

## The First U.S. Airmail Stamp, Scott C3

Although numbered as Scott C3, the 24¢ Curtiss Jenny issue (Figure 1) is the first U.S. airmail stamp. The Act of May 6, 1918 authorized the Post Office Department to carry the mail by airplane and set a rate of 24 cents per ounce. On May 11, 1918, the same day that President Woodrow Wilson signed the Act, the Post Office announced the new service, as follows:



Figure 1

Washington, D.C., May 11th, 1918

### Aeroplane Mail Service

Aeroplane Mail Service will be established May 15th 1918, between Washington, Philadelphia and New York, one round trip daily except Sundays. Letters and sealed parcels...may be mailed at Washington, Philadelphia and New York for any city in the United States, or its possessions or postal agencies.

The rate of postage will be 24 cents per ounce or fraction thereof, which includes special delivery service. Postage may be paid by affixing either the distinct aeroplane stamps or its equivalent in other postage stamps. When the latter are used, the mail should be endorsed, "By Aeroplane." Mail by aeroplane may be registered by prepayment of 10 cent registry fee in addition to postage.

Until further notice the aeroplanes will leave Belmont Park, N.Y., and Washington, D.C. at 11:30 A.M....

Otto Praeger,  
2nd Asst. Postmaster General

This necessitated a 24¢ airmail stamp, which was issued on May 13, 1918. In keeping with the importance of the occasion, a bicolored stamp was created by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. (This, of course, led to the airmail invert, which is covered in a separate set of Manual pages.)

It was only when the airmail rate was reduced to 16¢ (including a 10¢ Special Delivery fee) effective July 15, 1918, that a 16¢ airmail stamp (Scott C2) was needed, and then to 6¢ (dropping the Special Delivery fee unless specifically requested and paid for by the sender) effective December 15, 1918, that a 6¢ stamp (Scott C1) was needed. But because Scott treats these three stamps as one set, and numbers them from lowest to highest denomination, the earliest issued stamp is numbered as C3.

As scheduled, the first flight from New York to Washington, D.C. took place on May 15. Shown in Figure 2 is a cover carried on that



Figure 2

flight, signed by B. B. Lipsner, who was in charge of the Post Office's airmail service. The cover is addressed to Percy McG. Mann, who is credited with creating the labels that are affixed in the upper right and lower left corners.

Note the use of Washington-Franklin heads and the notation above Lipsner's signature, "No Airmail Stamps." If you look carefully at the label in Figure 3, with the C3 stamp, you can see that space was provided for three definitive sized stamps, and given the late announcement of the availability of a 24¢ airmail stamp, it is possible that the label was designed with the Washington-Franklins usage in mind.

Mekeel's *Weekly Stamp News* of May 25, 1918 carried the report "Written on the Field" by A. C. Roessler:

Promptly on schedule...the initial airplane U.S. mail service started from Belmont Park. Aviator Torrey Webb tuned up the machine (an Italian motor in a Curtiss type plane) and at 11:28 a special car on the Long Island R.R. raced to the edge of the field, where a waiting U.S. Mail auto carried the two bags of aero mail to the impatient messenger of the air. There were about 10,000 pieces in the bags for Philadelphia and Washington. Postmaster Patten had a wire from Washington, informing him that 4,000 letters were being sent northward...

At 3:30, five battle planes from Mineola training field, arose in triangle formation to greet the postplane from Philadelphia, which was then a speck on the horizon...and five minutes later...the first regular daily airplane mail pouch was lifted from the observer's seat and rushed to the waiting auto...

Newspaper correspondents mentioned the enthusiasm philatelists took in this airline mail...While much interest was shown in the event by P.O. officials and members of the Aero Club of America, it can be said with safety that the stamp collectors were the most interested.

Shown in Figure 3 is a cover with the 24¢ airmail issue tied to the cover by a Washington departure May 15, 1918 cancel with the "First Trip" inscription. However, this trip from Washington to New York was not successful, as is re-



Figure 3

ported in Mekeel's of May 25, 1918:

"The Air Mail service on the first day, May 15, was carried out as follows: at 11:30 a.m. Lieut. Torrey Webb left Belmont Park, L.I., N.Y. He arrived at Bustleton, Philadelphia, Pa., at 1 p.m.... At 1.06 p.m., Lieut. James C. Edgerton left Bustleton, and he arrived at the Polo Grounds, Washington, D.C., at 2:50 p.m....

At 11.47 a.m., Lieut. George Leroy Boyle left the Polo Grounds, Washington, D.C., and descended at Waldorf, Maryland, at 12.05 p.m., after engine trouble, breaking the propeller of his aeroplane when landing....The aeroplane in which Lieut. Boyle left Washington

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was numbered 38262, and this is the one that is pictured on the new 24¢ stamp. The mail dispatched on this unfortunate flight was returned to Washington by auto mail truck and was held over for the next day's service, and this was completed by Lieut. Edgerton, who carried the delayed mail (and probably the second day's mail) on the flight from Washington to Philadelphia...

The special cancellations are interesting. All are the same, with the exception of the name of the city of its origin, and consist of provisional rubber hand stamp impressions. Each is inscribed within a circle 'Air Mail Service Wash. N.Y. Phila.' The one in use at Washington has 'Washington' at the bottom, that at Philadelphia 'Phila.', and that at New York 'New York'....The May 15 service from all three cities was commemorated by the appearance of 'First Trip' under the date in the center of the circle. The May 16 service from Washington was also inscribed 'First Trip' owing to the failure of the previous day's service....

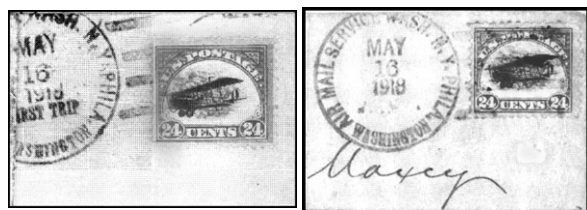


Figure 4

Actually, the clerk had forgotten to remove the inscription (Fig. 4, left), but his 'mistake' was detected almost immediately, the "First Trip" inscription was removed (Fig. 4, right), and most May 16 air mail from Washington does not have this inscription. It is believed that there are less than a dozen covers bearing the "First Trip" inscription and the May 16 date.

To provide a stamp that was both distinctive and appropriate, it was decided to create a red, white and blue stamp, using red for the frame and blue for the vignette, printed on white paper. The stamps were printed and issued in sheets of 100 subjects, divided by horizontal and vertical guide lines into units of 25 for the convenience of postal clerks and the general public. These full sheets of 100 turned out to be too large for the post office 'books' in which the sheets were distributed, so two of the margins were cut off.

At first there was no uniform plan as to which margins should be removed so early sheets were available with varying straight edged sides. This—and the fact that many stamps from this era were printed in full sheets of 400, cut into panes of 100—is what gave rise to the erroneous belief that these were different panes of 100 from a plate of 400 subjects.

In due course, it was decided to remove the right and bottom margins on all later sheets of this issue.

All of the planes used on these first flights were Curtiss JANDs, more familiarly known as Jennies. This is the plane that is pictured on the stamp, and it is one of the little-known ironies of history that the specific plane on the stamp was the one that broke down on the May 15 First Flight from Washington, D.C. With the permission of the War Department the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had obtained a photograph of one of the army planes which was to carry the air mail beginning May 15. This photograph was used as a model by C. A. Huston in designing the stamp. J. Eissler did the engraving for the vignette and E. M. Hall engraved the frame, lettering and numerals.

The frame plate was put to press on May 10, and on May 11, when the master die was approved, the vignette plate was

used for the first time to complete the printing. On May 13, the stamp was issued to the postmasters who immediately placed them on sale; however, reports at the time indicated that due to the short time from announcement to printing and distribution, initial supplies were limited, and in some instances stamps were sold one at a time strictly for immediate use, even to the point of being affixed to the envelopes as they were sold.

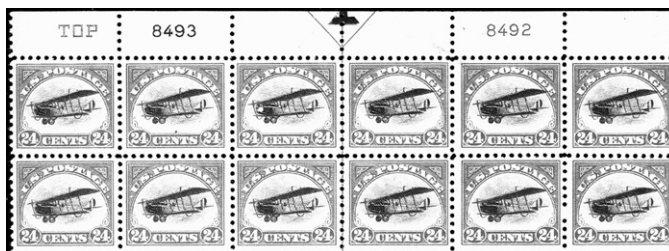


Figure 5

The discovery of the invert sheet made it advisable to place some mark on the plate to use as a printing and inspection guide. The word "TOP" was therefore added to the plates. After TOP had been added to the blue vignette plate, a small printing was made. The TOP was later added to the red (Scott identifies the color as carmine rose) frame plate. Figure 5 shows the blue TOP and plate number 8493, the red plate number 8492, the arrow and the vertical guide line. Plate blocks with both TOPs look the same as this illustration, with the red TOP one stamp over to the right from the red plate number 8492.

Because it was a short run, plate blocks from the printing showing only the blue TOP carry a considerable premium. The 2005 Durland Plate Number catalog assigns a value of \$1,600 to plates of 12 with both TOPs and \$12,000 to plates with only the blue TOP.)

Because of the manner in which the sheets were cut down, along the bottom and either the left or right margin (at first) and later the bottom and right margin, the scarcest full arrow positions are from the bottom position, next scarcest are from the right margin, then the left margin. Centerline blocks are more common than any arrow block, and horizontal or vertical line blocks are even more common.

The first airmail stamp was printed on unwatermarked paper and perforated 11 all around. As a result of the cutting process, straight edges were created along the bottom and either the left or right side. Many of these straight edges have since been perforated by stamp 'doctors' to the point where the rarest of all C3s, other than the inverts, may be straight-edged examples.

A total of 2,134,888 24¢ First Airmail stamps were produced. In addition to the invert, collectable varieties include stamps with the plane shifted to the left ('fast'; Fig. 6), right ('slow'), bottom ('grounded') or top. There are no significant shade or plate varieties.

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Figure 6

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## The New 24c Air Mail Stamp Discovered With Inverted Centre



(Editor's Note: With the current attention being given to the 75th anniversary of the inauguration of Airmail service, the issuance of the first Airmail stamp, and the discovery of a sheet of the stamp with inverted centers, we went back into the Mekeel's editions that first brought news of these historic events to the attention of the philatelic public. The headline above broke the news in the May 25 edition; as we shall see, the ad at left, from the same edition was obsolete before the ink was dry on the printed page. Ensuing editions chronicled the early history of the Invert sheet, as well as the brief life of the 24¢ Airmail rate, and the stamp that had been issued to meet that rate. JFD.)

### A New U.S. Invert.

24c carmine and blue with inverted airplane in center. A few of the remaining copies of the only sheet found for sale at \$250.00 each. Copies with one straight edge \$175.00 each.

Collections of United States, Twentieth Century and War Stamps will be incomplete without this great rarity.

**EUGENE KLEIN**

**1318 Chestnut Street,  
Philadelphia, Pa.**

Cable Address: KLEINSTAMP

*From Mekeel's, May 25, 1918*

### NEW 24c WITH INVERTED CENTRE.

H. B. Mason and Albert E. Gorham of Washington, D. C., inform us that the new 24c air mail stamp has been found with inverted centre. We quote from Mr. Gorham's letter as follows:-

"One of my friends, Wm. T. Robey, assistant cashier for Hibbs and Co., bankers, purchased a sheet of 100 of the new 24c with inverted centre. He was offered \$1,000 for it, which he refused. I have seen the sheet and it is a good one. Later he was called up by long distance from New York by a dealer who also made him a good offer.

### THE 24c AERO MAIL INVERT.

*Clipping from W. J. Eck.*

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.... bids for these stamps began to come in, for single stamps and for the hundred.... 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 \$15,000 for his prize and was considering it.... - *Washington Sun.*

### \$20,000 FOR SHEET OF 24c INVERTS.

The New York *Tribune* is authority for the statement that the sheet of 24c inverts has been purchased for \$20,000 by Col. E. H. R. Green, son of the late Hetty Green. The article states that Mr. Robey... sold it to a Philadelphia stamp dealer, who in turn disposed of it to Col. Green.

### AIRPLANE MAIL SERVICE INAUGURATED

By A. C. Roessler

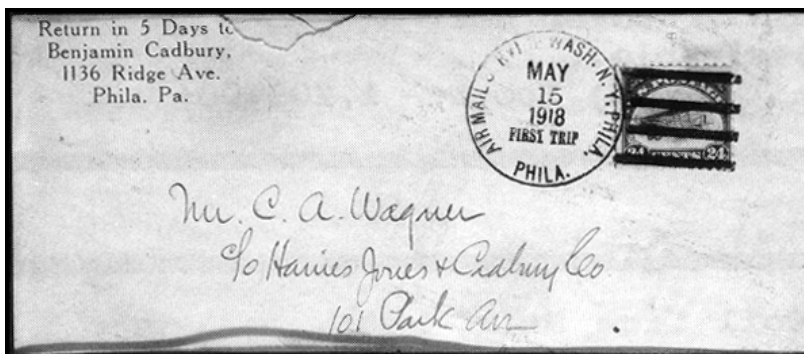
BELMONT PARK, L. ID., May 15, 1918—Promptly on schedule... the initial airplane U.S. mail service started from Belmont Park. Aviator Torrey Webb tuned up the machine... at 11:28 a special car on the Long Island R. R. raced to the edge of the field, where a waiting U.S. Mail auto carried the two bags of aero mail to the impatient messenger of the air. There were about 10,000 pieces in the bags for Phila-

delphia and Washington. Postmaster Patten had a wire from Washington, informing him that 4,000 letters were being sent northward.

At 3:30, five battle planes from Mineola training field, arose in triangle formation to greet the post-plane from Philadelphia, which was then a speck on the horizon, and five minutes later, after circling the field, first at 5,000 feet altitude and then at 1,000, the machine slid gracefully to the ground and the first regular daily airplane mail pouch was lifted from the observer's seat and rushed to the waiting auto, thence to a special track, where the one electric car of the Long Island R. R. was waiting to carry the single pouch to N. Y. City.

Newspaper correspondents mentioned the enthusiasm philatelists took in this airline mail, and several papers gave notice to the 400 letters one dealer had in one batch—one tenth of all the mail coming on the Washington plane. While much interest was shown in the event by P.O. officials and the Aero Club... stamp collectors were the most interested.

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*One of the covers carried on the first flight from Philadelphia, with the 24¢ Curtiss Jenny (Sc. C3) doing Air Mail Service. Backstamped "N.Y. May 15, 4:30 P.M., 1918."*

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## *The New 24c Air Mail Stamp Discovered With Inverted Centre*

*From Mekeel's, June 1, 1918*

### **A New U.S. Invert.**

After writing last week's advertisement, I sold the entire sheet of one hundred 24c with inverted airplane to a philatelist. Consequently, I am obliged to cancel the prices quoted. The purchaser incorporated a portion of the sheet with his collection and authorized me to sell the balance, thereby giving collectors an opportunity to secure an otherwise unobtainable stamp. Price on application....

**EUGENE KLEIN**

### **EDITORIAL**

*Inverted-* It came sooner than expected and it was introduced with a fanfare of trumpets that would make the ranking star of the circus satisfied with life. The Associated Press was generous in its treatment of the momentous discovery and detected the human interest in the episode and played it up with a master's touch. Aerial post, aeroplane on stamp upside down, and Colonel Green, son of Hetty Green, were an ensemble that was worthy of the eye of the best of managers and the refreshing result rejoices philatelists.

Stamps have received a stimulus just at the time they were beginning to droop a bit that will carry them on at high speed into mid-summer. How gripping is the sequence of events—the citizen returning the sheet or the stamps from it because the center was upside down; the receptive individual next in line at the post office who overhears the colloquy and whose memories of philatelic fondness for stamp curiosities are vaguely stirred; the inspired dealer who luckily has the underwriting, or at least, merchandising of the stamps, and then, the estimated value of each of the errors.

Colonel Green is said to have been content with "a portion of the sheet," and that he is glad to divide the remainder of the stamps among his friends, presumably at a fair *quid pro*

*quo*. The value of the error is placed at two hundred and fifty dollars each and the stamp has been offered at that price by a Philadelphia dealer. We do not need to say that the newest error, the twenty-four cent aeroplane stamp, inverted center, is under notice.

\* \* \*

*Talk-*Paragraphers and other newspaper writers seized upon the subject for exploitation, and many were the gay remarks and humorous quips committed to paper by the scribbling outsiders, who regard philately as a mysterious thing apart. While it seems difficult to head off the inverted center in a two color print, the aeroplane error has come so suddenly as to take away the breath of collectors.

We cannot forbear to publish in this connection an editorial from the Philadelphia *Record* of May 22nd: "A sheet of the new airplane postal stamps, aggregating \$24 in face value, in which the picture of the airplane was inadvertently printed upside down, is reported to have been purchased by a collector for \$20,000. The strain upon credulity is a little severe, but if we are able to believe it, an easy way appears to be opened to Uncle Sam to add to his war funds without taxing or borrowing. A few hundred of each variety of his numerous stamps and coins might be struck off with faulty workmanship for the satisfaction of collectors and the replenishment of the treasury. Collecting stamps and coins does not seem to be a very useful occupation, but it might be made so if collectors could be relieved of their money to help win the war."

Our comment is in the words of the friend who sent in the clipping: "It appears that there are still some writers who require an idea of this kind to help fill space and make their employers think they are earning their salaries."

\* \* \*

*Boom-*Somewhat unexpectedly, the aerial post and stamps have proved to be one of the greatest booms ever conferred on collecting. The columns of publicity that they have received would aggregate rods in length and illustrations of letters with aerial postmarks, etc., have been numerous. We have received a mass of clippings on the subject from readers to whom, *en bloc*, we return thanks. The stamp theme enters into many of the accounts, and in some instances, reference is made to philatelists in connection with the new stamp. We cannot forbear to comment on the liberal and intelligent treatment that has been accorded the aerial post and the stamp by the *Christian Science Monitor*.... We have heard that it has been proposed to start an aerial line between Chicago and St. Louis.

*From Mekeel's, July 6, 1918*

### **LOWER RATES FOR AERIAL MAIL.**

Washington, June 28-Postmaster General Burleson announced today that after July 15 the charge for airplane mail service will be 16 cents instead of 24. This will make a rate of 6 cents for the first ounce and the usual 10 cents for special delivery, with 6 cents more for each additional ounce or fraction of an ounce.

...The trip from New York to Washington is being made in three hours' actual flying time....

*From Mekeel's, July 13, 1918*

### **FINDING THE AEROPLANE INVERT**

BY W. T. ROBESY

The new 24 cent aeroplane mail stamps were put on sale in Washington on Tuesday, May 14, at 9:00 a.m. I secured a sheet as soon as same were placed on sale and later, at 12:30 p.m., returned to the postoffice for a second

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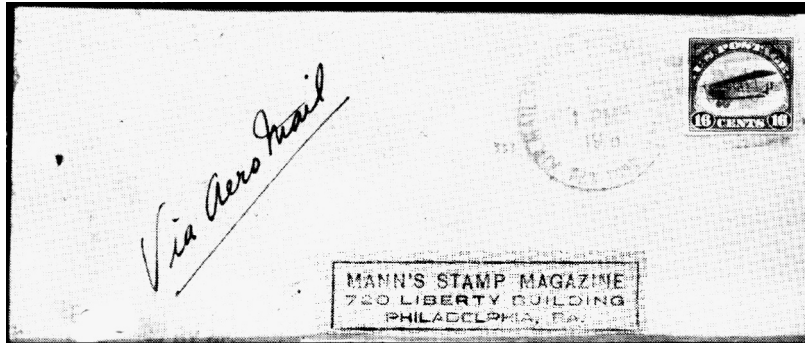
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sheet. It was on my second trip that same were found. These were brought from the New York Branch and when I discovered what I had, I immediately tried to buy more, but was unsuccessful in my attempt. After looking at several more sheets at the same time as I purchased the inverts I showed the clerk what I had. He immediately shut down his window and ran for the telephone. This caused a stoppage of the sale of these stamps until the supply on hand was carefully inspected for any other inverted sheets. Telegrams were immediately sent to New York and Philadelphia notifying them of the inverted sheet and to stop sale of these stamps until the stock on hand was carefully examined. I showed my prize to several dealers in New York, Philadelphia and Washington, but all seemed to be scared to place a value, thinking that it would turn out to be another case of the 5 cent error (*in which additional copies turned up*).

Three more sheets of these inverts were found in the stock on hand in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing

*Replacing the 24¢ rate, the 16¢ Curtiss Jenny doing Air Mail Service July 15, 1918, N.Y. to Philadelphia, on cover addressed to Mann's Stamp Magazine. Handstamp on reverse reads "Send a Letter by Airplane especially to one 'over there'". It will be a real treat."*



before any were placed on sale. These were cancelled with a pencil and thereby spoiling same for postage. The sheet I finally sold to a Philadelphia collector for the princely sum of \$15,000, which was quite an investment on the outlay of only \$24.00.—*Collectors' Journal*.

### *From Mekeel's, July 27, 1918* **Chronicle of New Issues and Varieties**

UNITED STATES—Mr. P.M. Wolsieffer shows us the new 16¢ aero mail post

stamp and advises that it was placed on sale at the Philadelphia Post Office July 15. The type is the same as the 24c, but the color is a soft green shade. He was also informed that the surplus of the 24c had been withdrawn from sale....Mr. Wolsieffer adds that he could secure no information whether or not the 24c stamps would be destroyed.

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