

American Bank Note Company "Córdoba" Issue of 1924 for Nicaragua

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By Kurt Streepy

While browsing an auction for Canal Zone or Panama material for my exhibits, I stumbled upon a Nicaragua listing that displayed a Panama 2c Vermillion Córdoba overprinted for use in the Canal Zone with the 1920 Type V overprint (Scott #56). It made me curious enough to look at the other images associated with the lot. The Canal Zone issue was attached to a document from Nicaragua to the American Bank Note Company (ABNCo) providing a crude stamp design for a proposed new issue (Figure 1-3). The Canal Zone issue was provided as an example of the vignette desired.



Figure 1: Nicaragua design request provided to the ABNCo.



Figure 2: Crude pencil essay of the proposed issue.



Figure 3: Crude pencil and pen essay of the proposed issue.

An additional document in the lot was an ABNCo internal worksheet to order the steel die (Figure 4). The document references Text "as per sketch herewith", Vignette "Portrait of Córdoba in stock" and Border "left to you". The Córdoba die referenced appears to be the same as used to print the Panama 2c Vermilion issue (Figure 5). The two documents must have been in the die maker's files instead of the general Nicaragua ABNCo communication archive that is available at the APRL. During a recent visit to the APRL, I found a duplicate copy of the steel die request in the archive.¹

7151

STEEL Postage Stamps

Date 10/24/25 Schedule No. 12480
 Model Wanted _____ Model to H.J.B.
 Title in full Republica de Nicaragua
 General Description and Style 1 color stamp in 4 denominations, one design and vignette

Words Un centavo de Córdoba Dos - Cinco - Diez Centavos de Córdoba
 Numerals 1 2 5 10
 Denominations _____
 Quantity _____
 Color _____

Work 1 inch high by 7/8 inch wide
 Size: _____
 Tinned _____
 Number On _____

FACE

Text as per sketch herewith
 Vignette Portrait of Córdoba in steel
 Border left to you

Figure 4: ABNCo steel die order for order F-7451.



Figure 5: ABNCo Córdoba die C-3112

The requested stamp was to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Leon and Granada in 1524. The central image was Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, who founded Leon and Granada and considered the founder of Nicaragua.

As I looked at the Córdoba connection between Panama and Nicaragua, I realized the two countries were not honoring the same Spanish officers. The issues of Panama listed Fernández de Córdoba while Nicaragua was honoring Francisco Hernández de Córdoba. Who are these two officers?

Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (1475-1526) – Founded Leon and Granada in what became Nicaragua. He was beheaded in Nicaragua by order of Pedro Arias de Ávila the Spanish Governor of Panama as an insurrectionist and a traitor.

Antonio Fernandez de Córdoba (? – April 8, 1673) - In 1672, initiated the construction of what would become the basis of the current location of Panama City which was founded on January 21, 1673. The original Panama City was burnt in January 1671 before being attacked and looted by pirate Henry Morgan.

The hand-drawn essays (Figure 2-3) clearly indicate Hernandez while an ABNCo model makes special note of the H of Hernandez with an arrow (Figure 6).

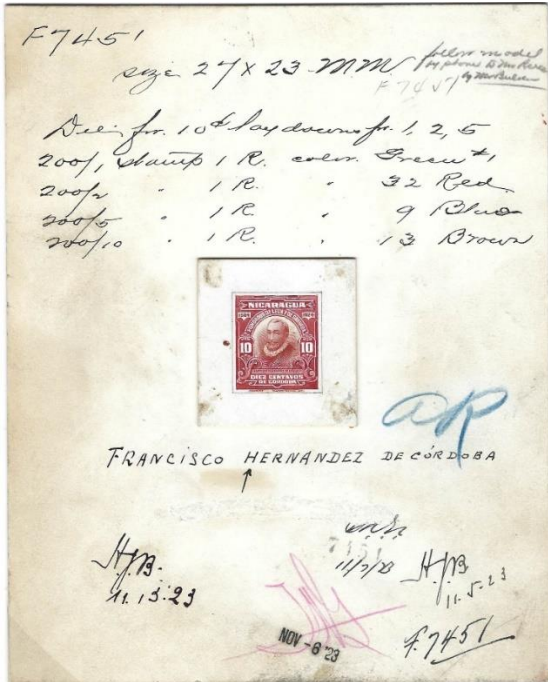


Figure 6: ABNCo model of the proposed design.

Further investigation found photo proofs of the same design with Fernandez as the listed name (Figure 7). I was not the first to discover this discrepancy. Glenn Stafford published an article in *Nicarao*², the journal of the Nicaragua Study Group, on the spelling error in the design of the 1924 issue as well as a previously proposed 1913 issue. Glenn proposed the ABNCo 1924 Nicaragua design was based on a Perkins Bacon photographic essay from 1913 (Figure 8).

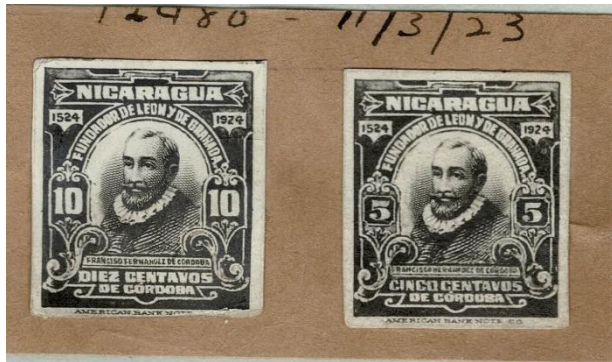


Figure 7a: 10c Fernandez and 5c Hernandez (Glenn Stafford Collection)

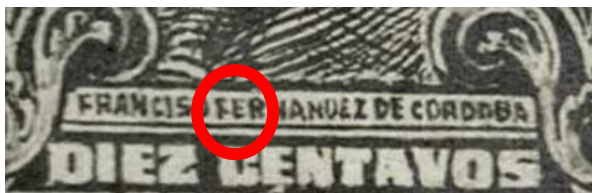




Figure 7b: Enlarged view of photographic essays (Glenn Stafford Collection)



Figure 8: Perkins Bacon photographic essays dated October 27, 1913, for a Francisco Hernández de Córdoba definitive series for Nicaragua. They include the misspelling “FERNANDEZ.” (Glenn Stafford Collection)

I feel the Perkin Bacon essays of 1913 appear to have been modeled after the 1906 Hamilton Bank Note Company (HBNCo) issue and the 1909 ABNCo issue for Panama (Figure 9). As David Zemer reported the HBNCo and ABNCo issues were based on sketches of Cordoba provided by Panama (Figure 10). Both were issued well before the Nicaragua 1913 Perkin Bacon essay or the 1924 ABNCo issue. The final Nicaragua version (Figure 11) has a very similar appearance to the Panama ABNCo issue.



Figure 9: 1906 HBNCo and 1909 ABNCo Issues



Figure 10: Photograph of Córdoba sketch provided by Panama to ABNCo in 1908.



Figure 11: Nicaragua 1924 Leon and Grenada Issue

Unfortunately, the ABNCo Nicaragua Communication Archive did not hold any additional information on the name listed on the stamp or the design shared between the two issues. The issue was approved locally by the Nicaragua consulate prior to printing. As to be expected there is little in the way of images of the two officers named Córdoba. Modern Nicaragua currency uses a different Córdoba image (Figure 12). Based on sketches provided by Panama, it appears ABNCo took some liberties with the image for the 1924 Nicaragua issue.



Figure 12: Nicaragua currency.

References:

1. American Bank Note Company Nicaragua Communication Archive. APRL.
2. Stafford, Glenn. Nicaragua: 400th Anniversary of the Founding of Leon and Granada: Stamps of 1924 picture portrait of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba. *Nicarao* October 2020. Vol 29(4)2-9.
3. Zemer, David. American Bank Note Company Portrait Stamps: The 2 Centesimos de Balboa Cordoba Stamp. COPACARTA January 2021. Vol 38(13)2-16.