

The C3a "Jenny" Multiples

By Dr. Roberto M. Rosende

With the recent expertization of the two Arthur J. Kobacker C3a blocks, The Philatelic Foundation has now examined and rendered opinions on all existing multiples of this most popular U.S. stamp called the inverted "Jenny." The story of this first U.S. air mail stamp is well-known, especially since George Amick wrote his book *Inverted Jenny: Money, Mystery, Mania* in 1986.

In summary, the U.S. Post Office Department decided that its first U.S. air-mail stamp would have a value of 24 cents and would be printed in two colors, carmine rose for the frame and deep blue for the airplane vignette. The U.S. Signal Corps was responsible for providing the planes and pilots for the new airmail service. It used Curtis wooden "jenny" model airplanes. The inaugural flight was scheduled to leave Washington, D.C., on May 15, 1918.

The specially prepared stamps went on sale the day before, May 14. At Washington's New York Avenue post office that day, one lucky young man, a collector named William T. Robey, bought an entire sheet of 100 with the airplane flying upside down. He immediately sold his \$24 purchase for \$15,000 to the well-known Philadelphia stamp dealer Eugene Klein, who in turn sold the sheet to Colonel Edward H. R. Green. The very wealthy son of "famous" Hetty Green (the world's greatest miser, according to the *Guinness Book of World*

Records), he was a stamp fanatic and did not waste the opportunity of acquiring the sheet. He had the sheet broken up, kept the choice examples and sold the rest at prices ranging from \$175 to \$250 in subsequent weeks.

In addition to a few vertical and horizontal pairs (all separated by now), there then existed seven blocks of four and one block of eight, including positions 85, 86, 87, 88, 95, 96, 97 and 98 and the blue plate number 8493 upside down on the bottom selvage under position 97.

Over the years, the block of eight was reduced to a block of four as positions 85, 86, 95 and 96 were separated and sold individually.

The Eugene Klein block of positions 47, 48, 57 and 58, almost perfectly centered, was sold following the dealer's death in 1944. After changing hands several times, this block was divided into four singles by the Weill brothers at the request of the then owner. While still a block, it received PF certificate

No. 10,000, issued October 13, 1958, with the opinion that it was completely genuine (Figure 1).

The "McCoy block," positions 65, 66, 75 and 76, was stolen on September 23, 1975, while on display at the American Philatelic Society convention in Norfolk, Virginia, and subsequently broken up. When position 75 was offered to the Weill brothers

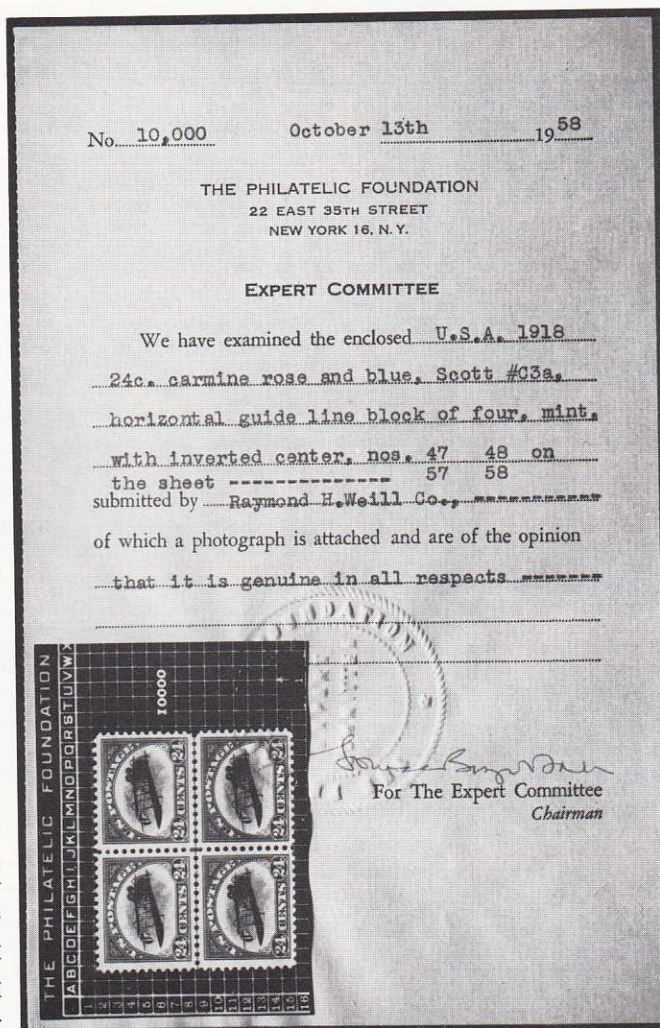


Fig. 1. "Eugene Klein" block, positions 47, 48, 57 and 58.

THE 24¢ BIPLANE INVERTED



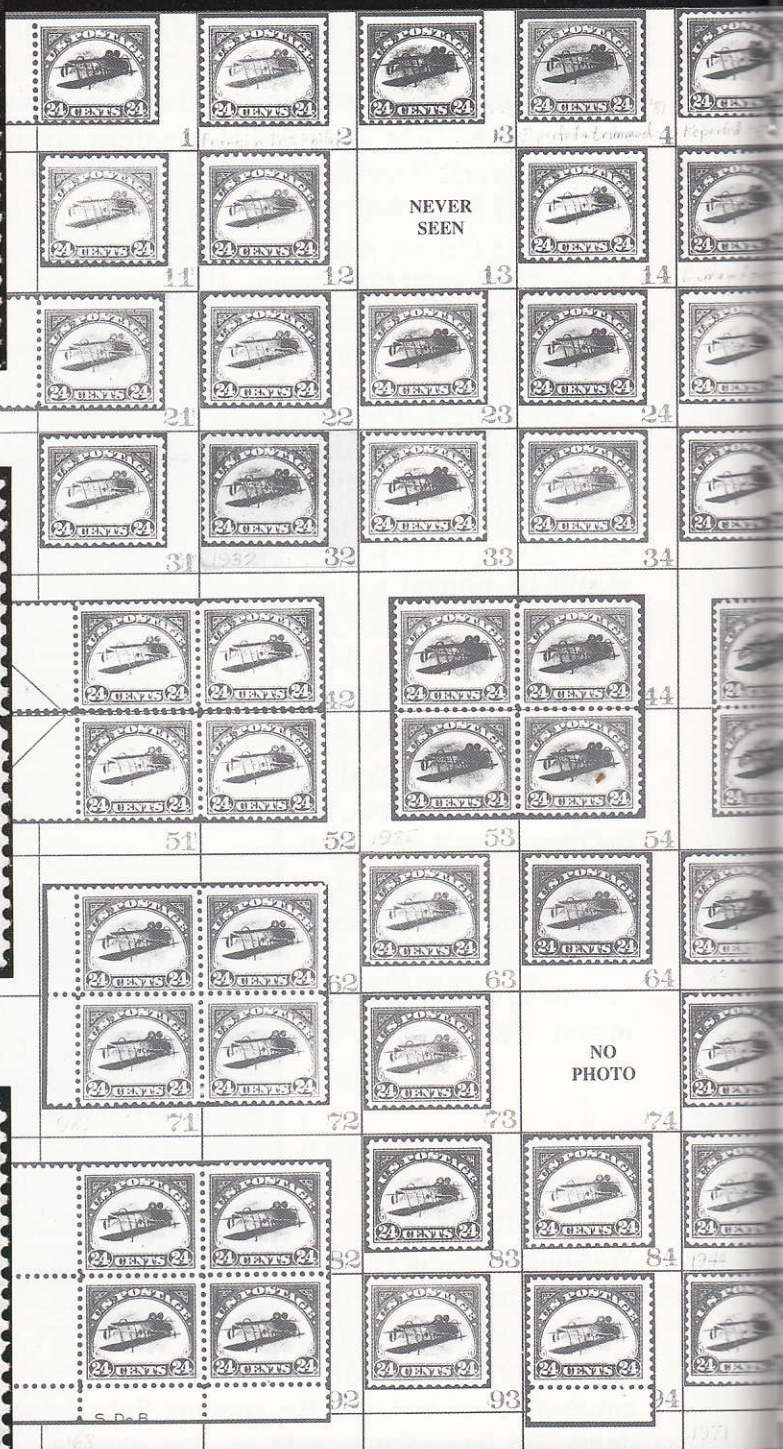
Reconstructed Left Arrow Block
Positions 41, 42, 51, 52.



Princeton Block
Positions 61, 62, 71, 72.



Siderographer Block
Positions 81, 82, 91, 92.



PHOTOGRAPHIC OF SCOTT NO. C3a AS TH

REPRODUCTION STAMPS EXIST TODAY.



in July 1958, they recognized it and notified the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which took photos. But since the value of the stamp was only \$3,000, and federal laws on the interstate movement of stolen property applied only to items worth more than \$5,000, the Weills were asked to return the item to the offerer, Mr. Louis Castelli Jr. of Chicago. In October 1977 the same stamp was offered to Robert L. Faiman, a Las Vegas collector, who agreed to buy it, providing The Philatelic Foundation expertized it. The curatorial staff traced it to position 75, and in November 1977 the PF handed it over to the FBI in New York. At that time the stamp was valued at \$16,000.

Stamp Awarded to APRL

A lengthy judicial process ensued. On January 30, 1981, the stamp was awarded to the American Philatelic Research Library to whom Mrs. McCoy had assigned the rights of ownership in the block. The APRL decided to sell the stamp in order to create an endowment fund to help support the library. After the sale for \$115,000 at the John Kaufmann Auction on September 25, 1981, the stamp was submitted for expertization. The PF issued certificate No. 105,495 on January 29, 1982, with the opinion that "it is a genuine position 75 with a small tear at left and thinning."

In 1987, Marcel Lutwick, a Chicago collector, donated position 65, which he had acquired years earlier, to the APRL. This is the copy the American Philatelic Society exhibits at its annual conventions and calls the "the real McCoy."

The two other stamps, positions 66 and 76, have not surfaced.

A third multiple of the inverted Jenny included positions 41, 42, 51 and 52. This was originally the left arrow block. It was separated by Colonel Green and then rejoined and sold as a reconstructed block in the Green Sale No. 26 in 1946. It was submitted for expertization and received PF certificate No. 230,000 dated August 7, 1990, with the opinion that "it is genuine, rejoined horizontally with mount-disturbed original gum and a pinpoint thin in the top right stamp."

Of the five remaining intact blocks of four, the first one to be expertized was the so-called "Princeton" block formed by positions 61, 62, 71 and 72. Certificate No. 64,046, dated September 19, 1977, described it as "genuine with tiny thin spot on top left stamp, and a natural gum bend diagonal across the two top stamps, Pos. 61 and 62." The block was donated by Edgar Palmer to Princeton University in 1947, leading to the Princeton nickname. The university sold it through a Harmer's of New York auction to the Weill brothers. This block attracted enormous publicity when Florida real estate investor George Mantor bought it in July 1979 for \$500,000. He was forced to sell it in December 1982 to pay debts, realizing only \$175,000. Bernard Harmer, whose firm was selected to auction the block, is known to have said to the many people assembled at the Plaza Hotel, "This is a very disappointing price." Indeed, this confirmed the beginning of the end of the attraction that stamps had as collectibles for investors.

For many years no other C3a block was submitted for expertization. Finally in 1989 Christie's/Robson Lowe was selected to auction the Weill brothers stock, which contained two of the blocks. The first, a horizontal guideline block, with positions 43, 44, 53 and 54, received certificate No. 214,623 on August 29, 1989. The opinion read, "It is genuine, previously hinged." This block realized \$528,000.

Record Price for Plate Block

On September 15, 1989, certificate No. 214,622 was issued for the plate block with positions 87, 88, 97 and 98, the opinion being that "it is genuine previously hinged." A month later, this block sold for \$1,100,000 to an anonymous buyer, this being the record auction price for a U.S. philatelic item.

We now come to the last two blocks to be submitted for expertization. Both were in the Arthur J. Kobacker collection of U.S. commemorative plate blocks sold by Christie's/Robson Lowe on September 25, 1991. The "centerline" block, containing positions 45, 46, 55 and 56, was issued certificate No. 244,999 dated July 31, 1991, with the opinion that "it is genuine with slightly disturbed O.G." It sold for \$550,000.

The last block is from the lower left corner of the sheet, positions 81, 82, 91 and 92, and in the lower selvage under position 91 it has the initials "S De B," belonging to Samuel De Binder, the siderographer who prepared the printing plates. Certificate No. 245,000 was issued on July 26, 1991, with the opinion that "it is genuine, previously hinged and the right pair with slightly disturbed original gum." This block, with good centering, sold for \$660,000.

All these blocks now have three things in common. First, all were in the Colonel Green collection. Second, all have been owned at one time or another by the Weill brothers. Third, all have now been expertized by The Philatelic Foundation.

Unusual C3a Singles

In total the PF has rendered opinions on 69 different positions of the 100 C3a stamps, including 12 stamps submitted more than once. In general, not much trickery has been attempted on these stamps. They are valuable to start with, so not many fakers dared tamper with them, since fakers know that the stamps will probably be submitted for expertization.

Four stamps from the top row, positions 3, 5, 6 and 8, have been reperforated at top to eliminate their straight edge.

Especially clumsy was the reperforating job done on position 3. Someone created fake perforations that gauge 12 instead of the normal 11. Recognizing the mistake, the faker proceeded to create a straight



Fig. 2. Position 3 with natural straight edge at top.

edge again; but because the space was limited, he could not eliminate all wells, and under close observation one can see the indentations in the top margin. The photo in the first certificate the PF issued for this stamp (No. 106,461, which reads, "It is genuine with part original gum.") shows the stamp with the natural straight edge at top (Figure 2).

When this stamp was submitted years later, certificate No. 225,967 recognized the change. The opinion reads, "It is genuine, previously hinged with the top natural straight edge reduced removing most of the reperforating attempt." Nonetheless, when sold



Fig. 3. Position 3 with traces of fake perforations at top.

on July 19, 1991, by William A. Fox Auctions, it brought \$45,000 plus 10% commission.

Position 18 also suffered transformations. It was mutilated at top as its normal perforations were converted into a straight edge so it would not be recognized as the stolen copy from the Miller collection. (Figure 4).

Benjamin K. Miller, a successful lawyer, donated his collection of U.S. stamps to the New York Public Library in 1925, with instructions that it should be



Fig. 4. The Miller copy, position 18, without perforations at top.

exhibited to the public. Sometime on Sunday, May 8, 1977, a burglar methodically went through the display frames and pulled out 153 of the best items. Among them was Miller's copy of the Jenny invert,

position 18, which he had bought directly from Eugene Klein.

One year later, Pennsylvania stamp dealer Lambert W. Gerber offered a copy of the C3a that had never been seen before. Washington auctioneer John Kaufmann bought it and, after some private consultations with a member of the PF curatorial staff and

without a certificate, offered it as lot No. 382 in his May 5, 1979, Napex official auction, purporting it was position 9 with a straight edge at top. It sold for \$51,700, including the buyer's fee.

No previous photo existed of either position 18 or 9 for comparison, so students of this stamp (among others, Clifford C. Cole, Jr., Calvet M. Hahn and Daniel Bagby) examined the item carefully and concluded that it could not be position 9 due to the position of the plane and the alignment of the perforations. Finally, previous examiners of the Miller copy while it was on exhibit had noted a small brown speck in the "2" of the left "24." This stamp contained the speck, proving it was the Miller copy.

With this information, the APS Stamp Theft Committee and the FBI visited the New York Public Library and, after checking photocopies of the collection, positively identified this stamp as the stolen Miller copy.

This development led to an intense investigation that traced many of the stamps to Mr. Gerber, who had died in the meantime, and to the final recovery of 81 of the stolen items. Finally, on July 8, 1986, the stamps including the Jenny in position 18 were returned to the library, where hopefully some day soon they will be on exhibit again.

Meanwhile, the straight-edged copy that Colonel Green had mounted in a locket—back to back with a normal copy—and given to his wife Mabel as a present was conclusively identified as the real position 9. In 1950 she bequeathed it to a



Fig. 5. The locket of Colonel Green's wife, containing position 9.

But no worst "horror story" has occurred than the "accident" suffered by position No. 78. Twice this

stamp (Figure 6) had been submitted for expertization, as noted on certificate Nos. 41,612 and 146,582. Its good centering and fresh color made this one of the finest examples. It is featured on the



Fig. 6. Position 78, later sucked into a vacuum cleaner!

front cover of George Amick's book. It changed hands at least eight times before certificate No. 146,582 (dated March 29, 1985) stated, "It is genuine position 78 with tiny thins due to hinge removal."

Three months later it was auctioned by Christie's for \$88,000.

Five years later, the same stamp was offered as lot No. 431 in the October 25, 1990, Christie's auction. The catalog description read, "24c carmine rose and blue, center inverted (C3a), position 78, well-centered and fresh colours, original gum, defects including tears and creases, very fine appearance."

This copy had the UNFORTUNATE fate of being sucked up in a vacuum cleaner.

The catalog description continued, "Presentable and attractive example of one of the most popular U.S. errors. Ex Green, Southgate, 'Ambassador.' With PF certificate, Scott retail \$135,000, photo, est. \$40,000-50,000."

It sold for \$39,600. We wonder about the fate of the vacuum cleaner and its operator!

Of course, some ingenious person created an inverted example by cutting out the center and fraudulently re-attaching it upside down, only to have certificate No. 84,942 say so in its opinion. A couple of photographic reproductions have also been submitted for opinions.

In general, though, most C3a examples are in good shape. The majority have been previously hinged, and removal of the hinge may have caused tiny thins of not great importance in such a rarity. Three copies

at least have been regummed, and two were submitted without gum.

Because C3a is one of the most popular and expensive U.S. stamps, it has always been important for the PF to possess as much information about it as possible. The PF's current records include, besides information on each expertized item, photos before and after to show if changes have occurred, and descriptions of all other positions it has not expertized, with the exceptions of positions 13, 49, 79 and 99. Perhaps those four stamps have disappeared. Perhaps they will surface in the future. We'll see!

References

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