



Lot 105

LOT 105°

The only recorded genuine cover with the 6¢ 1918 Air Post stamp mailed on the First Day of Issue—an important 20th century postal history rarity

ESTIMATE \$30,000-40,000

DESCRIPTION

6¢ Orange, 1918 Air Post (C1), vertical pair paying 2¢ postage and 10¢ special delivery fee on **December 10, 1918, First Day Cover** self-addressed by Joseph B. Leavy, then curator of the National Museum (1913-21), to his residence at 3600 13th Street, N.W., in Washington D.C., stamps tied by “Washington D.C. Dec. 10 8 PM” duplex date-stamp with “1918” yeardate and numeral “3” grid cancel—the clerk (or perhaps Leavy) was evidently not satisfied with the clarity of the first strikes, and two more were struck which clearly show the date—in addition, there is a Washington Post Office Special Delivery Department “DEC 10 P.M.” purple time/date handstamp on the back

PROVENANCE

Whereabouts unknown until 2007; pencil note on back indicates it was bought in September 1943 for \$125

Found in a collection consigned to Siegel Auction Galleries, 2/19/2007, Sale 950, lot 2424, to William H. Gross

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

Documented by both Joe R. Kirker and Ken Lawrence as the only genuine 6¢ 1918 Air Post cover

Joe R. Kirker, “The six-cent Jenny of 1918—First Day of Use!!!”, *Airpost Journal*, February 2009

Ken Lawrence, “First Day Covers of 1918 Air Post Stamps—or are they? Part 3,” *United States Specialist*, April 2015

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (2008)

CONDITION NOTES

Very Fine

Pencil note on back “9/43 [\$]125 Pre First Day C1”

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

The National Philatelic Collection Curator’s First Day

Joseph Britton Leavy was the nation’s first “Government Philatelist,” who was hired in 1913 to curate the stamp collection at the Smithsonian’s U.S. National Museum. The massive collection had been transferred to the museum from the Post Office Department the previous year. Leavy, a well-known and reputable philatelist from New York City, was chosen from several candidates applying for the position and paid a salary of \$100 per month. Coincidentally, he started the year that Bob Siegel was born.

Leavy was curator until 1921, and during those eight years one of his strategies was to build the collection by trading duplicate or unimportant material for items that filled in gaps in the collection. He prepared a catalogue of the National Museum’s collection, *Catalogue of the Postage Stamps and Stamped Envelopes of the United States and Possessions Issued to January 1, 1919*, to encourage donations of material needed to complete the collection.

Leavy mounted the collection and displayed it in special frames in the National Museum Building (known today as the Arts and Industries Building). It became one of the museum’s most popular exhibits, and many of the pages he mounted were on display well into the 1960s.

As a scholarly philatelist who was situated in the heart of the postal system, Leavy was privy to production information from postal officials. He was given early notice about new issues at a time when there were no “First Day of Issue” ceremonies. He must have known that the 6¢ Air Post stamp would go on sale in



Joseph B. Leavy
Custodian
National Museum

Washington on December 10, 1918, even though the rate for which it was created would not go into effect until December 16. Leavy used two 6¢ stamps of the new issue to pay the 2¢ postage and 10¢ special delivery fee, and a messenger delivered it to his home the same night.

While fake First Day covers with the 6¢ 1918 Air Post appeared over many years, this cover apparently traded just once, in 1943, because no experts knew of its existence. Now that all of the other 6¢ First Day covers have been discredited as fake, this one true genuine December 10, 1918, cover is the sole example of the stamp postmarked on the first day it went on sale anywhere. ■