PANAMA
The Evolution of Postal Systems in Panama (1777 - 1881)
Spanish Colonial Period to Panama joining the UPU

Purpose and Importance
This postal history exhibit details the development of Panama's postal system from 1777 to 1881, when Panama joined the Universal Postal Union. Due to its unique geographical position, the Isthmus of Panama had major commercial and political influence in the 19th century, including enormous importance in the international mail system.

Historical Background
Explored and settled by the Spanish in the 16th century, a Spanish colonial jurisdiction in northern South America was created as the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada in May 27, 1717. It encompassed the modern nations of Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. Panama was incorporated into it in 1739.

Panama broke with Spain and became independent on November 21, 1821. It joined Nueva Granada, Ecuador and Venezuela in forming the Republic of Gran Colombia. Although Gran Colombia was dissolved in 1831, Panama and Nueva Granada remained together as the Republic of Colombia. Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903.

Exhibit Plan
Panama Mails 1777 -1866
Foreign Postal Agencies in Panama
Forwarding Agents
Via Panama
Via Panama - After Joining the UPU

☐ Denotes the most significant items  ★ Denotes Certificate attached
This chapter shows the beginnings of the mail system in Panama in the late 1700’s containing very elusive, and in many cases, unique items from the oldest towns in the region such as Panama, Chagres, Colon, Portovelo, Veragua, David and Nata

"PANAMA" Condensed marking - 1777

19 February 1777

Entire letter from PANAMA CITY to GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador

With paid endorsement “Franca a la mano” in manuscript and signed “Castano” with straight line condensed PANAMA marking in brownish ink.

THE EARLIEST RECORDED USAGE OF A PRESTAMP MARKING IN PANAMA

Only two covers with this condensed marking are known, both dated 1777
2 December 1808

Entire letter from PANAMA CITY to SANTA FE de BOGOTA

The entire struck with a PANAMA handstamp Type II and above, with a FRANCA handstamp, both in red.

Rated 5 Reales for a double letter up to 2 ounces. Rate dated December 4, 1770 published in the "Itinerario Real de Correo del Nuevo Reino de Granada"

**ONE OF THREE LETTERS WITH BOTH "PANAMA" AND "FRANCA" POSTMARKS KNOWN**

**ONLY 11 COVERS WITH THE "PANAMA" MARKING DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD ARE KNOWN**

The addressee, Camilo Torres, was a leader of the Revolutionary Forces, and was elected President of the United Provinces of Nueva Granada on November 15, 1815. He was captured and executed on October 5, 1816.
30 June 1809

Entire letter from PANAMA CITY to SANTA FE de BOGOTA
Rated 5 Reales for a double letter up to 2 ounces
Rate dated December 4, 1770 published in the
"Itinerario Real de Correo del Nuevo Reino de Granada"
The entire struck with PANAMA Type II handstamp and above it
with the patriotic handstamp "VYVA FERNANDO 7" in red

**ONLY EXAMPLE OF THIS PATRIOTIC MARKING KNOWN**

12 November 1816

Entire letter from PANAMA CITY to LIMA, Peru
Rated 4 Reales for a double letter up to 1 1/2 ounces
Rate dated December 4, 1770 published in the
"Itinerario Real de Correo del Nuevo Reino de Granada"
Entire letter from PANAMA CITY to LIMA, Peru
With Paquebot notation on lower right and a straight line PANAMA Type II marking in red

Entire letter from LIMA to CADIZ, Spain
Sent by ship to Panama, then across the Isthmus and mailed with a strike of PANAMA Type II in red, and hand-stripped “10R” arrival rating in red

On arrival in Spain, the 10R rate would seem to suggest that it has been treated as a second weight letter originating from Panama rather than from Peru
In 1819, Simon Bolivar creates the Republic of Gran Colombia which included the territories of present day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, northern Peru, western Guyana and northwest Brazil. The federation was abolished in 1831 and Venezuela, Ecuador and New Granada came to exist as independent states.

No Panama covers are known during the Gran Colombia period.

The Republic of New Granada was created after the dissolution of the Republic of Gran Colombia, now consisting of present day Colombia, Panama and smaller portions of today’s Ecuador and Venezuela. New Granada was transformed in 1858 to the Granadine Confederation.

11 September 1837

Entire letter from PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA
The letter was originally rated 2 Reales to CARTAGENA, but as the addressee was not found, the letter was sent to BOGOTA and the rate of 2 Reales was amended to 4 Reales

Undated letter from PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA
The letter was originally rated 4 Reales to BOGOTA, but as the addressee was not found, the letter was sent to POPAYAN and the rate of 4 Reales was amended to 5 Reales
"SMALL RED PANAMA STRAIGHT LINE" Postmark 1855-1856

THIS "SMALL RED PANAMA STRAIGHT LINE" MARKING, DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS PANAMA MARKING, WAS DEVELOPED BY THE US CONSULAR OFFICE IN PANAMA AND WAS IN USE FOR LESS THAN TWO YEARS

8 March 1855

From PANAMA CITY to NEW YORK
Struck with a "30" rating handstamp for the 30c American packet rate from Panama

ONLY 1 OF 5 RECORDED
"PANAMA FRANCO" and "PANAMA DE OFICIO" Postmarks 1835-1860

Before adhesive stamps came into use, it was necessary to indicate on the cover whether the franking amount was free, prepaid or had to be collected on delivery. In Panama it was customary to use rubber handstamps that read "Panama de Oficio" (free for government mail), "Panama Franco" when franking was prepaid, and "Panama Debe" when it had to be collected on delivery.

12 September 1838

PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA

Showing "PANAMA FRANCO" Type I (without stars) and "PANAMA DE OFICIO" handstamps - unique combination, there is no logical explanation for the use of both markings

This is the only known "PANAMA FRANCO" (prepaid) and "PANAMA DE OFICIO" (free) handstamp combination
4 February 1839

PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA

Registered cover with oval PANAMA/FRANCO in red, with hash marks around the edges and manuscript registration endorsement with “4” rating and additional “4 + 8 = 12” paid rate endorsement on the reverse of cover

*Showing “PANAMA FRANCO” - TYPE I (without stars)
Recorded use 1829 -1839 period (T&G 5)*

Scan at 70% of reverse of cover showing the rate paid

ONLY REGISTERED COVER OF THE PERIODRecorded
REPUBLIC OF NEW GRANADA

13 March 1842
PANAMA CITY via KINGSTON, Jamaica to LONDON, England
1½ Reales ship letter rate to Kingston (arrived on 5 May 1842) and then by British packet to London. Charged postage due 1/8d on arrival
Showing Red oval “PANAMA FRANCO” TYPE II (with stars)

9 July 1844
PANAMA CITY via KINGSTON, Jamaica to LONDON, England
Posted in Panama paying the local internal fee to port of 1 Real and then taken by private ship to Kingston where the circular PANAMA B.P.O. handstamp in Black and manuscript 1/- charge to be paid upon arrival was applied.
Showing Red oval “PANAMA FRANCO” Type II handstamp

30 June 1846
PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA
Showing Red oval “PANAMA FRANCO” Type II handstamp Red handstamp 4 complements the manuscript 4 Reales correct 1846 rate for a triple letter weight of 1 oz.

Letter sent to the President of Colombia Tomas C. de Mosquera
"PANAMA DEBE" Postmark 1842-1866

The "PANAMA DEBE" postmark was used to indicate that the postage had to be collected on delivery

21 January 1842

PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA
Originally addressed to BOGOTA, changed to CARTAGENA or BARRANQUILLA prior to mailing.
Sent as DEBE (DUE) for 1 1/2 Reales single rate up to 1/2 oz. to another province

30 May 1846

PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA
Sent as DEBE (DUE) for 4 Reales triple rate up to 1 oz. to another province
8 March 1855

PANAMA CITY to BOGOTA
With oval handstamp “panama debe” (DUE) and 15 Ctvs. decimal single letter charge indication

29 February 1868

PARIS via LONDON, SANTA MARTA, COLON, PANAMA CITY to BUENAVENTURA

Paid French 1 Fr. single rate from Paris to Buenaventura with “LONDON PAID” Transit cds marked “PP” (Paid to Port) and “SANTA MARTA DEBE” (first port of entry into Colombia). Sent to Colon, and marked ULTRAMAR and PANAMA/DEBE in Panama City. Also marked “10” amount due on arrival in Buenaventura.
The "PANAMA DE OFICIO" postmark was used to indicate that the postage was free for official government mail.

11 August 1846

Letter sent "DE OFICIO" from PANAMA CITY to SAN CARLOS
Official correspondence to a Circuit Judge in San Carlos, located in South central Panama. Only reported cover to San Carlos
30 June 1852

Ecclesiastic correspondence "DE OFICIO" from PANAMA CITY to VERAGUAS
Veraguas is located in Southeast Panama
**“CHAGRES” Postmark**

29 November 1790

Sent from CHAGRES without postal markings Addressed to “Mr. Robert Hodgson” “If he should stop at Corn Islands” (Nicaragua)

**EARLIEST KNOWN COVER FROM CHAGRES**

7 August 1840

CHAGRES via KINGSTON to LONDON, England

Entire letter with Kingston, Jamaica transit backstamp. Manuscript rating “1/- + 11 d from CHAGRE = 1/11” deleted by London inspector “crown” handstamp and amended to “2/3” which was the correct rate from Panama to England in 1840.
“CHAGRES FRANCA” Postmark 1840 - 1850

27 August 1840

CHAGRES to PANAMA CITY
Postage paid 1 Real correct single letter rate within PANAMA

21 November 1844

CHAGRES to BOGOTA
Postage paid 4 Reales triple rate up to 1 oz. to another province
Unique letter with this postmark sent outside of PANAMA

ONLY TWO COVERS WITH “CHAGRES FRANCA” POSTMARK RECORDED
“DEBE CHAGRES” Postmark 1850

28 August 1850

CHAGRES to PANAMA CITY
Postage paid 1 Real correct single letter rate within PANAMA

18 September 1850

CHAGRES to PANAMA CITY
Postage due 1 Real correct single letter rate within PANAMA

ONLY TWO COVERS WITH “DEBE CHAGRES” POSTMARK RECORDED
“SANTA FE” Prior to PORTOVELO Postmark 1779 - 1816

Partial scan of letter at 60% showing PORTOVELO origin

4 December 1804

Sent from PORTOVELO to AZPEITIA, Spain

 Entire letter probably carried via HAVANA-CORUNA, rated by hand “6rs” as per an unpaid single letter rate. Bearing a fine and clear strike of Italic “SANTA FE”, being handstamped in PORTOVELO prior to the usage of PORTOVELO handstamps.

The only item recorded exhibiting the “SANTA FE” postmark applied in Panama, as well as one of just two covers known with this handstamp used outside of Santa Fe de Bogota

The SANTA FE postal district (Nueva Granada Viceroyalty) comprised territories in present-day Colombia and Panama. The “SANTA FE” postmark was not only used at SANTA FE de BOGOTA, but also in the area of Santa Fe, as stipulated by postal rules of 1st September 1779

“PORTOVELO” Postmark 1816 - 1850

16 February ’816

Sent from PORTOVELO to PANAMA

Entire letter from Portovelo to Panama, distance 26 loagucos / 146 kilometers. Struck with contracted PORTOVELO handstamp in red-brown.

No notation of rate, but under ¼ ounce and thus postage would have been ½ real.

THE EARLIEST RECORDED USAGE OF THIS HANDSTAMP

20 February 1633

Sent from PORTOVELO to CARTAGENA and re-directed to POPAYAN.

Marked 1½ Reales manuscript single letter rate for a distance from Panama to Cartagena. Readdressed to Popayan and the rate amended to 4 Reales DEBE (Due) as indicated by the oval “REPUBLICA DE COLOMBIA CARTAGENA DEBE” postal marking to cover the distance of more than 300 leagues (1,667 Kilometers) from Panama to Popayan

LESS THAN 5 COVERS WITH THIS “PORTOVELO” POSTAL MARKING KNOWN
VERAGUA to PANAMA CITY
30 August 1847

VERAGUA to PANAMA CITY
Paid 3 Reales for 1 1/2 oz.

VERAGUA to DAVID
Endorsed “3/4 de onza. Su porte dos réis cincuenta Cs. 2-50”, with single oval VERAGUA/DEBE in red deleted and replaced by double oval VERAGUA/DE/OFICIO also in red

The “DE OFICIO” postmark was used to indicate that the postage was free for official government mail.

The “FRANCA” postmark was used to indicate that the postage was prepaid.

“VERAGUA FRANCA” Postmark 1850-1855
9 November 1850
Entire letter from DAVID to SANTIAGO
With double oval DAVID/DE/OFICIO in black

Santiago was the principal town in the Province of Veragua

A VERY RARE MARKING
TO DATE ONLY TWO EXAMPLES HAVE BEEN RECORDED

Entire letter from DAVID to VERAGUA
With double oval DAVID/DE/OFICIO in black
Paid 16 Reales for 8 oz.
18 February 1851

Official Judicial correspondence from NATA to VERAGUA
Paid 4 Reales for 2 oz.

Note that FRANCA has been deleted (top right)

10 April 1851

A VERY RARE MARKING
TO DATE JUST THREE EXAMPLES OF THE NATA MARKING HAVE BEEN RECORDED

Official Judicial correspondence from NATA to VERAGUA
Endorsed "14 1/2 oz. valor 29 rs" with straight line NATA in black partly framed possibly from the edges of the cancelling device
16 March 1848

Sent from LOS SANTOS to SANTIAGO

Judicial correspondence to SANTIAGO, the principal town in the Province of Veraguas

Endorsed 1 oz 2rs and in black manuscript “de ofo” underneath, meaning De Oficio (Free Postage)

ONE OF ONLY TWO RECORDED EXAMPLES OF THE “LOS SANTOS” MARKING
Letters carried privately to COLON and then put on the national post to Bogota and Cartagena

Showing large circular "ADMINISTRACION DE CORREOS COLON"
handstamp in Red, sent as DEBE (DUE) 15 Centavos
The DEBE is misspelled "DABE"

2 OF 4 FOUR KNOWN LETTERS WITH THE MISSPELLED "DABE"
On May 22, 1858, the Granadine Confederation was created, conformed by eight Sovereign States. The Confederation came to an end on May 8, 1863 officially changing its name to United States of Colombia, consisting of nine Sovereign States, one of which was Panama.

“COLON FRANCA” Postmark

4 April 1859

BOGOTA via CARTAGENA and COLON to NEW YORK, USA

Forwarded by C.J.FOX of Aspinwall (COLON)

Showing large circular “ADMINISTRACION DE CORREOS COLON” handstamp in Red.

Sent as “FRANCA” (Paid) 15 Centavos

6 July 1859

CARTAGENA via COLON to NEW YORK, USA

by Forwarding Agents Francisco de Zubiria of Cartagena and C.J.FOX of Aspinwall (Also known as Colon).

Showing Red circular COLON Post Office “FRANCA” (Paid) handstamp

C.J. Fox was an official agent of the Colombian Post Office, as can be seen from the top cover, which was handled by the Bogota Post Office
24 April 1860

CALI via CARTAGENA and COLON to NEW YORK, USA

Franked with a 5c grey-blue and a 20c blue 1859 Colombia stamps, tied by oval CALI cancel

The 25c franking pays a double letter rate for up to 1350 kilometers in distance

Showing Red COLON Post Office “FRANCA” (Paid) handstamp.

The letter was forwarded to New York by C.J. Fox of Aspinwall (COLON)

ONLY 1 of 2 of the 1859 COLOMBIA 25 Centavos USED STAMP ON COVER KNOWN
Oval “COLON” Postmark
29 September 1863

From BARRANQUILLA via CARTAGENA and COLON
and then by US Steamship to NEW YORK.
Showing a “COLON” handstamp and “40” incoming ship rate

ONLY OVAL “COLON” POSTMARK KNOWN

RED “PAID AT COLON” CROWN CIRCLE
22 April 1868

From COLON to CARTAGENA
Showing a “PAID AT COLON” red crown circle and a 2/8d, British 8-times rate for
3.5 and 3.99 ounces. The Colombian charge of “9” signifies 9 Reales or 90c for a
weight of 81 to 90 grams - difference probably due to the use of different scales

LESS THAN 5 “PAID AT COLON” RED CROWN CIRCLE POSTMARKS KNOWN
II. FOREIGN POSTAL AGENCIES IN PANAMA

II. a. BRITISH POST AGENCY 1842 - 1921

PANAMA CITY AGENCY

PRE-STAMP PERIOD

Although Panama was discovered in 1502, it was the opening up of the trans-Pacific trade and the settlement of California that brought importance to the Isthmus. It was preferable to take an overland journey from Colon to Panama to reach the Pacific rather than risk the journey around the Horn.

To handle the mail in the area, several countries, the most important being the British and the French, established agencies to forward mail originating in the district or in transit.

The British Postal Agencies in Chagres and Panama City were opened in 1842, and in Colon (Aspinwall) in 1852. Chagres was closed in 1855, and the other two on March 31, 1921.

This section is organized in chronological order.

20 January 1842

From LIMA, Peru via PANAMA CITY and KINGSTON, Jamaica to EDINBURGH, Scotland

Showing undated “PANAMA” arc handstamp applied in KINGSTON, Jamaica as reference of origin.

Marked 2/- double the 1/- uniform rate by British packet to be paid on arrival

It is interesting to note that the undated circular PANAMA double arc cancel was sent to Kingston Jamaica on 13 September 1841 to denote origin beyond or at Panama, and thus facilitate the application of the correct postage charge upon arrival at destination.

EARLIEST KNOWN USAGE OF THIS HANDSTAMP
This undated circular SOUTH AMERICA / VIA PANAMA cancel was sent to Kingston, Jamaica on 13 September 1841 to denote origin beyond or at Panama, and thus facilitate the application of the correct postage charge upon arrival at destination.

Entire from LIMA via PANAMA CITY to LONDON
Bearing on reverse manuscript “PANAMA, July 1842/forwarded by/ Fr. W. Byrne”
With 2/- charge marking and circular SOUTH AMERICA/VIA PANAMA handstamp

Below:
Reverse of cover showing Forwarder handstamp and KINGSTON, JAMAICA circular datetamp.

From LIMA via PANAMA CITY and JAMAICA to LONDON
Forwarded in PANAMA by “FREDERIC W. BYRNE” and sent via KINGSTON, Jamaica to LONDON.
From BOGOTA via PANAMA CITY to COURS, France.
Handed by Forwarding Agent Louis LEWIS of Panama sent by British Post Office via KINGSTON, Jamaica to London and from there via PARIS to its final destination.
Showing the SOUTH AMERICA / VIA PANAMA handstamp applied in Kingston, and charged 17 decimes postage due on delivery.

From LIMA via PANAMA CITY and JAMAICA to LONDON
Handled by PANAMA Forwarding Agent “FREDERIC W. BYRNE” sent via KINGSTON, Jamaica SHIPLETTER to LONDON Postage. Due 2/8 Shillings (1/- British Packet Lima to Panama + 8d private ship to Kingston + 1/- British Packet to Southampton).
16 August 1845

PANAMA CITY via KINGSTON to LONDON
With manuscript 1/ Shilling single-weight postage due indication

ONLY THREE RED PANAMA UNDATED DOUBLE CIRCLE MARKINGS ARE KNOWN

The PANAMA undated double circle was applied in KINGSTON, Jamaica, to facilitate the application of the correct postage charge upon arrival at destination
From TACNA via CALLAO and PANAMA CITY to BORDEAUX
Showing Colonies Art. 13 accountancy marking
and 20 centimes postage due paid on delivery

THIS IS THE SECOND EARLIEST
RECORDED USAGE OF THIS
PANAMA DOUBLE ARC CIRCLE
DATE STAMP

Orange Anglo-French accountancy mark for unpaid
letter from the United Kingdom to France, accounted
for by letter bill article 13, under which the United Kingdom
received 3S 4d per 30 gm. bulk letter weight from France

Scans at 100%
LIVERPOOL via PANAMA CITY to LIMA

Sent on PSNC ship “Ecuador”, left Panama 24 April, arrived in Callao on 7 May 1847. With manuscript “1/6” triple letter rating and the red “PANAMA” double arc datestamp as well as the red “PAID AT PANAMA” crown circle

**THIS IS THE EARLIESTRecorded USAGE OF THIS RED “PAID AT PANAMA” CROWN CIRCLE MARKING**

**LESS THAN 10 COVERS WITH THIS RED “PAID AT PANAMA” CROWN CIRCLE MARKING KNOWN**

The red “PAID AT PANAMA” crown circle handstamp was sent by the British General Post Office on August 24, 1846. Parmenter’s book has the earliest date of use as 24 June 1847, and Rarity D (Not common)
PROVISIONAL “TRANSIT” HANDSTAMP

In use from early April to late July 1848

April 1848

COPIAPO via PANAMA to BIRMINGHAM, England
Endorsed “via Panama” and “para Inglaterra”. 1 1/2 applied in Copiapo paying domestic postage and domestic sea mail to Valparaiso, where it entered the British mail stream. Arrived in Panama on April 25, 1848. Received in London on July 3, 1848, forwarded to Birmingham where it arrived on June 4, 1848. Marked 2/- letter rate for 1/2 ounce established on 23 October 1845 to and from locations on the West Coast of South America.

Specific postal markings to denote the Panama Transit mails were requested from the London Foreign Office in early June 1848. These handstamps were sent to the British Agent in Panama for use at that office, arriving in late July 1848. In the meantime, however, the British Agent in Panama arranged for the fabrication of a handstamp to denote those letters that arrived at that Office in the open mails aboard the Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSNC) vessels which were addressed to the United Kingdom.

A rare provisional Panama TRANSIT marking in use for just a few months on open mail letters transiting Panama following the 16 March 1848 Postal Convention between the UK and New Granada.

ONLY SIX LETTERS ARE KNOWN WITH THE PROVISIONAL “Transit” HANDSTAMP.
27 February 1849

PANAMA CITY to LIMA, Peru
Marked with a “2” to signify double rated cover
With “1/-” manuscript rating and the red “PAID AT PANAMA” crown circle

23 January 1852

LONDON via PANAMA CITY to LIMA
Cover privately carried to Panama City and then mailed to Lima.
Showing the red “PAID AT PANAMA” crown circle and a “1/-” charged in Panama City
8 September 1852

NEW YORK (?) via PANAMA CITY and VALPARAISO TO SANTIAGO, Chile

Marked "50" and "PAID" for the ½ oz. rate sent to Chile via US packet to Panama and then to Valparaiso. (Rate in effect May 1851 to October 1853 when it was reduced to 48 cents.) The upper left "1½" denotes the payment due by the USA to the British P.O. for the British portion of the journey. Also showing the British red crown circle PAID AT PANAMA and the British P.O. backstamp.

On arrival in Chile it was charged "1½" Reales for incoming sea mail to port charge (single letter) and "2" Reales for the ongoing journey from Valparaiso to Santiago totalling "3½" Reales
15 March 1853

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY to VALPARAISO, Chile
Endorsed “Via Panama” and “Paid” in manuscript.
With USA “PAID” and British red crowned circle “PAID AT PANAMA” handstamps.

30 August 1853

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA to LIMA, Peru
Stampless letter, rated 32 Cents and a straight line “PAID”, sent via the British Post Office in Panama, where it received the Red Crown Circle “PAID AT PANAMA” with the cds. of Sept 6, 1853 on the reverse. Rated 6d. in red for the postage to LIMA, Peru, where it was charged “1” for the internal delivery.
22 September 1855

From PANAMA CITY via COLON and CALAIS to PARIS, France.
Showing the Colonies Art. 13 Accountancy marking
as well as October 11, 1855 Calais AMB CDS
15 decimes arrival charge was paid by the addressee

COLON Red Double Arc Datestamp is uncommon
ONLY 4 ARE KNOWN
26 August 1849

From CHAGRES via England 2 October 1849 and then via Calais to PARIS, France. Showing the Colonies Art. 13 Accountancy marking, a Calais CDS and a 15 décimes charge to the addressee

1 of 3 CHAGRES POSTMARKS KNOWN

The CHAGRES CDS date slug is inverted
ONLY ONE KNOWN
Before the organization of the U.P.U. most Latin American countries had no means to transport their mail prepaid to Europe. To meet the need the British postal service introduced a packet service and provided a means for letters to be prepaid, which at its peak, serviced 39 cities worldwide with British consulates.

In order to prevent the growing practice of illegal transmission of letters, the British General Post Office allocated special obliterators to each city. These barred cancels incorporated one letter and a pair of numbers. Two obliterators were allocated to Panama: “C35” for Panama and “E88” for Colon. Many stamps exist with the “E88” obliterator, however very few covers have been reported to date.

25 June 1867

From LIMA via PANAMA CITY to SCHWERIN, Germany

Cover endorsed “per steamer via Panama” was most likely given directly to a ship captain, with the 1/- stamp already attached for travel only as far as England, and the ship captain has simply handed it over to the British postal agency in Panama City.

The cover has the three line PANAMA/TRANSIT datestamp, and the stamp has been cancelled with the “C35” handstamp. It was also marked INSUFFICIENTLY/PREPAID in Panama with a manuscript “1/5”

The “1/5” rating was crossed out in London and amended to “1/3”. The 16 blue Groschen marking is postage due to Britain, and the 25 blue Groschen marking shows the postage due from the addressee on delivery

“C35” Panama Obliterator

First sent by the G.P.O. on 26 January 1865

Earliest use: 20 March 1866
22 April 1869

PANAMA CITY via LONDON to MELBOURNE, Australia
Correct postage to England of 1/- and from England to Australia 6 Pence less 1 Pence for non-delivery in the U.K.
Franked with a 1/- Plate 4, a 4p Plate 11 and a 1p Plate 1 stamps cancelled with a “C 35” Panama obliterator
6 July 1869 arrival CDS shown on reverse

5 December 1871

PANAMA CITY to LIMERICK, Ireland
Correct postage of 1/-
Franked with a 1/- stamp, Plate 5 cancelled with a “C 35” Panama obliterator
11 January 1872 arrival CDS shown on reverse
From LIMA via PANAMA CITY to JALAPA, Mexico

Franked with a 10 Centavos Peru stamp to pay for Peru’s foreign mail tax of 1 Dinero per rate step plus 2x 3 Pence GB stamps of Plate 12, one with lower margin with inscription, cancelled by “C35” in Panama, to cover 6 Pence PSNC rate from Peru to Panama.

Also showing large “25” (Centavos) to be paid on arrival by the addressee

With a manuscript note:
“PORTE INGLES PAGADO”
(British Postage Paid)
An unusual occurrence:

For expediency, French mail was handled by the British Post Office instead of the French Post office

From PANAMA CITY via LONDON to PARIS, France
Correct postage 1/3 to France less 1 Pence for non-delivery in the U.K.
Franked with 1/- Plate 10 and 2 Pence Plate 4 stamps cancelled by “C35” British Post Office Panama

1 March 1875

From LIVERPOOL via SOUTHAMPTON to PANAMA
Incoming cover to Panama, endorsed "per West India Mail via Southampton / Book Post" with GB 1859-79 1d red Plate 159 tied by Liverpool cds
The Book Post was instituted in 1848, and the overseas rates were reduced in 1870 to 1d per two ounce weight.
12 November 1875

From LIMA Peru via PANAMA CITY to NEWARK, England

Correct rate for a weight of 11 to 13 adarmes (step 5)
Franked with GB 4 x 6 Pence stamps, Plate 14 cancelled by “C35” British Post Office Panama handstamp

2 January 1876

PARIS via LIVERPOOL and COLON to CARACAS, Venezuela
Franked with 2 Francs in French stamps

Showing fancy “COLON” handstamp
ONLY 5 KNOWN
5 January 1876

From CALLAO via PANAMA CITY and NEW YORK to Greensboro

Triple rate letter franked with a 6d pair Great Britain and a single 6d, Plate 14, tied with a “C35” Panama cancellation, with a mixed franking pair 5 Cent strip of three United States Scott 179 tied with a N. York Steamship cancellation, all on the reverse. Showing PANAMA A circle datestamp

5 October 1876

From CALLAO via PANAMA CITY and NEW YORK to GREENSBORO

Double rate letter franked with 2x Great Britain 6d, Plate 14, tied with a “C35” Panama cancellation, with a mixed franking pair 5 Cent United States Scott 179 with a N. York Steamship cancellation. Showing PANAMA A circle datestamp

LESS THAN 10 BRITISH AND UNITED STATES MIXED FRANKING COVERS ORIGINATING IN CALLAO, PERU ARE KNOWN

British Postage Callao to Panama 6P per 1/2 oz.
U.S. Postage Panama to addressee 5 cents per 1/2 oz.
JIPIJAPA, Ecuador to ST. THOMAS, U.S. Virgin Islands
via Forwarding Agent in MANTA, Ecuador to PANAMA CITY
and from there by British Post Office 20 Dec 1877
to ST. THOMAS, Danish Virgin Islands
28 Dec 1877 arrival CDS shown on top

Panama to St. Thomas British local Caribbean rate was 4P.
Franked with a GB 4 Pence stamp, Plate 15, cancelled by “C35” of Panama
24 February 1879

MONTECRISTI, Ecuador to ST. THOMAS, Danish Virgin Islands via PANAMA CITY Forwarding Agent and British Post Office Panama
7 March 1879 to ST. THOMAS, U.S. Virgin Islands
Panama to St. Thomas local Caribbean rate was 4P.
Franked with a GB 4 Pence stamp, Plate 16, cancelled by “C35” of Panama

11 October 1880

From PANAMA CITY to BRETFORTON, England
Seaman’s letter with a strip x4 GB 1 reds to pay the reduced Seaman’s rate of 4d for a letter under 1/2 ounce. The stamps are cancelled with the PANAMA-TRANSIT -C35 cds duplex (20 Oct) marking.

This PANAMA-TRANSIT cds duplex cancel was sent from the GPO to Panama on April 8, 1880 as is recorded as being used from August 30, 1880 to July 5, 1892. It is given a “very rare” rating on cover by Parmenter in his “GB Used Abroad” book.
MANCHESTER, England via Southampton to SAN JOSE, Puerto Rico franked with a 1 Shilling stamp, but MISSENT to San Jose, Costa Rica and held there for insufficient postage.

With 14 January 1873 "Admon. Gnal. de Correos de Costa Rica" handstamp, repeated 5 April 1873 with 4 Pence GB stamp cancelled with barred "E88" of COLON, via ST. THOMAS 13 April 1873 and 23 April COLON Transit, arriving finally in San Jose 17 May 1873.

A single letter rated Postage Due paid by 25 Cents Cuban stamp to be collected upon arrival

(At right the notification letter of the Costa Rica Post Office)

Three Country Combination Usage

"E88" COLON Obliterator
First sent by the G.P.O. on 14 April 1870
Earliest use: 21 September 1871

1 of 10 RECORDED ON COVER
John Parmenter's book rates the rarity as "G" Very Rare

Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua are known to have maintained a Postal Agent in Panama to facilitate the handling of outgoing and incoming mails.

All basic mail from Costa Rica to other countries had to be franked with a 2r stamp. On rare occasion, when it was requested that the letter be prepaid to its destination, then the necessary additional fee was charged in cash at the post office and the Postal Agent in Panama was instructed to add the British postage when forwarding the cover.

Another minor task of the Agent was to cancel stamps on mail that had bypassed the Post Office system in Costa Rica.
The French Postal Agency operated in PANAMA CITY as of December 17, 1843 when the Consul General of France to Panama arrived in Panama with all the material required to operate the Agencies. The Agency was closed on July 1, 1881, when Colombia joined the Universal Postal Union.

6 June 1844

PANAMA CITY to LIMA
Cover sent to the Charge de Affaires of France in Lima, with indication Service du Roi. Sent on the ship Carolina, departing Panama on 7 June 1844, arriving in Callao on 19 July, 1844.

Official correspondence - no French mail rate applied

EARLIEST KNOWN PANAMA FRENCH POSTAL AGENCY CANCELLATION
29 June 1844

PANAMA CITY to LIMA

Showing French Red “PANAMA CDS” dated 29 June 1844
and Red boxed P.P. (Postage Paid to Port) handstamp
Paid 2 Reales Panama to Lima

4 December 1844

LIMA, via PANAMA CITY and SOUTHAMPTON and CALAIS to BORDEAUX, France
Paid 6 Reales in LIMA as shown on reverse. Showing French Post Office in
PANAMA date handstamp, and charged with 37 Centimes on delivery
14 November 1846

PARIS via PANAMA CITY to LIMA, Peru
Endorsed “Voie a Panama, Packets anglais”
With “P.P.” Postage Paid and PARIS handstamp.
Also showing PANAMA French Postal Agency datestamp

11 July 1847

From CALLAO via PANAMA CITY to ROCHEFORT, France.
Showing French Panama Red HANDSTAMP
with ERROR of date “43” instead of “47”.
Paid 36 Centimes upon arrival.
1 September 1866

PANAMA CITY to ROCHEFORT-SUR MER, France

Letter was readdressed on arrival and charged
12 decimes postage due on delivery

23 August 1867

PAITA, Peru Via PANAMA CITY and COLON to PARIS, France
Showing PANAMA 3 line transit 30 August 1867
Charged 24 decimes postage due on delivery
From LIMA via CALLAO and PANAMA CITY to BORDEAUX, France
Sent by French Paquebot “MARTINIQUE” on 1/11 arriving in ST.NAZAIRE
on 22/11 and from there to BORDEAUX
Franked with a 1 Diner Green stamp of Peru
Showing “BG 1F 90c” accountancy mark and 12 décimes postage due

From GUAYAQUIL via PANAMA CITY to PARIS, France
by French Paquebot “EUGENIE” on 8/1, Forte de France 8/8
and St. Nazaire on 8/23 and then to PARIS
Charged with 24 Centimes upon arrival.
The ASPINWALL (COLON) French Postal Agency was created as of September 1865 with Note of June 1865 (Bulletin des Postes No. 118) introducing two stopovers of the Line A from St. Nazaire to Aspinwall/Colon. The Agency was closed on July 1, 1881, when Colombia joined the Universal Postal Union.

12 December 1868

From GUATEMALA via ASPINWALL (COLON) to PARIS, France sent by French Paquebot “Floride” on 1 Jan., Fort de France 10 Jan. arriving in St. Nazaire on 25 Jan. and in Paris on 26 Jan (arrival CDS on reverse of cover) Charged 10 decimes postage due on delivery

Aspinwall was founded by Americans in 1850 as the Atlantic terminus of the Panama Railroad then under construction to meet the gold rush demand for a fast route to California. The United States emigree community called the town “ASPINWALL”, in honor of Mr. W.H. Aspinwall (1807-1875), the promoter of the Panama Railroad. The hispanic community called it “COLON” in honor of Christopher Columbus. The city was formally named “COLON” in 1890.
From ASPINWALL (COLON) to PARIS, France
sent by French Paquebot "Imp. Eugenie" on 11 May, Fort de France 15 May arriving
in St. Nazaire on 31 May and in Paris on 6 June (arrival CDS on reverse of cover)
Franked with a French 80 Centimes stamp and showing
Red boxed P.D. indicating letter was Paid to Destination

From ASPINWALL (COLON) to PARIS, France by French Paquebot "FLORIDE" on 4 June 1870, Fort de France on
9 June, St. Nazaire on 23 June and Paris 24 June 1870
Unpaid cover, charged 10 decimes on delivery
From CHIMBOTE, Peru to PARIS, France
Via HUACO, endorsed “via Panama” with 1881 PLATA/GENDO silver currency overprints on pair 1c and pair 5c. Sent from ASPINWALL (COLON) on Paquebot “Lafayette” 2 Feb, Fort de France on 10 Feb arriving in St. Nazaire on 26 Feb and from there to Paris on 27 Feb.

The 12c “via Panama” rate was in use from the introduction of the silver currency until sometime in 1881

20 April 1881

From LIMA, Peru to PARIS, France
Mourning cover endorsed “via Panama” with 1881 PLATA/LIMA silver currency overprints on single 1c and pair 5c tied by LIMA/PRINCIPALS cds’s (20 April), underfranked by 1c.

Sent from ASPINWALL (COLON) on Paquebot “Washington” on 1 May, Fort de France on 8 May arriving in St. Nazaire on 23 May and from there to Paris on 24 May
Postal historians are well aware of the important part played by Forwarding Agents in the handling of foreign mail during the period prior to the establishment of the Universal Postal Union. Except for the countries which had reciprocal treaties for the exchange of mail, Forwarding Agents were utilized extensively for the dispatch of mail from one country to another. The earliest recorded Forwarded Agent endorsement is Lamfranchi from the port of Anversa in Italy in 1579* and the latest recorded is Santiago Hernandez, of Santa Marta, Colombia in 1912.*

With the exception of a few larger ports such as New York, London and Hamburg, nowhere in the entire globe did the Forwarding Agent play such an important role as in Panama. Packet lines, first sailing vessels and then steamships of many nations converged on Panama from both the Atlantic and the Pacific. Panama became the most important trans-shipment point in the Western Hemisphere for mail to and from the west coasts of North and South America.

This section shows representative examples of covers handled by Forwarding Agents in Panama. Although some covers shown in this section show multiple Forwarders, the emphasis is on Forwarding Agents that operated in Panama during the period. The section is organized first by the cities in which they operated, and then alphabetically by last names.

From SANTA MARTA, Colombia by Forwarding Agent “HAUER SIMMONDS” to COLON and from there by AGENT “E.& H. ABRAHAMS & Co.” to NEW YORK

* "The Postal History and Markings of the Forwarding Agents" - Kenneth Rowe 1996
11 July 1871

COLON to NEW YORK
Forwarded by Agent Jose A. Cespedes in COLON
and sent by US Steamship to NEW YORK

1 of 2 covers reported from this Forwarder

13 October 1860

From BOGOTA via COLON to NEW YORK
Handled by Forwarding Agent “T.R.COWAN” of COLON
SANTA MARTA via COLON to NEW YORK
Handled by Forwarder "J.B.DONALISIO & Bros" from COLON
Less than 5 covers known from this Forwarder

CARTAGENA via ASPINWALL (COLON) to NEW YORK
Forwarded by “Geo W. FLETCHER” of ASPINWALL
Struck with rare circular N.YORK - STEAMSHIP in black
With 40 Cents Steamship charge to be paid upon arrival
22 February 1859

CARTAGENA via ASPINWALL to NEW YORK
Letter handled by 2 Forwarding Agents Antonio Merlano and Ramon Leon Sanchez of CARTAGENA and then by Forwarding Agent C.J.FOX of ASPINWALL

23 August 1869

BARRANQUILLA to LONDON, England
By Forwarding Agent "HAUER & SIMMONDS" of CARTAGENA to ASPINWALL, where the Agent "W.P.MAAL" directed the cover via British Post Office in COLON to LONDON, England.
1/- rate amended to 2/- and an additional 2/- strike charge marking is alongside to be paid upon arrival.
31 March 1868

From Cartagena via COLON to NEW YORK
Showing arrival CDS 16 April 1868

Handled by the COLON Agency of
WEST INDIA & PACIFIC STEAMSHIP Co. LIMITED

ONLY TWO EXAMPLES OF THIS FORWARDING AGENT KNOWN
21 October 1854

From CARTAGENA by Forwarding Agent “PEDRO MACIA” to “T.R. COWAN” of CHAGRES, Panama and then forwarded from there by “M.S.PKT. Co” to NEW YORK

LESS THAN 5 FORWARDING AGENTS FROM CHAGRES KNOWN
26 May 1852

BOGOTA via PANAMA CITY to NEW YORK

Originally sent from BOGOTA by the Colombian Postal Service, showing a "BOGOTA FRANCA" (Free) red handstamp to PANAMA and from there forwarded by "CORWINE BROTHERS & Co" and U.S. Steamship. With 20 Cents to be paid upon arrival.

28 February 1861

LIMA via PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO

Forwarded by "DE SABLA & CO." as well as CABRERO HOURQUET & CO.
also from Panama City
Showing Wells Fargo Express arrival cds April 6 in blue
From PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO, California
Handled by “FREEMAN & Co EXPRESS”

5 December 1859

From NEW YORK to POPAYAN, Colombia handled
by Forwarding Agent “F.GOGORZA & Cía.” of PANAMA CITY
From MANCHESTER via SOUTHAMPTON and PANAMA to ACAPULCO, Mexico
Franked with a 1/- plate 5 British stamp, directed to Forwarding Agent
HOURQUET POYLO & Co. in Panama to send to ACAPULCO

From CARMELO, Colombia to NEW YORK and re-directed to BOGOTA
Forwarded from PANAMA CITY by JIMENEZ HERMANOS and by Forwarding
Agent JOSE VASQUEZ from BUENAVENTURA on the return to BOGOTA
Showing a Steamship charge marking of 10 Cents
From PANAMA CITY to NEW YORK
Forwarding Agent “HURTADO HERMANOS” of PANAMA CITY
Showing early Forwarding mark in red

From PANAMA CITY by Forwarding Agent “HURTADO HERMANOS” to CARTAGENA and from there by National Postal Service to BOGOTA
Showing red oval CARTAGENA DEBE (Postage Due) of 3 Reales to be collected at destination as well as late Forwarding mark in red

General Tomas Cipriano de Mosquera (1798-1878) is considered one of the most important persons in Colombian history of the 19th century, having served as President four times between 1861 and 1867.
22 June 1850

From PANAMA CITY to NEW YORK
Struck with the “30” rating handstamp for the 30¢ American packet rate from Panama

THE SECOND EARLIEST OF ONLY 12 KNOWN RECORDED EXAMPLES OF THE U.S. CONSULAR OFFICE AT PANAMA POSTMARK

Scan of inside of cover showing Smith & Lewis as the Forwarder

Between June 10th and July 21st, 1850, the United States Consul at Panama, Amos B. Corwine is recorded as applying the “Panama N.Y.” circular datestamp on letters handled by his office
The unique geographical position of the Isthmus of Panama contributed not only to its economic and political influence, but to the importance of postal history during the 19th century, particularly during the 100 year period prior to July 1, 1881 when Colombia joined the Universal Postal Union.

With the exception of a few larger ports such as New York, London and Hamburg, nowhere in the entire globe did a country play such an important role as did Panama. Packet lines, first sailing vessels and then steamships of many nations converged on Panama from both the Atlantic and the Pacific. Panama became the most important trans-shipment point in the Western Hemisphere for mail to and from the west coasts of North and South America.

This section is organized geographically showing mail Via Panama originating firstly in South America, then the Caribbean, North America, Oceania and finally Europe. Within each geographic area, the exhibit follows a chronological order.

From BARRANQUILLA by Forwarding Agent “HAMBURGER I BATES” of BARRANQUILLA via COLON and by US Steamship to NEW YORK.

Showing “BARRANQUILLA FRANCA” handstamp, and “Steamship 20” postage due to be paid on arrival.
1 November 1866

From BARRANQUILLA by Forwarding Agent “E. ISAACS & Co.” via CARTAGENA British Post Office and COLON to NEW YORK Showing CARTAGENA and COLON double arc BLACK datestamps on reverse

29 November 1866

From BARBACOAS via PANAMA, LONDON and AACHEN to DEUTSCH LISSAU, Prussia - Germany. Franked with a pair of 5 Centavos stamps of 1865 Colombia, for domestic single letter rate. With manuscript “2/6 Shillings” and “22” Groschen to be paid upon arrival. Less than 10 covers franked with a 5 Centavos Pair known. ONLY KNOWN COVER FROM BARBACOAS
29 May 1872

From SANTA MARTA via COLON to NEW YORK.
Franked with a pair of GB 4 Pence stamps Plate 12 watermark “Large Garter”
cancelled by a single strike of the “C62” barred killer of SANTA MARTA.

Sent via the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company steamer “Tasmanian”
to Colon, and then by the American steamship “Ocean Queen”.
The 8d tariff represents double rate (one ounce) as does the 20 Notes
charge postage due upon arrival

Less than 10 covers known tied with a British stamp
cancelled with the “C62” BPO SANTA MARTA handstamp
31 July 1872

From BARRANQUILLA to NEW YORK via CARTAGENA British Post Office and Colon

Franked with a GB 4 Pence stamp Plate 11 tied by BPO barred “C56” handstamp of CARTAGENA for a single letter rate and charged 10 cents upon arrival

Very few covers are known tied with a British stamp cancelled with the “C56” BPO CARTAGENA handstamp

On 14 August 1865, the British Post Office decided to introduce UK postage stamps to Cartagena along with the “C56” killer
17 September 1877

SANTA MARTA by Forwarding Agent MANUEL J. de MIER to SAVANILLA, via COLON to ST.THOMAS

Showing SAVANILLA and COLON circular datestamps and a PANAMA “TRANSIT” handstamp.

Franked with a GB 4 Pence Green stamp Plate 15 tied by an “F69” British Post Office of SAVANILLA killer.

Less than 10 known covers tied with a British stamp cancelled with the “F69” BPO SAVANILLA handstamp

SAVANILLA was used as a port until BARRANQUILLA’S port was operational in the beginning of the 20th century.

The “F69” killer was sent by the British Post Office on April 4, 1872
10 July 1876

From CARACAS via LA GUIAIR, PANAMA CITY and ST. THOMAS to VALPARAISO, Chile
Stampless cover (Free Franking) letter sent by the German Consulate in Venezuela
With Colon small CDS of the B.P.O. and St. Thomas July 28, 1876 CDS on reverse,
where it was applied "No..../Detained for Postage in red. There is an additional
St. Thomas December 27, 1876 CDS indicating that it was detained until that date.

Reverse of cover showing
German Consulate for
Venezuela seal and
St. Thomas July 28, CDS
Scan at 50%

1 OF 3 KNOWN COVERS FROM VENEZUELA SENT VIA PANAMA
From GUAYAQUIL via PANAMA CITY and via SAN FRANCISCO to NEW YORK. With PAID TO PANAMA Red handstamp, double arc PANAMA handstamp, SAN FRANCISCO CDS and Black "SHIP 12" charge marking to be paid upon arrival.

Cover was routed through San Francisco, because the East Coast was blocked due to the U.S. Civil War.

From GUAYAQUIL and local Forwarding Agent via PANAMA CITY to NEW YORK Showing PAID TO PANAMA in black applied in Ecuador(1 Shilling), a double arc PANAMA datestamp and a US STEAMSHIP 10 postage due upon arrival.
9 January 1871

From BRITISH POST OFFICE in GUAYAQUIL via PANAMA TRANSIT and LONDON to BARCELONA, SPAIN. Franked with GB 2/- Blue Plate 1, 4 Pence Vermilion Plate 11 and 1 Penny Brown Plate 49, all cancelled by “C41” barred handstamps. Showing red “PD” (paid to destination)

26 January 1871

From GUAYAQUIL via PANAMA CITY to LONDON Showing PANAMA circular datestamp and 1 Shilling 6d postage due marking
Large cover from LIMA to MADRID, Spain

With “PERU” straight line handstamp (Sitja Type II) on dispatch, endorsed “Por la Preciosa” corresponding to the ship which carried this mail, and “Panama” denoting an extraordinary route with the purpose of avoiding entering part of the Nueva Granada territory during the war of independence of Colombia.

Marked “4 Ø 4” manuscript weight paid by the handstamp “115.R” rate, which represents one of the highest postal fees recorded on surviving colonial mail from Peru.
ISLAI to BORDEAUX, France
Via PANAMA CITY, LONDON, CALAIS, PARIS to BORDEAUX
With manuscript "Via Panama" on front of cover
Franked with 2x 1 Dinero Peru stamps, showing GB 1F 90 accountancy marking

27 July 1869

From LIMA via CALLAO and PANAMA CITY to PARIS
Showing handwritten "voie Panama" on top right of cover
Franked with a 1 Dinero Green stamp of Peru. Showing "1F.90" accountancy mark and 12 Centimes postage due upon arrival.
12 December 1875

From HUANILLO to GENOA, Italy endorsed “Via di Panama” with added 1866 5c and 3 x 10c perforated ABN Co. “Llamitas” stamps cancelled by unframed RECEPTORIA/DE CORREOS/DE/PABELLON DE PICA cancels to prepay the 35c single Germany Treaty rate to Italy. Iquique and Lima transits and Genoa arrival backstamps.

Mail from Juanillo was normally sent via Pabellon de Pica in order to get to the coast at Iquique. All three locations were lost to Chile during the 1879 - 1883 Pacific War

The German Treaty rate was introduced in early 1875 and under the treaty, mail could be sent prepaid from Peru to Germany or other European countries (including Italy) routed via Germany. The German treaty mail service was only available from Peru and Chile, and such mail was sent in closed bags to Europe via the Panama route.

Peru joined the UPU on April 1, 1879 and Chile joined two years later on April 1, 1881 after which dates the individual Treaties became defunct.

LESS THAN 10 COVERS FROM BOTH PERU AND CHILE HAVE BEEN RECORDED SHOWING THESE TREATY RATES
From RIO DE JANEIRO via VALPARAISO and PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO
Sent from RIO DE JANEIRO via French ship “Caravane” to VALPARAISO,
and then via PANAMA, and forwarded by “W. NELSON” to
SAN FRANCISCO, showing received on 14 August 1856
Also showing 20 Reis postage indication

Inside of letter indicating origin and date sent and date received
Scan at 70%

ONLY LETTER KNOWN SENT FROM BRAZIL VIA PANAMA
PORT FAMINE via PANAMA CITY to LONDON

With a manuscript "2/ Shillings" charge marking to be paid as postage due, correct single letter rate as of 1845.

Port Famine (Puerto de Hambre) is on the northern edge of the Strait of Magellan, about 56 kilometers south of the Chilean city of Punta Arenas, one of the southernmost cities in the world. The city was founded in 1584 as "Ciudad de Rey Don Felipe" (King Phillip City) by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa on the instructions of his King Phillip II of Spain to claim for the Spanish crown the control of the southern passage between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

**ONLY COVER RECORDED FROM PORT FAMINE**
30 March 1848

COQUIMBO, via VALPARAISO then by Steamship “CHILE” of PSNC to PANAMA CITY and then by RSMC Ship to SOUTHAMPTON and from there to LE HAVRE, France. With “15” Centimes charge marking to be paid upon arrival, as well as Colonies Art. 13 accountancy marking

1 July 1852

Letter from Santiago via VALPARAISO and CALAIS to PARIS. Showing red “SANTIAGO DE CHILE”, “FRANCA” and “PANAMA TRANSIT” markings in red. Charged 21 décimes postage due
From VALPARAISO via PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO, USA. Showing PAID-TO-PANAMA in Red with 1/ Shilling charge mark, oval “STEAM PANAMA” on incoming Pacific Steam Navigation Co. handstamp as well as “20” Cents double rate.

3 October 1865

From VALPARAISO via PANAMA CITY to OAKLAND, USA. Showing oval “STEAM PANAMA” handstamp and endorsed “Via Panama”. Postmarked “San Francisco, Cal, November 13 1865” double circle and “10” Cents single rate handstamp.

Arrived from PANAMA on the “Constitution” after 14 days and 9 hours as shown on the San Francisco Shipping Intelligence news clip on the right.
From VALPARAISO via PANAMA CITY and NEW YORK to NEW BEDFORD, USA
Franked with a GB 6 Pence stamp cancelled by “C30” barred handstamp of BPO VALPARAISO, Chile. Backstamped upon arrival.

From SANTIAGO via PANAMA CITY and NEW YORK to BRIEDENHOFF, Germany
“25 Cts” on top represented the rate to Panama. The “2/50” double rate (2) with 50 centimes credit to USA. The New York Panama Transit mark and “T” shows it arrived in New York and was treated as unpaid. The “120” at center is the amount due in Germany (150 centimes ≈ 120 pfennigs)
21 May 1876

From LA CHIMBA via PANAMA, LONDON and VERVIERS to DANZIG, Germany

Stampless cover endorsed “via Panama” with a blue-green negative cancel showing a ship inside, a line cancel “CORREOS de BOLIVIA - LA CHIMBA - Mayo 21” and single line “CANCELADO” and “FRANCO” as well as a circular ‘PANAMA TRANSIT JU 4 76’.

Reverse of cover showing red “LONDON LX JU 28 76”, “VERVIERS COLN” 29 6 and DANZIG arrival 30.6.76 cds

1 OF 10 COVERS FROM BOLIVIA VIA PANAMA KNOWN
20 November 1859

Printed Matter from HAVANA, via PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO handled by PANAMA Forwarding Agent “A.M. HINCKLEY & Co. EXPRESS”

6 May 1866

From HAVANA, via ST. THOMAS, and PANAMA CITY to LIMA Showing a HAVANA CDS and a PANAMA double arc datestamp with a “4/-” manuscript rating and “2” Dineros charged as postage due.
From POINTE PITRE, GUADELOUPE via PANAMA to LIMA, Peru
Letter sent from French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe
24 December 1864 to Lima, Peru transiting Panama 8 January 1865.

Sender decided to prepay letter at the Guadeloupe Post Office after the letter had been marked 6 décimes (=6d) which was likely the postage due rate to Panama. The entire Lima calculated rate was 165 centimes (then equivalent to 1s 4 1/2d) and the French colonial stamps were added to make up this rate. (Note the stamps almost cover the 6 décimes due handstamp beneath.)

Letter was then likely walked over to the British Packet Agency in Guadeloupe where the red Crowned Circle "Paid in Guadeloupe" (used from 1848 - 1874) was applied along with the red 1s4d marking indicating the postage rate paid to the British postal service. The letter was put into the British Packet Mail system, transited via Panama two weeks later on 8 January 1865, and then transported via British packet to Callao, Peru, and then by private courier to Lima.

1 OF 10 COVERS FROM FROM GUADELOUPE VIA PANAMA KNOWN TO DATE
From TRINIDAD via ST. THOMAS to PANAMA CITY
Franked with a 6d and 4d Trinidad stamps for a double rate
Showing a TRINIDAD double circle PAID handstamp
and an “8” red crayon postage due marking

26 August 1874

From TRINIDAD via ST. THOMAS to PANAMA CITY
Franked with a 4d Trinidad stamp for a single rate
Showing a TRINIDAD double circle PAID handstamp
and a “4” red crayon postage due marking

Both letters were for the Commander in Chief
of the “HMS Repulse” of the Royal Navy which
patrolled the seas from Patagonia to British
Columbia from 1872 to 1877
13 December 1867

From MASAYA, via PANAMA CITY to MANCHESTER
Showing three line “PANAMA TRANSIT” datestamp, MANCHESTER arrival datestamp and a 2/ Shillings charge indication.

6 February 1873

From GRANADA via GREY-TOWN by Forwarding Agent “S.ESPINOSA” to COLON British Post Office directed to NEW YORK.
With US Steamship charge of 10 Cents to be paid upon arrival.
23 December 1864
From LA LIBERTAD via PANAMA CITY and CALAIS to BORDEAUX
Showing red box “FRANCO” three line “PANAMA TRANSIT” and Calais arrival CDS.
Charged 12 decimes postage due.

24 June 1869
From SAN SALVADOR via PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO, USA
Endorsed “VIA PANAMA”
Showing oval “STEAM PANAMA” handstamp and cds “San Francisco, Cal, June 13” with “10” rate change

19 September 1872
From COJUTEPEQUE via SAN SALVADOR and PANAMA CITY to PARIS
Franked with a pair of 1 Real stamps, cancellation of COJUTEPEQUE CDS and “PANAMA TRANSIT” handstamp. With 15 Centimes postage due to be paid upon arrival.
14 March 1875

LA LIBERTAD via PANAMA CITY to LIVERPOOL
Franked with a 2 Reales Green stamp with overprint “CONTRASELLO” with manuscript cancellation. Showing three line “PANAMA TRANSIT” datetamp and LIVERPOOL arrival CDS. Charged with 1/6 Shillings upon arrival.

6 November 1877

From LA UNION, Salvador via PANAMA CITY to BARBASTE
Franked with a 2 Reales Green first issue of Salvador with “CONTRASELLO” overprint. Showing a PANAMA circular datetamp, a French “17” charge marking and a “T - 1.10” postage due to be paid upon arrival.
22 April 1860

From GUATEMALA CITY via PANAMA CITY to WASHINGTON
Forwarded by "HURTADO HERMANOS" of PANAMA and Steamship to WASHINGTON, Steamship Postage Due 20 Cents.

7 April 1863

GUATEMALA CITY via PANAMA CITY to LONDON and forwarded to ARDECHE
Showing three line PANAMA TRANSIT and CALAIS datestamp
With GB 2F.87½c accountancy handstamp and 24 decimes charge indication.
From MAZATLAN via SAN FRANCISCO and PANAMA to HAMBURG, Germany

Sent to San Francisco on the steamer “Surprise” privately by the ship’s captain. From San Francisco at double Prussian Closed Mail rate (2 x 30c) via Panama and New York where it received two “BR PKT” cds’s, one showing 14c credit due to Great Britain for their part in its handling.

Scan at 80% of inside of letter showing “per Str. Surprise via San Francisco and Panama”, as well Mazatlan, 8 May 1859

This 30c Prussian Closed Mail rate (per half oz.) was in effect from October 1852 until September 1861 when the rate was reduced to 28c.

Incidentally, this was not a compulsory rate... mail could be sent unpaid (paid by the addressee) by this method.
Panama played a very important role in the development of the communications between the east and west coast of the United States. In 1849 the United States Post Office established the Ocean Mail via Panama Route to carry the mail from New York to San Francisco and vice-versa. The route was comprised of three elements for which three different mail contracts were signed: (1) New York to Chagre with the “United States Mail Steamship Co.” (2) Aspinwall to Panama City with the “Panama Railroad Co.” (3) From Panama City to San Francisco with the “Pacific Mail Steamship Co.” From the outset, the mail was transported across the Isthmus by mules and canoes until the Panama railroad was completed in January 1855. No PANAMA transit marks were applied to any letters, as they were transported across the Isthmus in closed mailbags. Considerable research has gone into determining the ships that carried the mail to and from Panama, and the dates of arrival and departure.

The first eastbound mail under the contract left San Francisco for Panama City on April 12, 1849. The Ocean Mail via Panama Route remained a vital link in the nation’s mail system until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

20 June 1849

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY, CHAGRES AND NEW ORLEANS to CLINTON, NJ

Showing First Day of Usage of the SAN FRANCISCO straight line handstamp with magenta “June 20” and matching “40” rating. Sent on the first departure of the “S.S. Panama” on June 20, 1849. It arrived in Panama City on July 12th, and was put on the U.S. Steamship Co. “Falcon” leaving Chagres July 28th, arriving in New Orleans on Aug. 3rd. Then by great northern mails reaching Clinton, NJ as noted by “Recd Aug 14th, 1849”.

ONE OF ONLY EIGHT RECORDED FROM THE FIRST CONTRACT SAILING OF THE S.S. PANAMA

On June 15, 1849 R.T. Allen arrived as the new Postmaster of San Francisco and introduced the first handstamp at the office. The San Francisco straight line postmark was used only on mail dispatched on the third, fourth and fifth contract sailings from San Francisco to Panama in 1849 comprising the first departure of the S.S. Panama on June 20, the second departure of the S.S. Oregon on July 2, and the second departure of the S.S. California on August 1. The straight line marking was preceded by manuscript postmarks and succeeded by cds postmarks.
Earliest Recorded Letter Price Current
From US Military Administration of California

30 August 1849

From SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY and CHAGRES to BOSTON

This Vol. 1 No. 1 Letter Sheet Price was published August 30, 1849.

The year date on the masthead is a mistake, being surely a type setting error. This can be confirmed by the search of the San Francisco business directory. The circular was most likely sent on a ship and routed by a forwarding agent by way of Panama City and Chagres to New York and Boston.

The marking in the red oval is a new unlisted by Rowe forwarders marking "Forwarded by / ROB\(^T\). WELLS & C\(^O\) / SAN FRANCISCO U. CALF"
1 June 1850

From SAN FRANCISCO via CHAGRES and NEW YORK to SENECAVILLE, OH.

Struck with a “30” rating handstamp. An Act of March 3, 1847 set the steamship rate at 30c to and from Panama and USA. It remained in effect until June 30, 1861.

Left San Francisco on the “Oregon” on June 1, arriving in Chagres on June 12. Left for New York on June 24 on the “Crescent City”, arriving on June 24, 1850.

THE EARLIEST OF ONLY 12 KNOWN RECORDED EXAMPLES OF THE U.S. CONSULAR OFFICE IN PANAMA

Between June 10th and July 21st 1850, the United States Consul at Panama, Amos B. Corwine is recorded as applying the “PANAMA N.Y.” circular datestamp on letters handled by his office.
From SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY to HARDWICK, USA
Showing red "PAID" handstamp. Left San Francisco on 9/15/51 on the "Carolina" arriving in Panama City on 9/22/51. It left Chagre on the "Ohio" on 9/24/51, arriving in New York on 10/8/51, for further delivery to Hardwick, Mass.
SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY to BORDEAUX, France

“Endorsed Via Panama and England” with B.P.O. PANAMA double circle datestamp OCT 22 and boxed “JBF ARRIVET a Panama” in blue on reverse. Sent via LONDON with boxed Anglo-French accountancy “Colonies de Arts 13” in red. London transit “27/11” and BORDEAUX arrival on reverse “30/11” with handstruck charge “15”

12 December 1851

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY to SCHLESWIG, Germany

“Endorsed via Panama” carried by Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer “Oregon” to PANAMA CITY and United States Mail Steamship Co. steamer Ohio from CHAGRES to NEW YORK.

Carried from NEW YORK on 21 February 1852 on steamer “Pacific” of the New York & Liverpool United States Mail Steamship Co. (Collins Line) to Liverpool where it arrived on 3 March 1852 and then to Bremen, and to Hamburg.

The rating on this letter is in accordance with the U.S. - Bremen Postal Treaty of 1847, for American Contract Steamship via Great Britain. The rate applied was 26 Prepaid for British Open Mail rate by American packet and 4 shilling due in Getlingen.

Prepayment interpreted at NEW YORK to be the fully paid rate to Hamburg by Bremen mail, 20 Treaty rate to Bremen and 5 transit to Hamburg; therefore letter marked ALL PAID in red and sent in Bremen Closed Mails to England. In Bremen the letter was marked 7 grofe credit to Hamburg, where letter was marked FRANCO in black.
From SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY to BOSTON, USA

Showing blue SAN FRANCISCO postmark, with black "PAID" and blue "5" rate for printed circular over 3500 miles.

Endorsed "PER STEAMER PANAMA", arrived in Panama City on 8/24/52, left Aspinwall on the "Illinois" on 8/26/52, arriving in New York on 9/6/52 for further transfer to Boston.

FOUR EXAMPLES OF THE 5¢ RATE WITHOUT STAMPS ARE RECORDED

The graduated rate for printed circulars came into effect on July 1, 1851 and lasted only for fifteen months. It ended on September 30, 1852 when it became one cent for any distance.
1 September 1854

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY, ASPINWALL, SAN JUAN DEL NORTE
and NEW YORK to READING, PA

Departed San Francisco in Sept. 1, 1854 “AHEAD of the MAILS” on Vanderbilt’s “Uncle Sam” arriving in Panama on Sept. 15, 1854 and from Aspinwall to San Juan del Norte (Nicaragua) on Sept. 18, 1854 and then on Vanderbilt’s “Prometheus” arriving New York on Sept. 25, 1854. It entered the mails in New York on Sept. 27 for carriage to Reading, PA

CARRIED ON THE LAST TRIP OF THE INDEPENDENT LINE FROM CALIFORNIA

The Vanderbilt’s Independent Opposition Line operated steamships on both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans between August 17, 1853 and September 1, 1854. The private mails were taken to Nicaragua and then carried by Vanderbilt’s Independent Line steamer “Prometheus” to New York

The Nicaragua - In Advance of the Mails route was a non-contract route. This meant that there was no compensation from the U.S. government for delivery of the mails.
16 July 1855

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY and COLON to CAROLINE CENTER, New York

Franked with a 5c California Penny Post Co., San Francisco Type A adhesive
uncancelled, as most always, and a 10c Green Type II for a single letter rate
for U.S. domestic mail conveyed 3,000 miles or more as of April 1, 1855
(Postage Act of March 3, 1855)

Carried on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's "John L. Stephens" which departed
San Francisco on July 16, 1855 and arrived in Panama on July 31. It was then
carried over the Isthmus and put on USMC's steamer "Empire City" which
departed Aspinwall on August 2 and arrived in New York on August 11

ONE OF ONLY FIVE RECORDED COVERS BEARING
THIS RARE CALIFORNIA PENNY POST CO. ADHESIVE STAMP

The Penny Post Company, organized by Henry L. Goodwin, started
operations on June 25, 1855 and ceased to operate in July 1856. During the
short period of operations the company issued a series of printed envelopes
as well as a 5c adhesive stamp. The 5c adhesive stamp was used primarily
on mail carried by ocean steamers.
BEVERLY via CHAGRES AND PANAMA CITY to SACRAMENTO CITY
Correct 10c single rate cover (as of April 1, 1856) sent on the U.S. Mail steamer "Illinois" on December 5, 1856, arrived in Aspinwall on December 14. It left for San Francisco on December 15 on the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer "John L. Stephens" arriving in San Francisco on December 30, 1856

5 March 1857

SAN FRANCISCO via CHAGRES AND PANAMA CITY to BOSTON
Effective October 1, 1852 the printed circular rate was reduced to 1c any distance. The Newsletter departed on the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. "Golden Gate" on March 5, 1857, transited at Panama on March 18, and transferred to New York on the U.S.Mail Steamship Co. "Illinois" arriving on March 28, 1857
SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY and COLON to TROY, New York
San Francisco News Letter franked with a 10c Green Type III with printed
"P.M.S.S. GOLDEN AGE June 20" at upper left. *News letter does not accompany*
*but has a handwritten note inside, reason for the 10c letter rate, effective April 1, 1855*
Carried on the PMSS "Golden Age" which departed San Francisco on June 21, 1855
arrived in Panama City on July 4. It was carried across the Isthmus and put on the USMSC
"Star of the West" which departed Aspinwall on July 4 and arrived New York on July 13

4 July 1857

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY and COLON to NEW YORK
San Francisco News Letter franked with a 1c Blue Type II, with printed
"P.M.S.S. SONORA July 4, 1857" at upper left. The 1c stamp paid the
printed matter rate any distance, effective October 1, 1852
19 May 1859

From HARTFORD via NEW YORK, ASPINWALL and PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO

Correct single letter rate 10c # 14 stamp (April 1, 1855 - July 1, 1863) tied by red grid
Departed New York on May 20, 1859 on U.S. Mail Steamship Co.
steamer "Star of the West" and transited Aspinwall on May 31, 1859 to
Panama City where it went on the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer
"Golden Age", arriving in San Francisco June 13, 1859

3 September 1859

From PHILAELPHIA via ASPINWALL and PANAMA CITY to VALPARAISO, Chile

PAID double rate cover with a manuscript "68" in the corner (2 x 34c). This
rate was in effect from December 1856 to March 1870. The manuscript
"48" is the credit due to Britain in cents. On arrival it was handstruck with
"25", made up of 5c incoming charge plus twice the 10c domestic rate
18 January 1860

From SACKETS HARBOR via NEW YORK, ASPINWALL and PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO

Inside contents dated January 18, 1860. Correct single letter rate 10c #14 stamp struck by a clean HACKETS HARBOR N.Y. JAN 18 handstamp.

Departed New York on U.S. Mail Steamship Co. steamer "Northern Light" on February 5, 1860, and transited Aspinwall to Panama City, where it left on February 16, 1860 on the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer "Cortes" arriving in San Francisco on March 3, 1860

11 October 1860

From NEW YORK via ASPINWALL and PANAMA CITY to SAN FRANCISCO

Tied by "NEW YORK 11 OCT" Ocean Mail with small grid cds

Departed New York October 11, 1860 on U.S. Mail Steamship Co. "Northern Light" to Aspinwall, transited to Panama where it left on the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer "Golden Gate", arriving in San Francisco on November 14, 1860
31 October 1860

From BOSTON via NEW YORK, ASPINWALL and PANAMA CITY to SACRAMENTO CITY

This cover shows the 1c prepayment carrier fee to the Post Office in Boston in addition to the 10c single letter rate in effect from April 1, 1855 to July 1, 1863.

The cover was sent from New York on the U.S. Mail Steamship Co. steamer “Empire City” on November 1, 1860 arriving in Aspinwall on November 16, 1860 and transited to Panama City where it left on the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer “Uncle Sam” arriving in San Francisco on December 7, 1860

The “Via Panama” endorsement confirms the desire of the sender to use the Panama Ocean Route instead of the overland route which was in use from September 1858

March 23, 1864

March 23,1864 newspaper clipping announcing the sailing of the steamer “Constitution” to Panama

SAN FRANCISCO via PANAMA CITY, ASPINWALL and NEW YORK to JARNAC, France

Endorsed and sent on the steamer “Constitution”, showing NEW YORK 9 cds and “15” décimes postage due markings as well as a Calais arrival CDS 8 April 1864
17 June 1865

From SAN FRANCISCO to LOCARNO, Switzerland

Via PANAMA CITY on steamer "Constitution" and NEW YORK to Europe, showing German Transit handstamp of "AACHEN FRANCO 23/7" and various Swiss transit markings to LOCARNO, Switzerland. Franked with 35 Cents US stamps

LESS THAN 5 KNOWN COVERS WITH THIS FANCY CANCEL

Shipping Intelligence.
SAN FRANCISCO, JUNE 17, 1865.

Sailed:
June 17—Stur Constitution, Watkins, Panama.
Stir Sargison, Mc Dougall.
Barone W A Banks, Knight, Puget Sound.
Dr. Barry Knight, Bruce, Bryce, Nanaimo.
Bry Tannen, M'Guts, Puget Sound.
Brie Francisco, Berry, Cocos Bay.

June 17, 1865 newspaper clipping announcing that steamer "Constitution" sailed for Panama.
US 3c stationary envelope with imprinted Wells Fargo PAID frank and oval PAID marking in blue. Endorsed "Via Panama" Oval PANAMA/DE OFICIO overlapped by PANAMA DEBE, with boxed DE ULTRAMAR and handstruck '10' rating all in red. LIMA transit backstamp (31 Jul) plus additional manuscript '10c' and Debe ratings.

A stamp was originally affixed at the upper left corner, but was undoubtedly removed as being unnecessary prior to being sent and both the oval Wells Fargo PAID handstamp in blue and the handstruck '10' rating in red overlap the space where the stamp was affixed.

The PANAMA/DE OFICIO oval was undoubtedly struck in error.

The Panama to Buenaventura was a long sea route via Lima. Southbound ships from Panama rarely made the stop at Buenaventura and it was probably deemed faster to send the letter to Lima to catch a northbound coastal vessel that would call in Buenaventura.

The manuscript '10' and 'Debe 10' ratings were probably applied in Lima and Buenaventura respectively.
From WAVERLY via PANAMA CITY to NEW CASTLE, Australia
Left San Francisco on PMSS steamer “Golden Age” on April 20, arriving in Panama City on May 17. Left Panama on May 24 on The Panama, New Zealand and Australian Royal Mail Co. steamer “Rakaia” arriving in Sydney on May 24. Franked with 2x 10c +3c stamps, overpaid 1c as the correct rate was 22c.

UNUSUAL ROUTING
CALIFORNIA to PANAMA to AUSTRALIA

From PORTCHESTER, NY via PANAMA CITY to LIMA, Peru
Paid double the 34 Cents rate with 68 Cents in US stamps. Panama circular datsestamp with red “24” credit for British Postal Agency and 1 October 1869 arrival CDS on reverse
First Trans-Pacific experimental Mail
10 May 1854

From SYDNEY via PANAMA CITY to LONDON
Franked with a 3 Penny stamp of New South Wales
With manuscript 2/ Shillings Steamship charge from
the Pacific via Panama route, to be paid upon arrival.

Letter carried by “S.S. GOLDEN AGE” owned by the New York and Australian Navigation
Company on the first steamship voyage across the Pacific. She left Melbourne on 5.5 and
Sydney on 11.5. After coaling in Papeete, Tahiti, she arrived in Panama on 19.6. From there
the letter was taken across the Panama Isthmus by donkeys and riverboats (the railway
opened in 1855) and it arrived in Southampton by the Royal Mail steamer “Magdalena” on
17.7. The letter was handstamped in London on 18.7.1854. All this in 69 days!

The Trans-Pacific Mail Route was a financial disaster and was not repeated until 1866.

The steamer “Golden Age” entered service in 1851 and
burned at sea on July 27, 1862 with the loss of 223 lives.
4 January 1867

From DUNEDIN via PANAMA CITY and LONDON to BROMLEY
Franked with a 6 Pence New Zealand stamp, showing
manuscript “Via Panama” and London PAID CDS March 1, 1867

1 April 1868

From NELSON via PANAMA CITY, COLON and KINGSTON to LONDON
Endorsed “Via Panama”, franked with a 6 Pence New Zealand stamp,
cancelled by the NELSON duplex AP 1 68. A London 28 MY 68 PAID
handstamp is on the front and on the reverse is a London arrival cds

Departed Wellington on April 8 on the Panama New Zealand and Australian Royal
Mail Company’s “Rakaia” arriving in Panama City on May 4. After crossing the
Isthmus it left Colon on the “Tyne” to Jamaica, arriving Kingston on May 9.
It left Kingston on the “Douro” on May 10 arriving in Plymouth on May 27
30 January 1855

From PITCAIRN ISLAND on the ship "JAVA" via VALPARAISO (31 March) PANAMA (22 April), LONDON (22 May), to BRIGHTON, England (22 May)

On the front of the cover it reads: "Death of King Kamehameha" and "Pitcairn Island" plus "Valparaiso March 31st 1855"

These notes suggest that the contents of the cover were written by a sailor who started in Hawaii mentioning the death of the King and describing a visit to Pitcairn before being finalized and sent from Valparaiso. King Kamehameha III ruled the Hawaiian Islands from 1825 to December 1854

Showing "PANAMA 22 APR 1855 TRANSIT" and a 2/- rating for a half ounce letter from Chile to England at this time. (This rate was in effect from 1840 to 1870)

Pitcairn is best known for the mutiny on the Royal Navy vessel HMS "Bounty" which occurred in the south Pacific on 28 April 1789. Disaffected crewmen, led by Acting Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, seized control of the ship from their captain Lieutenant William Bligh and set him and 18 loyalists adrift in the ship’s open launch. The mutineers variously settled on Tahiti or on Pitcairn Island.

On the back it reads "Description of Pitcairn Island" and "Enclosing a note about death of King"

Scan of reverse of cover @ 70%

Only 6 letters have been recorded that originated from Pitcairn Island during most of the 19th Century.
17 August 1861

Letter from PAPEETE in Tahiti to ROCHEFORT in France

Endorsed “Par.Panama” with PAPEETE cds (17 August) PANAMA/TRANSIT (22 Oct) and boxed “P.D.” CALAIS transit cds and handstruck “12” (decimes) arrival charge, plus London and Paris backstamps.

1 of 2 KNOWN LETTERS FROM TAHITI via PANAMA

31 January 1860

HONOLULU to SOUTH HADLEY, USA

Endorsed “Paid” with U.S. 12c black, Pos, 73L1 prepaying 10c postage plus 2c ship fee.

This cover was carried by American schooner “L.P. Foster” from Honolulu on Feb. 2nd to San Francisco, arriving Feb. 19th. Postmarked at San Francisco for the PSMC “Sonora” departing Feb. 20th for Panama City arriving Mar. 4th, then by USMSC “George Law” departing Aspinwall Mar. 5th to New York arriving Mar. 15th
29 January 1846

From LE HAVRE via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to LIMA
Showing a Red French "BUREAU MARITIME of LE HAVRE"
and Red "LONDON PAID SHIPLETTER" handstamps, and "PD"
paid to destination) handstamp on front of cover.

16 May 1859

From LONDON via PANAMA CITY to COBIJA, Bolivia
Stampless cover showing unusual "VIA PANAMA" handstamp
in black privately applied by sender, Lombard Street PAID
circular datestamp, and PANAMA double arc circular datestamp

EARLIEST RECORDED COVER TO BOLIVIA
PLYMOUTH via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to VANCOUVER ISLAND, B.C. Canada

Endorsed via Panama. Correct British rate 2/4d for up to half ounce via the West Indies Packed via Panama. The rate was introduced on January 1, 1854 and remained in force until October 30, 1865, after which it was reduced to 1/6d 15 December 18631

17 May 1867

From LONDON via PANAMA CITY to GUATEMALA.
Stampless cover with “VIA PANAMA” marking, and “LOMBARD STREET PAID” handstamp (8 Shillings). Showing a small “VIA PANAMA” private handstamp
From STIRLING via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to WELLINGTON, New Zealand
Endorsed Via Panama, franked with a 6d stamp and
cancelled with a duplex Stirling 308 date stamp

The "via Panama" route from Britain to New Zealand operated from May 28, 1866 and was
withdrawn less than three years later on February 15, 1869. When first introduced, the rate
was 1/- per half ounce, but was reduced to 6d per half ounce as of September 29, 1866

15 July 1871

From MANCHESTER via LIVERPOOL and COLON to ACAPULCO, Mexico
Franked with a 1/ Shilling Green stamp Plate 9.
Carried by “S.S. MEXICANA” to COLON and then handled by the Forwarding
Agent “HOURQUET POYLO & Co.” in PANAMA
DUNDEE via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to VALPARAISO, Chile
Franked with a 1/- Shilling Green stamp Plate 1, correct British Packet rate via Panama to Chile of 2/- (up to half ounce). Rate in effect from October 23, 1845 through December 1869, when it was reduced to 1/6d on January 1, 1870

GLASGOW via PANAMA CITY to MELBOURNE, Australia
Prepaid by a 6d Plate tied by a Glasgow “159” duplex for AP.29.1868. Additionally tied by an oval “6d MORE TO PAY” handstamp with a boxed “UNCLAIMED AT MELBOURNE” alongside. Carried by “Royal Mail Steam Packet Co” to Colon and from Panama to Melbourne by “Panama, New Zealand and Australian Royal Mail Co.”

Although this service was much faster (especially for New Zealand mails) it proved unpopular with passengers and only operated for 2 1/2 years, thus mail routed this way is rarely seen.
15 December 1861

From JERSEY via LONDON and PANAMA to VALPARAISO
Paid single letter rate of 2/ Shillings with 2x 1/ Shilling GB stamps
Endorsed “Via Panama” and showing PANAMA double arc circular datestamp

29 October 1867

From AMSTERDAM via PANAMA to VALPARAISO
Showing LONDON Paid CDS, PANAMA Transit and FRANCO Chile marking
From VERGARA, via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to SUCRE, BOLIVIA
Franked with 2x 2 Reales, via LONDON 12.16.59, PANAMA 1.10.60, and transit to Bolivia on ship "LAMAR"

From ITALY

GENOVA, via LONDON, SOUTHAMPTON and PANAMA CITY to VALPARAISO
Endorsed "Via Southampton x Panama"
Franked with 1,40 Lira Italian stamps, and showing PANAMA double arc handstamp.
28 December 1858

From AARAU via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to VALPARAISO, Chile
"Endorsed Pr.Steamer via Panama" franked with 95 Rappen / Centimes
Marked PP (paid to port) but not charged on arrival

26 June 1861

From LOCLE via Le HAVRE and PANAMA CITY to LIMA, Peru
Carried privately by forwarding agents Charles Vignier for dispatch in Le Havre
Double rate cover (3 x 1Fr20), French Postal Treaty December 1, 1857 to June 30, 1862
Two recorded FORWARDED letters from Switzerland to Peru
Letter from HAMBURG, Germany via PANAMA CITY to VALPARAISO, Chile. Showing “HAMBURG” oval datestamp, with “fr. 33” red crayon representing 33 shillings in Hamburg currency, equivalent to 86 Kreuzer, according to the Great Britain-Prussia postal convention covering the “2/2” 2s.2p. British fee, carried via London by British packets. With “PANAMA” double arc datestamp, and finally taxed with “25” centavos marking on delivery.

1 OF 5 KNOWN LETTERS FROM GERMANY VIA PANAMA

From FRANCE

15 October 1857

PARIS via PANAMA to LIMA, Peru

Letter from LIBOURNE via PANAMA CITY to SANTIAGO. Endorsed “Par Panama” with sender’s cachet and CDS with boxed “PP” in red plus London PAID CDS and circular “15” arrival due marking.
3 February 1858

MONTPELIER via PANAMA CITY to TAITI (TAHITI)

Cover with contents sent from MONTPELIER to TAHITI endorsed “Voie Anglais par Panama” and “Station de Cote Occidental Amerique” with Montpellier cds, London PAID cds (6 Feb) and boxed “P.P.” both in red. Entire carried via R.M.S.P. “Atrato & Thames” from Southampton via St. Thomas to Colon.

ONE OF THE EARLIEST RECORDED FRENCH COVERS TO TAHITI

15 September 1864

OFFICIAL Mail from PARIS via LONDON and PANAMA CITY to GUATEMALA
With “FRANCO” handstamp (Free postage) for OFFICIAL correspondence. Franked with a strip of 3x 80 centimes in French stamps showing PARIS and PANAMA double arc datestamps
PARIS via LONDON, SOUTHAMPTON and PANAMA CITY to COBIJA, Bolivia
Franked with 1 French Franc stamps, sender’s cachet and LONDON and PANAMA datestamps

31 October 1867

PARIS via ST. NAZAIRE, LONDON, HAVANA and PANAMA CITY to GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador
Endorsed “VOIE DE PANAMA”, franked with 3 Franc French stamps, showing ST. NAZAIRE, LONDON PAID “P.P.” postage paid and PANAMA double arc handstamps
From PARIS, via PANAMA CITY to SANTA ANA, Costa Rica
Stampless letter, endorsed by sender’s cachet, handled by forwarding agent “HOURQUET & POYLO” in Panama.
Marked 6 Reales Postage Due

14 November 1874

From BORDEAUX via PANAMA CITY to SANTA ANA, Salvador
With indication “Via SOUTHAMPTON + PANAMA”, with “P.P.” (Postage Paid) and LONDON Transit marking and crayon mark “45” to be paid upon arrival.
Franked with 2,60 Francs French postage stamps.
V. VIA PANAMA - AFTER JOINING THE UPU

Chile joined the U.P.U. on April 1, 1881 prior to Panama joining the U.P.U. on July 1, 1881. The postal rates were less critical, as they would now be paid at origin, eliminating the need of Forwarding Agents and Foreign Post Offices, although some continued to operate for some time.

This event, together with the completion of the transcontinental railroad greatly reduced the importance of the Panama route.

May 11, 1881

VALPARAISO to PARIS, France

Endorsed "via Panama" and erroneously franked with a 1 Centavo and a 10 Centavos Chile stamps from the First Rouletted issue of 1877, intending to pay a 10 Cent rate, plus as was common with other countries, a 1 Cent surcharge for using the Panama Route.

Showing a Calais to Paris Juin 27 81 cds as well as a Paris arrival cds dated 27 Juin 81 on the reverse of cover

The above cover is one of the last known to transit Panama before it joined the U.P.U. on July 1, 1881