

THE FIRST PHILIPPINE POSTAL CARDS

By Don Peterson

After 25 years of using postal stamps (first issued in 1854), the Manila correspondent experienced another postal innovation — the postal card. In September, 1879, the first official postal card was issued in Manila — a 3-centavos de peso value surcharged on an earlier but unissued 50-milesimas card (Figure 1).

The “parent” 50-milesimas unsurcharged card shows the head of King Alfonso XII in the top center of the card and facing to the right, similar to the 1875 postage stamp issue of the Philippines. The 50-milesimas stamp is light maroon to maroon, and the nose of the bust is either white (unlined) or dark (lined). The card was engraved by Jose Garcia Morago, whose initials “JG” are in the shading at the base of the King’s head. The card was typographed on a buff to creamy-buff wove cardstock which occurs in various thicknesses. An intricate but faint yellow to yellow-orange groundwork design was printed within the ornate border with a space for the stamp in top center.

The groundwork was to prevent reuse of the postal card and probably also to prevent counterfeiting. To the left of the stamp is the word “TARJETA,” meaning “card”; and to the right of the stamp is the word “POSTAL,” both in tall scroll letters.

Below that is “Sr. D.” in script letters, meaning “Mr. Sir:” and four lines for the address in varying length and thickness. Jones et al. (1982) indicated that on the 1878 and 1879 postal cards of Cuba, there were four types of “Sr.” However, only one type, Type I (“r” with ball on the end and “S” to the right of “T” of “TARJETA”), is known on the first Philippine postal cards. The length of the top address line varies more than the other lines, and ranges between 73mm. and 79mm., but generally is 77-78mm. long.



Figure 1. Used example of the first official Philippine postal card — 3-centavos de peso value surcharged on an earlier but unissued 50-milesimas card. Manila local, dated November 1879.

On the bottom of the card is the inscription “NOTA. Le que debe escribirse se hare en el reverso é irá firmado por el remitente,” roughly meaning “write on the reverse side and leave the signature of the sender.” The bottom inscription is usually 90 mm. long, but varies. These features are all enclosed by a double-lined frame with fancy floret-type corners. The frame is 119 mm. by 74 mm. The size of the card varies, depending on how it was cut, but is usually 145 mm. by 98 mm. The card was printed at the Fabrica Nacional de Sellos (National Stamp Factory) in Madrid.

Except for the stamp impression, the 50-milesimas Philippine card is identical to the 1875 5-pesetas postal card of Spain and similar 1878 cards of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Apparently, the same plate was used for the printing of these cards with only the stamp impression changed, as appropriate.

The September, 1879, card with the 3-centavos de peso value surcharged on the earlier but unissued 50-milesimas card reflected the Universal Postal Union (UPU) rate. The surcharge is black and is similar to the large type letters surcharged on Philippine postage stamps also issued in September, 1879, (Figure 2). The surcharge was



Figure 2. 3-Centavos de peso surcharge on the September, 1879, postal card.

typeset and was done in Manila as we shall later discuss. The words of the surcharge "CONVENIO UNIVERSAL DE CORREOS" mean "Universal Postal Union." The word "HABILITADO," which appears on many stamps of Spain and her colonies, means that the stamp was revalidated and made legal for use, usually to validate a change in the government or monetary system. In this case, it validated the use of the new UPU system, specifically the new UPU rates.

We call the 3-centavos surcharged card the first "official" card because the 50-milesimas unsurcharged card was never authorized for release. However, because a few mint and even fewer used copies of that card are known the 50-milesimas unsurcharged card has been listed in various catalogues.

When was the 50-milesimas card printed? There is disagreement over the date of issue (a misnomer since it was never issued). For instance, Ascher (1928) indicates that it was issued in March 1878. Cotter and Quinto (1895) and Lopez (1890) place the date in 1879; whereas Bartels et al. (1904) and most other current catalogues such as Higgins and Gage (1979), Harradine (1977), and Graus (1982) give the date as 1878. Others such as Hanciau (1906) and Moens (1883-1884) list the 50-milesimas card as a variety of the 1879 surcharged card. One of the most reputable early references, Mencarini (1896), lists the date of issue of this card as 1876, the earliest date given. The confusion regarding the "date of issue" of the 50-milesimas card can be partially clarified when we look at the events in Spain and in the Philippines in the 1870's as they relate to the newly-formed Universal Postal Union (UPU) and changes in the monetary units.

Spain was an early proponent of uniform international postal procedures and was one of 20 countries to sign the Treaty of Berne on October 9, 1874. According to the Treaty, the General Postal Union (renamed the Universal Postal Union in 1878) was to become effec-

tive on July 1, 1875 (Coddington, 1964). In Spain, the new Treaty rates and procedures were promulgated on January 1, 1876, as a result of a Royal Order from Madrid dated July 15, 1875 (Van Dam, 1972).

The admission of the Philippines to the UPU actually began in 1876. On January 18, 1876, the UPU members called for a special conference in Berne to consider the admission of new applicants. At that conference, the Spanish delegate announced the intention of his government to request admission for the Spanish colonies. Although British India and most French colonies were admitted, the British refused to discuss admission of any additional colonies. However, restrictions were relaxed, and a number of colonies were allowed to join in 1877, including the Philippines. The Philippines joined the UPU on May 1, 1877 (Hargest, 1979).

Shortly after joining the UPU, the postal authorities in Manila issued a stamp, the 2 centavos de peso stamp of 1875 with the surcharge "HABILITADO 12 Cs. Pta." This stamp was issued in July or August, 1877. It is doubtful, however, that this stamp and two subsequent surcharged issues were for Postal Union purposes. Although the currency at that time was centavos de peso, the surcharges were in pesetas. The centavo de peseta was equal to 1/5 peso fuerte at that time. Thus, 12 centavos de peseta was equivalent to 2 or 2 1/2 centavos de peso, which was the rate for a single-weight interior letter at that time, not an overseas letter. Incidentally, that rate was established by a Civil Order by General Rafael Izquierdo in Manila on May 8, 1872, which stated that correspondence for the interior was to be at the rate of 12 1/2 centavos de peseta. No official reason has been found why the 1877 surcharge was in pesetas, except that Palmer (1912) indicated that "... the peseta was long the unit of commercial business" even after the change in currency to the peso fuerte in the mid 1870's.

According to Warren (1954, the centavo de peseta ceased to be used (officially) on the Islands on December 31, 1877. Starting January 1, 1878, the centavo and milésima de peso became the sole monetary units on the Islands and continued as such until the end of the Spanish period. The peseta was not that easily abandoned, however, as another "HABILITADO 12 Cs. Pta" surcharged stamp was issued in January, 1879 (the last stamp printed in pesetas in the Spanish period).

The point of this is that if the 50-milésimas postal card had been printed prior to 1878, the monetary units would most likely have been expressed in pesetas. The units were in pesos, however, which leads me to believe that the 50-milésimas card was printed at the Fabrica Nacional de Sellos in Madrid after January 1, 1878, but prior to the 1878 Postal Congress held May 2 - June 4, as I shall later explain.

Why was the value of the first postal card 50-milesimas de peso instead of 3-centavos de peso, as later surcharged? The 50-milesimas rate, which was equivalent to 5-centavos de peso, was much higher than the rate (8-centavos de peso) later applied to the card. According to UPU procedures as set forth by the 1874 Treaty, the postal card rate was to be one-half the single-letter rate.

The overseas rate for a single-weight letter, prior to the promulgation of the UPU rates in September 1879, was 10 centavos de peso. One-half of that rate would be 5-centavos de peso, or 50-milesimas de peso. I assume that this was the reasoning behind the establishment of that rate when the card was printed in 1878. At this high rate, it is doubtful that the card was originally intended for interior use.

Why and when was the postal card rate changed to 3-centavos de peso? One clue comes from Palmer (1912), who stated that "The reason for the changes in values and colors of the issues for Postal Union use may be traceable to the regulations adopted by the Congress (Postal) of 1878, which, as a result of its first four years' experience, made many changes." A Postal Congress was held in Paris, May 2 - June 4, 1878, to discuss problems that arose since the Treaty of 1874. One of the results of that Congress was a reduction in the basic rate of postal cards from 12 1/2 centimes (one-half the single-letter rate) to 10 centimes per article (Coddington, 1964). I am of the opinion that it was this action that prompted the Spanish postal authorities to reconsider the postal card rate for the Philippines. It is also known that as a result of that Congress, Spain changed its postal card rate, effective February 27, 1879 (Van Dam, 1972). Although I have found no official record of a subsequent change for the Philippines, we know that the rate was, in fact, changed from 50-milesimas (5-centavos) to 3-centavos de peso, which became effective in September, 1879. This explanation supports the fact that the 50-milesimas card was printed in 1878, but prior to Postal Congress, held May 2 - June 4, 1878.

Let us look at another approach as to how the postal card was determined for the Philippines. According to Hargest (1979) when the Philippines joined the UPU in 1877, the charge for a postal card would have been 2-centavos de peso. Exactly how Hargest arrived at this rate is not certain. However, according to Article 3 of the 1874 Treaty, the postal card rate was established at one-half the single-letter rate, with the power to round off the fractions (in either direction). Further, if transit took place by sea over a distance exceeding 300 nautical miles (as was the case from the Philippines), a slightly higher rate could be levied. It appears, as stated earlier, that the 50-milesimas (5-centavos) rate was too high. The reduction in the basic postal card rate by the

Paris Congress of 1878 provided the stimuli to change the rate to 3-centavos. At the same time, the value was changed from milesimas to centavos to reflect the official currency of the Philippines at that time.

Where was the 50 milesimas card surcharged, in Manila or Madrid? First of all, there is no disagreement in the literature that the 50-milesimas card was printed in Madrid. At the Fabrica Nacional de Sellos, the usual procedure was to print postal cards in large multi-subject panes, and then cut the panes into individual subjects (cards). However, in the case of the 50-milesimas card, the panes apparently were not cut but instead were shipped to Manila where they were surcharged and then cut. Two reasons lead me to this conclusion. First, colored essays or printer's waste of the surcharged cards were found in Manila in the late 1870's or early 1880's, not in Madrid. Secondly, the 3-centavos surcharge was identical to the large letter surcharge on the postage stamp issues of September, 1879, which were known to be surcharged in Manila. Additionally, it is observed that although the cards vary considerably in size (as a result of how the pane was cut), the position of the surcharge on the stamp on the postal card is relatively constant, indicating that the panes were cut after they were surcharged, in this case, in Manila. In fact, all surcharging of Philippine stamps, including the issues of the 1860's, the 1880's, and of 1897, was done in Manila rather than in Madrid (Bartels et al., 1904).

It is not known exactly when the uncut panes of the 50-milesimas cards were shipped to Manila. It could have been in late 1878, after the Postal Congress in Paris adjourned; or it could have been in 1879. It is likely that the Spanish authorities had decided that the stamps and the 50milesimas panes would be surcharged by a similar die. All of the evidence indicates that the 50milesimas postal card panes were surcharged and cut at the same time the stamps were surcharged. I am of the opinion this was done in Manila in 1879.

The existence of unused and used unsurcharged 50-milesimas cards indicates that a certain number "escaped" before surcharging, or were inadvertently not surcharged (a printing error) during the surcharging process. If the cards were surcharged and cut in 1879, the "date of issue" of the 50-milesimas unsurcharged card (when two they first showed up on the "street") was likely in late 1879. The only used unsurcharged card known to this author were dated in 1881 and 1883. Figure 3 depicts the sequence of events related to the issue of the first Philippine postal cards between 1877 and 1879.

What was the size and nature of the original uncut pane? The answer to that question is evident on the cards themselves. One interesting

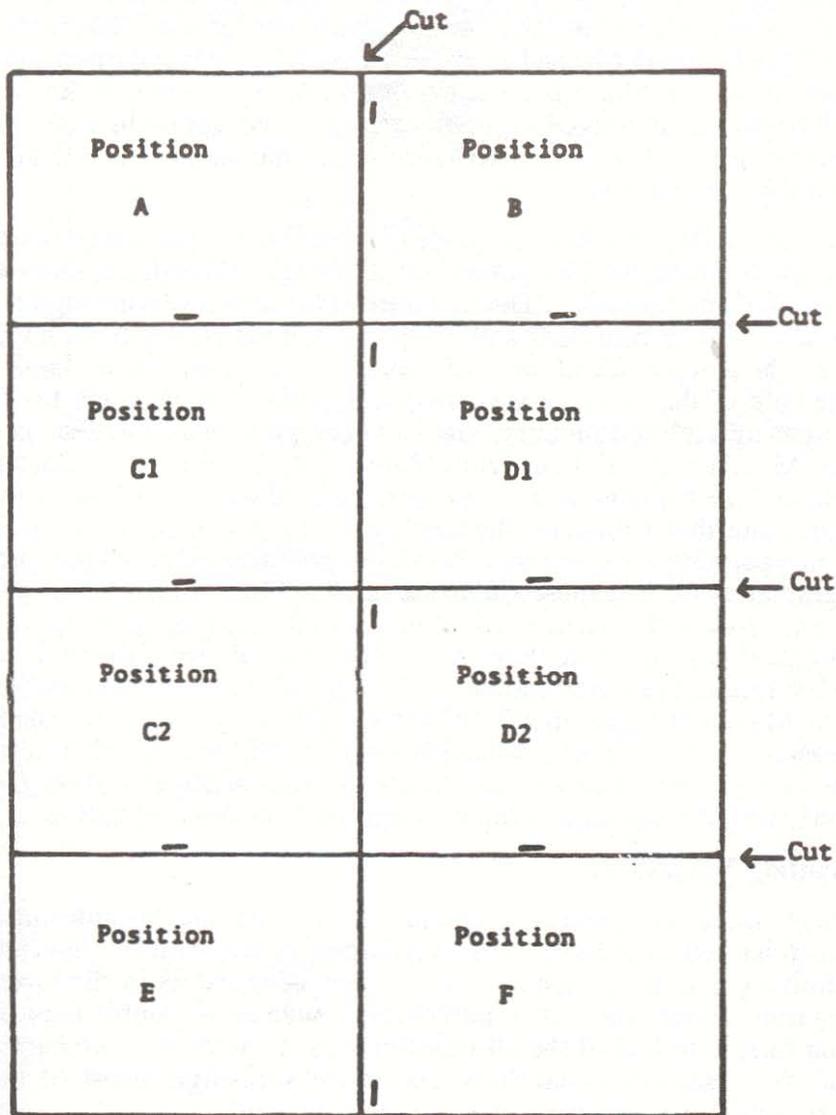


Figure 4. 8-subject pane of the 1878/79 Philippine postal card showing the location of guidelines

According to Harradine (1977), 3,050 surcharged cards were issued. There are no numbers given by any reference for the 50-milesimas unsurcharged card, which is expected, considering the status of the card. Ascher (1928) stated that "used copies have been seen." Harradine (1977) indicates that he had never seen a used copy. Over the past four years, however, I have been searching for known copies of the 50-milesimas unsurcharged card. I have recorded approximately 15 unused cards and two used cards. I estimate that there are less than 5 used cards in existence.

From my collection, the copy of the 50-milesimas unsurcharged card was mailed from the Philippines to C.S. Buff of Butterfield, Devine in Hong Kong (Figure 5). The signature of the sender was not legible. Although it was cancelled with a typical oval net obliteration on the front, the reverse side of the card indicated that it came from Manila. The date of the message was August 8, 1881. The message listed various agricultural products that had been previously shipped "per S.S. Manila Capt F. Peña from Manila July 1." Where the sender obtained the card and how many more he used will never be known. I speculate, that in this case, the missing surcharge could have resulted from a printing error and that the sender probably obtained the card legitimately from the post office or a vendor. That explanation would account for the "business as usual" nature of the card. In any event, the 50-milesimas rate more than covered the normal postal card rate to Hong Kong. The other known used 50-milesimas card was mailed from Manila on September 7, 1883 (date of the message), to Dresden, Germany. The card was cancelled with an oval net cancel. It also shows a Dresden receiving cancel on the front of the card. Like the 1881 card, the contents of the message are "business" in nature.

Printing Variations

There are many printing variations found on the 50-milesimas unsurcharged and 3-centavos surcharged postal cards. Some are relatively common, such as broken or missing letters in the lower inscription; and others are relatively rare, such as the double impression (one inverted) of the 50-milesimas card, the double surcharge, and the essays or printer's waste of the surcharge. Most of the variations have been seen on more than one card.

The following is a list of printing variations found on the first Philippine postal cards. The relative scarcity or abundance of the variation is indicated by C - common (also includes the normal condition), S - scarce, R - rare, and VR - very rare (usually only one or a handful known).



Figure 5. Used example of the 50-milesimas uncharged card. Manila to Hong Kong, dated August 1881.

50 -milesimas Card

Relative Scarcity

1.	Double impression. One normal One inverted.	VR
2.a.	Normal paper.	C
2.b.	Thin paper.	C
2.c.	Thick paper.	C
3.a.	Buff paper (normal).	C
3.b.	Creamy-buff paper (normal).	C
3.c.	Cream-colored paper.	S
4.a.	Yellow groundwork (normal).	C
4.b.	Yellow-orange groundwork (normal).	C
4.c.	Orange groundwork.	C
5.a.	Deformed base of first "T" of "TARJETA".	S
5.b.	Dot above "J" in "TARJETA".	S
5.c.	Deformed top bar of "E" of "TARJETA".	S
5.d.	Dot between "E" and "T" of "TARJETA".	S
5.e.	Small second "A" of "TARJETA".	S
5.f.	Broken horizontal bar in second "A" of "TARJETA".	S
5.g.	Nick on right leg of second "A" of "TARJETA".	S

6.a.	No period after "Sr".	S
6.b.	Large period after "Sr".	S
7.a.	Blot at end of upper right line of "D".	S
7.b.	Broken top line in swirl of "D".	S
7.c.	Broken inner line of "D".	S
7.d.	Displaced outer line of "D".	S
8.	Extra line in "P" of "POSTAL".	S
9.a.	Break in top right outer frame line.	S
9.b.	Break in top left outer frame line.	S
9.c.	Break in right center outer frame line.	S
10.a.	Break in top right inner frame line.	S
10.b.	Break in top center inner frame line.	S
10.c.	Chip in left center inner frame line.	S
10.d.	Thin inner frame line.	S
11.a.	"in" instead of "en" in lower inscription.	S
11.b.	"cn" instead of "en" in lower inscription.	S
11.c.	Dropped "e" in "el" in lower inscription.	S
11.d.	"i" not dotted in "ira" in lower inscription.	S
11.e.	Broken "b" in "debe" in lower inscription.	S
11.f.	Small "a" in "hara" in lower inscription.	R
11.g.	Missing accent above "e" in lower inscription.	S
11.h.	Missing "m" in "firmado" in lower inscription.	S
11.i.	Dot in "o" of "Lo" in lower inscription.	S
11.j.	Extra marks (tracks) above letters in lower inscription.	S
11.k.	Part of "q" missing in "que" in lower inscription	S
11.l.	Dot between "Lo" and "que" in lower inscription	S
11.m.	Lower inscription 90mm. long (normal).	S
11.n.	Lower inscription 90 1/2 mm. long (normal).	S
11.o.	Lower inscription 91mm. long.	S
12 a.	Light maroon stamp color (normal),	S
12.b.	Maroon stamp color (normal).	S
12.c.	Reddish-maroon stamp color	S
12.d.	Brown stamp color.	R
13 a.	White (unlined) nose on boat on stamp.	C
13.b.	Dark (lined) nose on bust on stamp.	C
13.c.	Pointed nose on bust on stamp.	R
13.d.	White spot in oval on upper right of bust on stamp.	S
13.e.	Dash in oval left of neck of bust on stamp.	S