

# The DISTRIBUTION of "SPECIMEN" STAMPS by the UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

By Marcus Samuel

(Continued from page 789, January 29th)

## Circular No. 6682/309: November 21st, 1899

### END OF THE CENTURY CLEARANCE OF SURPLUS SPECIMENS HELD BY THE U.P.U.

According to the Circular dated May 30th, 1892, one quintuple collection was destined for the International Bureau. However, the issuing authority of any item had not been included in the distribution of this item because it had not been considered necessary to send it a quintuple collection of its own stamps. Consequently there remained, in general, at the disposal of the International Bureau 10 examples of each of the stamps intended for distribution.

Only one of these had been placed in the collection of the International Bureau; the others had been carefully preserved to enable the Bureau to meet any demands which might be made on the distributing service. Since May 1892 the stock of the International Bureau had accumulated to such a degree that it had been found necessary to take storage space in the strong room of a Berne Bank. This stock, which was always growing, was not of much use to the International Bureau, while administrations might well desire to draw on the stocks of stamps which were thus frozen.

Under these circumstances the Director of the Bureau informed the administrations of the Union that he would return to each of them the specimens of postage stamps, postcards, etc., which remained in this stock.

In future, administrations were to send only the number of specimens strictly necessary for distribution, plus one only for the collection of the International Bureau. The total number of specimens required was 731 (including 215 for Great Britain and 41 territories under British control, 35 for the Portuguese Colonies, 20 for Germany, 20 for the U.S.A. with Cuba and Porto Rico and one for the International Bureau). Deducting five for the retention of the issuing authority, the number was 726.

Several administrations, including those of Germany and Russia, had taken responsibility for the distribution of specimens intended for their Colonies, etc. Such administrations would also deduct from the number of specimens sent to the International Bureau for distribution five examples for each of the offices for which they had undertaken the responsibility of distribution. The despatch of specimens by the staff of the International Bureau must have been greatly complicated by necessity to omit from the consignment to any administration the stamps of that particular administration and of those for which it took responsibility.

## Circular No. 4677/235: September 1st, 1900

CAYMAN ISLANDS: specimens of  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. and 1d. postage stamps.



According to notes made by the late A. J. Watkins, on January 22nd, 1901, the Colonial Office, who were awaiting "Specimen" copies of these stamps from Jamaica, which was at that time responsible for the Caymans postal administration, suddenly discovered that they had already been distributed to members of the U.P.U. The G.P.O. was at once informed that

the Cayman Islands must thenceforward be regarded as a separate political unit, and the members of the U.P.U. were so notified in a circular from Berne dated January 28th, 1901.

The Governor of Jamaica was immediately instructed that "the stamps may now be issued", but it is not believed that they were put on sale until February 19th, the date of King Edward VII's accession. Copies of these stamps used before this date must be classed as "locals", available for internal postage only, although specimens of them had been distributed to members of the U.P.U.

## Letter from the Crown Agents to De La Rue & Co. dated September 19th, 1900

D.L.R., page 658. The number of specimens required by the Postal Union for distribution was to be reduced from 736 to 722. In future this number, instead of 750, was to be supplied to the Crown Agents.

NOTE.—This detailed record of the Bureau Collection has dealt with stamps issued during the 19th century. There is, however, one important stamp-issuing country of that century, namely China, not so far dealt with because she did not become a U.P.U. member until 1914. The first Circular concerning China was published in 1914, as follows:—

## Circular No. 1670/33: April 3rd, 1914

CHINA: specimens of  $\frac{1}{4}$ c., 1c., 2c., 3c., 4c., 5c., 6c., 7c., 8c., 10c., 15c., 16c., 20c., 30c., 50c., \$1, \$2, \$5 and \$10 postage stamps "available for use from September 1st next".



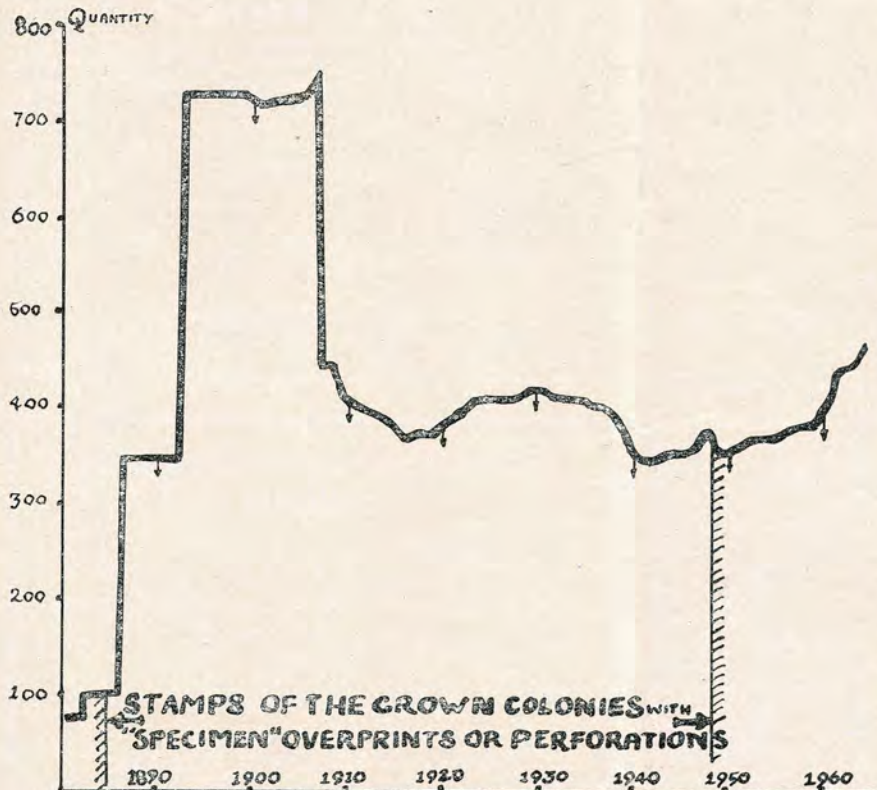
Bureau Collection. Examples of the 1902  $\frac{1}{4}$ c. to \$5 with small SPECIMEN overprints and of the 1913  $\frac{1}{4}$ c. to \$10 and postage due  $\frac{1}{4}$ c. to 30c., the 1919  $\frac{1}{4}$ c., 13c. and \$20, the 1921 1c. on 2c., 3c. on 4c. and 5c. on 6c., the 1912 Air and Commemorative sets, the 1923 2c. on 3c., the 1923 4c., 15c. and \$1 to \$20, the 1923 Temple set and the 1925 3c. on 4c. with larger SPECIMEN overprints. Also the Sinkiang 1919 1c. to \$20, 1921 Commemorative set, 1923 Temple set and 1924 4c., 6c., 15c. and \$1 to \$20 similarly overprinted.

## Further Information on Numbers Distributed

As further postal administrations became members of the Union, while others were absorbed into larger units or ceased to exist, so the numbers of specimens required for distribution by the International Bureau rose or fell. The variations are best illustrated by means of a graph\* which shows the number required for distribution in each year from 1880 to the present time. The political effects of the two World Wars, during which certain countries lost their identities and after which new nationalities emerged, are clearly indicated on the graph. Information from some of the 20th century circulars which throws light on some of these variations follows.

(Continued on page 819)

\* See page 819.



Graph of quantities of Specimen stamps of the world, including the period when Crown Colony issues were either overprinted or perforated (punctured).

### A CROWN COLONIES "SPECIMEN" HANDBOOK

Following publication of this serial study on the U.P.U. Specimen stamps in *STAMP COLLECTING*, Mr. Marcus Samuel is working on a handbook devoted to the Specimen stamps of all past and present British Crown Colonies. The new book will deal with the Specimen stamps circulated prior to distribution through the U.P.U. and also with the subsequent issues, colony by colony, rather than in "U.P.U. order" as in the serial completed in this issue.

Distribution of "Specimen" Stamps by U.P.U. (cont. from p. 817)

**Circular No. 4572/226: September 27th, 1900**

The number of specimens required for distribution was reduced from 726 (assuming that five were retained by every issuing authority) to 716 because only 25 instead of 35 were required for the Portuguese Colonies.

**Circular No. 2930/198: July 9th, 1902**

The number of specimens was increased from 716 to 721 because Crete had become a member of the U.P.U.

**Circular No. 3999/212: October 8th, 1904**

The number of specimens was increased from 721 to 726 because Panama had become a member of the U.P.U.

**Circular No. 885/42: February 15th, 1906**

The number of specimens was increased from 726 to 731 because Gaboon had become a member of the U.P.U.

**Circular No. 758/45: February 12th, 1907**

The number of specimens was increased from 731 to 756 because the French Colonies of Anjouan, Grande Comore, Moheli and Mauritanie had become members of the Union, and the number of quintuple collections required for the Portuguese Colonies had been increased from five to six.

**Circular No. 4796/340: September 28th, 1907**

**DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SPECIMENS REQUIRED FOR DISTRIBUTION**

By the terms of Article XXXIX (formerly Article XXXV amended from Article XXXIII at the 1897 Washington Congress) as amended at the 1906 Rome U.P.U. Congress, from October 1st, 1907, administrations were to communicate to one another, by the intermediary of the International Bureau, the collection of their postage stamps in triplicate, and they were to indicate the date on which previous issues ceased to be in use. The total number of specimens now required for distribution was 756, including one for the collection of the International Bureau. Deducting three for the retention of the issuing authority, the number was 448.

**Circular No. 3658/170: August 21st, 1908**

The number of specimens required for distribution was reduced from 454 to 442 because the French Colonies of Anjouan, Grande Comore, Mayotte and Moheli had come under the administration of the Madagascar Post Office.

**Circular No. 4334/213: October 15th, 1908**

The number of specimens was reduced from 442 to 409 because a number of British Colonies represented in the Union's affairs by the British G.P.O. wished to receive fewer than three specimens of each postage stamp, etc. In future only 30 triple collections instead of 41 would be required for the territories under British control.

**Circular No. 5346/209: December 16th, 1910**

The number of specimens was reduced from 409 to 400 because only one triple collection would be required for South Africa in place of triple collections for the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal.

**Circular No. 4844/227: October 25th, 1913**

The number of specimens was reduced from 400 to 389. Three British Colonies no longer desired to receive specimens and the number required for British controlled territories was reduced from 90 to 82. South Africa no longer required three specimens for British Bechuanaland.

**Note.**—The number of specimens required for Great Britain and the British controlled territories continued to decrease, from 82 to 68 in 1915, to 61 in 1929, to 46 early in 1939 and to 22 by the end of that year.

**Circular No. 8918/415: December 31st, 1921**

By the terms of Article XXXVIII (formerly Article XXXIX) as amended at the 1920 Madrid U.P.U. Congress, specimen impressions from officially adopted stamping machines were also to be distributed by members of the Union. This circular includes a table showing which nations were members of the Union at that time.

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Distribution of "Specimen" Stamps by U.P.U. (cont. from p. 819)

**Circular No. 9010/294: October 27th, 1925**

Complaint is made that the collection of the International Bureau is far from complete, particularly in War, Air and Commemorative stamps.

**Circular Letter No. 4136 of 1940**

The number of specimens was reduced from 360 to 351 owing to the annexation of **Esthonia, Lithuania and Latvia** by the U.S.S.R.

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A vast amount of interesting information is obtainable from these circulars and bulletins, a series of which, written in French, is available for study at G.P.O. Records, London. Acknowledgment is gratefully made to this Department for their valuable assistance.

**A Correction**

CANADA. Additional information received corrects data in the reference to Canada on December 11th, page 547. Readers are asked to substitute the following:—

"It was thought that there are no stamps with 'Specimen' overprints in the Bureau Collection. In fact, the 1897 Jubilee 20c., 50c., \$1, \$2, \$3, \$4 and \$5 and the King Edward VII 20c. hand-stamped 'Specimen', are in both the *Bureau Collection* and the *Berne Postal Museum Collection*."

**CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON  
BRITISH COLONIAL "SPECIMEN" STAMPS**

As we have seen, De La Rue typographed SPECIMEN overprints were brought into use for cancelling stamps of the British Crown Colonies intended for U.P.U. distribution in June 1884. From then until 1922, the same type of overprint was used on all De La Rue new issues with the exception of the King Edward VII stamps printed on paper with the Multiple Crown CA watermark which was introduced in 1904. Although specimens of stamps which differed from the previous issues only in their perforation or watermark were not normally sent to the U.P.U., the 1921 issues on paper with the new Script CA watermark were overprinted and supplied for distribution, but it must be remembered that, in most cases, the stamps on this paper were printed from the new King George V keyplate made

from Die II. In 1922 a smaller SPECIMEN overprint was brought into use by De La Rue & Co.

In the meantime, a number of other firms of printers were gaining contracts for printing British Colonial stamps, and they used different types of "Specimen" overprints on stamps supplied by them for U.P.U. distribution. In 1928, it is believed in consequence of the discovery that high-value stamps of Ceylon used on telegraph forms were being cleaned and fraudulently used again, and the decision that such stamps should, in future, have holes punched through them, the Crown Agents decided that stamps intended for U.P.U. distribution should have the word SPECIMEN punched through them, as a greater measure of security. The decision to perforate the word SPECIMEN was communicated to the Colonies in a circular letter from the Colonial Office dated August 24th, 1928. As with "Specimen" overprints, the different firms of printers used their own "Specimen" perforations. (For illustrations of these types see STAMP COLLECTING, Vol. 82, page 483, "King George VI 'Specimens'", by H. Moreton Black.)

On March 10th, 1948, the G.P.O. instructed the Post Office Stores Department that new stamps of Great Britain and of the British Post Offices abroad, of the face value of 1s. or over, intended for U.P.U. distribution, should no longer be overprinted with the word SPECIMEN, thus bringing Britain into line with the other administrations of the Union.

On March 24th, 1948, the Crown Agents informed the G.P.O. that the Colonial Office had no objection to the cessation of the employment of "Specimen" perforations on stamps of the Crown Colonies required for the same purpose. A circular letter from the Colonial Office to the Colonies dated July 15th, 1948, informed them that the Crown Agents had been instructed to cease using the "Specimen" perforation, in accordance with United Kingdom practice. In consequence of this, "Specimen" copies of the 1948 Silver Wedding stamps and of later British and Colonial issues cannot be distinguished from normal mint stamps. The risk that such stamps could be used postally has been accepted but, in fact, it is more probable that some of them will find their way into the hands of collectors after they have become obsolete.