

THE SRSC NEWSLETTER

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Editor's Note

Dennis Buss

This month's newsletter has a historical theme. The first article by Stephen Brett is the 5th installment of his *Amazing Stamp Stories* series. As an example of historical fiction, it represents a highly inventive account of how the world's smallest stamp came to be. The actual stamp was released by the State of Bolivar in what was then called the United States of Colombia in 1863. The second article, written by Paul von Gottfried, is the first of a two-parts that describes the origins of international postal traffic that culminates in the founding of the Universal Postal Union in 1875. All serious stamp collectors should become familiar with the functions and impact of the UPU on international postal rates as well as the actual designs of postage stamps themselves. Reading Paul's account will give you a greater appreciation of this important international postal authority.

Amazing Stamp Stories #5: The Smallest Stamp Ever Issued

Stephen Brett

Originally Bolivar was one of nine states of the United States of Colombia. It now holds the status of a Department in Colombia. It was widely known that Colombian President Froilan Largacha Hurtado, an anglophile, wished to emulate Great Britain and establish a postal service and issue postage stamps in his own beloved State of Bolivar. The year was 1861 and Pres. Hurtado targeted 1863 for the initial printing of stamps and the opening of a postal service throughout Bolivar.

An ambitious, educated young man in the Bolivar State, Juan Cristobal, learned of the president's plans in his local newspaper and began an arduous study Great Britain's postal system. Over a two-year period he absorbed and dissected every facet of the British system, ultimately composing a scholarly paper that he paid a courier to deliver to the Presidential Palace in Bogota, *Attention Pres. Hurtado*. He also proposed himself as being worthy for consideration as the first Postmaster General of the State of Bolivar. You can only imagine the thrill coursing through young Juan Cristobal when a courier delivered a parchment letter with the official wax seal from the President himself declaring that Juan Crisotbal was under serious consideration for the office of Postmaster General of the State.

Shortly thereafter ground was broken for the first Post Office in Bolivar State only blocks from Juan Crisotbal's home. His excitement and anticipation grew in leaps and bounds as he awaited his appointment and the magnificent postal edifice neared completion.

But, then came the crushing blow that brings this story to its amazing climax. Yes, an official document came to the house of Juan Cristobal. The son-in-law of President Hurtado, Miguel Sanchez Portillo, was to occupy the much-anticipated office of Postmaster. But, as a consolation, Sr. Cristobal was commissioned to select the design and printer of his state's first postal stamps. In sheer despair and in righteous vengeance Juan Cristobal hatched a plan to dispose of the President's son-in-law and replace him with a much more qualified person—namely, himself.

The owner of *Independencia Art & Printing* of Bogata was incredulous when Sr. Cristobal asked how small a stamp he could possibly print. After questioning his chief engraver and printer, he replied "I can produce a stamp that is only 8mm x 9.55mm. I do not think I can produce a credible likeness of Simon Bolivar that is so small, but I can produce the shield of our Bolivar state. But, your honor, why so small?" Juan replied, "We must be frugal in these times. The paper comes from England, after all." Little did the printer know the nefarious plot of which he was now a part.



Enlarged

And what the plotter had in mind soon came to pass. The tiny stamps became mangled and severed as users vainly tried to cut them from sheets. Countless stamps were never cancelled because they presented miniscule targets for the squinting and harried postal clerks.

This fiasco came to President Hurtado's attention in a matter of months. He quickly thought of the bright, young-man who was runner-up for the Postmaster position, and so the son-in-law became an admiral in Colombia's navy and he named Cristobal the second Postmaster General of Bolivar State.

Author's Note: The stamp itself actually exists. The story is a figment of my imagination. Most of the names are fictional (except for President Hurtado) in order to protect the innocent.



If you are fortunate enough to own the Scott No.1, Bolivar 1863, 10¢ Green (unwatermarked, lithographed, imperforate), its catalogue value is \$1,200 mint and \$600 canceled. If the shield has 5 stars instead of 6, its value is \$2,500 Mint and \$2,400 canceled. The 1866 No. 2, 10¢ Red is far less valuable, \$27.50 mint and \$30.00 canceled. A standard definitive American stamp is 22mm x 22.5mm, which should give you an idea of just how small this 8mm x 9.55mm stamp must be.

The History of the Universal Postal Union (UPU), Part I

Paul von Gottfried

We begin with the historical background that led up to the formation of the Universal Postal Union. The history of the post goes back thousands of years in ancient lands such as China, Persia, Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and the Roman Empire. We find traces of a communication system operating by word of mouth or writing and based on relays of men and horses stationed strategically along the highways. The post, as such, was the monopoly of monarchs, princes and nobles, whose main concern was that their orders and documents should reach the far corners of their vast domains. Later monasteries had their own courier system, the ramifications of which spread as religion gained ground. Eventually, as the social order and private enterprise grew under the stimulus of the guilds and merchants, private individuals of learning were able to communicate with each other by means of the couriers of princes and monasteries.

This rudimentary organization, half official and half private, lasted until the end of the Middle Ages, but was inadequate to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving society. With the advent

of the printing press, education penetrated into all social strata, while the discovery of new worlds and its consequences extended communication between nations.

Under the pressure of these needs, the post developed. During the 16th Century, thanks to Franz von Taxis, a postal service operated in several European states and began to extend beyond national frontiers. This expanded in the 18th Century to definitely become a public service and gradually assumed its current forms. International postal communications were originally governed by bilateral agreements that answered the needs of each particular country. This system, involving as it did a great variety of rates calculated in different currencies and according to different units of weights and different scales, made it complicated to operate the service and hampered its development and execution. The Administrations began to realize that if communication were to keep pace with the means of transport, formalities would have to be standardized and reduced.

A major step in that direction was taken by Great Britain in 1840, when under the advice of Sir Rowland Hill, the rate for letters in the internal service was reduced to one penny with this reform accompanied by the creation of the postage stamp. In 1862, Montgomery Blair, took the initiative and convened the first international meeting postal authorities with the idea of reaching an international postal agreement. The conference met in Paris on May 11, 1863. It was attended by delegates from fifteen European and American countries: Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Great Britain, the Hanseatic Towns (comprising Northern Europe), Italy, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Prussia, the Sandwich Islands, Spain, Switzerland and the United States of America (Civil War notwithstanding). The conference adopted a number of principles which administrations were recommended to consider when concluding postal agreements with other administrations.



There were many obstacles to be overcome before the Universal Postal Union was established. The attempt to develop uniform principles in the bilateral agreements between administrations was the first difficulty to be faced. International relations were developing at a rapid rate, due in part to the growing technologies that enhanced communication and relationships. This prompted Heinrich von Stephan, senior official in the postal administration of the North German Confederation, to draw up a plan for a postal union of civilized countries, in 1868. He proposed that his plan be submitted to a Plenipotentiary Conference, which, at the invitation of the Swiss government, met

in Berne on September 14, 1874. Plenipotentiary delegates from the following twenty-two countries attended the conference: Austria/Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States. The Congress resulted in the signing of the 1874 Treaty of Berne, which established the first collective Convention governing the international postal service. It founded the "General Postal Union." The Convention went into effect on July 1, 1875. Three years later, in view of the numerous accessions since the Treaty of Berne took place, the term "General Postal Union" was replaced with "Universal Postal Union". The fundamental rules introduced by the 1874 Convention in Berne as they still appear in the Constitution concluded in 1964 in Vienna and in the 1994 Seoul Convention are as follows:

- The formation among all member countries of a single postal territory for the reciprocal exchange of letter-post items.
- The guaranteed freedom of transit within the territory of the Union.
- The standardization of the charges to be collected by each country for letter-post items addressed to any part of the Union's territory; it should be noted, however, that this principle is not applied as strictly as in the past owing to the option that administrations were given of greatly increasing or reducing the basic charges and the fact that those charges became guideline charges when the Acts of the 1989 Washington Congress came into force.
- In the case of letter-post items, the abolition of the sharing of charges between the country of origin and the country of destination, each administration retaining the entire amount of the charges which it collects, subject to remuneration, at the established rates, of intermediate administrations ensuring the administrations of destination to demand a lump-sum remuneration from dispatching administrations as compensation for the amount of mail received in excess of the mail dispatched.
- The institution of an arbitration procedure to settle disputes between administrations
- The creation of a central countries, called the International Bureau, the cost of which is born by all contracting offices.
- The holding of periodic meetings of a Congress of plenipotentiaries of the member countries with a view to reviewing the basic Acts of the Union and discussing questions of common interest.

Currently, there are 193 members of the UPU. Before July 10, 1964, states became members of the UPU by ratifying the latest Treaty of Berne. After July 10, 1964 states became members by ratifying the Constitution of the UPU, which incorporated the Treaty of Berne and the added provisions to it. Interestingly, three states that signed the Treaty prior to 1964 and hence are members of the UPU, have never ratified the Constitution. They are Dominican Republic, Honduras and Sudan.



Under Article 23 of the UPU Constitution, dependencies of UPU member states are covered. Territories covered by the sovereign member states are listed under that country. For example, Palau and the Marshall Islands are dependent members of the United States. The UPU Congress meets usually every four years to implement changes to the Articles.

How does the UPU actually work? The quadrennial meetings of the Universal Postal Congress are held to consider revisions to the general legislation of the Constitution and to elect members of the Council of Administration and Postal Operations Council. An extraordinary congress, as in 1947 to consider becoming part of the UN, may be held at the request of two-thirds of the members. The provisions in force are those approved by the 24th UPU Congress in Geneva in 2008, which came into effect on January 1, 2010.

The Council of Administration (CA) carries out the work of the Union between Congresses. Forty members are elected on the basis of equitable geographic distribution. The 41st member is the representative of the Congress host country, which automatically becomes the Chair. Although the 2008 Congress was hosted in Geneva Switzerland, Kenya was given the Chair. There is always an effort to involve all member countries.

The Postal Operations Council (POC) is responsible for operational, commercial, technical and economic postal matters. The POC's 40 members are elected by the Congress on a geographical basis. The POC members elect the Chair during the Congress.

The Consultative Committee (CC) was created by the 2004 Bucharest Congress. It gives postal stakeholders, other than the public operators and regulators, a voice in the organization's deliberations. It consists of non-governmental entities, delivery service providers, workers' organizations, suppliers of goods and services to the postal sector and other organizations that have an interest in international postal services. The Chair is from the Global Envelope Alliance.

The International Bureau is the permanent secretariat of the Union and is the UPU's headquarters. Located in Berne, Switzerland, it provides logistical and technical support for the UPU's members. It also serves as an office of liaison, information and consultation and promotes technical cooperation among Union members.

The UPU became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1948. Article 1 of the Vienna Constitution of 1964 states that the aim of the Union is to secure the organization and improvements of postal services, promote the development of international collaboration and undertake, as much as possible, technical assistance in postal matters requested by member countries. To this end, the countries that have adopted the Constitution comprise a single postal entity.

The UPU is one of the most functional and efficient international organizations. It benefits all citizens of the world. The UPU subsidizes the postal rates of smaller, poorer countries. This enables mail to be delivered to anywhere in the world safely, efficiently and cheaply. Since its inception, the UPU has worked with little political influence. It was a logical conclusion that the UPU would become part of the United Nations.

In Part II I will discuss the philatelic aspects related to the UPU as well as recent developments affecting the UPU.



The Santa Rosa Stamp Club meets on the first Tuesday of the month from 6:45 pm to 9:00 pm at the Finley Community Center, 2060 W. College Road, in Santa Rosa. Membership dues are \$20 per year. Following a discussion of club business matters, the meetings feature a philatelic presentation and a member auction. Regular group meetings have been suspended while the Covid-19 restrictions remain in place. For further information about the club visit our website at <http://www.santarosastampclub.org/home.html>

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