

THE CUBAN REPUBLIC'S FIRST POSTAL CARD

BY MARK R. TYK

When the supply of 1 centavo stamps (Scott #227) was exhausted due to a contest sponsored by El Figaro, a Habana newspaper, Cuban Postmaster General Fernando Figueredo ordered the local surcharging of 200,000 surplus 3 centavo stamps (Scott #229) revalued to 1 centavo (Scott 232) in order to meet the unexpected demand for additional 1 centavo postage stamps. Both major and minor surcharge varieties occurred due to lack of proper equipment and the rush to complete this task. The first postage stamp of the young Republic of Cuba, a provisional issue (Scott #232), went on sale September 30, 1902 and the entire stock of overprinted stamps was sold out to collectors, speculators, and the general public by October 2.

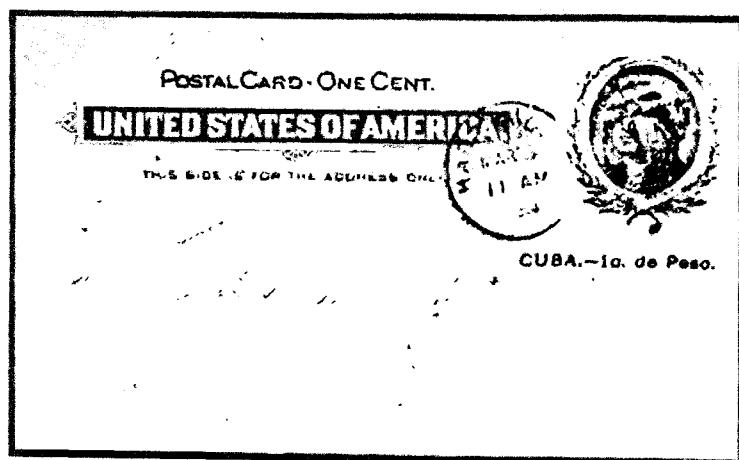


Figure 1

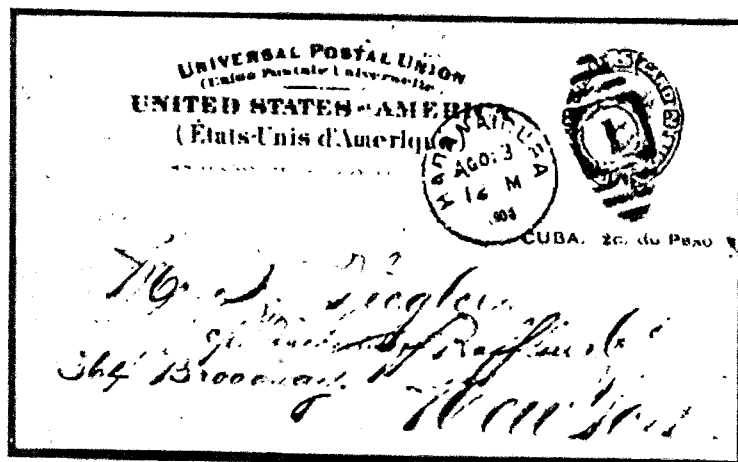


Figure 2

The Cuban Republic's first postal card (H&G #38) had its origin under similar circumstances. When the U. S. Post Office Department relinquished its control of the island's postal system, Cuban postal officials continued using the two U. S. postal cards overprinted for Cuba under American administration. The U. S. 1c black postal card (UPSS S-17, H&G 36) overprinted "CUBA.-1c. de Peso" (fig. 1) was utilized for domestic purposes while the U. S. 2c black postal card (UPSS S-20, H&G 37) overprinted "CUBA.-2c. de Peso" (fig. 2) was intended for overseas communications. Sometime in late 1903 Cuban postal authorities realized that the supply of 1c. de Peso overprinted postal cards was soon to be depleted. This particular card was popular with the general public because it afforded a fast, inexpensive way of acknowledging business transactions, advertising goods and services, announcing club and social functions, and contacting friends and relatives. Until new 1 centavo

and 2 centavo postal cards could be ordered and issued by the Republic, it was decided to create a provisional 1 centavo postal card by perforating a numeral "1" over the 2c. of the "2c. de Peso." overprint of the H&G 37 postal card (fig.3). Unlike its adhesive counterpart, there was no previous announcement concerning the revaluation and distribution of this item to either philatelists or the general public. As a result, the Cuban Republic's first postal card, a provisional issue, went virtually unnoticed.

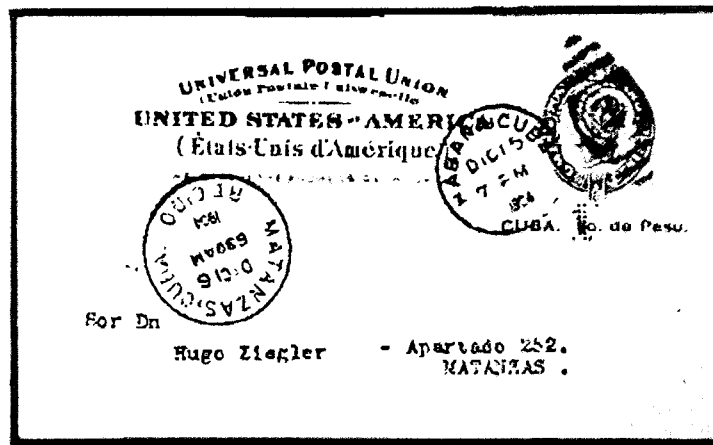


Figure 3

Why were the postal cards revalued by means of a perforated numeral instead of merely overprinting the new value? When the Republic released its first provisional postage stamp (Scott #232), the worldwide philatelic press severely criticized it as a purely speculative issue. Recognizing that more overprinted items would further damage the reputation of the Cuban Post Office in the eyes of the philatelic world, The Sociedad Filatelica Cubana urged that utmost care be exercised to avoid issuing other overprinted items. Heeding this warning, Postmaster General Figuerdo ordered the postal cards revalued by perforation rather than overprinting.

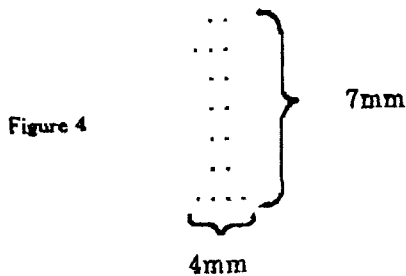


Figure 4

The perforated numeral "1" consists of a total of 17 holes: four holes in the base, six pairs of holes in the body of the number, and a single hole on the left to complete the numeral, as illustrated in Figure 4. Often one or more holes may be missing in the numeral "1" due to the breaking of the perforating pins during the revaluing process. Although there have been no major errors or varieties reported, the location of the perforated numeral "1" shifts from card to card (figs. 5-7).



Figure 5
Numeral Shifted Upward

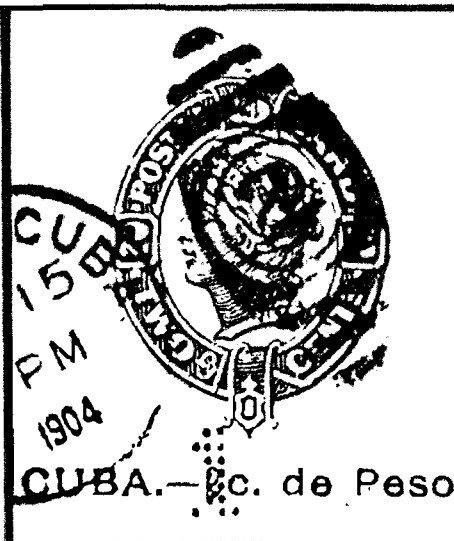


Figure 6
Numeral in Center



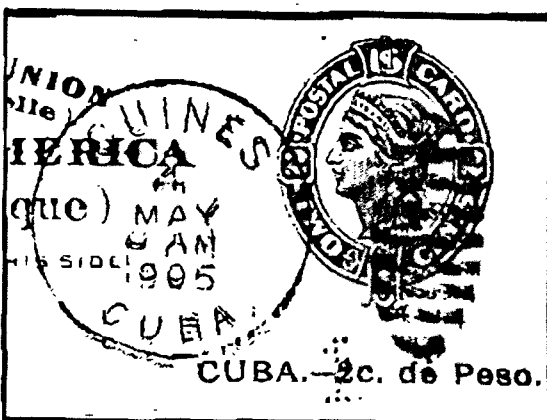
Figure 7
Numeral Shifted Downward

The exact quantity of these provisional postal cards has never been revealed. An extract from an official letter of Cuban Postmaster General Figueredo indicates that the revaluing process was ongoing and would cease upon arrival of the new 1 centavo card. It is quite likely that records were never kept on the number of cards perforated. From the perspective of a postal stationery collector, both mint and used copies of H&G 38 are found less frequently than its contemporaries, H&G 36 and 37.

Thus far I have collected data on 21 used perf "1" postal cards:

Place of Dispatch	Date of Use	Place of Dispatch	Date of Use
Habana	January 20, 1904	Habana	October 31, 1904
Habana	February 3, 1904	Habana	November 21, 1904
Habana	March 28, 1904	Habana	November 24, 1904
Guanabacoa	April 11, 1904	Habana	December 5, 1904
Habana	April 11, 1904	Habana	December 13, 1904
Habana	April 21, 1904	Habana	December 15, 1904
Arroyo Naranjo	July 4, 1904	Habana	December 22, 1904
Habana	August 6, 1904	Habana	February 10, 1905
Habana	August 9, 1904	Guines	May 4, 1905
Habana	August 16, 1904	Trinidad	April 27, 1908
Habana	September 7, 1904		

Figure 8



As can be observed, the earliest known use for H&G 38 is January 20, 1904, although it is possible that there may be even an earlier date eventually reported during the first or second week of January 1904. It seems natural that most cards bear a Habana cancel since the greatest demand would logically be located in the metropolitan Habana area where population would be greatest and literacy rate highest. The rather late usage at Guines (fig. 8) can perhaps be attributed to a quantity of provisional postal cards remaining at a small rural post office even though the new regular 1 centavo postal card (fig. 9) was issued by the Republic during the first week of January 1905. The card cancelled in Trinidad on April 27, 1908 is an unusually late usage. It may have been sitting in the bottom of a desk drawer for a considerable amount of time before the owner noticed it and decided to use it. Also with the addition of 1 centavo in postage, the postal cards cancelled on August 16th, November 21st, December 5th, and December 22 were dispatched to overseas destinations; Berlin, Potsdam and Paris respectively.

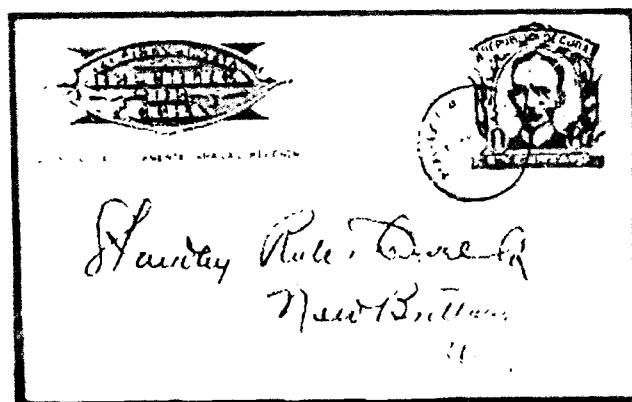


Figure 9

Next time you read or hear about a Cuban postal card with a perforated numeral "1", you will know the story behind this unique piece of postal history.

Bibliography

- Anonymous. Actas. Rev. Soc. Fil. Cubana 3(1):10-12. Jan. 15, 1904.
- Butler, A. R. Washington Notes. Weekly Philatelic Era 18(23):196. Feb 27, 1904.
- Butler, A. R. Washington Notes. Weekly Philatelic Era 18(25):214. Mar. 12, 1904.
- Ferrer-Monge, Dr. Jose A. 1967. Cuba #232. An unusual cover with a story behind it. First Days 12:32-34.
- Haller, A. P. 1971. Catalog of Postal Stationery of U. S. Possessions. Priv. Publ. United Postal Stat. Soc.
- Higgins and Gage. 1974. World Postal Stationery Catalog. Sect. "C". 2nd Ed.

Sloane, George B. 1941. New listing, Cuban postal card. Stamps 36:301.

Sloane, George B. 1951. Cuba: postal card perfed "1". Stamps 74:229.

Editors note:

Thanks to Elwood Meschter (#1966) for bringing the above article to my attention. It is reprinted (with permission) from Postal Stationery Jan/Feb 1984:7-11. Thanks to Mark Tyx and Ross Towle (the editor of Postal Stationery) for their cooperation. Postal Stationery is the periodical publication of the United Postal Stationery Society. Further information about this group can be obtained from the UPSS Central Office, Box 48, Redlands, CA 92373.

WHERE ARE THE SCHERMACKS?

Our long time members will remember the many years spent in identifying and finally rating US perfins. Now, only the Schermack patterns remain unrated.

Shown below is a listing of Schermack patterns by catalog numbers and quantities reported to date. Notice the zeros! Have these patterns been lost?

1	17	16	29	30	9	44	21	58	1	72	17
2	2	17	1	31	1	45	21	59	29	73	0
3	4	18	16	32	5	46	0	60	3	74	25
4	0	19	20	33	2	47	1	61	16	75	0
5	0	20	0	34	28	48	0	62	1	76	0
6	7	21	25	35	1	49	0	63	0	12-1	18
7	10	22	1	36	1	50	0	64	0	12-2	0
8	9	23	1	37	1	51	1	65	33	12-3	0
9	2	24	10	38	0	52	0	66	2	12-4	0
10	0	25	3	39	0	53	15	67	0	12-5	0
11	14	26	1	40	0	54	0	68	7	12-6	1
12	10	27	1	41	14	55	3	69	26	12-7	1
13	11	28	9	42	15	56	7	70	1	12-8	1
14	23	29	6	43	1	57	0	71	10	12-9	0
15	12	Experimental patterns 4									

Whoever has the missing ones, or didn't return a survey form, PLEASE list your Schermacks and send it in, so that we can accurately rate these items.

Mail your reports to Harry Rickard, 2163 Cumbre Pl., El Cajon, CA 92020.

Thanks!