

Northern Ireland man left rare £1m stamp by grandad to get £34k finder's fee

By Claire McNeilly

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The Inverted Jenny

The Northern Ireland man who found one of the world's rarest postage stamps has said he will probably never know how it ended up in his late grandfather's attic.

The Inverted Jenny No. 76 - valued at around £1m - disappeared from an exhibition in the United States 61 years ago.

It was written off as lost until a few weeks ago, when Keelin O'Neill caused a sensation by walking into a New York auction house with the item.

The young man, who is in his 20s, only acquired the red and blue stamp when he took possession of his grandad's collection in October 2011.

"My grandfather gave me a bunch of stuff two months before he passed away," said Keelin.

"I wasn't aware I had the stamp, and he never really pointed out to me what it was.

"He didn't mention, 'Oh, by the way, there's a stamp in there that's so rare that there's only a hundred of them'."

The coveted stamp earned its name because it features a Jenny airmail biplane erroneously printed upside-down.

It will not, however, make Keelin an instant millionaire because the item is classed as stolen property by the FBI. He is, however, entitled to a \$50,000 (£34,000) finder's fee.

He was contacted by the FBI shortly after he showed the stamp to staff at Spink USA auctioneers in Manhattan.

"Once I was told that it was stolen, I wanted to give it back to the rightful owner," said Keelin, who is due to be at the World Stamp Show-NY 2016 today when the American Philatelic Research Library (APRL) takes ownership of the item.

Keelin's Jenny was one of a block of four owned by the daughter of an executive at Dow Jones & Company. It disappeared from an exhibition in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1955.

He said his grandad must have bought it at a car boot sale, adding: "I used to go (to them) with him when I was a kid."

The "bunch of stuff" his grandfather gave him was in a box that comprised old antique records, an antique clock - and one single stamp.

It is understood that APRL has reached an agreement with Keelin and the US Attorney's office that means he will be receive the \$50,000 reward.

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