

FAUX FALLS FOR FILIPINOS

The 1932 Philippines
Design Disaster

by Douglas K. Lehmann



1932 Philippine stamp error showing the Vernal Falls in Yosemite National Park, instead of the Pagsanjan Falls in the Philippines.

On July 27, 2003, the Philippines issued eight stamps featuring famous waterfalls of that country — a virtual deluge for a topical collector. Four stamps grace a souvenir sheet and the other four make up a pane. On that pane appears Pagsanjan Falls, Laguna Province. This is the third time a Philippine stamp has this fall named, but only the second time it is pictured. How can that be? The following 1932 newspaper story begins the explanation of this discrepancy:

Talk about man's keen power of observation! For exactly 175 days since May 3, Americans, Filipinos, and foreigners have handled this little rectangular piece of printed paper. Fat men and lean men, tall men and short men, men speaking in doleful tones about "this depression" and men who predict "better times" — all of them have licked the paste off the back of this 18-centavo stamp and scolded when the so and so would not stick. But not one of them has noticed the picture advertised on the stamp as Pagsanjan Falls is not this fall [sic] at all nor any other beauty-spot of the Philippines but Vernal Falls of Yosemite Valley of California.

A bulletin [sic] reporter noticed the substitution of pictures for the first time yesterday. The matter was reported to the city desk. The entire staff went into a huddle and expert opinion was sought. After that a decision was announced: the bit of scenery pictured on the stamp is not Pagsanjan Falls but Vernal Falls.

Perhaps unknowingly, the postal bureau has been selling these 18-centavo stamps with a view to boosting the tourist attractions of the Philippines and at the same time increasing the revenues of the bureau. This sale has been going on since May 3 when the stamps were first issued.¹

A total of 1,003,400 copies of the stamp had been made available in the Philippines starting May 3, 1932. This surprisingly accurate report, researched in less than twenty-four hours, continues:

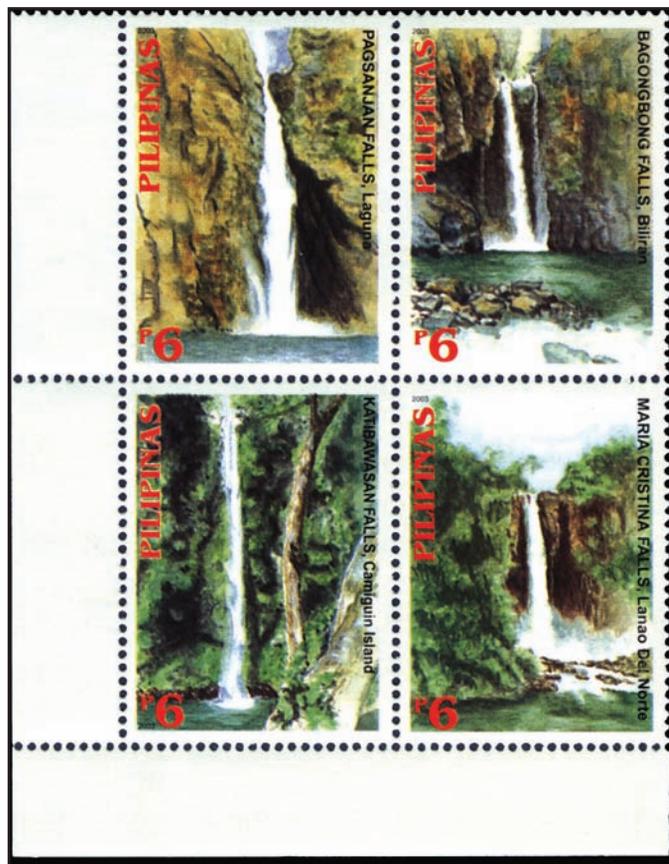
Filipinos and other local residents who profess to know the beauty spots of the islands have not complained to Juan Ruiz, director of posts, or to any of the sellers of the postage stamps, that the 18-centavos stamps, are not carrying the picture of the locally famous Pagsanjan Falls.

James King "Mabuhay" Steele, executive secretary of the Philippine Tourist Association, now in San Francisco "selling" the beauty spots of the Philippines to American tourists, probably does not realize, it is presumed, that the bureau of posts is "cheating" the world and the Philippines as far as representing Pagsanjan Falls is concerned. Mr. Steele was one of those who worked hard for the issue of these pictorial tourist stamps by the bureau of posts.

Indeed Mr. Steele and others did push for this special



2003 Souvenir sheet showing four Philippine waterfalls.



Pane of four stamps featuring famous Philippine waterfalls, including Pagsanjan Falls, also issued in 2003



Side-by-side comparison of stamp in its original color and in black and white; note that identifying details are more evident in black-and-white.



Overprinted version of the 1932 stamp error honoring the round-the-world flight of Captain Wolfgang von Gronau.

issue. Juan Ruiz, Acting Director of Posts, sent a letter on November 17, 1930, with a request to Washington, DC, for “the following postage stamps depicting Philippine views, designed to advertise the Philippine Islands and to attract tourists....” On April 24, 1931, Director Ruiz (no long Acting) followed up with a detailed request that included seven designs. The other six designs requested were:

1. Mayon Volcano,
2. New Post Office Building,
3. Manila Bay with Pier Number 7,
4. Rice Planting with Carabao,
5. Rice Terraces — Baguio, and
6. Baguio Zigzag Road.

Ruiz left the decision to Washington for the stamp colors, but suggested “that the colors be of light hue.” He also asked for expedited printing and “shipment thereof made on the first available transportation.” The wheels of government turn slowly, however, and the shipment was not ready until January 18, 1932, and left the port of Seattle

on the President Cleveland on January 23. There were forty-eight registered boxes with five boxes containing the 18-centavos stamps.

The Manila newspaper report goes on to state:

The 18-centavos stamp is printed in deep salmon and white, with the following inscription: “Philippine Islands. Pagsanjan Falls. United States of America. 18 centavos.” The picture of Vernal Falls, with the big rocks of Yosemite Valley as well as cedar trees appear on the picture. Did you ever see any cedars at Pagsanjan?

An official of the bureau of posts stated last night that 10,000 [pesos] of this design of the pictorial stamps has already been sold. Hundreds of stamp collectors have bought the stamps, not knowing the change of pictures. Several blocks of this design have been specially surcharged as commemorative stamps on the occasion of the visit here of Captain Wolfgang von Gronau round-the-world German flyer.

Scott Publishing Company has assigned number 357 to this commemorate postage stamp and C32 to the overprinted air mail stamp. Scott designates the color as red orange; however, most people would just call it orange. The referenced cedar trees are in fact pine trees, but at least both types are evergreen trees. The 10,000 pesos collected only represents sales on May 3, 1932, of the entire seven-stamp set, and not the amount sold in the subsequent months. The von Gronau stamps, overprinted and issued on September 27, 1932, amounted to 30,000 examples.

While it took about six months to disclose the error in the local press, the Bureau of Posts knew of the error much earlier. On June 1, 1932, Director Ruiz wrote, “as the defect in the view used on the 18-centavo stamp was not discovered until several days after the same was placed on sale in all post offices of the islands and in Washington, it was not deemed proper to stop the use thereof now that many of such stamps have already been sold.” Otherwise, no big deal! However, after the story hit the local press in Manila, it became a big deal and took just four days to stop the sale of all unsold copies of both issues. Never underestimate the power of the press!

In addition to the million plus stamps sent to the Philippines, 10,000 copies were sent to the Philatelic Agency in Washington, DC. These remained on sale until November 17, 1932. On January 5, 1933, Manila condemned and eventually destroyed 911,421 of Scott 357 and 4,696 of Scott C32. On March 8, 1933, the Philatelic Agency sent 1,450 unsold remaining commemorative stamps to the Philippines upon their request, leaving 8,550 sold in Washington. Since the Philatelic Agency’s examples arrived after the condemnation date, I am adding the entire 10,000 to the issued quantity. I believe Manila quietly sold the 1,450 stamps to one to

three favorite dealers or dignitaries. Manila only paid the BEP for the plates and printing costs. For copies sent to the Philatelic Agency, the BEP only charged for printing, which amounted to one cent per fifty copies. It turns out that the demand for the error (start of 1933) came after the decision to withdraw and destroy the stamps was made (late October 1932). At one time this 18-centavo stamp (\$0.09) was getting seventeen pesos (\$8.50) on the philatelic market. The issued quantities, with this 1,450 assumption, equaled 76,675 for Scott 357 and 25,304 for Scott C32. Manila sent 1,000 von Gronau stamps to the Philatelic Agency on October 12, 1932, and considered them sold from then on (included in the 25,304 quantity sold). Scott still lists the incorrect quantity for C32 as 30,000.

The newspaper article concludes its story with these facts and a challenge:

The U.S. bureau of printing and engraving printed the Pagsanjan Falls stamps, together with several other designs. The local bureau submitted the designs.

And now, Watson, my hat, There is work to do. Cable Mr. Steele, and call up Director Ruiz. The solution of the puzzle of the substitution is with them.

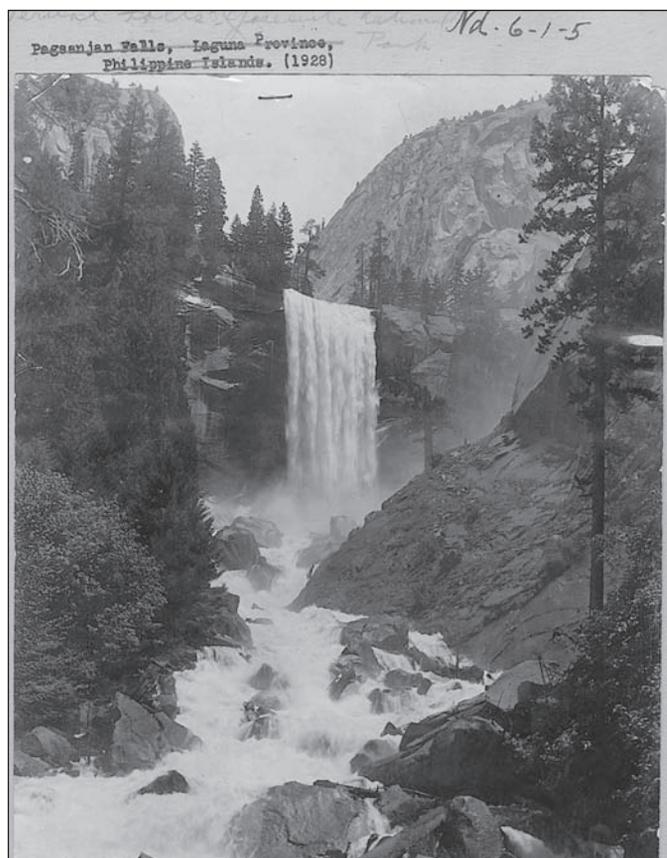
In the prologue to "All for Love," John Dryden (1651-1700) writes:

Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;
He who would search for pearls must dive below.

Deep water with pearls lies within the correspondence between the Bureau of Posts in Manila and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) in Washington. The government agency above both of these entities is the Bureau of Insular Affairs (BIA) in the War Department. All correspondence between the BEP and Manila had to pass through the BIA. The BIA files now reside in the National Archives comprising record group 350. All quotations in this article (unless noted otherwise) are from file 7628 of this source.

In his April 24, 1931, letter to the BIA Director Ruiz noted: "Photographs or reproductions of photographs of Philippine views to be used for each denomination as above [seven designs] indicating are enclosed herewith." After the BEP got this letter from the BIA, it made models of the seven designs submitted, and recommended, on July 3, 1931, that three of the designs be changed, including the Pagsanjan Falls design. The BEP requested "that an excellent front view of entire Pagsanjan Falls in possession of Bureau be substituted for the view of falls submitted by Bureau of Posts. The latter when reduced to stamp size does not show details and is so flat in appearance as to make it impossible to determine what the scene actually represents."

Radiograms were exchanged between the BIA and Manila, with Manila instructing the BIA on July 22, 1931,



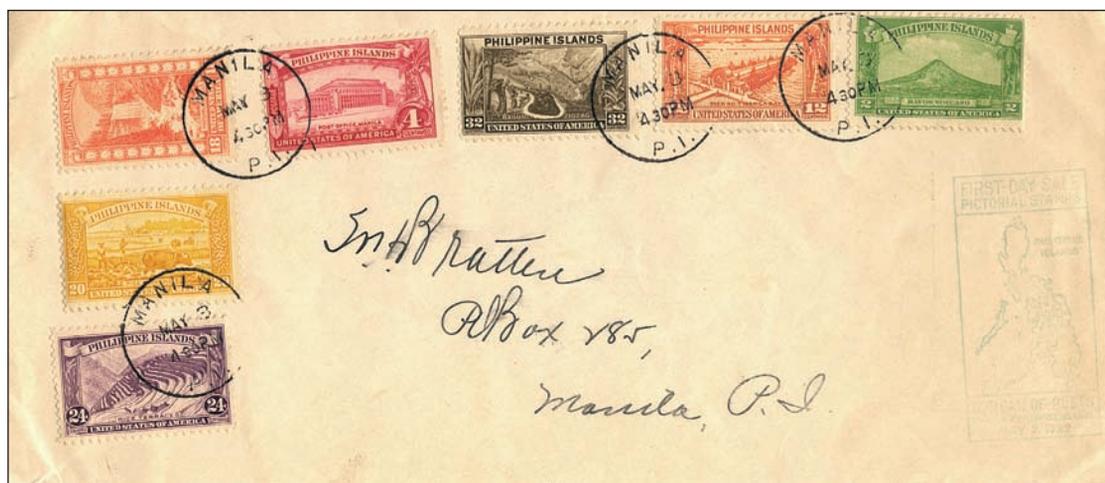
Photograph in U.S. National Archives showing incorrectly labeled Vernal Falls.

to use "new views which the Philippine Government is forwarding by mail," and to proceed with the printing "as soon as practicable." However, the "new views" were not actually sent until September 14, 1931. The mailing contained hand-drawn pictures for five of the seven designs, including two photographs of each drawing. The cover letter noted: "Among the hand-drawn pictures mailed is the 'Pagsanjan Falls', Pagsanjan, P.I., which may be used if the same be found better than the copy on file in the Bureau of Engraving."

The BEP made new models of three of these designs (seeing no need to change two of them), including the falls, and two sets of color proofs. Great latitude was given the BEP to pick the best design, but the BIA liked to stay "in the picture" for the final approval, which they gave on November 14, 1931. It is not explicitly stated in the records, but it is clear that although the BEP considered the new design from the Philippines, the Bureau still considered the photographic view to be a better image than the hand-drawn design. Manila trusted the BEP to make this final choice and never asked to see the approved designs. The BIA returned the models and proofs to the BEP. No one in the BEP or BIA ever noticed the design error.

After the error was discovered, an investigation was started. This BIA interoffice memorandum, dated August

First Day cover featuring seven stamps from the 1932 Philippine issue, including the Pagsanjan Falls error.



3, 1932, covers most of the significant facts of the investigation:

The correspondence relative to the picture on the 18-centavo Philippine postage stamp “Pagsanjan Falls” was brought to my attention today for the first time since its arrival in the Bureau on July 9th. Copies of newspapers having references to the subject have also been received in the Bureau and are attached hereto.

This message was prepared by Major Ashbridge who handled this matter for the Bureau. The picture on the postage stamp is the same as the one in the large frame in the anteroom of our office which is labeled “Pagsanjan Falls” with a typewritten slip. I do not recall when this picture was made whether before or after I came to the Bureau.

According to the records of this Bureau there were received in 1928, some 1256 pictures among which, according to the statement of the clerk (Miss L.A. Davis) having this matter in charge, was a picture of which the inclosed [sic] is a copy. This picture, although not listed in the numbered list of pictures referred to above, was entered in the files and labeled “Pagsanjan Falls”. Further investigation this morning by Major Baldwin discloses the fact that the picture is, in fact, a picture of Vernal Falls, Yosemite National Park.

It appears that the copy of this picture furnished the Bureau of Engraving and Printing labeled “Pagsanjan Falls” had a pencil notation on the back of it over which a typewritten slip had been pasted which if it had been noted should have thrown grave doubt as to the authenticity of the picture as labeled. However, apparently no suspicion was created by this situation and upon the recommendation of the Bureau this picture was substituted for the picture of Pagsanjan Falls submitted by the Philippine Government.

It is recommended that a copy of the picture be forwarded and that the Director of Posts be advised of the error as disclosed by the investigation here and

that he be requested to advise the Bureau as to the action taken by the Philippine postal authorities.

Another memo, dated August 5, 1932, identifies the dates of the mailings of the 1,256 photographs as leaving Manila on June 13, 1928, and being received September 11, 1928. A Mr. Welch handled most of the investigation for the BIA, and a letter to him dated July 16, 1932, gives some additional information not used in the summary memorandum above. These extracts show how sensitive the BEP was to the situation and how they wanted to shift the blame elsewhere:

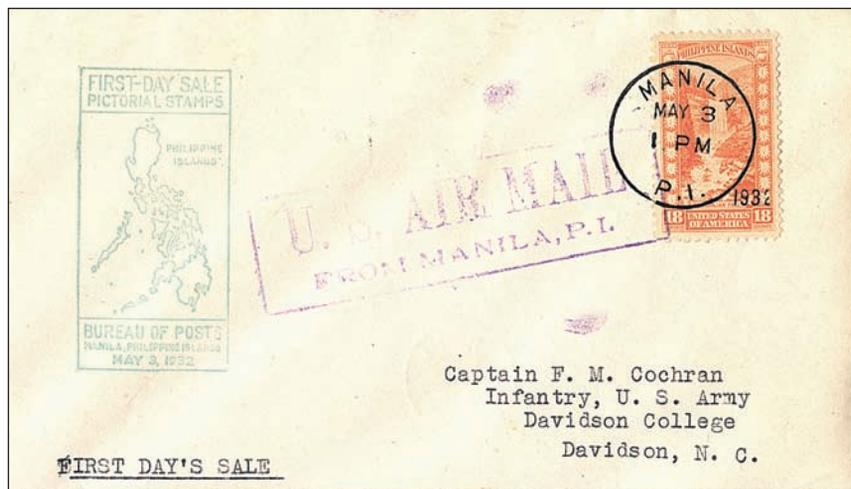
The picture he sent for this particular stamp when the order was placed showed the Falls from a side view. The result was, when the view was reduced to stamp size, to make the Falls appear no larger than a very thin white streak down the left side of the stamp. This streak which represented the Falls was smaller than a line made by a very fine pen. The result was that it gave no idea of the beauty of the Falls. In fact it mitigated against it.

If there is any doubt about the view of the stamp being a correct one of the Falls the fault lies with the Philippine authorities as they furnished the picture from which it was made. I believe that the original picture from which the enlargement in the hallway was made will bear out the above. The enlargement was made as I remember it by the Signal Corps.

The concluding paragraph in the August 5 memorandum gets as close to the source of the mislabeled photo as we will ever be able to determine:

You will note these photographs were prepared by the Bureau Public Works, Bureau of Science, Bureau of Education and Denniston, Inc.; the photographs of Pagsanjan Falls and listed under the name of Denniston, Inc., who, perhaps, might have included by mistake the picture in question.

One copy of the two misidentified photographs is still in the National Archives. It is stapled to a backing sheet



A May 3, 1932 FDC of the 18-centavo single sent to the United States.

containing the typed title at top: "Pagsanjan Falls, Laguna Province, Philippine Islands." The title has now been crossed through by pencil with the correct name. There is also a filing number of "Nd 6-15" that has been crossed out and replaced with "Nd 6-1-5." There is nothing on the back of the backing sheet. On the back of the photo the title is repeated twice, once on a small slip of paper glued to the center of the photograph. There is also a handwritten "Nd 6-5 Falls, Pagsanjan — Philippines" in red ink, subsequently crossed out and replaced by the handwritten "U.S. 3-1, Vernal Falls, Yosemite" in black ink. The glued slip has the typed notation "Ud-6-5 Falls, Pagsanjan, Philippine Islands / Bureau of Insular Affairs — War Department." The "Ud" is crossed out and a handwritten "Nd" replaces it. Part of the slip has been peeled back in the upper right and a faint penciled "Yosemite" is now seen.

In 1936 Currier reported that the back of the photograph had a statement that read "Office of the Governor General of the Philippine Islands." Such a statement is not present on this copy. The August 3 memorandum hinted that the slip was a clue to the photo's misidentification, but at that time it was firmly pasted in place. I held the photo up to a strong light and could not read anything behind the slip. However, the revised filing label of 3-1 strongly hints that the photograph belonged to another collection that had no connection whatsoever to the Philippines.

On September 3, 1932, the BIA sent one of these two photographs to Manila with a brief summary of how the error had occurred and an apology. On November 5 the Bureau of Posts returned the photograph and mentioned that the stamps had been recalled on October 31. Manila never denied nor confirmed that they had labeled the wrong photograph; however, they did ask for and receive back all of their submitted drawings and photos for the seven designs. Manila also requested that the BEP destroy all eighteen plates of the series, which they did. You could

interpret these actions as a desire to wipe out all elements of a bad dream never to be dreamt again. I have every reason to believe that the photograph shown is the one that made a round trip to Manila and back to Washington in 1932. The Manila correspondence did not mention the Manila Bulletin publicity that had just preceded the withdrawal date.

The official story has circumstances that range from the odd to the bizarre. The Bureau of Posts was in no rush to recall the stamps. Perhaps they hoped that the publicity would sell more stamps. The BEP and BIA worked slowly to uncover the error, but people on both sides of the ocean correctly and quickly identified the falls when the image was challenged. The

BEP always vehemently blamed the error on the mislabeled photograph, whereas the BIA, to its credit, remained tactful in its dealings with both Manila and the BEP on the subject. The most bizarre fact is the disclosure that an enlarged copy of the mislabeled photograph hung in the anteroom of Creed F. Cox, Assistant to the Chief of Bureau, BIA. Although this is a side issue that most likely has nothing to do with the printing error, it remained an embarrassment to the BIA.

The Rest of the Story

The official story took place in the first six months of the error's existence and was mostly in the government sector hidden from the general public. In 1932 both Manila and the BIA avoided the press and were reticent about disclosing what they knew about the misidentified stamp image — or perhaps the philatelic press was not that insistent. In November 1932, the Weekly Philatelic Gossip asked the BEP for the story, and the BIA queried Manila to see if it was okay to release the minimum facts surrounding the substituted photograph. Manila had no reservations, so on December 8, 1932, the BEP provided a terse reply that was published December 17: "The Bureau is unable to furnish you with a picture or other illustrated matter, which would permit you to show prints of this picture which is in error." In fact, the BEP misunderstood the significance of the November 17, 1932, Washington Philatelic Agency withdrawal date and extended that date to the Philippines.

After the BEP letter to the Weekly Philatelic Gossip, the topic never became one of major public debate nor was it politicized in any way. In fact, this article makes public many of the official comments and the photograph for the first time. The next three months, however, saw the emergence of reports on the error in the public and philatelic

Partial Publicity Trail of the Error

Date	Publication	Observation
June 20, 1932	Mekeel's, "Philippine Picture Stamps," by Richard C. McGregor	Picture story of series, suspects photo substitution by the BEP.
Nov. 14, 1932	Mekeel's	Reader falsely identifies falls as Maria Christina Falls, Mindanao.
Dec. 3, 1932	Linn's, "Philippine Pictorial Withdrawn"	Issue believed withdrawn.
Dec. 10, 1932	Linn's, "18c Philippine Withdrawn"	Issue confirmed as withdrawn. Chicago Boy Scout credited with identification (but Vernal name not given).
Dec. 17, 1932	Linn's, "Broadway Chatter," by Bi Standon	Opines avoid buying frenzy.
Dec. 17, 1932	Weekly Philatelic Gossip, "Stamp Sale Stopped"	Confirms withdrawal. BEP admits Vernal error (first philatelic reference in United States to correct falls).
Dec. 24, 1932	Linn's, "Raspberries"	Full Boy Scout story, now from California.
Jan. 1933	Scott's Monthly Journal, "Notes of the Month," by Prescott H. Thorp	Questions correct photo substitution rumor as false. Quantity of C32 reported incorrectly.
Jan. 28, 1933	Linn's	Advice to avoid inflated prices.
Mar. 14, 1936	Stamps, "Philippine 18-Centavo Error," by C.E. Currier	Full report, including Washington, DC, quantities but with a few minor errors.
Nov.-Dec. 1938	Asociation Filatelica de Filipinaas, "How the 18-cent Error Pagsanjan Falls was discovered in America," by Ernest A. Kehr	Gives his version of stamp error discovery minus dates.
March 11, 1943	Linn's, "Another Error on 18-Centavo Stamp of Philippines," by Pablo M. Espiridion	Credits Kehr as discovering error. Gives lower and upper falls correct names.
December 20, 1947	Stamps, "Philippines, 'Pagsanjan Falls'," George Sloan's column	Gives correct pronunciation of falls. (Pag-sang-han)
May-June 1951	Philippine Journal of Philately, "More on the 'Pagsanjan Falls,'" by Pablo M. Espiridion	Discloses undated Bison Star Journal crediting Boy Scout with discovery and gives Kehr's own account of it.

press in the United States. I will attempt to explain two aspects of this story that go far beyond the official record. They are (1) should or could the error have been discovered before printing, and (2) why the long delay in the press on both the discovery and provenance of the error, including the philatelic response in the United States?

I have a theory that would explain why the general populace of the Philippines did not object intensely to the error. Shown is a comparison of the stamp in color and in black and white. The orange color example gives the image a hazy look and does not invite the viewer to inspect the design in detail. The black-and-white image makes the pine trees and the rocks below jump out at the viewer. If Director Ruiz had not asked for a light hue, perhaps a louder and more immediate uproar would have occurred.

Three views in grayscale of the actual Pagsanjan Falls

reveal some other distinguishing details. Notice that the falls empties into a large pool; Vernal Falls pours into a rocky stream. Also notice that the top of the falls is not outlined against the sky; Vernal Falls is so outlined. Although both falls drop about 300 feet, Pagsanjan Falls are narrow at the top, while Vernal Falls are a broad sheet of water. To these three differences, add the pine trees that are clearly visible in the mislabeled photograph, including a large tree on the right foreground that appears to be nearly as high as the falls and that was cropped by the engraver. If anyone at the BEP had taken the time to compare the two pictures sent by the Philippine Government of the actual falls to the mislabeled photograph, they could easily have determined that the two falls were not the same.

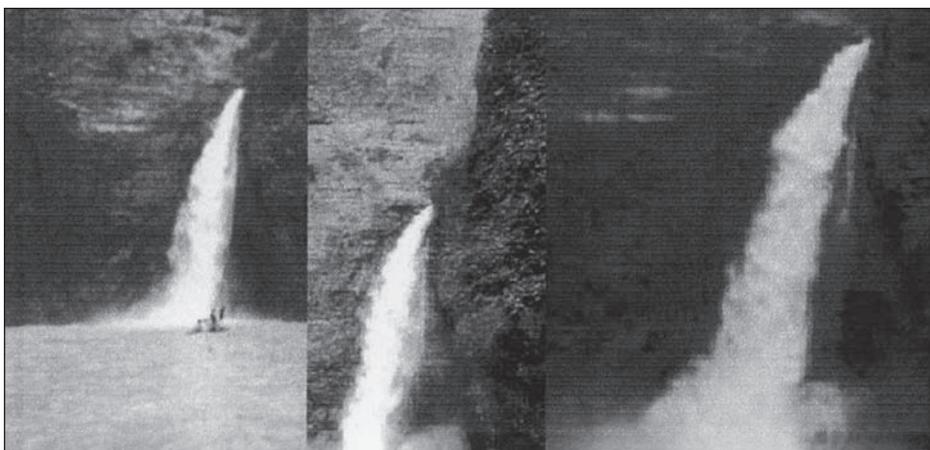
Most design errors are avoidable but do not represent gross negligence, as was the case here. In particular, I

fault the BEP for not finding this error as they were given a second chance when Manila furnished a second drawing for them to consider. The receipt of that second drawing should have resulted in a deeper analysis of the two designs and then anyone with a ninth-grade geography knowledge would have detected the pine tree flaw. I can only imagine that the BEP was so enamored of the Vernal design that, combined with the probability that some advanced engraving had already been done, the stamp design team just kept on going down the straight and narrow but incorrect route it was on.

Now we come to the philatelic publicity in the United States. The table, "Partial Publicity Trail of the Error," features some of the major publications that reported this error. Mekeel's Richard McGregor noticed the error on June 20, 1932, writing, "The scene on the stamp does not look like the usual photograph of Pagsanjan Falls. It seems probable that a picture of some other falls was used as copy by the engraver." This was a golden opportunity lost by a reporter with great analytical instinct but no desire to research the facts and find the name of the falls pictured. Neither McGregor nor any Mekeel's reader followed up on his correct suspicion, and the story died there.

It wasn't until after the Manila Bulletin report of October 27, 1932, that the story began to appear in the American press. It began slowly in November, peaked in December, and was mostly forgotten by January 1933. There was a keen interest in reporting both the withdrawal information and the name of the person who correctly identified the falls on the stamp as the Vernal Falls. The former concern was never reported with complete accuracy — the month (October) was reported correctly but the date (the 31st) never was. The two-week delay between the time the stamp was withdrawn in Manila and the time it was withdrawn in Washington was never reported.

Ernest A. Kehr brought the story to America. Kehr was the stamp editor of the New York World-Telegram (later the New York Herald Tribune). He was in California for the 1932 Summer Olympics, which were being held in Los Angeles that year. Kehr also collected Philippine stamps, was a member of several Philippine philatelic societies, and was later chairman of the international jury for PHICIPEX (held 1954 in Manila) — in other words, a collector well known to prominent Filipino philatelists. While passing through San Francisco, he was furnished with a first day cover with the stamps by a friend. According to both Pablo



Strip of three black-and-white photographic views of the Pagsanjan Falls that clearly distinguish it from the Vernal Falls.

Espiridion and Kehr himself, Kehr sent Lowell Thomas the cover and information about the error. Thomas later made a New York City broadcast in early December 1932, bringing the story to the American public for the first time.

Espiridion later credited Kehr with the discovery of the correct name of the falls, which Kehr recognized as Vernal Falls when he had been hiking in Yosemite National Park earlier that year. Kehr was first credited with the discovery of the error in 1938 in published accounts that referred to the Lowell broadcast — which, however, has not been dated any closer than late November or early December 1932. In 1951 Kehr was challenged to prove he was the first to discover the stamp error. He responded politely that "if someone else had noted this 'error' before I did, and had published the information, why was nothing said about it before this?"

Of course, someone did mention it earlier; in fact, several people did. The Manila Bulletin report of October 27, 1932, did not migrate to the United States. It could have, although it usually took six weeks for newspapers to reach the East Coast from Manila, but it did not. However, California Boy Scout Melville Oppenheimer discovered and published an account of the Vernal Falls mistake. On October 30, 1932, the Manila Sunday Tribune republished a San Francisco Examiner article about Oppenheimer's discovery. The young scout is quoted as saying, "Proof of the pudding [sic] stands in that lone pine, at the beginning of 'Mist Trail,' which every Yosemite hiker knows." I was unable to date the original Examiner article, but using the same six-weeks-for-travel assumption, it should have appeared about mid-September 1932 or earlier.

Edilberto S. Evidente reviewed this situation in 1951, but by that time his earlier records had been lost in the chaos of World War II. His memory was very detailed, but some facts were blurred or lost. He knew that it was either the Manila Tribune or Herald that had carried the story (it was the Tribune). He remembered a picture of the falls and

Oppenheimer (only Vernal Falls was pictured). He reported that an article in the *Bison* (actually the *Bison Star Journal*), a journal of the Bison Exchange Club also ran the story under the title “Evidente Pages Oppenheimer.” The Bison Exchange Club is in South Norwalk, Connecticut. Evidente did not state when the *Bison Star Journal* was published, but it was probably in November 1932 or later and that might be where Oppenheimer’s picture was placed. While Evidente’s date sequences do not track when he discusses the three publications, the Oppenheimer discovery publication did precede Kehr’s announcement.

By December 1932 a number of things were being said about the error. Linn’s first mentioned the Vernal Falls mistake on December 10, but claimed that Oppenheimer was from Chicago. Linn’s also published the *Manila Tribune* article of October 30th on December 24, 1932. (This lag also corresponds to my assumed six-week mailing delay mentioned above. Here the time is eight weeks, but subtract at least a week for the normal editorial time it takes to bring an article to fruition and get into the next available issue, including postdating of that issue.) The December 24th article changed Oppenheimer’s residence to California; however, all this was merely delayed publicity from the earliest account in the *San Francisco Examiner*.

The BIA correspondence credits Major Baldwin for the first written report of the error, although not published, on July 9, 1932. Major Baldwin simply walked over to the nearby headquarters of the National Park Service, Interior Department to get the answer. While the claim by the *Manila Bulletin* reporter to be the first to publish turns out not to be true, it was made independent of other reports. Kehr’s discovery also was later but independent of the other two reports. Oppenheimer remains the first to publish but without his discovery reaching the other two. But does it really matter? I don’t think so.

There is one other quibble about the stamp. Some, including Espiridion in 1943, contend that the stamp has a second error, that the correct name of the Pagsanjan Falls is Magdapio Falls. They are technically correct, as every map illustrates, but Filipinos to this day use the common name of Pagsanjan.

Pagsanjan Falls remain the same as they were more than seventy years ago when all the fuss began. Then and now they were a major tourist attraction. You begin at the city of Pagsanjan, a distance of fifty-seven miles from



Pagsanjan Falls finally appears on a 1971 issue celebrating Philippine tourism.

Manila. The falls are about three miles upriver from the city and can only be reached by native bancas (small boats). Two skilled boatmen take more than an hour to reach the falls, which are on the Bumbungan River in the municipality of Caviati. (Both Caviati and Pagsanjan are in Laguna Province.) The setting is a lush tropical paradise that never disappoints. The return trip is much quicker, as the boatmen

shoot the rapids on their way down river. Today, Pagsanjan City has grown to accommodate the 500 daily visitors who come to view the falls and surrounding scenic vistas and has many modern hotels. It even has its own website at www.pagsanjan.org.

How long did the Philippine Government wait to issue a stamp showing the actual Pagsanjan Falls? They did nothing in 1933, after all the controversy had died down, nor did they issue a corrected stamp during the nine remaining years of the United States’ administration. Then followed the Japanese Occupation of World War II. A stamp with Pagsanjan Falls was not issued until long after the Philippines became a republic on July 4, 1946. Nearly forty years after the Pagsanjan/Vernal Falls mistake, the Philippine Government issued a multicolored stamp showing the falls (Scott 1088). The stamp (issued February 16, 1971) included the text “Pagsanjan Falls/Excursionists Shooting the Rapids” and was one of a set of four promoting Philippine tourism. I think it is a beautiful stamp and a fitting reversal to one of the most infamous, mysterious, regrettable, preventable, and obvious human design errors of the twentieth century.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the following for their kind assistance in preparing this article: John Hunt, Joe Napp, William Oliver, Ellen S. Peachey, Don Peterson, and Bob Yacano.

Endnote

1. *Manila Bulletin* (Philippine Islands), October 27, 1932: 23.

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