

NEWS

Stolen rare 'Inverted Jenny' stamp resurfaces 61 years later

By Matthew Allan and Danika Fears

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A missing poster for the remaining "Inverted Jenny" at the World Stamp Show in New York.

Photo: AP

A rare misprinted stamp that was stolen from a display case more than 60 years ago was delivered to its rightful owner Thursday — but the mystery of who swiped it hasn't been solved.

Manhattan US Attorney Preet Bharara announced the return of the "Inverted Jenny" stamp — on which the image of a biplane was mistakenly printed upside down — to the American Philatelic Research Library during the World Stamp Show at the Javits Center.

"I've long appreciated the value and how special this stamp was because I collected stamps as a boy myself," Bharara said.

"It's with great pleasure we welcome back to New York this inverted . . . Jenny from the block."

The 1918 24-cent stamp was one of four that went missing during a convention in Norfolk, Va., in 1955.

At the time, it was owned by New York City collector Ethel McCoy, who had bought all four from Big Apple stamp dealer Spencer Anderson in 1936 for \$16,000.

"The thief cut a cord binding two of the exhibit frames and slid back the covering sheet of glass," author George Amick wrote in his book, "The Inverted Jenny: Mystery, Money, Mania."

Two turned up in the '70s and '80s, but the whereabouts of the other two remained unknown.

That is until April, when Keelin O'Neill, of Ireland, gave one to the Spink auction house in New York, which suspected it might be one of the long-lost stamps.

The Philatelic Foundation in New York determined it to be real and alerted federal authorities.

O'Neill told the FBI his grandfather gave it to him in October 2013.

"I inherited the stamp from my grandfather in Ireland but had no idea about the importance of it until recently," he said Thursday.

"It's been a roller coaster ever since I found out what the stamp was. I never even knew people collected stamps."

As for the possibility his grandpa was the thief, O'Neill said, "That's ridiculous."

The American Philatelic Research Library, which took over ownership after McCoy died in 1980, was withholding judgment.

"All we know right now is that Keelin's grandfather purchased the stamp at a garage sale," said its administrator, Scott English.

O'Neill will get a \$10,000 reward from the library and a \$50,000 reward the Mystic Stamp Co., a dealer, offered several years ago.

The stamp is said to be worth at least \$250,000. Another "Inverted Jenny" was sold Tuesday at auction for \$1.175 million.

"It was important to me to return the stamp, because I got it from my grandfather," O'Neill said, "and I know he'd never steal anything, and it's what he would want."

One of the stamps remains lost.

"It's funny because the reward was set to expire on Saturday," said Donald Sundman, president of Mystic Stamp. "I wonder if the fourth stamp will suddenly appear by Saturday, as well."

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