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THE BIANUAL REVALIDATION SURCHARGES ON ECUADORIAN POSTAL STATIONERY

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Before entering into a discussion regarding the revalidation of postal stationery with a surcharge it is noteworthy mentioning that it is unknown whether official permission exists to apply such surcharges or whether this is an initiative of the private sector. In most cases, the surcharges exist in large quantities and were sanctioned by the public sector in that postal usage is widespread and accepted by the government. Furthermore, the surcharges appear very similar to those applied on postage stamps of the same period. All this because of a lack of postal material.

Legal documentation for the application of surcharges on postage stamps (Official Registry No. 453, January, 1897) first appeared in 1897. The government officially authorized the post office of Quito to recall all Rocafuerte stamps of 1894 and 1895 from the rest of the country as well as private individuals and surcharge them with 1897-1898, this assuming their validity for said bienium. This, despite the fact that the stamps were initially to be returned to Nicolas Seebeck.



1897-1898 large numbers on 1894 postal stationery card

Unfortunately, most holders of this material did not honor the request of the Quito post office which could not enforce the recall because the postal authorities did not fall under the authority of the Treasury, agency which was the source of all postal material. Thus all in possession of the Rocafuerte stamps who did not return the stamps of the Quito post office began to overprint them and while there was only talk of only one type of surcharge in the recall, there appeared three different ones: large numbers, small numbers, and medium sized numbers with a "Y" between the numbers. Since no pattern of the original surcharge exists it is unknown what was produced by the Quito post office on one hand, and the remainder of the post offices and private individuals.

Therefore, all existing surcharges on the original Rocafuerte stamps must be considered legal and official although, to some purists, with a grain of salt. This is true not only for stamps but for entires as well.



1897 Y 1898 on 1896 postal stationery card mailed to Wiesbaden where it arrived on June 6, 1897 and returned because of unknown addressee

The case of the surcharges on postal stationery

Even though no official documentation is known for the application of surcharges on postal stationery there exist two different surcharges, one extending the validity of the postal material for a biennium and the second for devaluing the 10 centavos envelopes to 5 centavos. This article is concerned only with the first surcharge which, again, falls into two categories: an 1895-1896 extension of validity of the 1894 Rocafuerte envelopes and a 1897-1898 extension of the 1894 and 1896 Seebeck post card and the 1894 Rocafuerte envelopes.

It is a matter of much speculation why the surcharges were applied in the first place. It is necessary to reiterate that all surcharged material, once its time had expired had to be returned to the contracting party, in this case Nicolas Seebeck. Since the recall was a practical impossibility, rendering the postal material invalid it is difficult to understand the logic of revalidating invalid cards or envelopes. Someone, nevertheless, must have come to this decision and the culprit was none other than a government official. This "logical" decision was most likely arrived at by deducing that if the revalidation could be applied on stamps than why not on cards or envelopes. Obviously, no one wanted to put his signature under what could be considered an illegality. Surcharges which appeared 10-20 years later all enjoyed the benefit of government sanction with the accompanying official registry.

The postal stationery surcharged were accepted as legal and passed through the post offices without an argument, i.e., they were accepted by all sides concerned. Moreover, since there are no fake entires known, the surcharges applied to them should be considered official as well. This, bearing in mind, that surcharged as well as unsurcharged material is known to have been used during the two bienniums in question.

Most of the surcharged material was widely used. There are, however, a number of post card entries and envelopes which appear only rarely. It is not known whether there were patterns, proofs, trial runs or the creation of an avid collector who wanted to add to his collection. The use of such items is not necessarily

guarantee of official blessing. It is in this realm where someone may have indulged in forging material. The post office would have been the last instance to discover such an anomaly in the face of such a great array of postal varieties.

The following is a list of stationery cards and envelopes surcharged with the bienium of 1895-1896 and 1897-1898.



1895-1896 on 1894 postal stationery envelope mailed from Quito to Guayaquil

The 1895-1896 surcharges

Postal stationery envelopes of 1894

The two covers issued in 1894 with a face value of 5 centavos (green) and 10 centavos (red) were surcharged with 1895-1896 to extend their validity for two more years. This revalidation comes in the form of small numbers and in both values a “Y” can be detected in some covers between the two years. Moreover, at least five different types of lettering are evidenced. The 10 centavos value is known on white and cream paper. Both surcharged values are relatively common in a mint as well as used condition. A unique copy of the 10 centavos value is also known in a demonetized version.

The 1897-1898 surcharges

Postal stationery cards of 1894 and 1896

The two centavos and three centavos cards of 1894 and 1896 were both surcharged with the 1897-1898 revalidation. Although we have not seen all known examples it is entirely possible that the surcharge exists in small and large letters as well as a “Y” in between medium size letters. In all cases the number known is extremely small, ever more so in used condition. There is no source which indicates who is responsible for the surcharges. In fact, most of the cards used after the expiration date do not show a surcharge which makes us believe that the surcharged material comes from private sources.



1895-1896 on 1894 postal stationery envelope mailed to Canada, with stamps added

The postal stationery envelopes of 1894

Both the 5 centavos (green) and 10 centavos (red) envelopes were surcharged with the 1897-1898 overprint.

In the case of 5 centavos envelope the surcharge comes in small and large letters with a "Y" in between and in the 10 centavos value the case is the same. The most common variety is the 5 centavos envelope particularly with small letters whereas the surcharges on the 10 centavos envelope are extremely rare. Copies of the 10 centavos value with surcharge are only known on cream paper.



1897-1898 large numbers on 1894 postal stationery envelope with stamps added, mailed from Quito to Guayaquil

The relative abundance, on one hand, and extreme scarcity, on the other, of surcharge stationery makes it difficult to establish what was officially accepted for usage and what should be considered, a proof, pattern or trial run. Existing catalogs do not provide much help in differentiating between the two. They had to show what was reported to them in one form or another or copied from existing documentation. This makes it difficult for a judge when presented with a study of the material.

The guessing game will continue until primary evidence surfaces which helps us to separate between officially used entries and trial runs or proofs. This will contribute to the vicissitudes of collecting a Latin American country or, shall we say, to the fun of collecting it.