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The 1937 Colombia "Olympics" Set - the Bumpy Road to Issuance

By Debby Friedman..... Page 2

Panama First Flight to Buenos Aires

By Brad Wilde..... Page 3

Manuel Amador Guerrero: 1933 Commemorative of the Centennial of His Birth

By Brad Wilde..... Page 6

SCADTA Postage Due on Letter from Germany

By Thomas P. Myers Page 10

Private Carriers" of Colombia: Expreso Tobon with Cutting Marking

By Rainer Fuchs..... Page 12

Postcards: C. L. Chester

By Brad Wilde..... Page 13

Louis Eugene Langlais

By Debby Friedman..... Page 17

Basil Rowe: Airmail Pioneer

By Juan L. Riera. Page 18

Cover of the Quarter: 5 centavos surcharge on 1887 postal card

When the post card rate was raised to 5 centavos a 5 centavos surcharge was authorized in December 1902 and the existing stock of 1890 issue cards (H&G 13 and 14) was gathered, Reply cards were split in half as the surcharges were applied to cards one at a time. Mixed in with the cards receiving the surcharge was this reply half from the 1887 issue (H&G 11). While there likely was a message half, this is the only recorded example.



Panama's American Bank Note Company Portrait Stamps: The 2 Centésimos de Balboa Cordoba Stamp

by David Zemer

This article will discuss the development, printing, and usage of the 2-centesimos Cordoba stamp produced by the American Bank Note Company (ABNCo).

Background

Panama was obligated by the Taft Treaty of 1904 to supply postage stamps to the Canal Zone from 1904 to 1924. In return Panama received 40% of the face value of the stamps. In 1907, the foreign post card rate for both the Panama and Canal Zone postal systems was 2 centésimos/cents (1 centésimo equaled one cent), so there was a need for the 2-cent stamp for post cards or as a makeup rate. The foreign rate in Panama for printed matter or "impresos" was also 2 cents.

The 1907 rate for 1st class domestic mail within Panama was 2 ½ cents whereas the Canal Zone rate was 2 cents. Therefore, it appears that this 2-cent stamp, Scott Number 198, was also ordered to supply the Canal Zone with a 1st class domestic stamp. The procedure at that time was that Panama stamps would be supplied to the Canal Zone where they would be overprinted "CANAL ZONE."

The demand for a 2-cent post card stamp for Panama was small as most of the foreign-addressed post cards mailed from the Isthmus were from the Canal Zone. This stamp was only printed five times for Panama over 11 years and it appears that Panama carried a surplus of them as some were sold to the Canal Zone to be

overprinted "CANAL ZONE" or were used as tax and telegraph stamps by Panama.

1908 – First Order F1518

July 18, 1907. Panama ordered 1,000,000 2-cent stamps with the portrait of Cordoba from the ABNCo.

This Department wishes to have your house make the following shipment of Postage Stamps which must be printed in accordance with the specimens sent herewith, and the instructions given below:

1,000,000 stamps of dos centesimos de Balboa (2 centesimos) with the portrait of Fernandez de Cordoba, similar to the emission made by the Hamilton Bank Note Co., specimen of which is enclosed.

Panama asked the HBNCo to supply the ABNCo with the portrait of Cordoba which Panama had sent them and which they had used as the example to engrave the vignette. As noted in the previous article on the 1-cent Balboa stamp in *COPACARTA*, September 2018, the HBNCo falsely said that they had destroyed the photograph of Cordoba. This figure later became part of the Ward collection and now resides in the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. **Fig. 1.**

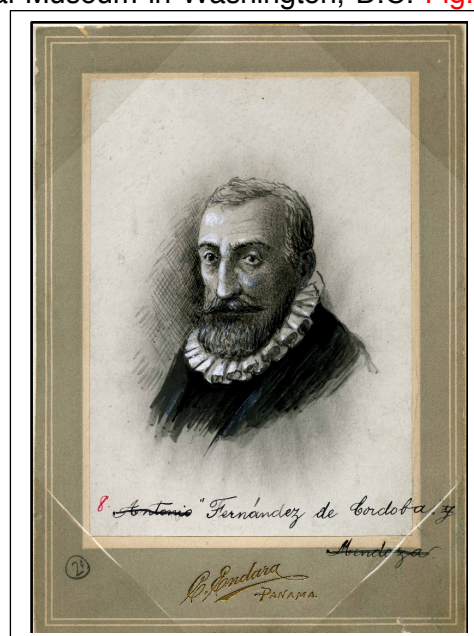


Fig. 1: HBN Co sketch of Cordoba

The ABNCo had to wait until 1908, when Panama sent a photograph of a different sketch of Cordoba, to produce this stamp. **Fig. 2.**

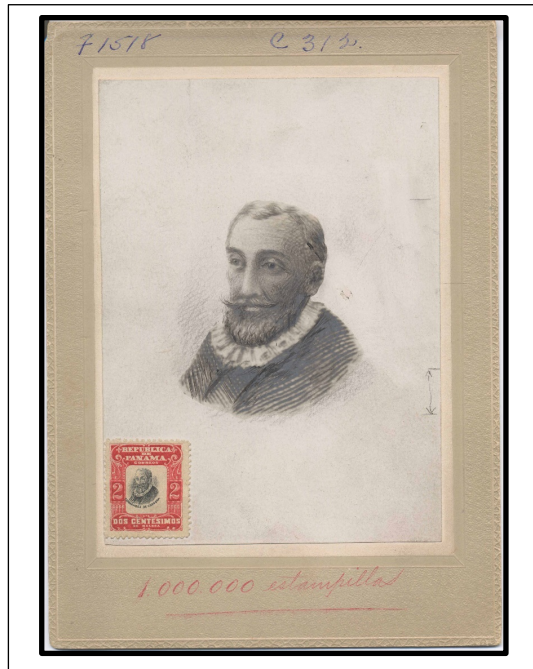


Fig. 2: ABN Co sketch of Cordoba

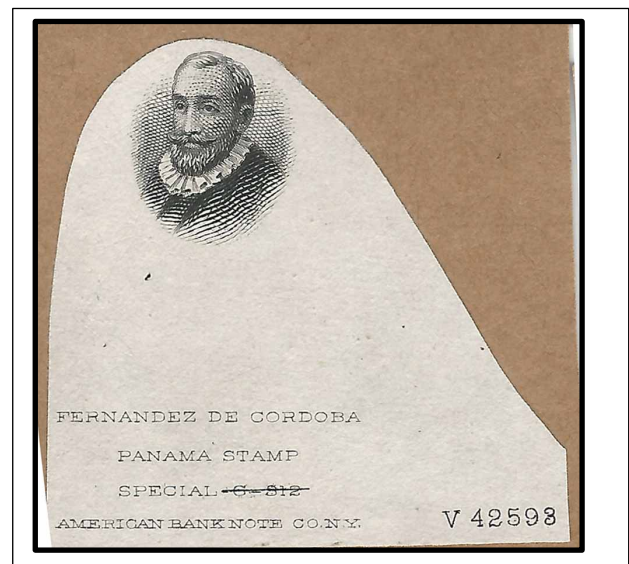
The original die for the frame was number C – 816 and changed to 26315 in 1924. **Fig 4.** A cropped copy of a die proof on thin paper in the final color is shown in **Fig. 5.**



Fig. 3 – Photograph of essay. Vignette is a reduced photograph; frame is roughly drawn

A stamp-sized essay was made with a reduced photograph of Cordoba's head inserted into a roughly drawn frame. Unfortunately, the original has never surfaced and only a black and white photograph is recorded. **Fig 3.** The photograph was then reduced and engraved, with the vignette die catalogue as **SPECIAL C-312**. In 1924 it was renumbered **V 42593**. **Fig. 3a**

*Figure 3a – Production die proof of Vignette pasted on storage envelope. Original die number **SPECIAL C-312** changed to **V 42593** in 1924*



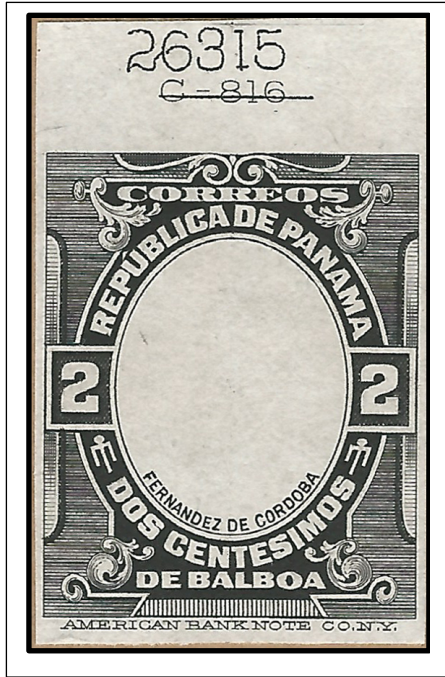


Figure 4 - Frame die proof showing original die number C-316 which was changed to 28315 in 1924



Figure 5 - Final frame die proof in color

April 27, 1908. The dies were approved, and 1,000,000 stamps printed with 10 x 10 stamps per sheet. Fig 6, 7. No complete sheets from this printing are known to have survived and the largest blocks are the specimen stamps from the 1990 Christie's Auction. Fig 8.

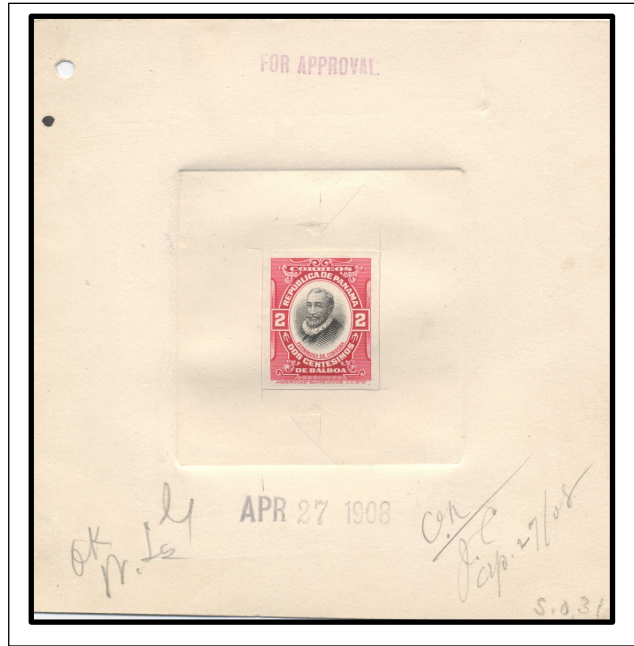


Figure 6 - APR 27, 1906. Approved die proof



Figure 7 - Large Die proof for stamp as issued. Frame die number is C-816



Figure 8 – Order # 1, F1518 - APR 8, 1908, date order entered into ABNCo books. Specimen stamps.

July 16, 1908. In a letter to Panama the ABNCo wrote "... we have ready for the steamer of next week, all the postage stamps ordered last year, which will amount to --- \$ 3,150, U.S. Gold."

August 12, 1908. The ABNCo sent Panama a Bill of Lading for five boxes which included 1,000,000 2-cent stamps. They were "... shipped per SS *Esperansa* hence this day for Colon ... completing the order of 18th July 1907."

April 12, 1909. The Canal Zone took delivery of 500,000 2-cent Cordoba stamps and overprinted them "CANAL ZONE." Canal Zone First Day of Issue was May 11, 1909.

REF 1

May 22, 1909. Panama issued Resolution # 20 authorizing the use of this stamp but there is no record of a First Day of Issue. REF 2. The Earliest Recorded Usage on cover is August 28, 1909. Fig 9.

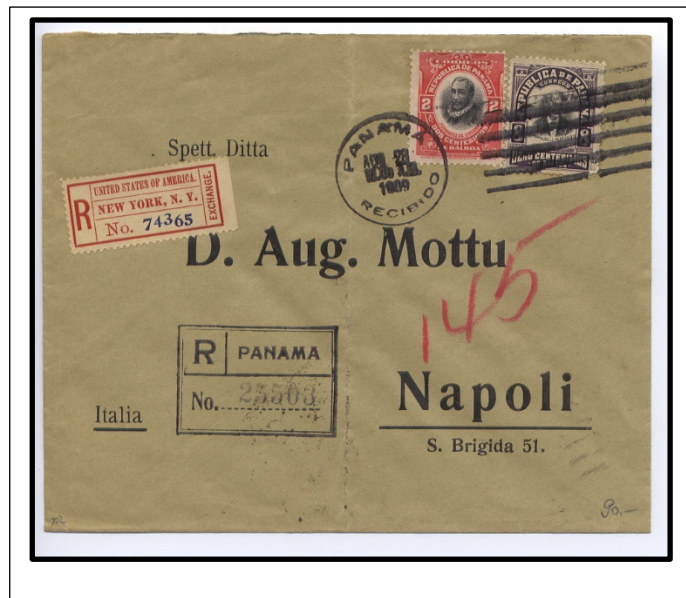


Figure 9 – Earliest Recorded Usage, August 28, 1909. 5c pays registry fee, 5c pays foreign 1st class mail

1913 – Second Order F3843

September 9, 1912. The second ABNCo printing for Panama used "new" plates previously created by an order on this date for the Canal Zone. These sheets can be identified by the order number, F-3397, engraved in the upper left selvage. In addition two reversed (mirror-image) "2"s were engraved in the upper right-hand-side

of the selvage. A black reversed “2” came from the vignette plate and red reversed “2” the frame.

As with the previous order, the printing format was 10 x 10 stamps on one sheet.

October 30, 1912. The Foreign Sales department of the ABNCo received a memo from its Engraving Department that both of the plates from the first order had been cancelled.

July 16, 1913. Francisco Filós of the *Secretaria Gobierno y justicia seccion tercera* sent the ABNCo Order Number 22 for:

- 1,000,000 ½ cent stamps
- 1,000,000 1 cent stamps
- 500,000 2 cent stamps

July 22, 1913. Panama sent a follow up letter asking that these stamps be sent “... as quickly as possible as our supply is very low...” and that their purchasing agent Stark & Co. would pay for them.

August 5, 1913. The ABNCo confirmed the order, F3843, noting that they would rush it. The specimen stamps have **AUG 4, 1913** hand-stamped in the selvage which would be the date this order was placed into the order book. **Fig 10**

September 11, 1913. The ABNCo supplied Stark & Co. 1,000,000 ½ cent stamps to be shipped on the SS *Tivives* on September 13.

September 24. ABNCo notified Panama that the 1-cent and 2-cent stamps would be shipped on the SS *Carrillo* on September 27th. The total charge to Panama for these two stamps was \$915.

A census started 30 years ago and logged into my database indicates that Panama quit issuing the first printing of this stamp around August 1913. The Earliest Recorded Usage from the second printing is dated December 5, 1913 but not shown here.

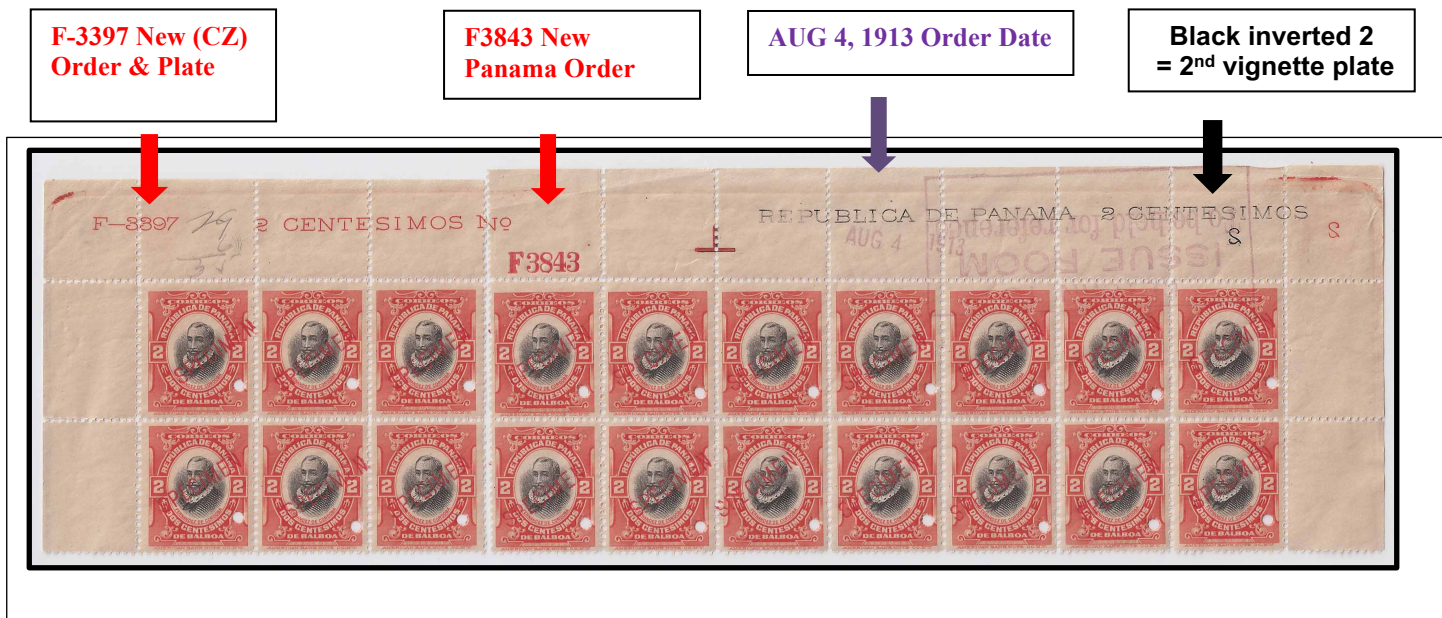


Figure 10 – Order # 2, F3843 - SEP 4, 1913. Specimen stamps. Note engraved F3397 and reversed “2” s in upper selvage

1914 – Reduction in Panama’s 1st Class Mail Rates from 2½ c to 2c

January 15, 1914. Panama reduced its domestic postage rate for a 1st class letter weighing up to 20 grams from 2½ cents to 2 cents. There might have been some misunderstanding on the start date for this new reduced rate as there is a cover from the British Consulate to J.H. Helmer, the Canal Zone Claims Officer, dated January 7, 1914 with a single 2-cent Cordoba stamp but no postage due notice. The earliest reported cover, not shown, using this stamp after the new rates came into force was January 22, 1914 from the Italian Consulate to J.H. Helmer.

LEY 24 DE 1915

Panama passed a law in 1915, no. 24, enabling it to use tax stamps on a number of items. However, Panama had not received new revenue stamps from the ABNCo when the law went into effect. In order not to lose revenue, Panama overprinted both HBNCo and ABNCo postage stamps, including the 2-cent ABNCo Cordoba stamp. They were hand-stamped “LEY 24 DE 1915.” in purple and struck vertically. REF. 3, Fig. 11. There are no records on how many stamps of each denomination were overprinted.



1916 Third Order – F4853 – Booklets

These booklet stamps have been covered in earlier articles but new information, the ABNCo correspondence, has since become available and a short synopsis from it is given here. [REF 4.5.6.7.](#)

January 17, 1916. Juan Ehrman, the ABNCo agent in Panama, wrote the ABNCo that the Canal Zone was ordering 1-cent and 2-cent booklet stamps, and he was trying to get the Panama government to order similar booklets for Panama.

January 21, 1916. Panama sent the ABNCo *Pedido* (Order) No. 89 for 1-cent and 2-cent booklet panes for the Canal Zone and 1-, 2-, and 5-cent booklets for Panama. On February 5, the ABNCo Foreign Sales Department placed internal orders, F4853 for the 1-cent and 2-cent booklets and F4854 for the 5-cent booklet.

January 24, 1916. An order for 10,000 2-cent Panama booklets was placed. Each 2-cent booklet had 4 panes of 6 stamps each for a total of 240,000 stamps.

February 5, 1916. The ABNCo Foreign Sales Department placed an internal order for both Canal Zone and Panama booklets. The total price to Panama for all of the booklets was \$2457.66.

February 23, 1916. This date is the first time F4853 is mentioned typed in a letter.

No Panama 2-cent booklet specimen sheets were sold at the 1990 Christie’s auction but there were a large number of Canal Zone booklet sheets. They all used the same engraved plates with the foreign order number F-4853, black from the vignette plate and red from the frame plate, engraved in the

Figure 11 – 2-Cent Cordoba stamp overprinted *LEY 24 DE 1915* vertically in purple Courtesy Joe Ross

CANAL ZONE overprint they are identical to the Panama printing.

Figure 12 below is from the right-hand side of a Canal Zone sheet, cut down the cutting guideline as shown on the left. Each sheet contained 144 stamps divided into 24 booklet panes of 6 stamps.

Figure 12 – Right side of partial sheet of 2-cent specimen stamps from Canal Zone order



Two complete booklets of the 2-cent Panama stamps were in the Christie's sale, each hand-stamped "SPECIMEN" and the foreign order F4853 in red. Fig 13

April 29, 1916. The ABNCo sent Panama an invoice for the Canal Zone and Panama booklets, \$2457.66 + \$ 74.93 for boxes, Insurance, freight and Consul Fee.

May 1, 1916. There is a Bill of Lading for shipment on the SS *Carrillo*, May 3, of seven boxes containing the booklet stamps.

These Panama booklet stamps are extremely scarce! Although 240,000 2-cent booklet stamps were printed, only four covers with them are known, about a dozen mint panes are recorded, and I have only seen a few stamps off-cover *per decade* over the past 30 years. The Earliest Recorded Usage is September 27, 1916, Fig. 14, and the last two covers were from the small town of Almirante, not far from Bocas del Toro, cancelled in 1926.



Figure 13 – Order F4853. Specimen booklet containing 2-cent Cordoba specimen stamps



Figure 14 – **September 27, 1916. Booklet stamp Earliest Recorded Usage.** From a lawyer in Colon to Juan Ehrman who was also the ABNCo agent in Panama: 9 ½ cent rating pays 5c registry fee, 2 1/2 cent A.R. fee, 2 cent 1st class domestic postage

With the acquisition of the ABNCo correspondence, a wealth of information concerning Canal Zone and Panama booklet stamps is now available and it is hoped that one day a complete study will be finalized.

1918 Fourth Order – F5635

May 20, 1918. With Order 845-D, Panama asked the ABNCo to print 1,000,000 1-cent Balboa stamps, 1,000,000 2-cent Cordoba stamps, and 50,000 each of the 12-, 15-, and 24-cent stamps previously printed for the Canal Zone, but this time without the CANAL ZONE overprint. Panama asked that the 1- and 2-cent printing be rushed as their supplies were nearly exhausted. **June 8, 1918.** Order F5635 was entered into ABNCo books.

July 31, 1918. ABNCo sent Panama an invoice for \$700 US gold for the printing of the 2-cent stamps. This did not include insurance, shipping, etc.

August 6, 1918. The stamps were shipped on the SS *Almirante*.

This printing used a set of plates originally made to fulfil an order, F-4068, dated January 26, 1914, for the Canal Zone. Until order F-4068 these stamps were printed 10 x 10 per sheet. Order F4068 created a double-sized plate of two panes per sheet, each of 10 x 10 stamps for a total of 200 stamps per sheet. Note the reversed red and black “3”s in the selvage on the upper right-hand corner of the specimen stamps indicating that this printing is from the 3rd

plate for both the frame and vignette. **Fig 15.**
The image shown is from the right-hand
pane.



Figure 15 – Order # 4, June 8, 1918 - F5635.
Righthand pane of a sheet of 200 stamps.
Note reversed “3”s. Same plates as Canal
Zone order F4068.

No covers are recorded in my database of
close to 250 covers with this 2-cent stamp
between March 1918 and April 27, 1919,
indicating a shortage of 2-cent Cordoba
stamps for almost a year. **Fig 16**

December 17, 1919. There is some
documented evidence that these postage
stamps could have been used as tax stamps.
Juan Ehrman, the ABNCo representative in
Panama, wrote the order of tax stamps as
Panama had run out. More importantly for
this narrative he stated that Panama had
already used about 162,500 old postage
stamps as tax stamps.

1920 Fifth Order – F6256



**Figure 16 – April 27,
1919.** First cover
recorded with a 2-cent
Cordoba stamp since
March 1918; presumably
from the 4th printing. Note
color change due to iron
oxidation in red ink.

January 26, 1920. The ABNCo entered orders F6256, 2-cent, and F6257, 5-cent, stamps into their books. The correspondence for these orders is missing but we know from the records at the American Numismatic Association Museum that 1,500,000 stamps were ordered by Panama at the end of January and it is assumed from past orders that 1,000,000 were of the 2-cent Cordoba and 500,000 of the 5-cent Arosemena stamp.

The same plates of 200 stamps that printed the 1918 issue were used. The order date and order number are hand-stamped on the specimen stamps from the left hand pane shown in **Fig 17**.

Besides the stamps overprinted *LEY 24 DE 1915*, Panama ran short of tax and telegraph stamps more than once and often used postage stamps to show that taxes and fees were paid.

There are 2-cent Cordoba stamps overprinted **TELEGRAFOS**. **Fig 18** The overprint is identical to those on the HBNCo stamps, overprinted in 1917 but the issue date is not clear. Hiscocks (**REF 9**) and Yvert give a date of 1934 which was used by Ross and Brid, but no dated stamps or legal decrees have been uncovered. **REF 10**. Copies of this stamp with a cancellation would be greatly appreciated by the author.



Figure 17 – Order # 5, January 26, 1920 - F6256. Same plates as Canal Zone order F4068.

There might be a righthand pane of 100 specimen stamps from this F6256 printing and any information on its present location would be welcomed. A scan of the top two rows would be greatly appreciated.

August 19, 1920. A batch of 200,000 2-cent Cordoba stamps were sent to the Canal Zone where they were overprinted “CANAL ZONE” (CZ sc. 47). **REF 8**. The five printings are summarized in Table 1.

Non-postal Usage



Figure 18 – Overprinted TELEGRAFOS.

Postage stamps were also pressed into service to show that a tax had been paid. Only three examples with this stamp still on the document have been recorded. REF 11.

Fig. 19

Dr. James Helme who also left the panes intact. There are three panes, all from the 4th or 5th printing and so far as I know they have never appeared in an article or have been exhibited in public. Both the left pane and right pane exist in their entirety, no doubt

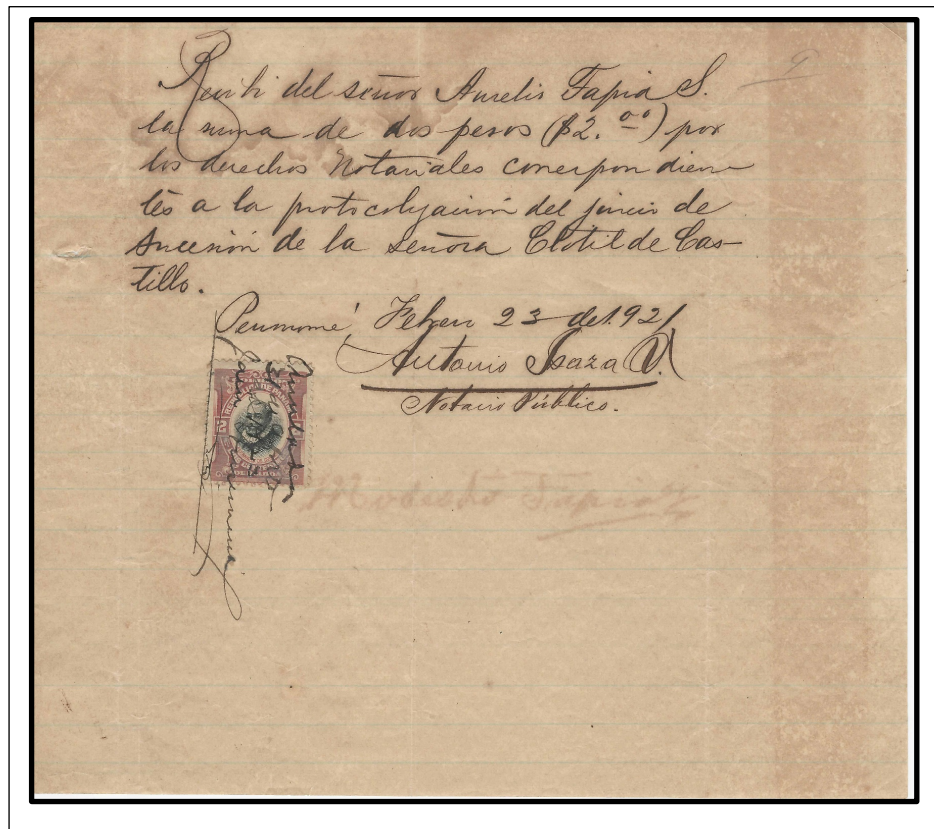


Figure 19 – February 23, 1921, Penonomé. The 2-cent stamp paid the stamp tax on a receipt for notary services. Note iron oxidation in the red ink of the frame.

Print and Manufacturing Errors

No center inverted stamps have been recorded on this Panama stamp, but they have been recorded on a Canal Zone printing, Scott 39e, and are from the 3rd set of plates, F-4068.

Manufacturing errors that got through the ABNCo quality control system are extremely scarce and it is fortunate that several spectacular perforation errors were saved as full panes by Joseph P. Coveleski and first recorded in his estate auction on March 14, 1931. Ref 12. The next recorded owner was

because of these errors. These are the only known complete Panama panes recorded of this stamp, but at least one other misperforated pane was created as Coveleski's **Lot 430** described the "... same stamp (sc. 198), 24 copies, 11 used. Very fine & Scarce lot consisting chiefly of freak perforations and rare cancellations."

A single example appeared on eBay in 2010. It is used but without a date. Others might still exist, and I would appreciate scans of any, especially those with a legible cancellation.

Fig 20

Lot 427 in the Coveleski sale, a pane from the left of the sheet, shows the diagonal perforation errors. Fig 21. And Lot 428, the right pane, has vertical perforations. Fig 22.



Figure 20 – Example of a single used stamp with perforation error



Figure 21 - Lot 427 from the Coveleski sale. Diagonal perforation errors on the left pane. Entire pane intact.



Figure 22 - Lot 428 from the Coveleski sale. Vertical perforation errors on the right pane. Entire pane intact.

Lot 429 has the only imperforate stamp of this issue recorded. It is stamp number 10 in a full right-hand pane of 100 stamps. The pane has been scanned and cropped to show the top right block of 10 stamps and the horizontal imperforation. Fig 23.

Last but not least there is a puzzle concerning the engraved “3”s found in the top right selvage of the right pane. The two reversed “3”s, in red and black, indicate that these are from the 3rd plates. However, one example of a right-hand pane has a third red “3” directly above the other two as shown by an arrow in Figure 24. This third “3,” apparently not reversed but rotated 225 degrees clockwise, also appears in the selvage of the 1920 and 1923 Canal Zone 2-cent Cordoba specimens, not shown here, but in a different position and at a different angle of rotation. What significance this red

“3” has is unknown and I would appreciate scans of the upper selvage from these stamps, Panama or Canal Zone, showing these “3”s, whether two, three, or even a fourth in black. The fourth has only been seen on Canal Zone printings.



Figure 23 – Block of 10 stamps scanned and cropped to show the imperforate top margin on stamp # 10. From Lot 429 of the Coveleski sale.



Figure 24 – Puzzling second red, not reversed, “3” in selvage.

Notes on article: The ABNCo correspondence, handstamps on specimen selvage, sample book (Lot 4, in Christie’s 1990 Auction), list of Panama ABNCo orders found at the American Numismatic Association Museum, and the log books stored in the American Museum of Finance all use order dates to keep track of Panama orders. Therefore, this article, like those in the past, highlights dates in order that any future researcher can more easily locate an original record.

Unlike most other Panama stamps I was unable to find a reference to this new stamp in the 1909 *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News*. Any contemporary literary references to this stamp would be appreciated.

End Notes

1. Plass, Brewster, Salz, **Canal Zone Stamps**, Published by the Canal Zone Study Group, 1986. P. 81.
2. Federico Brid, **The Stamps of Panama 1878-2007: Vital Statistics**, A handbook of COPAPHIL, The Colombia/Panama Philatelic Study Group. 2008. P. 6.
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4. David Zemer, **The Machine-Made Panama Booklets of 1916**. *The Collectors’ Club Philatelist*, July-August 2009, Vol. 88, No. 4, pp. 227-237.
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6. David Zemer, **Panama 1911 and 1916 Booklets Revisited: Amounts Printed and Update to Census**. *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 89, No. 1, January-February 2010, pp 45-47.
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8. Plass, Brewster, Salz, **Canal Zone Stamps**, Published by the Canal Zone Study Group, 1986. p. 94.

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12. [canalzonestudygroup.com/Docs/Coveleski Estate Sale Complete Catalogue March 14 1931.pdf](http://canalzonestudygroup.com/Docs/Coveleski%20Estate%20Sale%20Complete%20Catalogue%20March%2014%201931.pdf)

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President	Larry Crain	larry.crain@gmail.com
Vice President	Vacant	
Secretary	Scott Schaffer	schaffers@sbcglobal.net
Treasurer	Allan Harris	HPEXCHANGE@aol.com
Webmaster	Patrick Lamastus	patrick@iCollectPanama.com
Editor	Brad Wilde	bgwndal@gmail.com

3131 Walnut Street, Apt 505,
Philadelphia, PA 19104

OVERSEASE REPRESENTATIVES

Europe: Malcom Bentley	Malcolm.bentely1@ntlworld.com
Panama: Dr. Ernesto Arosemena	kikoaro@cableonda.net
Colombia: Santiago Cruz	Scollectibles2003@yahoo.com

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