

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On November 8, Siegel Auction Galleries will offer at auction the finest example of the Inverted Jenny stamp. The sale will be held in New York City and over the internet.

The Inverted Jenny is an icon in the world of stamp collecting, on par with Superman's first appearance in Action Comics #1 and the Honus Wagner T206 baseball card. The stamp has appeared everywhere from the front page of the New York Times to an episode of the Simpsons. But while many know that the "upside down airplane" was the United States post office's greatest mistake, few know the true story behind this remarkable stamp.

In 1918, Americans were worrying about their soldiers fighting in World War I and a worldwide flu pandemic that forced mailmen to wear masks on their rounds. At the same time, a transportation revolution was starting with the mass production of the automobile and improvements in airplane technology. These advancements gave hope to a country that deeply needed it.

After years refusing to provide funding, Congress finally decided it was time to inaugurate airmail service. The world's first regularly scheduled airmail route was an innovation that would make it possible for Americans to communicate with greater speed.

To draw attention to the new service and present a patriotic tribute in red, white and blue, postal officials approved a beautiful 24¢ stamp with an engraved illustration of a Curtiss JN-4H "Jenny" biplane flying in the center of it.

There was little time to lose in printing the new airmail stamp. At the Bureau of Engraving & Printing, where stamps, paper currency and government securities were printed, the plate printers rushed to prepare the first supply of sheets for sale at the three major post offices in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York City just days before the first flight on May 15, 1918.



A scan of the Inverted Jenny Stamp being sold at auction on November 8th.

With a simple act of human error, the printers ended up creating the most famous error in stamp collecting, and the post office let one sheet of 100 get into public hands.

"In their rush to get the stamps finished on time for the first airmail flight, they created an invert," explains Scott Trepel, president of Siegel Auction Galleries. "When they went to print the airplane design on the stamp, they put the plate down the wrong way, and that makes it appear that the airplane is flying upside-down. They destroyed all the error sheets except for one sheet of 100."

When this error occurred, stamp collecting was hugely popular. William Robey, a stamp collector and part-time dealer, walked to the Washington D.C. post office near his office on May 14, the first day the stamps were placed on sale in all three cities on the airmail route.

Robey had \$24 in his pocket to buy a sheet for his collection. He was already on the lookout for an invert error and told one of his friends to be on the lookout, too. When the postal clerk handed Robey the sheet



of 100 with the upside-down airplanes, his “heart stood still,” as he put it in an account of his great stroke of luck. Robey bought the sheet for \$24 and eventually sold it shortly after to a dealer for \$15,000.

The story inspired a new generation of stamp collectors set on finding similar errors and striking it rich. In the same way innovation and technology symbolized hope for many Americans, the story of the Inverted Jenny symbolized a rag to riches dream.

For all but the most well-heeled collectors, the Inverted Jenny would remain out of reach, as prices over the next century climbed into the millions for the best examples.

“The Inverted Jenny we are selling this fall is the best example of the 100 stamps from the sheet,” says Trepel, who has handled and sold over two-thirds of the original 100 during his career.

Stamps are graded by experts on a scale of 10 to 100 based on the condition and centering of the stamp. Two expertizing organizations (The Philatelic Foundation and Professional Stamp Experts) gave the stamp the illustrious grade of 95 and described the gum as “Mint Never-Hinged.” The combination of Never Hinged and 95 cannot be matched by any of the 99 other stamps in Robey’s sheet.

Trepel explained, “That is the highest grade an Inverted Jenny has ever or will ever receive. We have tracked each of the stamps and are certain no other example compares to this one.” He added “For the collector, it simply doesn’t get better than this.”

The Inverted Jenny is more than just a stamp. It is a piece of our shared history, a striking piece of visual art and a representation of the hope that bound Americans together when the world was at war and a flu pandemic cost millions their lives.

This fall, one bidder will take home the finest example of the Inverted Jenny and will realize the dream of millions of stamp collectors.

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries was founded in 1930 in Kansas City, Missouri and moved to New York City in 1934. Over the firm’s 93 years of business, Siegel has distinguished itself as the leading philatelic auction house in the United States. Siegel has broken multiple auction records with sales including the Inverted Jenny plate block at \$2.97 million, the Brazil Pack strip at \$2.185 million, the Hawaiian 2c Missionary cover at \$2.090 million, the Inverted Jenny single at \$977,500 and the 1c Z Grill at \$935,000. Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries is committed to ensuring the future of stamp collecting by providing free educational resources, developing innovative technology, and sharing the stories of collections with the public.

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