

Overlooked Issues Part 10 – The Foreign Mail Issue

My last installment was about the 'Banknote' issues of 1874-83 so the natural issues we should talk about would be what the collectors call the 'Foreign Mail' issues. In response to Mexico's joining the United Postal Union, there was a need to produce stamps that would fit into the new international rate schedules. Considering the rate was actually quite a bit lower than the domestic rates in Mexico at the time, the postal authorities did something very unorthodox by issuing a complete new issue for foreign mail use only. So, in 1879 a new issue featuring the portrait of Benito Juarez was placed in the district offices around Mexico for the sole use of international mail.



Thick paper examples mint, used w/ bogus cnl, MS obliteration and legitimately used.

This issue was a real oddity for the patrons of Mexico. Since most of the people sending mail would never use such a stamp on their mail, especially if living in the interior of Mexico, many of the districts had little use for these new stamps, and if the person did not live in places like a port city or had businesses in the major areas like Mexico City or Guadalajara, it is unlikely they would ever find a need to use these stamps. The issuing of these stamps by Mexico was unique at the time, and their limited use would produce one of the most interesting issues and unfortunately one of the least collected in Classic Mexican philately.



Possible scarcely used 25ctv on thick paper. Normally found higher denomination 50 centavos with MS obliteration.

The first printings were done on heavy thick wove paper, followed by a more medium soft wove type, but by the last years of these Juarez issues, a very thin wove paper was put into use. Obviously, the earlier papers used were much less fragile than the very thin wove paper of 1882 and 1883. There were also two series in these stamps. There is the first series starting with the brown Un Centavos and ended with black 100 centavos. The 1, 2, 5, 10 and 25 centavos can be found legitimately used, where the 50, 85 and 100 centavos were so rarely used, if at all, that that legitimately used examples need to have certificates of authenticity. Under the UPU rate system these high denomination issues were really not needed and almost all that we have available to collectors today have either mint, have manuscript obliterations or bogus cancels, added by dealers that purchased these in bulk after these issues were no longer accepted as postage for many years, in 1889.



Small numeral Foreign Mail issue, mint 2 centavos.

The second series like the first had Juarez portrait on some of the stamps, but it also includes what collectors call the 'Small Numerals' of 1882-1883. These stamps that feature just the 2, 3 and 6 centavos are listed separately in Scott with the 6 centavos in both the scarce blue and the more common ultramarine colors. Since these new style issues served the same purpose as the Juarez issues, Follansbee groups these together along with the 12, 18, and 24 centavos Juarez, the new denominations to this issues, along with the 50 and 100 centavos now issued in new colors. There are also some non-issued stamps in different colors without any overprints and only found in mint condition which include the brown 10 centavos, orange brown 25 centavos and the Orange 100 centavos issues. All stamps of the second series are only found on the very thin wove paper. Many of these due to the fragile paper are either damaged from handling or they have very poor perforations.



Used pair, used with bogus cancel, mint without consignment overprint, 3 centavos.

For the reason a collector should consider collecting these interesting stamps are for some the following reasons. First of all, these stamps are very often from rare district in mint condition or with the obliterations or fake cancels, that in other issue do not exist. Secondly, the cost of most of these stamps are generally low in relation to rarity due to the lower demand. Although covers bearing these stamps are rare due to stamps being removed buy collectors during the 19th century, the stamps are normally not that expensive in the lower denominations. Lastly, the scope of collecting these beautifully colored stamps is a big factor for the specialist of the Foreign Mail issues. With, 1900 plus district/year combinations, many numbering errors and a large amount of re-issued "Habilitados" district issues, there is great depth in collecting these stamps.



Ultramarine used example, same w bright Ultra mint w/o consignment and Blue used, 6 centavos.

For the collector that would like to find out more information on these stamps along with the district used values I suggest to start by seeing what Nick Follansbee has to say about these stamps and the data he provides in his catalogue *A Catalogue of the Stamps of Mexico 1856 - 1910*. Dr. Richard Daffner along with Dean Carter put out a more in depth book about these issues in the year 2000 call *The Foreign Mail Issues of Mexico 1878 - 1884*. Daffner is also in the process of writing an update to this previous book. Stamp Finder has also published *Mexico Catalog of Foreign Mail Stamps 1879 to 1883* authored by Richard Lehmann that acts as a check list of the various issues by district.