15-Cent 1869 Pictorial Invert
The Lichtenstein Discovery Copy

Lot 1°

15¢ Brown & Blue, Type II, Center Inverted (119b). Original gum, intense rich colors and sharp impressions, the vignette is precisely centered within frame and the fine details of the intricate engraving are remarkably clear, centered slightly to top with perforations far from frameline on all sides, small and negligible gum residue at lower left, small “W.H.C.” handstamp applied on back by Warren H. Colson

VERY FINE. THE FINEST OF THE THREE RECORDED UNUSED 15-CENT 1869 PICTORIAL INVERT STAMPS, AND THE ONLY EXAMPLE KNOWN WITH ORIGINAL GUM. ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AND INSTANTLY RECOGNIZABLE RARITIES IN PHILATELY.


Ex Paul Lichtenstein (the discoverer), George H. Worthington (possibly from the Frederick W. Ayer collection), Alfred F. Lichtenstein, Arthur Hind, Alfred R. Brigham, Josiah K. Lilly Jr., Benjamin D. Phillips, Ryohei Ishikawa and Steven C. Walske (additional past owners and sale information will be found in the Sale History which follows).

Siegel Census No. 119b-OG-01. Certified by The Philatelic Foundation in 1960 and again in 2003 as “Genuine, Previously Hinged” (certificate 398836, which no longer accompanies stamp). With 2013 Professional Stamp Experts certificate (1270180), which states “genuine unused, o.g., previously hinged” with a grade of Fine 70, Mint OGph.

2013 Scott Catalogue Value: $1,250,000
Stamp Market Quarterly Value: $1,500,000

Sale History of the 15¢ 1869 Invert with Original Gum

The story of this stamp’s discovery was written in a letter from Alfred F. Lichtenstein to George B. Sloane (Sloane’s Column, Feb. 9, 1946). Not only is this the only 15¢ 1869 Invert to survive with original gum, it is probably the first example of any 1869 Invert to be discovered.

In 1869, when the Pictorial Issue was current, a junior clerk at the banking firm of Baltzer & Taaks—founded in 1866 by Hermann R. Baltzer and William G. Taaks—was sent to the post office located in the Old Dutch Church in New York City to purchase a quarter-sheet of 15¢ stamps for use on company mail.

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The clerk was Paul Lichtenstein, whose son Alfred became one of the titans of philately during the first half of the 20th century. The elder Lichtenstein was born and educated in Germany. In 1868 he emigrated to the United States, settling in New York City and going to work for Baltzer & Taaks, then located at 50 Exchange Place. Paul eventually became a partner in Baltzer & Lichtenstein. In 1872 he married Clara Kapp, the daughter of Friedrich Kapp, a prominent German-American lawyer, historian and politician who was an outspoken critic of German colonization policy. Two of Paul and Clara’s three children, Julie and Friedrich, died in infancy. Alfred F. Lichtenstein, born in 1876, survived and prospered until his death in 1947. (Source: Carl Schurz, History of German Immigration in the United States and Successful German-Americans and Their Descendants, 1908).

The youthful Paul was a novice stamp collector in 1869. When he looked at the quarter-sheet of 15¢ stamps handed to him at the post office window, Paul noticed that the central part of the design on each stamp was upside down. After asking the Irish window clerk if the misprinted stamps were valid, Paul was assured that no one would notice. He used his lunch money to pay for one of the error stamps, which he kept for his personal collection, and the others were presumably used on Baltzer & Taaks mail.

One evening in the 1880’s, when Alfred was a boy, his father had a friend over to the family home. The friend was also a stamp collector, and he persuaded the elder Lichtenstein to part with his 15¢ Invert. Alfred, observing the transaction, protested, but he was sent to bed. The 15¢ is reported to have been sold around the year 1886 in a Staten Island Philatelic Society auction for $285, a substantial price for a stamp at this time. After that, it is said to have been acquired by a collector in Europe, but neither the buyer’s name nor details of the transaction are known.

There is some evidence that the ex-Lichtenstein 15¢ Invert was sold to Frederick W. Ayer (1855-1936), a prominent collector from Maine. Charles J. Phillips stated that the Ayer collection contained unused examples of the 15¢ and 30¢ Inverts (Stamp Collecting: The King of Hobbies and The Hobby of Kings, page 122), and Phillips was in a position to know. Between 1892 and 1897 Ayer embarked on a philatelic buying spree, spending (by some reports) as much as $750,000 on his collection, some of it with borrowed money (Bierman, The World’s Greatest Stamp Collectors, page 95). When Fred’s conservative banker-father learned of his son’s extravagant philatelic spending, he presented Fred with a choice between liquidation or disinheritance. Fred chose the former.

Beginning in 1897 portions of the Ayer collection were sold through various dealers, including Warren H. Colson and the New England Stamp Company. The 15¢ and 30¢ Inverts from the Worthington collection (both in this sale) have Colson’s backstamp. It is quite possible that Worthington bought them from the Ayer collection in 1903 or 1904.

The 15¢ Invert was sold privately to Worthington for a reported $1,200. This transaction had to take place before 1907, because in that year Warren H. Colson described Worthington’s 15¢ and 30¢ 1869 Inverts in his book, Postage Stamps and Their Collection (page 10). In 1910 the 15¢ and 30¢ 1869 Inverts with original gum were displayed by Worthington at the Garfield-Perry Stamp Club event in Cleveland (a photograph of the exhibit page is shown here).
Worthington also exhibited his 15¢ and 30¢ 1869 Inverts at the 1913 International Philatelic Exhibition in New York. The description of this exhibit specifically mentions the two inverts and the fact that each stamp is “unused o.g.” Significantly, there is no mention of an unused 24¢ 1869 Invert in the exhibit. The 1917 Worthington auction included an unused 24¢ (Census No. 120b-UNC-03), a stamp he must have acquired between 1913 and 1915, shortly before his collecting activity stopped.

Portions of the Worthington collection were sold privately by Warren H. Colson in 1915, at a time when Worthington’s financial position was beginning to falter. In 1917 the entire balance of the collection was sold privately to Alfred F. Lichtenstein, who was 41 years old and wealthy enough to pay $455,000 cash for the collection. Lichtenstein consigned portions of the Worthington collection, including the 15¢ Invert his father had sold some thirty years earlier, to J. C. Morgenthau & Co. for sale by auction. The 1869 Inverts were offered in Part I of the Worthington sales, held in New York City on August 21-23, 1917.

The 15¢, lot 476, was described as having “full original gum, perfectly centered.” It sold for $4,100 to an agent for Arthur Hind, who was emerging as one of the greatest collectors of the era between the wars. It is reported that after the sale Alfred Lichtenstein and his father had lunch with the friend who had bought the stamp years earlier, and they all agreed that the friend would donate $700 to a New York hospital, representing the original $285 sale price plus interest.

1869 Issue. Centers Inverted.

476 ★ 15¢ brown and blue (119a), full original gum, perfectly centered, a wonderful copy of this great rarity of which only a few copies are known unused and certainly none in finer condition than this one.

378 ★ 24¢ green and violet (120b), perfs run in slightly at top, but this is of no importance in the case of a stamp of this kind, which we are informed is the only unused copy in existence.

379 © 24¢ green and violet (120b), lightly cancelled, a very fine copy of this standard rarity.

480 ★ 30¢ blue and carmine (121b), part o. g., perfectly centered, fine color, a remarkable copy of this great rarity.

J. C. Morgenthau August 21-23, 1917, sale catalogue entries for Worthington’s three unused 1869 Inverts (lots 476, 478, 480).
Arthur Hind (1856-1933) was a British-born textile manufacturer who emigrated to the United States in 1890 and, while running his business from Utica, New York, formed a worldwide collection of staggering proportions, commensurate with his estimated wealth of $7 to $10 million (about $100 million in today’s money).

Following the 1917 Worthington sale, the 15¢ Invert remained with Hind until his death in 1933. In 1928 and 1929, with the stock market and society roaring, Hind had attempted to sell his United States and Confederate States collection through Charles J. Phillips for $535,000. Offers of $450,000 and $480,000 were made, but Hind rejected them. With the stock market crash of October 1929, the hope of selling the collection intact faded, and Hind’s financial position weakened.

Following Hind’s death in Miami on March 1, 1933, the estate executors authorized Charles J. Phillips and William C. Kennett Jr. (Hind’s philatelic secretary) to sell the collection at unreserved public auction, which was held on November 20-24, 1933. The first sale catalogue listed 1,653 lots of United States and Confederate States stamps and covers. Since photographs of regular United States postage stamps were still banned by law, only the provisionals, carriers, locals and Confederate States items were photographed. Following the Phillips-Kennett auction, which realized $244,810 (as reported by Phillips), the balance of the Hind collection, comprising stamps of foreign countries, was acquired by Hind’s nephew in England and sold through H. R. Harmer in London in eleven sales held in 1934 and 1935, which realized a total of more than $675,000.

Hind’s three unused 1869 Inverts were offered in the Phillips-Kennett sale as lots 390, 394 and 399. The 15¢ with original gum, which Hind purchased in the Worthington sale, sold for $7,000 to Elliott Perry, a dealer, agent and leading authority on United States philately and postal history. Hind’s unused 24¢ (Census No. 120b-UNC-02) sold to Philip H. Ward Jr., and his unused 30¢ (Census No. 121b-UNC-03) sold to Scott Stamp & Coin, but the same stamp was eventually acquired by Ward.

Perry was probably acting as agent for Alfred R. Brigham (1874-1948), a wealthy banker residing in Worcester, Massachusetts. After Brigham’s death on September 22, 1948, portions of his collection were sold through Kelleher and Colby auctions, but the 15¢ Invert was not sold at auction, so it must have been placed privately.

In 1954 the 15¢ with original gum and one of the unused 30¢ Inverts (Census No. 121b-UNC-04) were illustrated in the famous LIFE magazine spread on the “World’s Rarest Stamps.” The 30¢ was sold that year in a John A. Fox auction. The path of the 15¢ during this period is uncertain.
In 1960 a certificate for the 15¢ Invert was issued by The Philatelic Foundation to Ezra D. Cole (1902-1992), a dealer and agent who represented major collectors, including Josiah K. Lilly Jr., the pharmaceutical magnate. It is possible that Cole obtained the certificate at the time he sold the stamp to Lilly. Cole wrote the introduction to the 1950 Colby sale of part of Brigham’s stamp collection, and he was involved with private sales of other Brigham material.

Lilly was born in 1893 in Indianapolis, a son of Josiah K. Lilly Sr. and an heir to the family fortune in pharmaceuticals. He received his degree in pharmacology at the University of Michigan and joined the family business in 1914. In 1944 he became president of the newly formed Eli Lilly International Corporation, and in 1948, president of the Eli Lilly Company. He died on May 5, 1966.

Lilly was a collector on a grand scale, across many areas. He amassed a library of first editions and manuscripts which he donated to Indiana University, forming the core of the Lilly Library rare book and manuscript collection. He also collected sets of miniature soldiers representing every regiment that ever served in the United States armies up to 1900. The collection included accurate uniforms, flags insignia and arms. The Lilly collection of gold coins became the basis of the Smithsonian collection after his death.

The scope of Lilly’s stamp collecting activities was known only to a few professionals. Ezra Cole and the Weills of New Orleans were his exclusive agents and sources of material. After his death, Lilly’s executors chose the Siegel firm to offer the entire collection at auction, rejecting an offer for outright sale from the Weills. The series of ten sales was held from February 1967 to December 1968 and realized a total of more than $3 million.
The 15¢ Invert with original gum, Lilly’s only 1869 invert, was offered in Part I (Siegel Sale 312) as lot 216. It sold for $35,000 to Raymond H. Weill of New Orleans. There is no record of the underbidder, but it was probably A. T. Seymour, a Texas collector who was a major bidder in the Lilly sale and would have wanted the stamp for his collection. News of the $35,000 sale to the Weills made the New York Times. What was not reported was the fact that the Weills bought the stamp as agents for their secret client, B. D. Phillips.

Benjamin Dwight Phillips (1885-1968) was the scion of the T. W. Phillips family, owners of a large natural gas and oil company in Butler, Pennsylvania. Phillips started his stamp collection in earnest in 1946, initially with purchases from Warren H. Colson. Within a few years the Weills had gained Phillips as a client and began representing him in auctions. According to the three-volume inventory of the Phillips collection, many of the Weills’ major purchases in auctions during the 1950’s and 60’s, including the Caspary and Lilly sales, were made directly on behalf of Phillips.

In 1968 the Weills purchased the entire Phillips collection for $4.07 million, evidently a record for any collection sold up to that time. Phillips died on October 23, 1968, and the Weills advertised the purchase as having been made from the estate of an anonymous collector. However, in a later personal recollection of the acquisition, Raymond Weill stated that he and Roger spent several days at the Phillips home in Butler, valuing the stamps at his request, in order to make a cash offer. When the Weills presented their $4.07 million offer, Phillips was attired in a hunting jacket and cap with a Purdey shotgun slung over his shoulder. Upon hearing the offer, Phillips responded “Sounds good, boys,” and walked out of the room.

If this account is accurate, the Weills acquired one of the greatest, if not the greatest, United States collections of all time, and the owner went off to shoot ducks. Phillips died soon after accepting the offer, but the estate honored the agreement, and the collection was packed up and shipped from Butler to the Weills’ New York representative on November 8, 1968 (per Weills’ records).

The Weills maintained tight control over the 15¢ Invert from 1968 to 1982. During that time, the stamp was, in typical Weill fashion, sold to their exclusive clients and bought back from those clients. It was offered in the Siegel 1982 Rarities of the World sale (Sale 596, April 24, lot 241), where it sold for $180,000 plus 10% premium to auction agent, Renee Bowden, who outbid a telephone bidder.

Five years later, the stamp would leave the Weills’ domain forever. In a private transaction engineered by Harvey R. Warm, a Connecticut dealer, and Scott R. Trepel, who was then in charge of Christie’s stamp auctions in New York, the 15¢ stamp and two other unused 1869 Inverts were purchased from the Weills for a substantial six-figure sum. The Weills assumed the buyer was Robert Zoellner, but they were mistaken. At CAPEX in 1987, the identity of the buyer was revealed: Ryohei Ishikawa.
Ryohei Ishikawa, a Japanese businessman, emerged in the 1970’s as one of philately’s leading collectors and exhibitors. After his 1¢ 1851-57 collection lost to Grunin’s 1847-1869 stamps and covers at INTERPHIL in 1976, Ishikawa set out to assemble a Grand Prix award-winning collection of the same classic period. From 1977 to 1980, Ishikawa’s aggressive buying, combined with speculation in tangibles, fueled a philatelic boom. He bought the largest known 5¢ and 10¢ 1847 unused blocks and the 24¢ 1869 Invert block from the Weills. He paid Siegel more than $300,000 for two covers: the 5¢ 1847 strip and Canada 3p mixed franking, and the cover with five Hawaii 5¢ surcharged stamps. Ishikawa bought numerous items from the 1979 Grunin sale at Sotheby Parke Bernet Stamp Auction Co., run by Andrew Levitt, which included the Waterbury Running Chicken cover, for which he paid $240,000 plus 10% premium. As Ishikawa swept the market, even his collector friends Duane Garrett and Robert Paliastio furnished items from their own holdings.

In May 1981 Ishikawa won the International Grand Prix award at WIPA in Austria, and shortly after he published a coffee table book depicting his exhibit collection. In 1986 Ishikawa began using the services of Harvey R. Warm, a dealer in U.S. classics, to make improvements to the exhibit. During this stage of collecting, he bought significant items from the Wunderlich 1861-66 and Paliastio Civil War Patriotics collections, both handled by Warm. In 1987 he acquired the 15¢ 1869 Invert with original gum, one of the four unused 24¢ Inverts (Census No. 120b-UNC-01) and a defective unused 30¢ Invert (Census No. 121b-UNC-05) in a six-figure private transaction orchestrated by Warm and Trepel. The seller was Raymond H. Weil, who was unaware that the principal on the buying side was Ishikawa. Warm located a much better 30¢ (Census No. 121b-UNC-03) to replace the defective stamp, and the set displayed at CAPEX in 1987 is the same set in the 1993 Christie’s sale of Ishikawa’s collection.

In the September 29, 1993, auction of the Ishikawa collection, the 15¢ Invert (lot 740) sold to Melissa Purser for $195,000 plus 10% premium. Purser was acting as agent for Harry “Sonny” Hagendorf, of Columbian Stamp Co., who in turn was representing a private collector who had amassed a major holding of U.S. rarities, including three 24¢ Inverted “Jenny” blocks. Hagendorf also bought the 24¢ in the Ishikawa sale, but he let the 30¢ go, because his client had already acquired the ex-Worthington copy with original gum (offered in this sale).

After exhibiting the 1869 Inverts in the Invited Exhibits section of ANPHILEX in 1996, Hagendorf negotiated a private sale of the three stamps to Steven C. Walske, a computer technology entrepreneur who had decided to form an important collection of the 1869 Pictorial Issue. In addition to the singles, Walske acquired the 24¢ block from the Siegel firm. The collection was never exhibited. On May 2, 2003, it was sold under the pseudonym “Lafayette” in a Matthew Bennett Inc. auction. The 15¢ Invert was lot 1331 and sold for $375,000 hammer plus 10% premium to Hagendorf for inventory.

About one year later Hagendorf sold the stamp to a collector from Maryland, who despite his youth was in ill health and succumbed to congestive heart failure in 2006. The estate executor arranged a sale to Hagendorf, who in turn had arranged to sell the collection, including the 15¢ and 30¢ Inverts in this auction, to the Siegel firm on behalf of Jay Parrino, as agent for the principal buyer (“Beverly Hills”).