



# Philatelic Foundation Analysis Leaflet

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## THE UNITED STATES GROUNDED PLANE



Figure 1



Figure 2

### BACKGROUND

Recently, the Philatelic Foundation was asked to pass on an item that was submitted for expertizing as a Grounded Plane variety of the 1918 24¢ Curtiss Jenny issue. That copy, reproduced above as Figure 1, was determined to be a Bottom Shift variety, rather than the more pronounced Grounded Plane (Figure 2).

In most instances, the Foundation is called upon to determine matters of authenticity and condition of material submitted. In this instance, however, such was not the case and the Foundation's Expert Committee decided to break new ground in order to eliminate confusion and controversy by bringing the research and writings of specialists on the subject together with the Foundation's own reference resources.

This decision gives philatelists a recognized standard against which to measure stamps purported to be Grounded Planes. In this way, they can protect themselves from purchases of stamps priced as Grounded Planes that are actually the more common Bottom Shift varieties.

The first Grounded Plane sheet to come to light was the one owned by Jacob (Jake) Klemann, owner of Nassau Stamp Co. The second sheet came to light in 1946 when it was purchased by Henry M. Goodkind, the aero-philatelic specialist. In 1964 that sheet was offered at auction and purchased by Georges A. Medawar, publisher of the Sanabria Airmail Catalogue.

Stamps from that second sheet have all been backstamped Sanabria, making them easily distinguishable from stamps from the Klemann sheet.



## EXPERT SUPPORTING DATA

No misregistered United States stamp has attracted more attention than has the Grounded Plane. Of the two sheets known to contain Grounded Planes, we know that the Sanabria Sheet came from the same first printing, first cutting of the 1918 24¢ Curtiss Jenny issue that produced the famous Air Post Invert. The Klemann sheet may also have come from that first printing, first cutting, although definitive knowledge is not available.

Much of the controversy and confusion regarding the distinction between Grounded Planes and Bottom Shifts is caused by early differences between specialists on their definitions of a Grounded Plane. The Expert Committee of the Foundation examined the accumulated reference material on the subject, including the writings of students of the Grounded Plane. The consensus of opinion of the experts was that the determining factor in the examination of a Grounded Plane is the relationship between the wheels of the airplane and the word "CENTS" in the bottom frame.

The Sanabria catalogue lists the 24¢ Curtiss Jenny Grounded Plane (Sanabria No. 1e) with a total quantity of 200. On this basis, one would have to consider all stamps from the Sanabria and Klemann sheets as Grounded Planes.

In his research and subsequent writings on the subject Henry Goodkind stated, "In order to qualify as the grounded plane, the wheels of the airplane must touch the bottom frame with the word 'cents'..." (See *Aero Philatelist Annals*, October, 1961).

Subsequent thereto the definition was further tightened. Philip Silver writes in the March, 1980 *American Philatelist*, "...to be labeled the true 'grounded plane' variety, the wheels must cut into the word 'CENTS'." This latter definition is now the generally accepted standard.

The Philatelic Foundation, supported by the opinions of expert consultants, has determined and established the following guideline for examination of Grounded Planes and Bottom Shifts of the 24¢ Curtiss Jenny:

For a stamp to be determined by The Philatelic Foundation to be a Grounded Plane, the wheels of the airplane must actually cut into the word "CENTS" in the bottom frame. Touching is not sufficient.

A stamp that shows a pronounced downward shift of the plane or wheels just touching, but not cutting into "CENTS" will be determined to be a Bottom Shift.

The Foundation's reference sources include a number of stamps against which collectors can compare. Examples are illustrated.

Figure 1 above shows the copy submitted for expertizing and determined to be a Bottom Shift. Note that the wheels approach, but do not cut into the C in "CENTS". This particular stamp is position 63 (sixth row, third from left) from the Sanabria sheet.

Figure 2 shows a bottom row Grounded Plane. Stamps from the bottom row of each sheet are the most pronounced of the Grounded Planes. This particular stamp is position 98 from the Sanabria sheet.



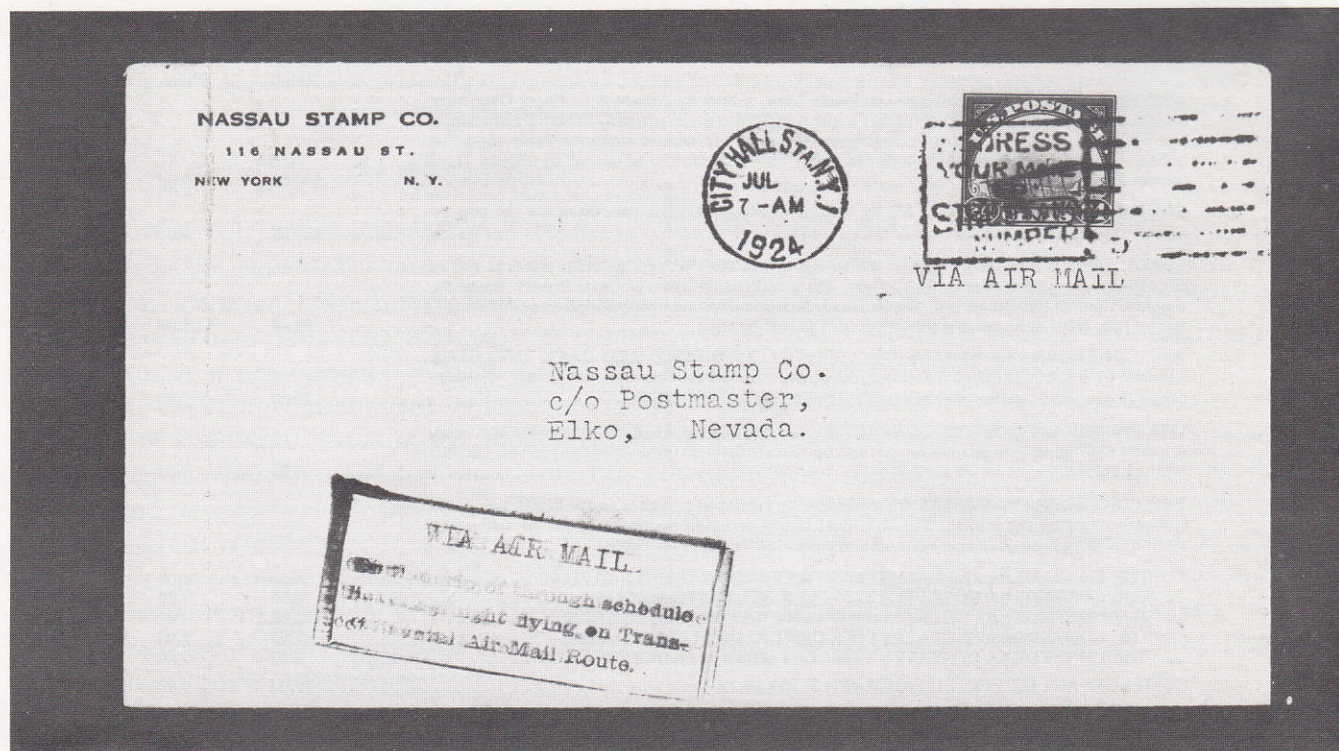


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows a July 1, 1924 cover with the Grounded Plane. Unable to sell many of the mint stamps from the first sheet, Klemann resorted to using some of the Grounded Planes on covers of his Nassau Stamp Co. for the first flight of the government-operated transcontinental mail route between San Francisco and New York. The only known covers with Grounded Planes affixed come from this July 1, 1924 flight.

Examination of photos of the Sanabria sheet and plating of individual stamps from that sheet indicates that all stamps in the bottom three rows are Grounded Planes, with the top seven rows being the less pronounced Bottom Shifts. The number of Grounded Planes on the Klemann sheet has not been determined.

Condition-minded philatelists will want to bear in mind that a desire to obtain the best centering possible that would apply when purchasing normal stamps should not be attempted with Grounded Planes. This is because the most pronounced (bottom row) Grounded Planes do not have the best centered frames. The frames in this row are centered high, thereby increasing the penetration of the Grounded Plane into "CENTS". So if one is seeking the most pronounced of these rare shifts, centering must be compromised.