

THE ESSAYS AND PROOFS OF GUATEMALA

Excluding Designs by Arnaldo Chavarry

Guatemala issued stamps from 1871 to 2015, when the issuance of stamps, and the postal service itself ceased. The production of most stamps begins with an artist’s conception, and develops via artists’ essays, to engraved dies (for recess printing), and then to final printing plates. While we have lost much of this material, some of it has been preserved in the estates of the designer, and the archives of stamp printers and governments, as well as in specialized collections.

This exhibit represents an attempt to collect and describe as much of this archival material as possible for Guatemala. It is not possible to produce a “complete” collection as much of this material is unique and rarely sold. Some of it has been catalogued, especially in publications from the International Society of Guatemala Collectors, but new discoveries are occasionally made. Material was originally obtained through official sales of archives, and through back-channel sources.

This exhibit contains archival material relating to postage stamps and does not include postal stationary or revenue stamps of Guatemala. It includes the designs of all artists, except for Arnaldo Chavarry, whose works and archival materials are contained in a separate exhibit. For the purpose of this exhibit, UPU specimens were not included as they are post-production artifacts.

Essays and proofs are displayed in chronological order.

Rarity

All archival material is scarce or rare. The rarity is fairly uniform for each class of archival material, which are classified as follows

- Issued stamps. Usually relatively common.
- Artist’s sketches and essays. Unique for both rejected and accepted designs and the rarest form of archival material.
- Die proofs. Usually made in quantities of less than 10.
- Plate proofs. More common, with issued quantities of just a few sheets (50-200)
- Color trial die and plate proofs, prepared for salesmen sample books. Usually just one or two sheets were printed.

Order of Display in Exhibit

Each class of material is displayed, in the following order with background and borders color coded.

- 1) Issued Stamp
- 2) Artist’s Sketches & Essays
- 3) Die Proofs
- 4) Plate Proofs
- 5) Color Trial Die and Plate Proofs

The 1871 First Issue

Printing Process: Typographed
Printer: Hotel des Monnaies (French Government Mint)
Designer: Sketch from Guatemalan officials
Engraver: Ferdinand Joubert

The History of the First Issue

The first Latin American nation to issue adhesive postage stamps was Brazil, whose 1843 issue came only three years after the Penny Blacks, and four years ahead of the first regular U.S. stamps. Stamps were in use in nine other Latin American countries before the first Central American government, that of Nicaragua, joined the procession in 1862. Costa Rica followed suit in 1863, Honduras in 1865 and El Salvador in 1867 before Guatemala’s first stamps went on sale in 1871. The only Latin American countries which were later to act were Panama, in 1873, when that nation was still a province of Columbia, and Haiti in 1881.

Guatemala’s delay was not entirely its own fault. In 1866 the government of President Vicente Cerna decided that Guatemala should adopt postage stamps, and they were ordered from France before the middle of that year. Their production was delayed by extreme procrastination, and then there was a further loss of time in Guatemala before they were put on sale.

The first issue begins with a formal decree issued May 31, 1866, by General Cerna, which also began the modernization of a postal system which was still operating much as it did under Spanish rule. This decree is especially notable for setting moderate postal rates and establishing the prepayment of postage six months before stamps were to be ready.

On the same day the decree was issued. Foreign Minister Pedro de Aycinca wrote to Juan de Francisco Martin, the Guatemalan minister to France. Senor Martin, incidentally, was a notable figure; a former Colombian, he was a friend of Simon Bolivar and executor of Bolivar’s estate. Moving on to Guatemala after the liberation of South America from Spain was completed, Sr. Martin became his adopted country’s minister in Paris in 1856, and served there until his death on October 24, 1869, bearing the brunt of the struggle to get the stamps printed.

Aycinca told Martin that he had heard of the skill and speed with which Anatole Hulot, “engraver” of the French Mint (actually Hulot was the director of stamp production), had turned out France’s first stamps in 1849. Hulot’s system, “typographical, engraved in relief,” was the best discovered yet, Aycinca understood, and he had been told that it was still a secret of Hulot or the Mint. Thus Aycinca asked Martin to arrange to have the stamps printed at the Paris Mint.

As Issued



Trial Printings, Printer’s Waste, or Plate Proofs?

Imperforates exist with original gum identical with that of the issued stamps. There are also imperforates with no trace of gum. Though it could be argued that many of the imperforates could be called trial printings, printer’s waste or proofs, **there is no definite evidence one way or the other.** Most catalogs have deemed these as merely imperforate varieties. However, they never seem to have entered the mail stream. For the purpose of this exhibit, they are considered plate proofs.

Plate Proofs

