

# THE EARLY ISSUES OF THE PHILIPPINES

By

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In 1854, when the Philippines issued its first postage stamps, letters were franked with the following rates:

In the interior of the country, for every  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce, 5 *Cuartos*.

For Spain, for every  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce, 2 *Reales Fuertes*.

The monetary unit used then in the Philippines at that time were: 1 *Peso Fuerte* which was equivalent to 8 *Reales Fuertes* and 1 *Real Fuerte* which was worth 20 *Cuartos*. Thus, 1 *Peso Fuerte* was equivalent to 160 *Cuartos*. And 5 *Cuartos* was  $\frac{1}{4}$  of 1 *Real Fuerte*. The 1 *Real Fuerte* was commonly known in the Islands as "1 *Cuartillo*", and Tagalogs called it "alew".

The standard currency then was the gold. The Spanish ounce had 28.75 grams. The *Real* used in the Philippines and in the Spanish Colonies in America was called *Fuerte* to distinguish it from the *Real de Vellón* which was then in use in Spain, since 1 Spanish *Duro* had 20 *Reales de Vellón* and every *Real de Vellón* had a value of 34 *maravedises*, in accordance with the decree of King Philip V of Spain issued on May 16, 1737.

For this reason, the first postage stamps issued then in the Philippines were, the 5 *Cuartos*, 10 *Cuartos*, 1 *Real Fuerte* and 2 *Reales Fuertes*. Stamps of these denominations were put on sale, for the first time, on February 1, 1854, in the City of Manila. Apparently, whatever stamps of these issues exist either postmarked or cancelled prior to this date, are therefore fake.

The stamps of the Philippines issued in 1854 were hand-engraved. They were made on copper plates by a Spanish artillery sergeant, at a house in the corner of San Fernando Street and Plaza de Binondo, Manila. They were made of the same design

as those of the stamps of Spain of 1853. In each sheet there were 40 subjects in 8 horizontal rows of 5 stamps each. They were separated at variable lengths—from one to one and a half millimeters. Stamps of the Philippines at those times were not perforated since during those early postal days, perforating machines were quite unknown in these Islands as well as in Spain. Since the stamps were hand-engraved one by one, all of the 40 stamps produced from each plate were different, whereby on the sheet of the 1 *Real Fuerte* a great error was discovered—the famous 'CORROS'. The position of the error "CORROS" is on the first stamp on the sixth horizontal row on the left. Thus neither a pair nor a block could exist in which the error "CORROS" is on the right of another adhesive.

Some collectors claim that possibly two different plates had been used in the printing of the early stamps of the Philippines, since there are stamps in which the lines on the background around the effigy are broken, while on others, these lines are thin and very close to each other. At present, not a single original sheet of the 5 and 10 *Cuartos* exists in the Philippines. However, on making a careful perusal of the photostat made by Mr. Calman (one of the founders of the Scott Stamp & Coin Co.), in one of the sheets of 40 subjects there were some lines on the background, separated, while others with the same thin lines and very close. It is interesting to note that the first philatelist who made a meticulous study of these stamps was Jean Baptiste Moens of Belgium, with the aid of his assistant, Louis, Hancian. These stamps were printed, as every one is perhaps aware, with the following colors:

- 5 Cuartos — Orange
- 10 Cuartos — Rose, and later, carmine
- 1 Real — Ultramarine and later, slate blue
- 2 Reales — Green.

Due to the various printings, the colors had varied very much as well as the kind of paper. And since these stamps were not perforated, they were separated by means of scissors; and as the stamps were very close to each other, their separation made it impossible to produce well-centered copies and as a result, many of which, the borders of the design were even cut. Naturally enough, well-centered copies of these stamps are scarcely seen. However, Colonel Louis J. van Schaick possesses an extraordinary copy—a block of four of the 1 *Real*, including the “CORROS” and *heres ligne* — the best copy I had ever seen.

Many forgeries of the early issues of the Philippines had been made. Some of them were made almost similar to the design, but when imitating the original colors, the forgers found it difficult to perfect

their wares. The fact is that all the 40 stamps in each sheet are different; and with the existence of 40 different designs, nobody could remember them all from memory unless one makes a recourse through the photostat of Mr. Calman. Despite this, there were daring fakers who had forged the 1 *Real* stamp which I had seen on which the following inscription in the above panel were written: “Correos—1854 y 55” and on the lower panel reads: “FRANCO—1 RL, Fte.” It was a very clever forgery.

While forgeries of the early issues of the Philippines were skillfully executed, it is a fact that amateurs are the easy preys of the fakers. As a matter of fact, when I was just a beginner, I was once one of their victims, when they sold me some stamps of the 5 *Cuartos* with the postmark: “MANILA—16 ENE. 1851—IS. FILIPS.” I did not know then that these stamps were sold for the first time on February 1, 1854, and besides the last cipher of “1851” was so cut as if to look if it were 4.

**COMMONWEALTH OF THE PHILIPPINES**  
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Eugenio Mesa.  
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# THE POSTAL ISSUES OF THE PHILIPPINES

By

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## PHILATELIC CHAOS

With the arrival of American troops at Cavite on July 16, 1898, an American post office was established temporarily on one of the ships in the Bay, and, on July 30, on shore at Cavite. From this date until the end of the following year, a veritable philatelic chaos existed in the Philippines. Mails were received and forwarded as opportunity offered, by all of the numerous "governments" involved, each of which used the stamps most available at the time. As a result there were numerous vagaries in matters philatelic, and certain so-called philatelists contributed their aid (though not without hope of reward) toward rendering confusion worse confused. Thus we are compelled to consider not only the Spanish issues but also those of the United States for the American forces, the stamps issued by the Revolutionary Government, and "provisional" issues for the Philippines and other islands formerly controlled from Manila. Of the Spanish issues it is sufficient merely to add (to what has already been noted) that they continued in use where available until replaced by those of the government which later came to exercise actual control. The issues of the Revolutionary Government will be treated in a separate chapter, and those of the United States will follow.

Of the other issues referred to, the first to claim consideration, through priority in date, is the fake "provisional issue" for Zamboanga, a city in the island of Mindanao, which has been listed by Kohl and Galvez. As the true story of this issue seems never to have been printed and is by no means without its humorous side, it will be given in detail as related to the writer by one of the two promoters thereof, who will be referred to as Messrs. A. and B.

A. and B., both well-known philatelists of Manila, realized that

Manila must sooner or later surrender to the Americans, that Spanish rule would pass away, and that philatelic changes must ensue. Wishing to take time by the forelock, in order that any profits obtainable might not pass them by, they conceived a shortage of stamps at Zamboanga, where Mr. B. had a personal friend in the postmaster. Mr. A. was a former Spanish official who had friends in high places at Manila, so he procured through them a decree providing for surcharging stamps for use at Zamboanga on the plea of the alleged shortage. This decree is said to have been issued on August 12, the day before the surrender of Manila; apparently the dies had been prepared and the stamps obtained in advance, for the surcharging was done that night by the promoters themselves. Later, and when opportunity offered, these supplies (except those retained by A. and B. for their own philatelic uses) were forwarded to Zamboanga where they were (more or less) placed in use. In March of 1899, B. was in Zamboanga on business and his friend, the postmaster, then provided him with covers bearing these issues, which the postmaster obligingly cancelled as of quite a range of dates, presumably to avoid the monotony of one date only. Mr. B. thoughtfully placed a full set of this issue on a cover which he sent by registered mail to himself at his Manila address, and which was forwarded by the same boat on which he returned. This letter was duly delivered to him in Manila, without any other stamps or postal charge, through the American post office, thus furnishing undeniable (?) proof of recognition by the American postal authorities of the validity of this issue.

Upon investigation by the writer himself at the post office, it was found that this letter (identified by