

World of Stamps: **Puerto Rico**

By Geir Sør-Reime



Aerial view of Fort San Felipe del Morro and Old San Juan

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has an area of 3,515 square miles and around 3.7 million inhabitants. It is an unincorporated territory of the United States.

Before Columbus found the island in 1493, it was inhabited by the Taino people. The island was colonized by Europeans from 1508 onwards. It remained under Spanish control until the Spanish-American War, when Spain ceded the island to the United States in 1898.

Just a year before the U.S. invasion, the Puerto Ricans had succeeded in achieving an autonomy status within Spain.

The U.S. invaded the island July 25, 1898. Until 1900, it was under military rule, but then, a civilian government was established.

Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917, and they have elected their own Governor since 1947. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a free associated state of the United

States, officially called the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Many Puerto Ricans are now opting for statehood for the island, only a small minority opts for full independence.

The first stamps used on Puerto Rico were the joint issues for Cuba and Puerto Rico, listed under Cuba in most catalogs. These joint issues were used 1855-1873, and were inscribed ULTRAMAR (Overseas). This inscription was retained on Cuban stamps until 1877.



Left, 1868, Cuba Sc. 32; right, 1871, Cuba Sc. 51



Left to right, stamps of Cuba overprinted in black: 1873, Puerto Rico Sc. 1; 1875 Sc. 6 and 7; 1876 Sc. 8

In 1873, several of these stamps were issued with manuscript overprints, being the signatures of the governor and the minister of finance of Puerto Rico.



1877, Sc. 15



1878, Sc. 19 proof



1879 Sc. 26

In 1877, key-type stamps featuring a portrait of King Alfonso XII were issued, inscribed PTO. RICO and the year 1877. In 1878, the inscription was changed to Pto. Rico and 1878, re-issued the following year with the year date 1879.



1880, Sc. 31 with
"Ultramar" Specimen overprint



1881, Sc. 54

PUERTO-RICO 1881 were issued in 1881.

In 1882, the same stamps were re-issued, but now without a year date.



1890, Sc. 91

only commemorative stamp was issued 1893, commemorating the 400th anniversary of Columbus' landing on Puerto Rico. This stamp was valid for only one day and on domestic correspondence only. It was designed and printed on the island.

A new design was introduced 1880, also featuring a portrait of King Alfonso XII, and now inscribed PUERTO-RICO 1880.

In 1881, the currency used on Puerto Rico was changed from Spanish Pesetas divided into Centimos, to Peso divided into Centavos. Stamps with the new currency, but in the same design and inscribed PUERTO-



1880, Sc. 34, block of 4



1883, Sc. 63, 65

In 1890, stamps featuring a portrait of the infant King Alfonso XIII were issued, also inscribed PUERTO-RICO. These were re-issued in changed colors 1891-92, and again 1893-94 and 1895-97.

Puerto Rico's only commemorative stamp was issued 1893, com-



1893, Columbus' Landing, Sc. 133



1898, Sc. 154

A new portrait of King Alfonso XIII was featured on new stamps issued 1898. The final issue of the Spanish administration of Puerto Rico were provisional overprints of previous stamp is-



1898 Provisional issue, Sc. 156

sues (in the 'baby' Alfonso XIII design) making them valid for postage again in 1898 and 1899.

In 1898, special war tax stamps were also issued, being 'Baby' Alfonso XIII stamps overprinted IMPUESTO DE GUERRA' (war tax).



1898 war tax, Sc. MR2



U.S. administration 1899 issue, Sc. 211

U.S. troops landed on Puerto Rico in 1898, and initially local provision-als were made in Ponce and Coamo in August. U.S. stamps overprinted PORTO RICO were introduced March 15, 1899.

In 1900, U.S. stamps overprinted PUERTO RICO were issued. U.S. postage due stamps were also issued with a PORTO RICO overprint in 1899.



1899 postage due, Sc. J1



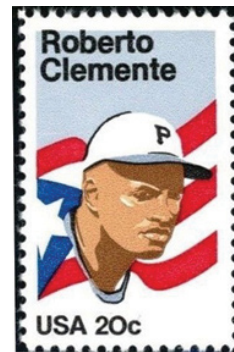
U.S. 1937, Sc. 801;
see also page 5

U.S. stamps have been used on Puerto Rico since. Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth in 1952, after having been granted autonomy in 1946.

In 1937, the territory of Puerto Rico was the subject of one of the U.S. territories stamps, featuring La Fortaleza in San Juan.



La Fortaleza, Natianal Heritage Site



Left to right, Luis Muños Marin, governor of Puerto Rico 1949-65, Sc. 2173; Julia de Burgos (1914-53), Puerto Rican poet and an advocate of Puerto Rican independence, Sc. 4476; Pittsburgh Pirates star Roberto Clemente, Sc. 2097; Actor José Ferrer, Sc. 4666

Puerto Ricans who have been honored on U.S. stamps include Luis Muñoz Marín, first Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, shown on one of the 1986-94 Great Americans stamps, the Marín 5¢ stamp was issued 1990.

The Puerto Rican baseball player Roberto Clemente was honored on a 1984 stamp, the poet Julio de Burgos on a 2010 stamp and the actor José Ferrer on a 2012 stamp.

The flag of Puerto Rico appeared on one of the 2011 Flags of Our Nation coil stamps.



2011 flag of Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Sc. 4318

The 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing was commemorated on a 1993 U.S. stamp.



1993 for 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in Puerto Rico, Sc. 2805

The first Spanish governor of Puerto Rico, Ponce de Leon, was commemorated on a 1982 stamp.



Sc. 1437, 1971 for 450th anniversary of San Juan showing Sentry Box at Morro Castle, San Juan.



The San Juan National Historic Site includes forts San Cristbal, San Felipe del Morro (photo), and San Juan de la Cruz (also known as El Cauelo), Paseo del Morro National Recreation Trail, plus bastions, powder houses, and three fourths of the city wall. All these fortifications surround the old, colonial portion of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Fort San Juan de la Cruz is located at Isla de Cabras at the western end of the entrance to San Juan Bay.



Sc. 2024, 1982 Ponce de Leon, first Spanish governor of Puerto Rico (and also led the first European expedition to Florida, which he in fact named)

In 1971, a U.S. stamp commemorated the 450th anniversary of San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico, showing a sentry box at the Morro Castle. The 450th anniversary was also commemorated by Spain, with a series of four stamps issued 1972.



Spain Sc. 200-03, 1972 for 450th anniversary of San Juan, Puerto Rico, and showing Brigadier M.A. de Ustariz (governor of Puerto Rico 1798-92), view of San Juan 1870, view 1625 and map of Plaza and Bay 1792 (Sc.1734-37)

The first popular election of the Puerto Rica governor took place in 1948, and a 1949 single stamp commemorated the inauguration of the first governor (Luis Muños Marin).



1949 for 1st gubernatorial elections in the territory, Sc. 983

A referendum held on Puerto Rico in November 2012 showed a slight majority for applying for U.S. statehood for the island.

Pro-independence groups have produced Cinderella stamps for various events relating to the island, including the illustrated one commemorating the birth centenary of Puerto Rican independence advocate Don Luis Moñoz Rivera (1859-1916).



Cinderella commemorating birth centenary of Don Luis Moñoz Rivera, independence advocate.



Aerovías Nacioales air mail labels

Recognizing the Puerto Rican airline, Aerovías Nacionales, Puerto Rico issued stamps for the carriage of items on their flights, in 1938 and 1941.

Also associated with Puerto Rico are the ship letter stamps purporting to originate from the *Clara Rothe* ship on the line St. Thomas (now in the U.S. Virgin Islands) and Puerto Rico. This line operated 1865-66, but the stamps did not appear until 1869. The stamps exist in several denominations. Probably, the stamps had been prepared for the actual service, but they were delayed and not delivered



Clara Rothe stamp; see also page 8



Complete set of Clara Rothe stamps (genuine). Forgeries are known.

until after Clara Rothe had been sold to the Haitian government.



The Clara Rothe as it was depicted on an 1864 Steamship stamp with the inscription "SAN TOMAS LA GUAIRA Pto CABELLO PAQUETE" for the steamship line that ran between St-Thomas (Danish Antilles) and La Guaira (Venezuela)

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