

Evolution of Nicaragua 1924 León and Granada Commemorative Issue



Treatment:

This three-frame traditional exhibit explores the production and use of the 1924 Nicaragua León and Granada Commemorative honoring Francisco Hernández de Córdoba's founding of the cities in 1524. The material includes pre-production, archival, and postal use. The use of the original issue along with overprints from 1928 and 1931 are within scope.

The exhibit opens with the **unique** request from Nicaragua for a new stamp issue picturing Francisco Hernández de Córdoba to commemorate his founding of the Nicaraguan cities of León & Granada in 1524. The document includes crude hand-drawn stamp essays from the National Telegraph Department of Nicaragua. The request for a set of four stamps also includes an example of a stamp printed by the American Bank Note Company (ABNCo) for Panama and overprinted in 1920 for use within the United States Panama Canal Zone.

This is followed by the models and proofs from the ABNCo archives with a progression to a final product. Postal use of each issue follows.

During the 1927-1933 civil war, Sandino guerilla fighters targeted post offices to steal postage stamps and sell them for cash to finance the guerilla efforts. To revalidate the remainder of the 10c brown issue, they were overprinted with "Correos 1928". **There are no known covers of this issue.** There were no overprints on the other stamp values.

On March 31, 1931, the Managua post office was destroyed by a major earthquake and fire that destroyed much of Managua. To meet postal demands, the post office recalled the 10c brown with 1928 overprint from the outlying post offices. The issue was overprinted a second time. The issue was surcharged 2c with 1928 obliterated with a bar and 1931 overprint. A

second surcharge was created for official use. The stamp was surcharged 5c with "OFICIAL" using the same overprint bar to obliterate 1928 and add 1931.

A variety of overprint errors occurred, including missing and inverted components. The exhibit provides copies of the errors listed in major catalogs (Scott and Maxwell) along with additional **unlisted errors**.

Covers from the 1931 overprints are generally philatelic, but the exhibit provides commercial uses of the overprints.

Background:

The design proposed is very similar to the 1906 Hamilton Bank Note Company (HBNCo) and 1909 ABNCo Córdoba issues for Panama. I suspect the same vignette model was used for the ABNCo Panama and Nicaragua issues. This hypothesis appears to be confirmed by the die maker order that states "Portrait of Córdoba in Stock". The images look to be based on the drawing provided by Panama to the ANBCo in 1908 to create ABNCo vignette die C-312.

An intriguing difference between the Panama issue and the Nicaragua issue is the full name of Córdoba. The Panama issue is inscribed **Fernandez de Córdoba**. This issue celebrates Antonio Fernandez de Córdoba (? – April 8, 1673), a Spanish conquistador known for re-establishing Panama City in a new location following the raid by Morgan and his pirates in 1671 that destroyed the more coastal city. The Nicaragua issue honors Francisco **Hernández** de Córdoba (1475-1526), a Spanish conquistador known for founding León and Granada who was beheaded by Pedro Arias de Ávila the Spanish Governor of Panama as an insurrectionist and a traitor. Based on the limited number of images available through paintings and drawing it appears the ABNCo used the wrong Córdoba image for the Nicaragua issue.

Both the approved painted proof and the photo model make a notation regarding the “H” in Hernández to indicate there was some confusion about the listed name. One item not in the exhibit is a photo model of the 10c brown Nicaragua issue with the name Fernandez. This item has not been on the market in many years. Although the name was corrected, this item demonstrates the confusion within the ABNCo on the issue. While reviewing the ABNCo archives at the APRL, I found no mention of the naming error or correction on the issued stamps.

Importance:

This exhibit is the definitive exhibit of the Nicaragua León & Granada issue. No exhibit has shown the collection of unique models, proofs, and specimens paired with rare pieces of postal history from the period of use.

Research:

My visit to the APRL to view the ABNCo Nicaragua Communication Archive provided answers to many questions related to the issue. I discovered the number of each denomination issued, the cost of the die and printing, and the date shipped from New York.

Through personal research and communication with other collectors of Nicaragua, I established the earliest known use of the issues as May 22, 1924. The 1c green was used on a postcard to New York City as seen in the exhibit. This will be published in an upcoming issue of *NICARAO*, the journal of the Nicaragua Study Group. Scott lists an issue date of 1924 with no month or date

and the Maxwell Nicaragua Handbook lists an issue date of July 1924.

Rarity & Condition:

Issued over 95 years ago in a tropical environment, most covers and postcards show signs of wear, including stains, tears, and toning. Covers are rarely found in the market and domestic covers are uncommon due to low literacy rates and the ravages of civil war, earthquakes, and political instability. Most of the pre-production and archival material presented is unique or from a unique position.

The **unique** hand-painted design essay on China paper mounted on card includes the approval signatures of the ABNCo team along with confirmation of desired colors for each issue. This is followed by the **unique** photo essay card of the lower three denominations. The **unique** final approval proofs of design and color with approval initials and dates round out the pre-production material.

Archival material such as proofs on card and specimens on gum paper include desirable positions such as the F-corner block, approval signature, gutter blocks, and ancillary markings.

The exhibit includes the **earliest known use** of a León & Granada issue on a cover from May 22, 1924, along with the **only known** León & Granada issue on a valor declarado (insured) cover. This is one of only 2 known Nicaraguan valor declarado covers from the 1920s. The 10c brown cover is **1 of 3** known covers for this issue.

References:

Streepy, Kurt. American Bank Note Company Córdoba Issue of 1924 for Nicaragua. *Canal Zone Philatelist*. 2023; 59(1):1-4.

Stafford, Glen. Nicaragua: 400th Anniversary of the Founding of León and Granada: Stamps of 1924 picture portrait of Francisco Hernández de Cordoba – Overprints. *NICARAO*. 2020; 29(4):2-9.

Zemer, David. Panama’s American Bank Note Company Portrait Stamps: The 2 Centesimos de Balboa Cordoba Stamp. *COPACARA*. 2021; 38(13): 2-16.

Access to my references.



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