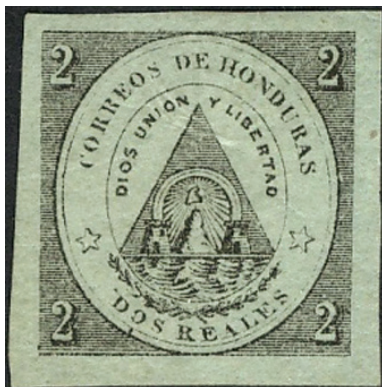


Fabulous Firsts: Honduras, Jan. 1, 1866

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Honduras No. 1



Honduras No. 2

The First Stamps of Honduras

by

Bertram W. H. Poole

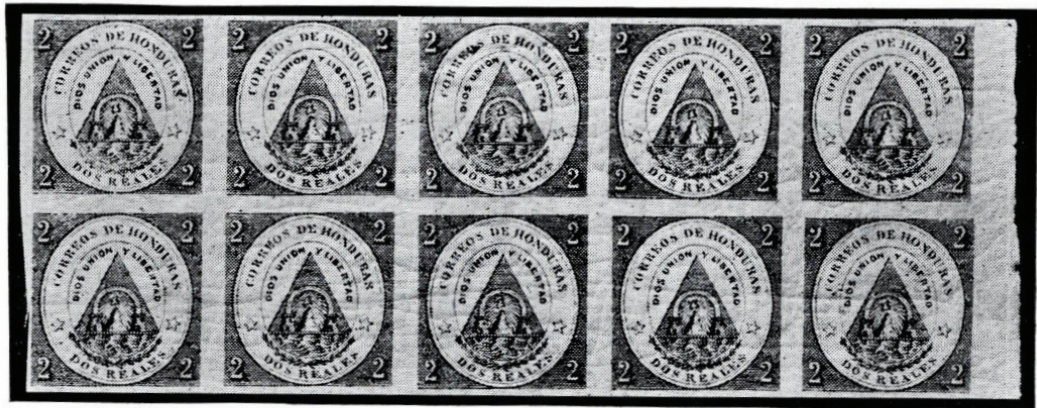
THE first issue of stamps for Honduras consisted of two labels of identical design and both printed in black, but one was on green and the other on rose paper. Both bore the value of 2 reales but were, apparently, always sold at half this value. They are said to have been issued on January 1st, 1866, but were announced in the philatelic journals some time before that date.

Shortly after issue their bona-fides were in question and it was not until about 1870 that it was satisfactorily proved they were legitimately issued postage stamps. The *Stamp Collector's Magazine* for August 1865, describes these stamps in the following interesting paragraph:

"The junction of another country to the postage-stamp-adopting ranks (how useful a long German compound word would be here!) is always an object of congratulation to the philatelic world, Honduras is the last aspirant for postal honours. We have before

us some of the first specimens issued, and can vouch for their genuine character on the faith of a well-known Liverpool firm, to whom all collectors are ready to attribute the good qualities of truth and honesty. From them we obtain information that the 'welcome little strangers' were designed by a gentleman in the consul's office, and executed by a Belgian firm. They were printed at first as essays in three colours, one only of each; rose, green and yellow. One value for all, 2 reales. The latter, consequently, is unique, the former two colours having been selected, and about three millions struck off and sent to the Honduras government, where they will be now just come into use. One colour only will be issued at first till exhausted, after which the other will come into play, until superseded in its turn by a *third* hue, and so on, every edition being different in colour.

"Like most of the Central American, and we wish the custom were more general, the device is figurative, but we cannot give the engraver much credit for his execution. The stamp is a xylograph, and altogether has but a poor appearance. The impression is very nearly square, printed in black on coloured paper. A broad oval occupies the centre, the rectangle being completed by transverse lines, on which appears the figure of value in each corner. A faint line bounds an inner oval containing a pyramid resting on the sea. Either the Bay of Honduras is particularly buoyant, or the bricks or stones of that territory marvellously light! This triangular anomaly forms the background to a pair of small turrets supporting an arch, beneath which the rising sun flames behind a rock topped by the cap of liberty. Over this is the legend DIOS UNION Y LIBERTAD. Encompassing this device is CORREOS DE HONDURAS, above; DOS REALES, below. Right and left of the lower angles of the pyramid is a star, and following the curved outline of the sea, a couple of branches. The pink is the precise tint of the 2gr., Oldenburg, second series; the green neither pea, apple, emerald, grass, or verdigris, but the undescribable shade last in fashion."



Block of ten of Honduras No. 1 on green paper from the author's collection.

The central device, so admirably described above, it is perhaps hardly necessary to state, forms the Arms of the republic. The motto "DIOS, UNION Y LIBERTAD" means "God, Union and Liberty" and a correspondent writing in the before mentioned magazine states that this explains the design i. e., "there is a triangle for DIOS; the two castles connected by the arch signifying UNION; and LIBERTAD being designated by the Cap of Liberty." With the two latter we are in complete agreement but DIOS is more probably represented by the rising sun. The triangular device refers to the pyramids—relics of an ancient civilization—found in many parts of the republic, and the mountain between the two turrets is probably intended to represent the volcano which forms the highest point in the country.

Although these stamps were inscribed 2 reales *Le Timbre Poste* for June 1866 stated that their actual value was 12½ centavos or 1 real and in support

of this contention the official decree authorising their emission and fixing the postal rates was published. This decree certainly directs that stamps of only one value, 12½ centavos, shall be sold and at the same time it established the following rates:

For a single rate letter	(¼ oz.)	1 real
For a double rate letter	(½ oz.)	2 reales
For a triple rate letter	(¾ oz.)	3 reales
For a quadruple rate letter	(1 oz.)	4 reales

The same journal also stated that though specimens had been distributed early in 1865 the stamps had no postal value until January 1st, 1866.

Shortly after this serious doubts were entertained as to the genuineness of these labels due, presumably, to the fact that though in different colours both bore the same denomination and, furthermore, that they were sold at half their face value. These doubts formed the subject of an interesting article in the *Stamp Collector's Magazine* for July 1867 and we reproduce this in its entirety viz:-

“There seems to us to be a considerable mystery about the stamps stated to have been issued for this country. They were known and sold here and on the Continent in March, 1865, but the decree authorising the emission of stamps was not signed until the 18th of October following, and that decree directs that the single rate of postage shall be 12½ cents or *one* real, whilst the stamps known as Honduras stamps bear the facial value of 2 reales. Moreover, we question very much if any *used* specimens of these stamps have ever been seen, and this is rather strange considering that they must have been current upwards of a year and a half. The decree itself is given in *Le Timbre Poste* and is worth studying. The preamble states that the president had recognised the necessity of modifying the postal tariff, and of adopting a new system. The first article then prohibits the reception of letters not bearing the necessary stamps; the second provides for the establishment, subordinately to the Treasury, of a depot for the sale of stamps, and for the vending of the same at 12½ cents each; the third gives to all persons the right to buy and use the stamps, and directs that the latter shall only be used once, and, to prevent their being used a second time, provides for their obliteration in the post-office; the fourth fixes the scale of weight, viz: ¼, ½, ¾ and 1 oz.: and the fifth declares the rates of postage viz: 1, 2, 3 and 4 reales for home letters of the above weights respectively; heavy letters, it is directed, are to be charged according to this scale, and the registration fee is fixed at 4 rls. to the pound. No letters are to exceed 10 lbs. in order that the march of the courier may not be impeded. Article 6th fixes the charge on letters for the other Central American republics at double that made for internal postage and to all other countries at triple the charge. Printed matter is to be carried at the rate of one real per pound. The articles thence up to 14 are of no especial interest. No. 14 suppresses a convention made on the 22nd of the previous August, establishing couriers in the districts, and another convention, establishing a postal tariff; and No. 15 declares that a certain convention of the 1st August 1856, shall remain in vigour, insofar as it does not clash with the present decree, which decree is stated to be given at Comayagua (the capital) at the government palace, the 18th October, 1865.

“The document accompanied a letter from a correspondent in Honduras to M. Moens, in which it is stated that the green and rose stamps are the only ones employed in that country, and are of the value of 12½c. each. Why their facial value should be double their actual value we cannot conjecture—unless the gentleman who designed the stamps was misinformed as to the price at which they were intended to be issued. We cannot help thinking, taking into account the non-arrival of obliterated specimens, that these

stamps, if they were ever used, must have been withdrawn on account of the error in denomination, after a very short currency. The stamps hitherto sold to collectors have come from the firm which in the first instance gave notice of their existence, and was fortunate enough to obtain a supply before their emission. We should like to know from them if they have since received any direct from Honduras, or if they are in possession of any further information concerning them. We make these enquiries, not because we for a moment doubt the integrity of the firm in question, or the genuine character of the stamps. Their statement is sufficient to prove that the stamps were actually designed and engraved for the purpose of being used to prepay postage of letters in Honduras. The statement of M. Moen's correspondent is also evidence of their reception there, but we have very little to show they were actually used there, and nothing to prove that they are in use now."

Later it was said that these stamps were "unknown in Honduras" and it was not until 1870 all suspicions were finally abandoned and it was proved beyond question that the stamps had been in use since 1866 and were then still current.

The only information we have as to the manufacture of these stamps is that they were designed by the Consul-general for the Republic and were printed in Belgium. This latter statement is particularly vague, but at this late date the chance of obtaining fuller information regarding the printers is rather obscure.

In Messrs. Collin and Calman's *Catalogue for Advanced Collectors* it is stated that these two stamps were typographed, while in the paragraph quoted from the *Stamp Collector's Magazine* we read "the stamp is a xylograph" i. e., a wood-engraving.

Owing to the courtesy of Messrs. Whitfield King & Co., of Ipswich, we have been able to examine a large number of entire sheets of both varieties. These consist of 120 impressions arranged in 12 horizontal rows of ten. The first thing to strike the eye on examining a sheet is that the space between the first five stamps of the 6th and 7th horizontal rows (the centre of the sheet) is much narrower than between any of the other rows. Further examination showed that the spaces between the 3rd and 4th, and 8th and 9th horizontal rows was also narrow while, vertically, the space dividing rows 6 and 7 was distinctly narrower than that between the other vertical rows. This seemed to show that the plate or stone, from which the stamps were printed, was composed of eight groups of 15 stamps each, and a careful scrutiny of the stamps proved this assumption to be correct.

Three stamps in each block of fifteen have distinguishing marks by which they can be identified in each of the eight blocks on a sheet viz:-

No. 4.—There is a short line or dot on the outer line of the oval, at the left, just above the star, and the inner line of the oval at the same point is broken.

No. 8.—There is an uncolored diagonal line through the centre of the "2" in the lower right hand corner.

No. 11.—The outer line of the oval is broken at the base, exactly in the centre.

Possibly there may be other differences we have failed to detect but the

three referred to are sufficient to prove our point that the sheets were composed of eight blocks of fifteen arranged as follows:-

1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15

The original die was possibly engraved on wood, as early accounts of these stamps would seem to indicate, and the next point to arise is that relating to the method of manufacture. Were fifteen electrotypes taken from the original die, clamped together, and then re-duplicated eight times, or, was a group of fifteen transfers made and applied eight times to a lithographic stone? Personally we lean to the opinion that lithography was the method of production though we are quite willing to admit that the question is open to discussion.

The stamps were printed on unwatermarked wove paper, colored right through, and they were issued imperforate. There were three distinct printings. Or, perhaps, we should say that among the sheets shown us by Messrs. Whitfield King & Co. we discovered evidence of three printings—possibly there may also have been others. These printings may be identified by flaws or defects peculiar to certain stamps and in the following notes we have tabulated the most prominent of these.

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Printing A.

The "No." numbers are the positions of those specific stamps on the sheet. Nos. run left to right, top row first, so that Position 1 would be the upper left stamp and Position 120 would be the lower right stamp. Studying the sheet of Scott 1 on page 8, the resolution was not high enough for me to pick out the characteristics described below and identify the printing from which it came. JFD.

- No. 6. There is a colored smudge above the E of CORREOS.
- No. 9. There is a colored line on the centre of the outer line of the oval at the left.
- No. 14. There is a colored dot between the lines of the oval opposite the star at the left.
- No. 17. There is a colored dot on the outer line of the oval above the E of CORREOS.
- No. 22. A line of color connects the ovals below the O of DOS.
- No. 24. There is a short line of color above the star at the right.
- No. 28. There is a small dot above the left arm of the Y in the motto.
- No. 31. An uncolored circular flaw is shown after the numeral 2 in the left lower corner.
- No. 40. There is a colored smudge below the letters CO of CORREOS.
- No. 42. There is a stop after LIBERTAD.
- No. 45. There is a dot outside the top frame line above the D of DE.
- No. 46. There is a similar dot below the base line under the space between EA of REALES.
- No. 48. A large colored dot connects the top of the L of REALES with the wreath above.
- No. 50. There is an uncolored semicircular flaw in the centre of the right hand border.
- No. 59. Has a small dot as in No. 46 but a little nearer the frame.
- No. 67. There are uncolored flaws above both numerals in the lower corners.
- No. 69. There is a colored dot to the right of the star at the right.
- No. 75. There is a colored dot before the C of CORREOS and another under the first O of the same word.
- No. 77. A large colored smudge is shown on the N of HONDURAS.
- No. 82. There is a dot outside the left border opposite the first O of CORREOS.
- No. 88. There is a circular flaw on the shading below the L of REALES.
- No. 90. There is a stop after LIBERTAD.
- No. 91. A small dot is attached to the top of the O of UNION.
- No. 92. A dot is attached to the right hand border 1mm. from its base.
- No. 93. There is a circular flaw after the figure 2 in the lower left corner.
- No. 94. A colored dot is shown above the D of DE.
- No. 99. There is a small flaw after and level with the base of the numeral in the top right corner.
- No. 100. A small dot closes the top of the N of HONDURAS.
- No. 103. There is a large colored dot below the left end of the wreath.
- No. 109. There is a large uncolored flaw after the numeral 2 in the upper left corner.
- No. 110. A large colored smudge appears before the figure 2 in the lower right corner.
- No. 113. There is a dot above the C of CORREOS.
- No. 119. There is a dot at the top of the space between DI of DIOS, and another and larger dot near the top of the right hand side of the pyramid.

Printing B.

- No. 14.* The colored dot is not shown.
No. 17. The colored dot does not show.
No. 24. The line does not appear.
No. 40. The smudge does not show.
No. 42. The stop is omitted.
No. 46. Has no dot at the base, but a large one is shown under the D of LIBERTAD.
No. 55. A colored dot joins the ovals in the centre of the right hand side.
No. 63. There is a large dot above the right hand end of the top border.
No. 75. The dots are not shown.
No. 77. The smudge does not appear but there is a large dot above the R of REALES.
No. 90. There is no dot.
No. 91. The dot is not shown.
No. 109. The flaw does not show.
No. 118. A large uncolored circular flaw is attached to the back of the figure 2 in the lower left corner.
No. 119. The large dot near the pyramid does not appear.

Printing C.

- No. 55.* The dot is not shown.
No. 69. There is a large uncolored flaw after the numeral in the top right corner.
No. 72. A large uncolored flaw is shown on the waves.
No. 77. The dot does not appear.
No. 82. This dot also does not show.
No. 90. There is a large dot above the E of CORREOS.
No. 111. The letters ON of UNION are badly damaged.
No. 118. The flaw is not shown.

The three printings were all made from the same stone and the above arrangement is a purely arbitrary one for there is nothing to prove in what order the printings were made. We have found all three printings in both the stamps on the green and rose papers. Specialists will, of course, require entire sheets to show the printings; but collectors of more moderate tastes will find the strip of three stamps from the right hand end of the bottom row quite sufficient to prove that the differences exist. In "A" the second stamp of the strip has a large dot on the right of the pyramid; in "B" this dot is not shown but the first stamp has a large flaw in the left lower corner; while in "C" neither the dot nor the flaw are shown.

What was the object of having stamps of the same value on both green and rose colored papers we cannot say. Messrs. Collin and Calman state that the green stamps were intended for internal and the rose for foreign correspondence, and B. T. K. Smith states exactly the reverse. Possibly at first there was some intention of apportioning the varieties to some definite use of this sort but it is certain that during the last few years they were in use either variety could be used as sweet fancy dictated.



