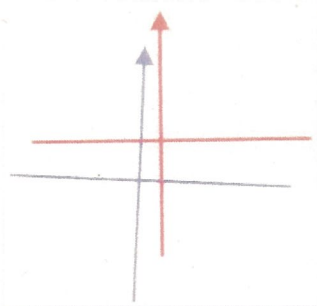


The Philatelic Foundation Analysis Leaflet (ISSN 0196-576X) defining "The United States Grounded Plane" states on page 3: "Examination of photos of the Sanabria Sheet and plating of individual stamps from the sheet indicates that all stamps in the bottom three rows are Grounded Planes, with the top seven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

New exhibitor research

The nine "Grounded Plane" stamp positions (20, 40, 49, 50, 59, 60, 68, 69 and 70) outlined in green, 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



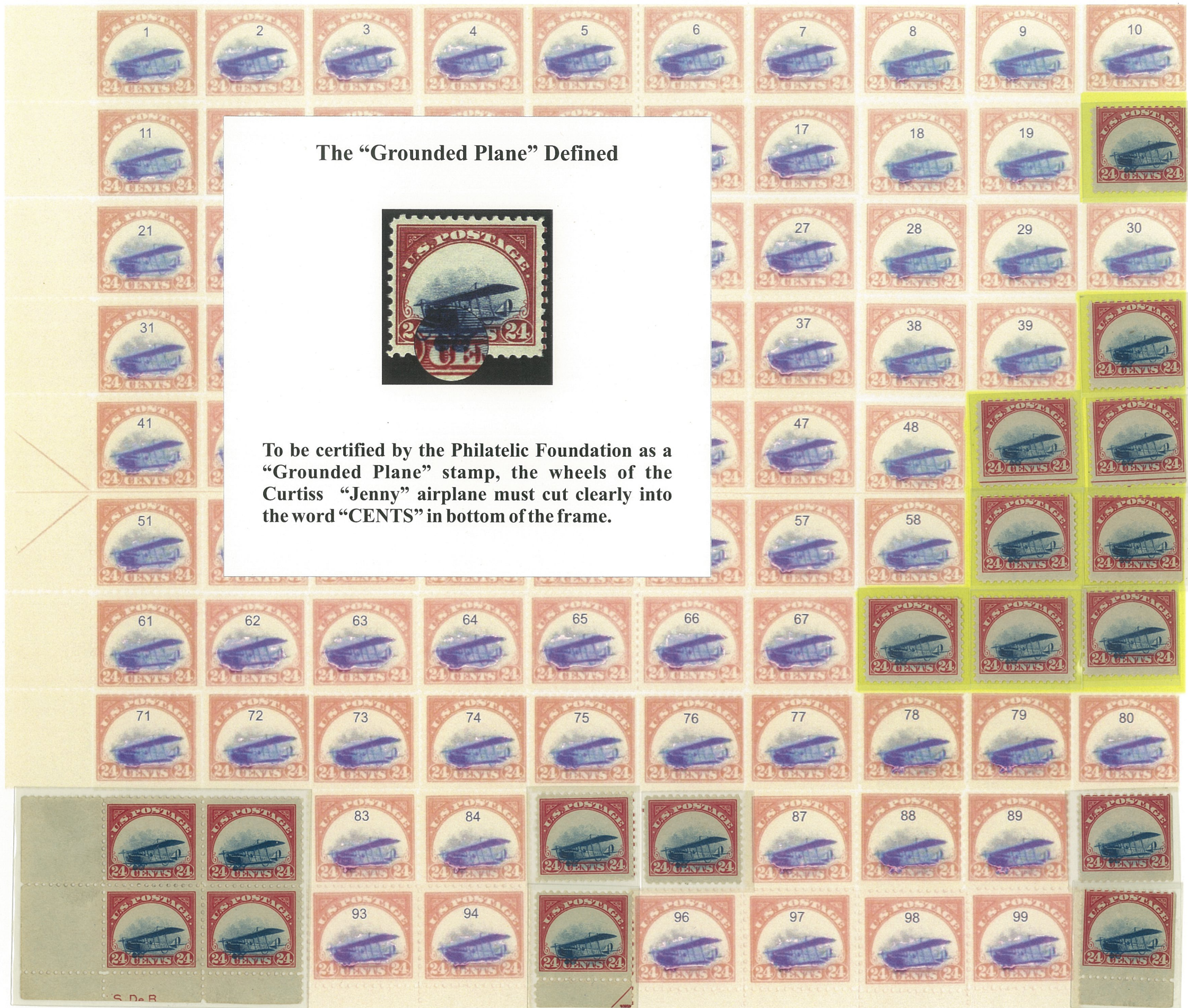
Direction of the Sanabria sheet of paper when passing through the Spider press twice: first for the carmine frame, then a second time for the blue vignette. *Note* the misalignment and downward shift of the vignette.

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

The "Grounded Plane" Defined



To be certified by the Philatelic Foundation as a "Grounded Plane" stamp, the wheels of the Curtiss "Jenny" airplane must cut clearly into the word "CENTS" in bottom of the frame.



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.

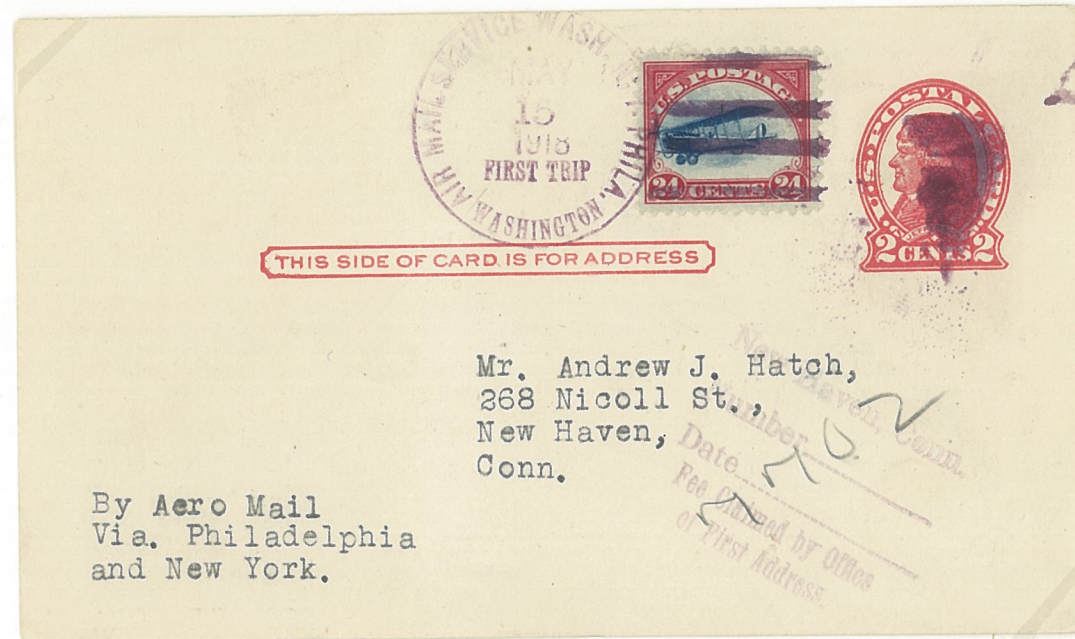


“Slow” Plane

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

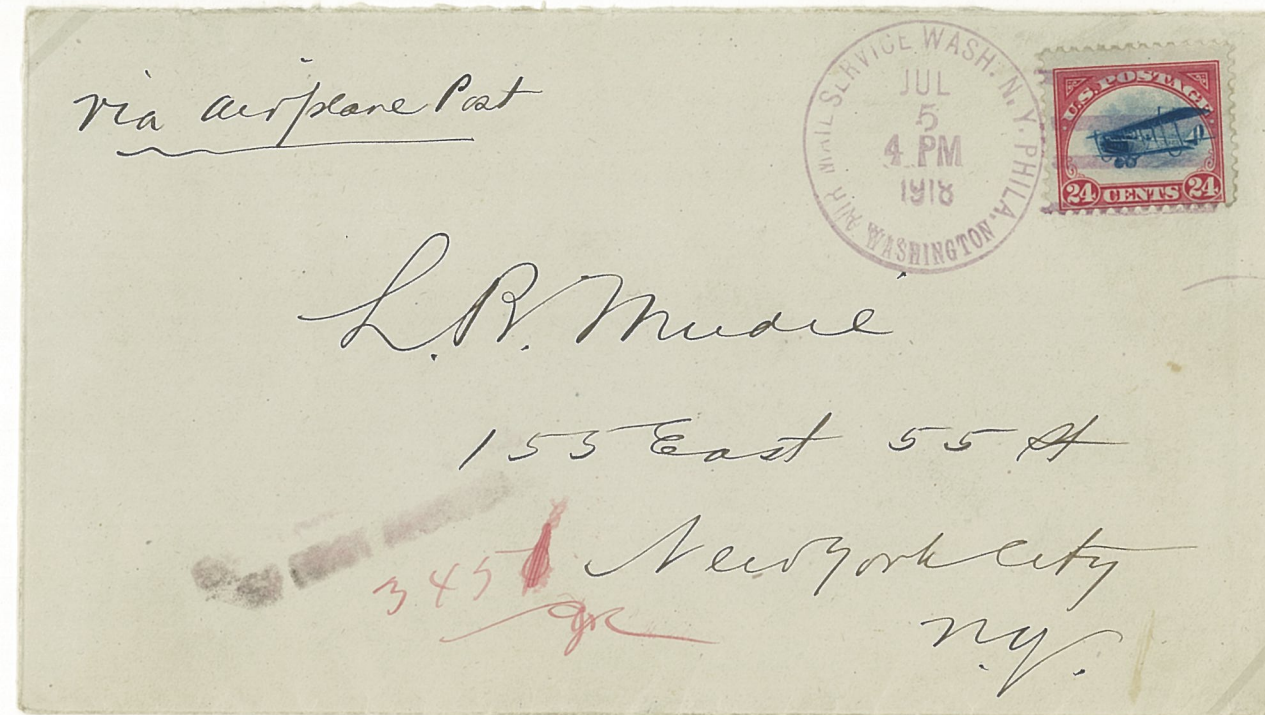


“Slow” Plane
Third Printing
Positions 7-8/17-18.



“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” Plane

Some of the stamps on this page, particularly those in the bottom row of the arrow block at left, 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.



First Printing: Positions 85-86/95-96



First Printing
Positions 31
Sanabria Sheet

“High-Flying” Plane



PFC



Positions 5-6/15-16

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

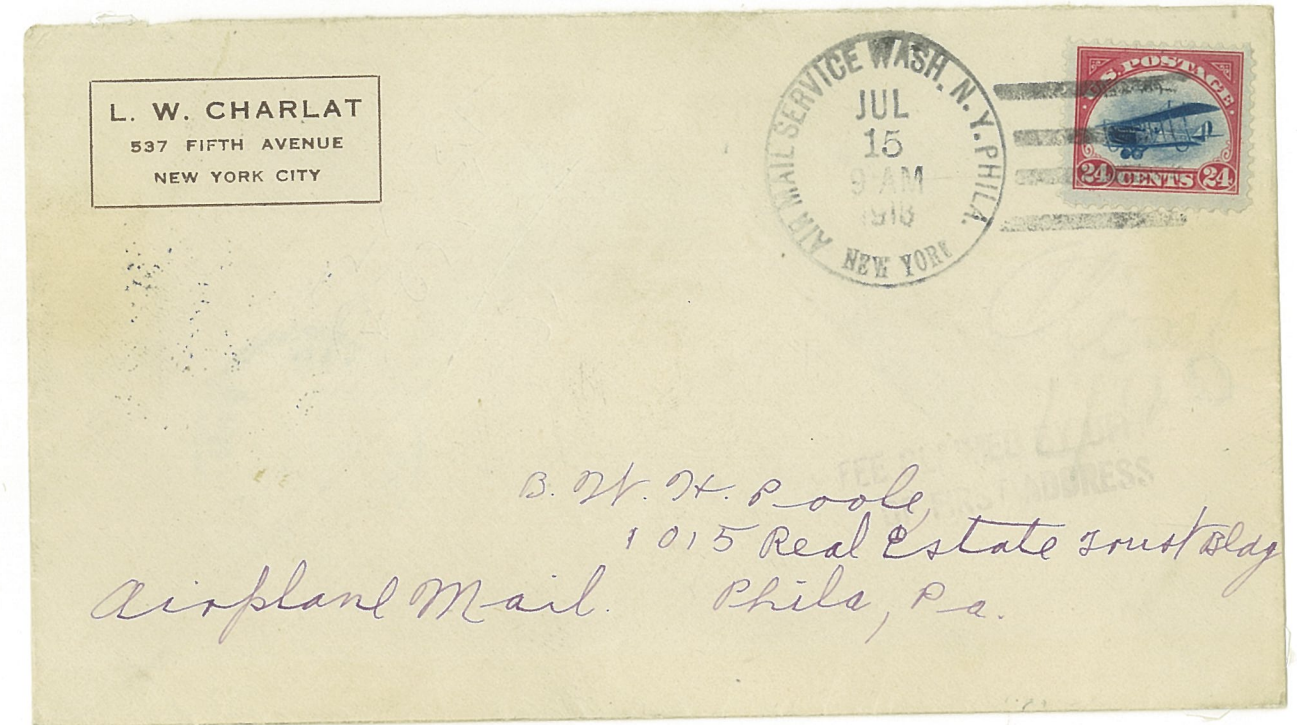
“High-Flying” Plane stamps are those in which the wing tip cuts in the frame adjacent to the “U.S. POSTAGE” lettering.

Conclusion

The End of the 24¢ Jenny

To further encourage the public to use airmail, the rates were reduced to 16¢ on July 15. A stamp to pay the new rate was issued on July 11. It featured the same “Jenny” aircraft but in one color: green.

This cover was among the 34 pounds of mail flown on the first flight from New York to Philadelphia on July 15, 1918 at the new 16¢ rate. Note the overpayment of the 16¢ postage using the 24¢ Jenny stamp.



EPILOGUE

In 2013, the Post Office issued a new \$2 version of the most publicized stamp error in U.S. history—the 24¢ 1918 Inverted Jenny stamp. The stamps are self-adhesive and issued in souvenir sheets of six. The Post Office printed only 100 sheets of the “Un-Inverted Jenny”, which are great rarities as a result.



2013 \$2 *Inverted Jenny* Commemorative Souvenir Sheet Vignette Only Essay

2013 \$2 “Un-Inverted” Jenny Commemorative Souvenir Sheet
One of only 100 Printed, 2nd Discovery Sheet

PFC