

“THE JENNY”

Printing Variations of America’s First Airmail Stamp



Introduction

The stamps in this traditional exhibit illustrate both the problems 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.



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.



Perfectly Centered
Graded “100”

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.

Stamps from the First Printed Sheets

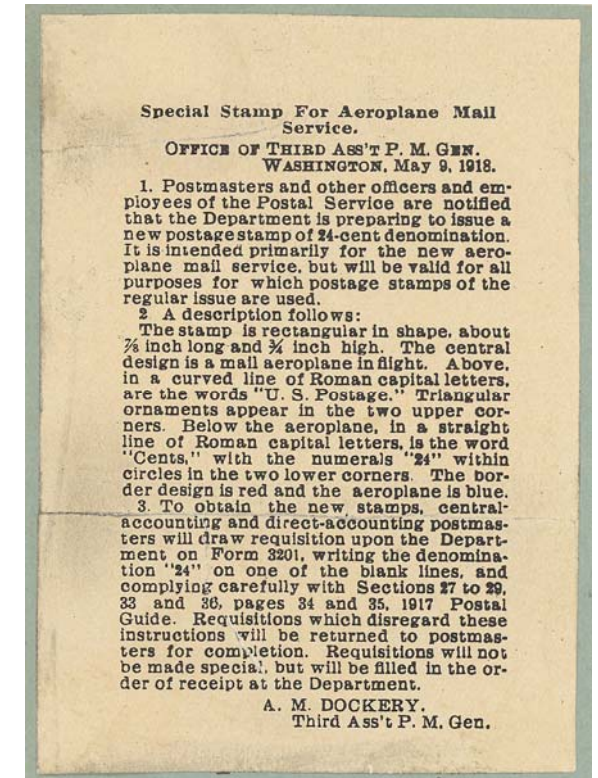


The only recorded used
“Grounded Plane” multiple



The “Grounded Plane”
3rd Discovery Block

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.



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