


Six Findings from Covers of Mexico's First Officials Issue 1884-1895

Before 1884 government entities in Mexico used either free-franking stampless covers with a manuscript "De Oficio" to send their correspondence or used regular stamps. In 1884 the Porfirio Diaz government issued the first issue of official stamps for domestic (and occasionally USA) use. They had no denomination as they were official free-franking. Only 100-125 covers or fronts exists, making it hard to figure out the rules of usage. This is critical as 1) not all government entities used these stamps and 2) the regulations were not transparent. Many official letters still went through the mails either stampless or with regular stamps. The rules of usage have remained a philatelic mystery for a long time, as well as the reason for such a low survival rate of the covers. This is NOT an exhibit about the overall issue but rather about the findings from known covers and fronts. Information came from analysis of two of the largest collections of covers, the complex laws in place at the time and the 1990's research of the late Carl LeMar John published in *Mexicana*. Important data was provided by Michael Hart. Especially rare covers are indicated 

This exhibit is organized by the 6 findings from this research:

- 1 Each of the 6 stamp colors of the issue represents a different year of issue, although overlap in usage exists.
- 2 Almost all covers are addressed to government entities except for a handful to private individuals. Therefore, the scarcity of covers is probably because they were originally kept in files of receiving government offices and many of those files were probably burned or destroyed during the 1910 Revolution.
- 3 This issue was strictly domestic except for a handful of covers to the USA.
- 4 Several covers are registered. Therefore that service was available and free for these official usages.
- 5 Covers or fronts exist from from the President, the Military, Federal Courts. Government of States and local courts only when sent to Federal entities. Also covers from 4 Federal Ministries or their entities are known (Finance, Communications, Interior and Foreign Affairs) and The Astronomic Observatory (independent Federal entity). Federal Legislators and other Federal Ministries were also entitled to use them but no covers from them have surfaced yet.
- 6 Thousands of used singles from all over the country including small towns, attest to this issue's widespread use.

Bright Red 1884-1888  Earliest: October 11, 1884 Latest: January 2, 1888	Scarlet 1885-1887  Earliest: October 3, 1885 Latest: August 29, 1887	Olive Brown 1887-1893  Earliest: October 7, 1887 Latest: May 28, 1893	Blue Green 1893-1894  Earliest: August 11, 1893 Latest: November 20, 1894
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1 The Six Colors

Each of the 6 stamp colors represent a different year of issue, although overlap in usage exists. The colors were not issued in yearly or biyearly fashion, so they were probably changed as the previous stock was about to run out. The only discontinued color was the last (Ultramarine) which was replaced by the Multas issue with OFICIAL overprint. The earliest known date of usage (shown below) was October 11, 1884.

Earliest Recorded Cover

Orange 1888-1891



Earliest: November 2, 1888
Latest: December 6, 1891



Ultramarine 1894-1895



Earliest: September 11, 1894
Latest: November 8, 1895

Guaymas to Ures. Bright Red stamp. Registered dated October 11, 1884. Sent by the District Court of Sonora in Guaymas to the Federal Revenue Stamp Inspector. Returned to Guaymas as the addressee could not be found. The earliest recorded cover of the issue.

2 Non-Government as Addressee

Almost all covers are addressed to government entities or functionaries although a handful exist addressed to private individuals or companies. Those are very rare. This suggests, as a possible explanation for the scarcity of covers, that most covers were originally kept in files of receiving government offices and many burned or destroyed during the 1910 Revolution.

3 International Usages

This issue was strictly domestic. As for international use, there are only 5-6 covers known to the USA due to a 1861 obscure free-franking bilateral agreement for official mail. There are no other international usages known.

International Destination: 1 of 5 Known

Mexico to New York. Blue green stamp. Sent by the Finance Ministry to a non-government company either in San Francisco or in New York. Transit Veracruz (Jan 9, 1894), New York (Jan 16). One of 5 covers known to the USA, which is the only foreign country where this issue is known to.

Registered & Return Receipt

Atlixco to Tochmilco. Olive Brown stamp. Registered cover dated October 11, 1884. It has the Returned Receipt indicating it was sent by the Income Tax Administrator (Federal) to the President of Tochmilco Municipality. The cover has the cachet of Atlixco lower court (Juzgado de Primera Instancia). Inside it says it contained legal paperwork about disciplinary actions against the main Judge of Tochmilco. Very few return receipts are known.

Addressed to Non-Government Individual

San Blas to Tepic. Scarlet stamp so circa 1885-1887. Sent by the Maritime Customs Office in San Blas to a private individual. Authorized to use official stamps because it was a Federal department of the Ministry of Finance.



4 Registration

Several covers are registered. This indicates that such service was available and free for official letters. Many of them are fronts as per the old rules about cutting the front and the addressee signing on back as return receipt. Although this rule had been abandoned recently when joining UPU, but the postmasters were not aware.



5 Entities that Used the Issue

Covers or fronts exist from the entities listed below. Although the Federal Legislators and other Federal Ministries were also entitled to use the issue no covers from them have surfaced yet:

- a) The President
 - b) The Military
 - c) States' Governments when communicating to Federal entities
 - d) Federal Courts. Also State and local Courts when communicating to Federal entities
 - Federal Ministries, their departments and other federal entities. Covers exist from:
 - e) Ministry of Communications and Transportation (Post Office, Telegraph Office and Inspectors of Railways and Inspectors of Local Roads)
 - f) Ministry of Finance (including Customs Offices)
 - g) Ministry of the Interior and Colonization (including the Commission of Geography and Exploration)
 - h) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including the Commission of Borders with Guatemala)
 - i) National Observatory in Mazatlan (part of an independent Federal entity)
- Since 20-25% of the known covers are from the Tepic Post Office most of the other groups above mentioned are scarce. No covers are recorded from the Ministries of Government, Justice and Public Education, War and Navy. Other missing Federal entities include the Supreme Court and the Office of the Attorney General.

5b Military Use from Remote Town



Ubesic
Señor
E. J.

Estimado señor

Ud. de 20 del actual, me
gracias por los buenos
presan respecto a este
lo ver; que siendo en su mayor parte el cuestio-
nario que me envia de carácter financiero, pue-
de Ud. hablar con el señor Secretario de Hacien-
da a quien doy desde luego instrucciones sobre
enlar.

De Ud. afmo seguro servidor.

Porfirio Diaz



Señor
W. R. Grace

New York

P. O. Box 2866



5a Presidential Mail

Mexico to New York.
Olive Brown stamp. Cover dated July 27, 1893. Personal stationary of the President General Porfirio Diaz. The letter is from an unrelated cover but using same stationary and bears the autograph of the President. By law he and his office were authorized to use the issue. One of a handful of official letters abroad. The USA had a bilateral a1861 free-franking agreement.



Potam to Puebla. Scarlet stamp. Transit via Guaymas (Nov 17, 1887) and Mexico (Nov 19). Addressed to a Lieutenant Colonel. It shows "De Oficio" manuscript note meaning official free-franking, and "Campamento Militar en Potam" (Military Camp in Potam). Very few military covers have survived. This tiny town is in the desertic Hermosillo region.

**Government of
Tabasco State
Cut to Shape Stamp**

San Juan Bautista to Mexico. Olive Brown stamp. Dated February 20, 1888. Addressed the Finance Minister of Mexico. The stamp is cut around the Medallion before it was placed in the mails. The cachet reads "Supreme Government of the Free and Sovereign State of Tabasco". A cover from the Governor of Chihuahua is also known.



5c States' Governments

The articles 174 and 198 of the 1884 law and the article 212 of its regulation authorizes States' Governments and their dependencies to receive and use the stamps of the issue but ONLY when sending mail to Federal entities. Not many of these covers have survived. Most of them are related to sending back revenue stamps remainders to the Federal authorities.

Registered from Small Town

**Revenue
Stamps Return**

Chilchota to Morelia. Bright Red stamp. Registered dated 1886. Transit in Zamora where it was registered. Sent by the Treasury of Chilchota Municipality to the head of Finance in the State. It contained "1.74c in federal contribution revenue stamps" and therefore a "Federal Business" matter. Very small town and cancel is probably unique.



Puruandiro to Zamora. Scarlet stamp. Registered dated May 23, 1886. Transit in Morelia (May 24). Addressed to the Administrator General of Revenue Stamps. This suggests returns of Federal Revenue stamps most likely by the administrator of the small Puruandiro Municipality. This Municipality was part of the Morelia State Government.

5d The Courts

All the mail from Federal Courts including the Supreme Court and all Mexico City courts and Federal Territories were authorized to use this issue. State and local Courts only when communicating to Federal entities

Registered from Federal Criminal Court

Mexico to Zamora. Bright Red stamp. Dated May 24, 1886. Sent by the Federal Criminal Court in Mexico City, to a Criminal Judge in the interior.



5e Ministry of Communications: Telegraph and Post Office

All the Federal Ministries, their departments and their dependencies were authorized to use this issue. The most prolific was the Ministry of Communications. Covers exist from the Post Office, the Telegraphs Office and Inspectors of Railways and Inspectors of Local Roads



Post Office with Cerrado and Sellado Label

Chilapa to Toluca. Ultramarine stamp. Registered dated October 13, 1894. Transit via Mexico (Oct 16) and Toluca (Oct 18). In Chilapa it was officially sealed with a Cerrado label. These labels are scarce on cover and their use is still a mystery. Post Offices were Federal jurisdiction within the Ministry of Communications. The Blue stamp is rarely seen on cover and was replaced by the Multas issue in April 1895.



Federal Telegraph Office in Zamora

Zamora to Morelia. Scarlet stamp. Registered dated May 7, 1886. Arrived on May 10. Sent by the Telegraph office which was a Federal service under the Ministry of Communications, to the Head of Finance of the State of Michoacan.



Inter-Post Office Use

Topic to Mexico. Scarlet stamp. Registered dated August 29, 1887. Transit via Guadalajara and Mexico (Sept 8). Inter-office mail probably containing returned stamps directly to the head post office in Mexico City,



5e
Ministry of Communications: Post Office

20-25% of covers in this research are from the Tepic Post Office, which was a federal entity of the Ministry of Communications. Covers exist from the Telegraphs and the Inspectors of Railways and Local Roads

Post Office Use

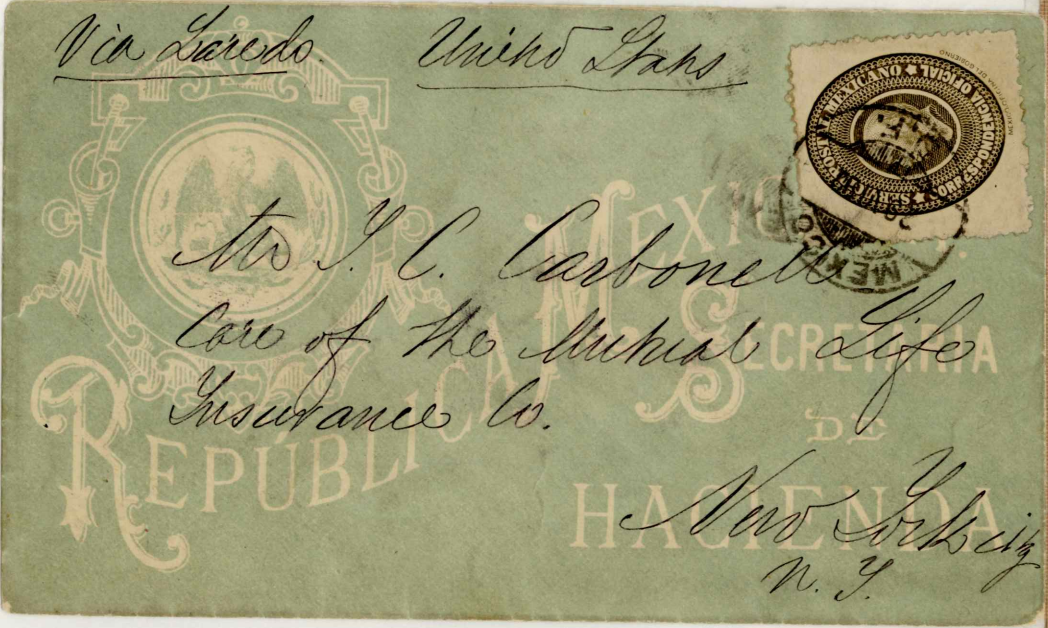
Topic to Guadalajara. Brown stamp. Registered dated October 7, 1887. Inter-office mail probably containing returned stamps. Tepic was a sub office of the Guadalajara postal district.



5f
Ministry of Finance: Customs Office

Several covers are known from the Finance Ministry itself, and 3-4 from the Customs Offices, which reported to the Ministry.

Business Cover Ministry of Finance



Mexico to New York. Brown stamp. Dated June 29, 1892. Transit via Laredo and New York (July 4). Sent by the Private Secretary of the Minister of Finance. Only 5-6 covers are known abroad. This was sent to a functionary in an insurance company.



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Customs Office Small Port

Manzanillo to Mexico. Brown Stamp. Registered dated April 12, 1889. Transit via Colima (Apr 12) and Mexico (April 17). The only known from this small port. Marked "De Oficio" indicating free-franking and signed by the local accountant. Customs Offices were Federal jurisdiction and part of the Ministry of Finance. In the back it states that it contained an addition to the manifest of the ship "Granada".

5g Ministry of the Interior:
Commission of Geography
and Exploration

A couple of covers are recorded from the Ministry of the Interior (Secretaria de Fomento y Colonización) and its dependencies. Each is very rare.

5i National Astronomy Observatory

The National Astronomy Observatory was a Federal independent agency and therefore entitled to use the stamps of this issue. It had branches in different parts of the country.

Mazatlán Astronomy Observatory Wrapper

 Business Mail

Jalapa to Mexico. Blue Green stamp. Dated September 20, 1894. Sent by the Commission of Geography and Exploration to the Agent for the Interoceanic Railroad Company. It bears a pen "De Oficio" inscription indicating it is a Federal free-franking usage.



5h Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
Commission of Borders
with Guatemala

A few covers are known from this Ministry and its dependencies.

Inter-Agency Registered Mail

Comitan to San Juan Bautista, Tabasco. Bright Red Stamp. Registered dated June 16, 1885. Stamp is sent by and cancelled with the cachet of the agency overseen the border with Guatemala "Comision de Limites entre Mexico y Guatemala", an agency part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This bilateral commission was first founded by an act of Congress on April 29, 1871 and ratified by Guatemala on July 4, 1878. The addressee is a functionary of a Federal entity too, the General Manager of the Revenue Stamp office in Tabasco.



Mazatlan to Guaymas. Ultramarine Stamp. Dated October 9, 1894. Sent by the Weather Astronomic Observatory in Mazatlan and addressed to a private individual. This wrapper probably contained weather updates for the area. As part of the network of the Federal National Observatory system it was entitled to use free-franking stamps.

6 Geographical Reach of the Issue

To close this exhibit, it is critical to address the question of geographical reach, which the estimated 100-125 surviving covers cannot answer. There are thousands of used singles, some from tiny obscure towns like some of the ones below. They attest that the issue had a full national reach and that it was wildly used everywhere, although such little amount of covers exist. The ultramarine stamps, the last color of this issue, were discontinued and replaced by the Multas issue with "OFICIAL" overprint which was launched on April 2, 1895.

1 Northwest



Guaymas, Sonora



Fresnillo, Zacatecas



Mulejé, Baja California



Potam, Sonora



Santiago Ixcuintla, Nayarit.



Sombrerete, Zacatecas



Alaquines, San Luis Potosí



Lampazos, Nuevo León



Mier, Tamaulipas



Piedras Negras, Coahuila

2 North



Apaseo, Querétaro



Colima, Colima



Manzanillo, Colima



Teocaltiche, Jalisco

4 South



Chiautla, Puebla



Chignahuapan, Puebla



Huauchinango, Puebla



Huaquechula, Puebla



Huejotzingo, Puebla



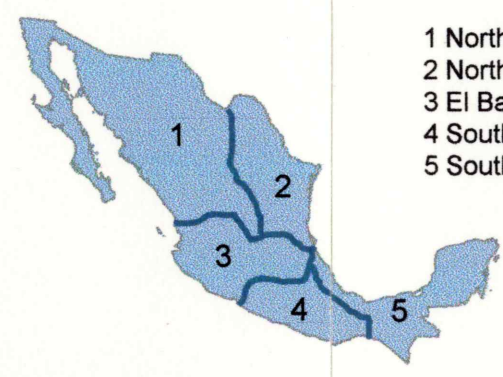
Tepeji de la Seda, Puebla



Tuxtlahuaca, Oaxaca



Zacopoaxtla, Puebla



- 1 Northwest
- 2 North
- 3 El Bajío
- 4 South
- 5 Southeast



Frontera, Tabasco



Hecelchakán, Campeche



Naranja, Veracruz



Progreso, Mérida



Tapachula, Chiapas



Tuxpan, Veracruz

5 Southeast

3 El Bajío