

EARLY POSTMARKS of LATIN AMERICA

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Introduction

SOONER or later every collector reaches the point when he finds he has got as far as he is likely to get with any particular country, and has to look round for new ground to break. For those in such case the postmark or cancellation side of philately may fulfil the need, for it offers great opportunity for research and is a never failing source of pleasure in the discovery of a scarce postmark on a common stamp.

Leaving aside the hand-cut cancellers of the pre-adhesive years, in the early days of adhesive stamps thousands of Postmasters all over the vast American continent employed pieces of cork, box-wood, or other materials, cut in an endless variety of shapes and designs to cancel the stamps posted at their particular office.

An outstanding example of such local manufacture is found in the cancellations of Waterbury, U.S.A., whose Postmaster, Mr. John W. Hiss, had a clerk who was an engraver, and cut cancellers in all kinds of shapes and patterns, using them perhaps for a few days only and then changing the design. Thanks to him, and the thousands of other Postmasters in those early days, collectors may now enjoy an aspect of philately until recently little regarded, but which has now become increasingly popular.

The size of the town, as well as the length of time the postmark was in use, has a distinct bearing on the scarcity of that mark. Obviously, a small town or village will provide postmarks much harder to find than will a capital city.

Speaking generally, postmarks fall into two categories. First, those identifiable by their carrying the name of the town; second, the ones cut in a shape or design only, which tell nothing, and are therefore "DUMB".

This series of articles will be concerned with the cancellations of Central and South America, but will omit those of the United States, on which a very wide range of literature is already available.

Thanks to the dispersal of the two world-famous collections of Burrus and Almeida Dias, thousands of copies of stamps with great postmark interest have been liberated particularly, in the case of the latter, the stamps of Brazil.

The following countries each provide ample material in their early issues to satisfy the most ardent postmark enthusiast; each is to be dealt with in separate articles:—

ARGENTINE 1858-77. The work by Cochrane and Spowart illustrates about 100 postmarks.

BOLIVIA 1868-90. About 60 different cancellations are known to the author, but upon which little information exists—which is an added interest in the quest for knowledge.

BRAZIL 1843-79. Many hundreds of stamps of low catalogue value carry an almost unlimited range of postmarks. The standard work on the subject is by Paulo Ayres; it illustrates and describes some thousands of cancellations.

COLOMBIA 1859-83. Here, the previous situation as regards "DUMB" cancels is reversed, practically all are of the "straight town in oval" character.

COSTA RICA 1863-64. Apart from two or three types of a star, dumb cancellations are almost absent, but an attractive range of "town in oval" postmarks abound.

GUATEMALA 1871-86. A fine range of postmarks is provided by this country, almost all of them of the "DUMB" type.

MEXICO 1856-61. The question of cost again occurs, otherwise this country must stand high for postmark interest. It provides a wonderful range of straight-line and fancy cancellations. Standard works are by De Smeth and Fayolle, W. T. Wilson and, recently published, "Mexico" by Joseph Schatzkés, with over 2,000 illustrations, many in colour. In a limited edition, this was published by Robson Lowe Ltd.

NICARAGUA 1860-78. In addition to the small number of "Dumb" cancellations, this country provides a range of 13 unique "Numeral over Letter" postmarks, followed by a similar number of "petite" town cancellations.

PERU 1858-73. Provides a wide range of "Towns" both straight-line and circular, plus quite a number of "Dumb" ones. Unfortunately, most postmarks occur on the early expensive issues. The standard work is by Georges Lamy and Jacques-Andre Rinck. It illustrates 141 postmarks, enumerates hundreds of others together with their coefficients of rarity.

THE ARGENTINE (Period 1858-1873)

There is ample scope here for postmarks at low cost. On the 5c. vermilion of 1868—worth, as a stamp, only a few pence—at least 20 different cancellations may be found.

Like Brazil, vast areas of the country at this time were uninhabited or, at best, dotted only with villages or small towns, but unlike the Brazilian postmasters, those of Argentina appear to have been provided with metal cancellers, and the variety is comparatively small. Types are illustrated on page 673.

The straight-line postmarks of the pre-stamp era such as that for Santa Fé (Fig. 1) do not appear to have survived, as did those of Brazil, with the exception of Cordova (Fig. 2), which is found on the Rivadavia and San Martin (Fig. 9) on a later issue.

In 1858 only one line of railways operated, and several years later the Post Office still conveyed much of its mail by horse-drawn coaches and mounted express riders, and it was not unusual for some outlying town to run short of one or other value of adhesive stamps. In consequence, the bi-section of a higher value than in stock was resorted to.

As late as 1876 the 10 cents green Belgrano is known bisected with the TUCUMAN cancellation (Fig. 6). The same town used an attractive "Half Moon" cancellation with FRANCA above the name (illustrated in the heading).

The decree of February 24th, 1858, stated that: "As soon as a letter reaches a post office the stamp must be impressed with the FRANCA oblator, with which all offices have been supplied." Hence this cancellation is the only one used at some offices, whilst others, additionally, used other cancellers.

The FRANCA cancellation is found unframed (Fig. 3) and in rectangular, oval and circular frames. These postmarks are fairly scarce, having become obsolete by 1865. The ink used is generally black or blue. Very occasionally it was green.

Registered letters were marked CERTIFICADO unframed and in boxed oblong or oval. Such cancellations are rare because instructions were given that the cover of the registered letter should be handed to the Post Office official at the same time that the receipt for the letter was signed.

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The OFICINA MARITIMA used an OM mark (Fig. 4). It is that of an office opened on August 12th, 1861, where correspondence for conveyance by sea and river was accepted, and it is usually impressed in a greenish-blue ink, rarely in black.

Among town cancellations, a circular date-stamp with the town name was used by several offices, BUENOS AIRES (spelt AYRES in 1869), ROSARIO, PARANA and, among others, JUJUY (Fig. 7) used this mark until about 1875, when a circular type (Fig. 11) came into use.

Interesting postmarks are ORAN (Fig. 5), RIO CUARTO (Fig. 8), SALTA (Fig. 10).

Dumb cancellations include BUENOS AYRES (Fig. 12), CORRIENTES (Fig. 13) and GUALEGUAYCHO (Fig. 14). Unlocated, but rare, is Fig. 15. CORRIENTES used the "Bar" (Fig. 16). The mark illustrated as Fig. 17 is one of the later postmarks, and probably superseded the OM mark.

Railway cancellations include F.C.O. (Fig. 18) and "F.C. del Sud". Black and blue cancellations such as "B" (Fig. 19) and "BE" and "P" are known. An unshaded star (Fig. 20), usually in black, is found on most of the 1867-73 issues.

Numeral cancellations such as the "16" (Fig. 21) are scarce and unlocated. There are other numerals at present equally mysterious.

The standard work on the RIVADAVIA issues and their postmarks is by W. J. Cochrane, F.R.P.S.L., and H. A. Spowart.

(To be continued)

SLOGAN NEWS

The postmark slogan "Ulster Week in Bristol March 22nd-27th" will be in the **standard** position in four machines at **Bristol** from March 15th to 27th, 1965.

Two new dies bearing the slogan "Bath the winner of the 'Britain in Bloom' Trophy, Gayest Floral City" were brought into use at **Bath**, Somerset, on December 16th to replace the two bearing this text used from December 2nd to 15th, 1964. One of the new dies went into use in the **transposed** position from December 16th, 1964, until June 30th, 1965, and the other was in use from December 16th to 30th, 1964.

The slogan "Buckhaven and Methil for Industrial Expansion" will continue in use in the **transposed** position at **Leven**, Fife, from February 12th, 1965, to February 11th, 1966.