

Cinderella Time: **Correos de la Chimba**

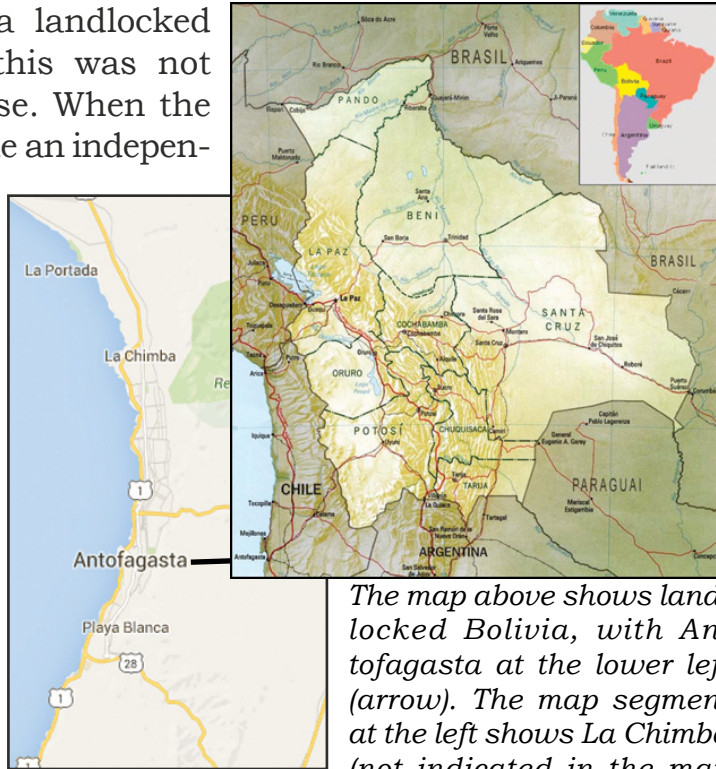
By Christer Brunström, AIJP

Bolivia is a landlocked country but this was not always the case. When the country became an independent state in 1825, the new nation's territory included the mineral rich coastal provinces of Atacama and Antofagasta.

In 1866, Bolivia had awarded Chile a concession to exploit the saltpeter deposits in the two coastal provinces. After a number of years, the Bolivian government wanted to cancel the concession. This resulted in war between the two nations starting in 1879. The so-called Nitrate war led to a humiliating defeat for the Bolivians and in 1883 Bolivia had to relinquish its two former provinces and thus lose its only seaports.

The city of Antofagasta had been the terminus of the main routes from the Andean highlands. It is located in the Bay of Moreno but its harbor facilities were not particularly good. Instead the small port of La Chimba just north of Antofagasta had a natural harbor able to receive larger ships.

In the 1870s there was a post office in La Chimba which handled mail from the region to ports along the coast. The postal agency used an oval handstamp featuring a ship in



The map above shows landlocked Bolivia, with Antofagasta at the lower left (arrow). The map segment at the left shows La Chimba (not indicated in the map above) as well as Antofagasta

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Right, an example of the “Correos de la Chimba/Bolivia” marking. Left, the negative blue ship illustrated handstamp on 1877 cover to Hamburg, Germany, with matching ornate “Cancelado” oval and boxed “Franca”. Not shown, there is a rare “La Chimba/Enrero./21 1877” three-line handstamp on the reverse. The cover was sent via British packet with three-line “Panama/4 FE 1877/Transit” handstamp, London c.d.s. transit on the reverse and backstamped Hamburg.

the center surrounded by the wording “CORREOS DE LA CHIMBA / BOLIVIA”.

When Julius Steindler’s large collection of Private Shipping Companies stamps was sold by Robson Lowe in Basel, Switzerland, on March 14, 1972, it included no less than six covers from the 1875-1877 period which all had the distinctive handstamp described above. This gives us an idea of when this handstamp was in use.

In their work *Handbook of the Private Local Posts*, authors E. F. Hurst and L. N. and M. Williams claim that the Correos de la Chimba was a privately run local post without providing any specific evidence. Many of the known covers were addressed to recipients in Chile but lack Chilean postage stamps. Instead they show Cancelado and FRANCA cancels.

They further write that the handstamp was introduced in 1876 and that it exists in blue and black. On cover the handstamp was given a valuation of \$5 and as a cut-out only \$2.50 (the handbook was compiled in the 1940s and today the valuations are only of historic interest).

S. Ringström and H. E. Tester gave an entirely different background to the La Chimba handstamp in part 2 of their book *Private Ship Letter Stamps of the World*. They suggest that Bolivian postmasters in the coastal provinces contin-

ued to use handstamps instead of using the postage stamps which Bolivia had issued since 1867. However, it seems rather strange that postage stamps were not used almost ten years after they had first been issued.

The La Chimba handstamp has only been found on covers carried by ship to Valparaiso and other ports in Chile and on some letters to Europe. This certainly suggests that the handstamp was used exclusively on mail sent by ship; the ship design also suggests this.

The La Chimba handstamp is known on covers carried by the following steamers: *Chile*, *Liguria*, *Lima* and *Santa Rosa*.

In Chile the covers were apparently accepted as fully prepaid despite the fact that they lack any Chilean stamps. Perhaps the political situation in the coastal provinces was sufficiently complicated to make the La Chimba postmaster refrain from using Bolivian or Chilean postage stamps?

The theory that Hurt and the Williams brothers put forward that it was a private post is contradicted by the fact that there was never any addition of Chilean postage stamps or postage due markings to the covers. The stamps used by private shipping lines generally only paid the postage from one port to the next one. For further transmission government stamps had to be added.

Ringström and Tester chose to include the La Chimba handstamp in their handbook as many collectors have considered it to be a privately run service. Obviously Julius Steindler shared that opinion when he assembled a very large collection of private ship mail. However, much suggests that the Correos de La Chimba was an official government post office although we don't really know how it worked.

Perhaps some reader is able to provide some more information?