

Cuba Postal Stationery 1878 - 1898

The Spanish Colonial Era

Scope - This is an exhibit of the postal cards issued by Spain for use by its island colony of Cuba. It covers the twenty-one year period between the issuance of the first postal card on January 1, 1878 and the official end of Spanish rule on December 31, 1898. US stationery used at Military Stations in Cuba is excluded from this exhibit.

Organization - The exhibit follows a traditional presentation. The issues are presented chronologically, starting with the basic set, followed by proofs (when available), varieties, errors, and lastly usage. The exhibitor has chosen to structure the presentation by issues since it better explains the purpose of each value in the set.

Treatment/Balance - The biggest challenge offered by this collecting area is to acquire representative usage. In that respect, this is the most complete exhibit of Cuba's Spanish era cards shown to date. While the type of postal stationery issued during the colonial era was limited to just postal cards, the service nevertheless experienced substantial growth over the years. The first issue consisted of only one value, priced the same as the first class letter rate. Needless to say, initial public reaction was very negative. That inauspicious beginning nearly doomed the new service, however, a rate reduction in 1880 led to gradually increasing use of the government postcards. Soon thereafter consumers, led by the business community, fulfilled the potential of this convenient and now inexpensive means of communication. In stark contrast to 1878, the 1898 issue consisted of four values, each available in both single card and paid reply card format. Balanced treatment demands that one consider the number of items issued (including varieties), as well as, their period of use. Thus, the 1882 issue with its many varieties and long period of service (1882 to 1897) takes up just under one fifth of the pages, in spite of representing only one of the thirteen issues covered by the exhibit.

Condition/Rarity - The material is in the best condition obtainable. One must remember, however, that Cuba's humid, hot weather makes the card stock brittle and susceptible to corner breaks. Rarity statements are based on the exhibitor's personal knowledge gained through over thirty years of collecting the material.

Original research - The exhibitor has co-authored research that led to the plating of the 1880-82 UPU double cards, as well as, the plating of the 1892-96 cards; the revised plating of the 1898 single cards; the proof of the yellow stock cards of 1896 being a separate printing; the proof of the 1898 salmon stock cards being the second printing, not the first; and the discovery of the 3 c. "Ultraamar" variety, among others.

Presentation - To assist the viewer, the page headings follow a uniform format. The left heading lists the year and issue, the right heading describes the item. An underlined heading signals the start of a new issue. Special items in the exhibit are highlighted by green matting.

Bibliography - The most comprehensive/current writing on the subject is the Cuba Section of "*Postal Cards of Spanish Colonial Cuba, Philippines and Puerto Rico*", written by Robert Littrell and published by the United Postal Stationery Society (UPSS).

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This first issue consisted of only one value, intended for both domestic and international use.

Plate position # 20.
Based on A. Laiz's
"Reconstrucción de
las Planchas de las
Tarjetas Enteros
Postales de Alfonso
XII, 1877 - 1879".

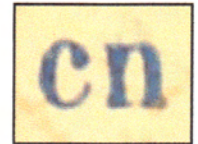


Double Impression, one inverted.

The strong, upright
impression is from
plate position # 20.
The faint, inverted
impression is from
plate position # 1,
as expected.



Some of these typesetting varieties, like the ones shown below, had been known for years. As a result of the plating study by A. Laiz, however, we now know what plate position they occur in.



Variety "cn"

Variety "cn" instead of "en" in the footnote. Position 11.



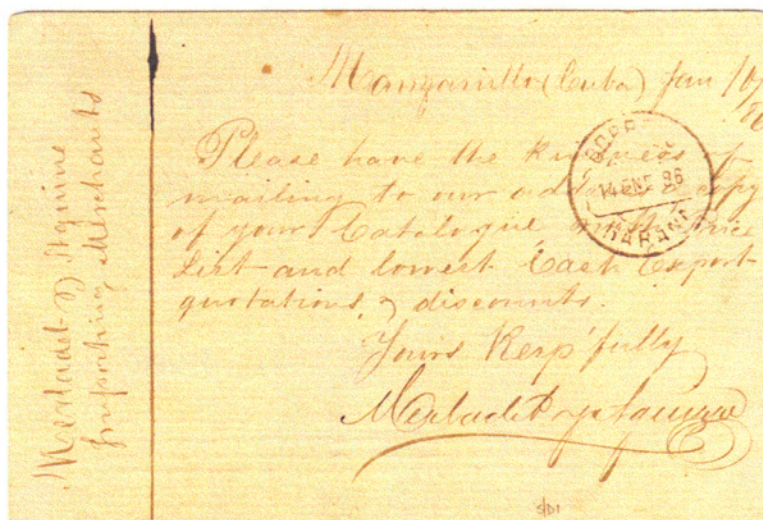
Variety broken
arrow tip.

Variety missing tip at bottom right. Position 18.

A commercial use of the first postal card issue.



Commercial use from Manzanillo to New York, NY, January 10, 1886.
Addressed to the United Brass Co.



Scan of message side.

Message, from Merladeb y Aguirre (Import Merchants),
requests a product catalog and price list.



Plate position
8.

Same format as for 1878, but with an added date & in a new color.



Variety deformed "E" of TARJETA, Plate 1, Position 14. Plate 1 was the same as used for the 1878 cards.

The two better known varieties occurring in Plate 2 are the variety of "Sr." with the r ending in a hook and the variety with a misspelled "escribirse".



"Sr." Type II
Plate position
A.1

The Type II of "Sr" is only found in one position of Plate 2, which had a more limited run than Plate 1.

Double Impression



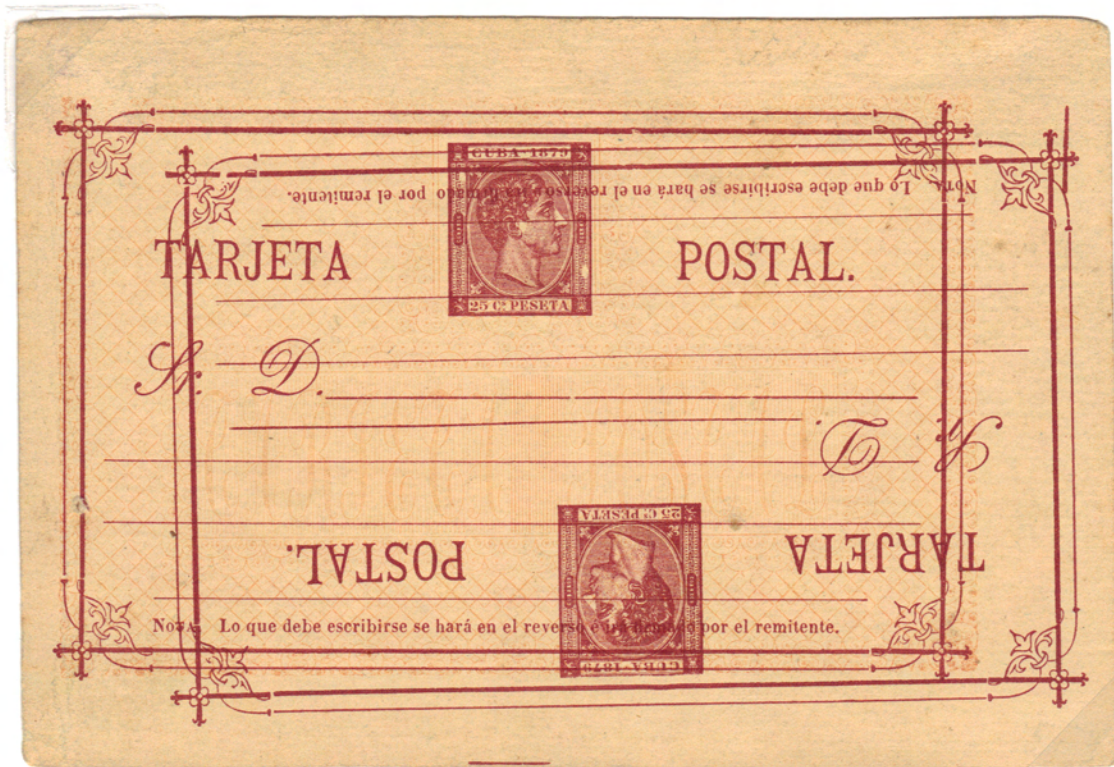
Plate position
B.2

This card has the error "escribirs", in place of escribirse.

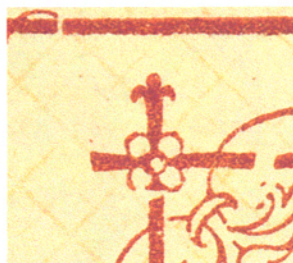
Laiz reported in his plating study of these cards that he had found twelve (12) positions that did not conform with Plate 1. He correctly concluded that a second plate, Plate 2, had been used for the later printings of the 1879 cards. Laiz, however, misidentified the card he referred to as Position F.6, of Plate 2. Position F.6 is really position # 3, from Plate 1.



Upright impression is Position # 3, from Plate 1, distinguished by flare at end of Sr.



Inverted impression is Position # 18, from Plate 1, distinguished by break at end of frame.

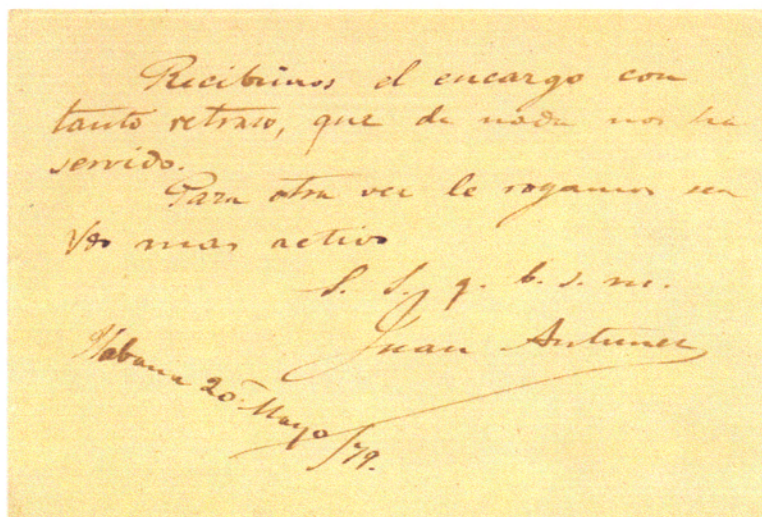


This card confirms that the variety flared end of Sr (as shown in detail at top) is position # 3. When this card is compared with the so called position F.6 from Plate 2, we can see they are the same card. The number of “new” cards in Plate 2 should be reduced by one.

A very scarce commercial usage of the second issue. Only a handful of these 1879 cards are known used, and none from Plate 1.



Parrilla cancel on Habana to Matanzas, Cuba, May 20, 1879.
This card is a newly identified position from Plate 2.



Scan of message side.

Message reads: We received the shipment so late it was of no use. Next time we pray you'd be more prompt.