

THE FIRST DEFINITIVE SET OF STAMPS OF THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA THE HAMILTON BANK NOTE Co. ISSUE OF 1906-1907: EXPERIMENTATION, PRODUCTION AND USAGE

A synopsis

Background of the Hamilton issue

Right after independence the new Republic started divesting itself from all things that linked her with the former Department of Colombia including the postal system. Inside the post office vaults were millions of stamps Colombia had ordered for the exclusive use of the Department of Panama. The fastest way to convert these Colombian stamps into Republic of Panama stamps was to overprint them. Even though the “mapita” stamps continued to be overprinted until May 1906 the new Republic started the process of acquiring a definitive issue as early as February 1904.

Between 1904 and 1905 the American Bank Note Co. printed for Panama one and two centavo stamps, a Registration, a Retardo and an AR stamp, but it was not until April 7, 1906, that the Hamilton Bank Note Co. of New York received an order to produce a definitive series of nine values. This was the only time that the Hamilton Bank Note Co. printed stamps for Panama.

The Hamilton Bank Note Issue was placed on sale after the change of currency in the Republic of Panama from a silver to a gold basis. Instead of “centavo” and “Peso”, the new values would be “centésimo” and “Balboa” which was worth twice the value of the silver standard. This is important to understand rate issues on some exhibited items.

The Secretary of Government visited the offices of the General Postal Administration to conduct two inventories of the stock of old Colombian and Panama provisional stamps. The first inventory was conducted on August 31, 1906, to retire the 2 centavo stamps in order to place in circulation the next day 1 centésimo Hamilton issue. The second inventory was conducted on November 19, 1906, in order to retire the remainders of the old Colombian and provisional stamps and to place in circulation the next day the other 8 values of the Hamilton issue.

On March 7, 1907, Panama ordered from the Hamilton company additional printings of 2, 5, and 10 centésimos stamps and the printing of 1 and 2 centésimos postal cards. On June 6, 1907, Panama ordered an additional printing of the 1 centésimo stamp.

Purpose of the exhibit

1. To show the experimentation, difficulty and intricacies faced by the printers in developing a multi-color set of nine values.
2. To show carelessness in quality control, i.e. multiple errors and varieties released to the public.
3. To show postal usage of each of the nine values including rare fiscal usage.

Order of the exhibit and what it contains

The exhibit, in a traditional format, starts with the introduction of two covers, one representing the end of the provisional period, the other, a first day of issue of a Hamilton stamp. Both covers are unique in this endeavor. To give the viewer an overview of these stamps, this is followed by a presentation of the nine- value set partially overprinted SPECIMEN MUESTRA in red or blue in blocks of 4.

From this point forward, the exhibit introduces each of the values starting with the ½ centésimo stamp by presenting an array of color die proofs of the frames and vignettes to show experimentation done by the printers before the dies were transferred into steel engraved plates for the production of the issue.

Of special note is the ½ centesimo stamp. This stamp was produced by a steel engraved frame and a multi-colored lithographic stone of the vignette. Obtaining an accurate and sharp registry of the red, blue and green colors of the vignette was most difficult and the presentation shows the challenge to the printer's skill.

Once the printing plates were completed, the experimentation continued by producing plate proof material with frames and vignettes of various colors and even vignettes of the wrong values. These presentations are all in scarce imperforated blocks of four.

Fully overprinted SPECIMEN MUESTRA for distribution to U.P.U. members are shown as well as the final issued stamps. This is followed by a presentation of perforation errors and varieties and inverted vignettes. Each of the values will conclude with a display of covers and postcards, all with a description of their postal rates. Of special note is the legal correspondence between judicial districts. The only legal correspondence in private hands with Hamilton stamps is on display in this exhibit.

Starting with the five centésimos value, the exhibit will display 9 samples of stamps utilized to pay a revenue duty. They are the only privately owned samples with Hamilton stamps.

The exhibit ends with a presentation of two covers to show the replacement process of the older Hamilton issue with the new American Bank Note Co. issue of 1909.

Even though much of the exhibited material, in particular the proof material and perforation varieties deserve a designation of "items of note", I have been conservative in this endeavor. On the very scarce and rare items I have placed a blue frame around the piece. The thicker the frame, the rarer and more important the item.

Condition

The tropical climate of Panama has not been kind to several pieces of this exhibit, specially to the judicial correspondence. This Hamilton judicial correspondence is unique in that it has never been exhibited, it has never left Panama, and is the only one of its kind in private hands.

What is not contained in the exhibit

The National Postal Museum (N.P.M.) in Washington, D. C. holds a 3-volume collection containing 157 pages of mostly proof material of the Panama Hamilton issue. I have personally visited the museum and have recorded its holding. All the original models sent by Panama and the unique artwork that started the production process are part of this collection. The N.P.M. collection also has several unique composite trials as well as unique photographic reductions of the frames and vignettes of all the nine values.

700,000 one centésimo postal cards and 300,000 two centésimos postal cards were printed by the Hamilton company in 1907 but not included in this exhibit because my aim is to focus the 10-frame exhibit solely on the stamp material.

Philatelic references

The Collectors Club Philatelist of April and July 1948 (volume 27) published a two-part article by Mr. Philip H. Ward Jr entitled PANAMA, the Issue of 1906. Mr. Ward writes at the beginning of the article: *"All the material pertaining to this issue has been gathered and maintained in one place, and presents a most interesting story of the progression of the issue, and the problems which had to be circumvented"*.¹

In the September 1996 issue of COPACARTA, Volume 14, pages 8-25, there is an article by Federico A. Brid and Dr. James B. Helme entitled The Panama Issue of 1906-1907: The Background of the Issue and the Listing of Die and Plate Proof Material. The article starts with a 3-page narrative followed by a listing of all the known proofs including the N.P.M. holdings.²

In 2014 the Colombia/Panama Philatelic Study Group published the 2nd edition of The Stamps of Panama 1878-2010: Vital Statistics by Federico A. Brid. The 69 pages of chapter IV of this handbook are dedicated to the postal rates of Panama. This is the only publication on Panama postal rates and was utilized to describe rates of exhibited covers and post cards.³

On the exhibitor's Hamilton collection

It was started in earnest in 1982. It holds 256 covers, 425 post cards and 3 wrappers. It also holds 256 die proofs, multiple plate proof items, errors and varieties and over 500 identifiable loose stamps by date and town of origin. It has full sheets of the ½, 1, 2, 2 ½, 5 and 25 centésimos values.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THE EXHIBITOR HAS PRESENTED A COLLECTION ON A COMPETITIVE BASIS.

¹ This issue of the CCP is available in pdf format on the Collectors Club's website to its members at no cost.

² This reference is available in pdf format to everyone at: COPAPHIL.ORG, References COPACARTA, the journal of COPAPHIL

³ This 150-page book can be ordered from COPAPHIL, attention Allan Harris, 26997 Hemmingway Ct., Hayward, CA 94542-2349.