

Philatelic Literature: **The 1918 Airmails**

by Dr. Everett L. Parker

Early U.S. stamps can be a very involved study, especially for the novice. The first U.S. airmails, often referred to by the nickname “Jennys” because they depict the Curtiss Jenny airplane, is a lifetime study for many. For them, a new book by Joe Kirker will be most welcome.



Kirker offers a comprehensive and systematic look at the history of the first day of sale postal use for the first three airmail stamps issued in the U.S. Many questions have been raised about these stamps over the decades, and clearly this book offers considerable insight.

Kirker’s book is titled ***United States Airmail Stamps 1918***, and he began his analysis with an outline of the conflict surrounding the first days of issue of the three stamps.

Although they were issued during World War I, many well known philatelists were expressing concern into the 1940s whether first days were known with authenticity, much less preserved on first day covers.

May 15 was given as the first day of sale of the 24 cent stamp by at least one catalogue in early editions, but that was changed in 1951 to May 13. “Not until 1951 was May 13 given as the revised date, along with July 11 and December 10 for the later Jenny stamps, but minus evaluation until the 1957 edition,” Kirker wrote. Other catalogues gave different dates.

“There was simply no material which had yet appeared in the marketplace, nor serious efforts taken by the early catalog editors regarding accepted issue dates of the stamps,” Kirker added.

This changed in 1956 with examples of all three Jennys on covers with appropriate date cancels, he said, but these did not command the high prices as one might have expected. Soon more material appeared on the market and prices exploded.

Kirker traces the evolution of sales from the 1950s to the present,

noting the tremendous increase in value placed on each of the covers.

The second part of his book (published in color in the 8.5 x 11.0 inch format and saddlestitched with soft cover) is an analysis of recorded first day of use material. This is the technical part of the treatise, but the author presents the material in a straightforward and easy to read and comprehend fashion.

For example, he discussed one cover thought to be genuine, but noted there was concern expressed by an expertizing firm over a time slug which showed posting in Philadelphia only 30 minutes after purchase in Washington, a distance of about 130 miles. "Simply not a logical event," Kirker wrote. The cover was ultimately determined to be not genuine.

A total of 18 covers are examined and critiqued. In each case, the cover is illustrated and the item is described as "genuine," "not genuine," or "questionable."

A final segment of the book is a discussion of a timeline for availability of the stamps. It's an interesting review and includes a corner block of four of the 24 cent issue showing a May 14, 1918 first day of issue from the author's collection. There is also a segment on covers with these three stamps after the known first days.

Kirker noted that if any of the Jenny airmail stamps were sold in May 13, 1918 and posted on that day, "perhaps one may have survived and awaits discovery."

From a technical standpoint, the book is attractive but would have been improved with higher quality scans of illustrations, but since some came from other publications, it may not have been possible to improve them.

An additional improvement would have been an annotated bibliography at the rear of the book.

These minor items aside, this is a book which deserves to be on your bookcase if you're a student of early U.S. stamps.

The book is printed on coated stock paper with a simple but attractive cover. The book is priced at \$25 postpaid (by Priority) in the U.S. and \$30 foreign. Contact Joe Kirker, 529 Parton Dr., Gatlinburg, TN 37738, or by email at Jenny1918joe@aol.com.

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Remember that review copies of books, monographs, society journals and other philatelic literature are solicited. Please send all publications to Dr. Everett L. Parker, 249 NW Live Oak Place, Lake City, FL 32055-8906. Email is eparker@hughes.net.