

Synopsis

“A Postal History of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1917”

This exhibit relates the history of the Mexican Revolution through a study of the various usages of its postal issues on cover, “on piece” or as cancelled stamps.

It must be remembered that full-length postal history exhibits could be and have been made on any one of the 24 revolutionary stamp issues (not including the local “provisional” overprints) delineated in this study (e.g. “The White Seals of Sonora”). The goal of this exhibit is to show postal usages of each revolutionary issue (and some of the local “provisional” overprints) and use this postal history to highlight the historical evolution of the revolution itself.

While this exhibit is above all a postal history exhibit, the philatelic treatment of the subject (the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917) could be classified as thematic, as the usages of the revolutionary stamp issues are treated in chronological order to better reflect the actual historical events of the revolution. While postal rates, routes and markings are emphasized, equal importance is given to dates of issue and date of usage, as it is often by these methods that a postal history item can be connected to historical events. While geographic lines of control in north and south remained largely stable after the defeat of Huerta, control of the populated central region of the country remained in flux. Each of the warring factions had separate postal administrations, and for a time, both “Conventionists” and “Constitutionalists” had different postal rates. Certain cities (such as the capital) changed hands numerous times, and with each change in administration, the handling of mail changed. This caused delays in delivery, and mail destined to areas controlled by the other side was not delivered. The “Dead Letter Office” (*Departamento de Rezagos*) was used more and more frequently, while numerous handstamps lend a historical significance to many covers. Note that many stamp issues (the *Transitorios*, the various Sonora issues, and the “Denvers”) were not recognized by the U.P.U. for international use, and this was one reason for the proliferation of overprints on the *Centenarios*.

Examples of mixed and dual country frankings, internal and external censorship, registered mail, earliest known usages (EKUs), unusual destinations, small town cancellations, and postal auxiliary markings are all shown.

Some key items (exceptional pieces are highlighted in **Bold**) of the exhibit are as follows:

[The numbers refer to the different revolutionary stamp issues delineated on the “Title Page/Plan Page”]

1. Early use of 2x1c. “White Seals” (18 June 1913) on PC; 10c. “White Seal” on “Chinese” cover
2. 5c. “Green Seal” used on hand-made mourning cover (one of two known hand-made MCs from this period – both in this exhibit)
3. Genuine commercial usage of 5c. *Ejercito* with revenue coupon attached
4. **Genuine usages of 10c. *Transitorio* bisect, and 2 halves put together on one cover to make double-letter rate of 10c.**; Special discount postal rate of 3c. on official Sonora government correspondence; **Registered parcel (2160 grams) with *Transitorio* franking of 1 peso, 5 centavos**
 - **Usage of the seldom seen “*Devuelta por clausura de la oficina de destino*” handstamp on cover**
5. 15c. “*Victoria de Torreon*” registered cover
6. Mixed franking of 1c. “Large Script GCM Monogram” with 4c. *Transitorio* to make 5c. rate
7. “Denver” revenue issue used from Mexico City in September 1914 (most were used from the north-eastern region of Mexico) to United States
8. **EKU of *Transitorio* perforated issue (23 June 1914)**; Cover from small town of Batuc, Sonora to Arizona, franked with 5c. perf. *Transitorio*
9. EKU of 5c. “Denver” postal issue from Alamos to New York City (30 July 1914); “Denver” postal issue on cover to US, postage due (this issue not recognized internationally), returned to Mexico; **Postage due “Denver” postal issue cover, paid with pair of 5c. Sonora “Coach Seals”; Mixed franking (“Denvers” and *Centenarios*) on third class mail package to Germany, returned due to wartime restrictions**; Mixed franking usage of “Denver” postal issue on semi-official envelope, with 5x1c. *Centenarios* (no overprint) on back, from Nochixtlan to California.
10. Dollar sign overprint on souvenir folder to Canada; **“Dollar sign” block of 4x5c. *Centenarios* on cover to England from Conventionist territory (Aguascalientes) with Conventionist rate of 20c. (double that of Constitutionalists)**; Internally censored mourning cover from Mexico City during Constitutionalist occupation
 - **Registered cover from Orizaba (September 1914), forwarded to British legation for onward transmission by diplomatic pouch**
11. **Green Seal re-issue on censored cover to Port Said, Egypt (unique)**

- **Local Provisional Overprints (LPO) from Dolores Hidalgo – one of the most difficult LPOs.**
Colima LPO, 2x5c. for double-weight letter
Monterrey LPOs used on commercial cover from Tamaulipas (10c. *Centenario*) double-weight rate; also used from Los Herreras, Nuevo Leon (most Monterrey LPOs used from Monterrey)
Sinaloa LPO mixed franking with “Denver” postal issue, also 20c. single franking for double-weight letter
Torreon LPO mixed franking with “Denver” postal issue
- 12. **EKU of 10c. Sonora Coach Seal (3 October 1914);** Study of different postal rates using Coach Seal franking (4 pages)
- 13. “ES” overprint mourning cover, registered cover single franking of 20c. 1899 definitive with “ES” ovpt.
- 14. **“Large GCM monogram (Veracruz)” overprint on cover from Puebla to Mexico , internally censored. by Constitutionalist post office. Delivery delayed for 5 months**
- 17. **Baja California “Coach Seal” used on cover from Santa Rosalia**
- 18. Pair of 1c. “provisional” Oaxaca State Revenue stamps used on local cover
- 21. Mixed franking of Famous Men with “Villa” postal card to foreign destination
“Famous Men” (strip of 5x1c.) paying unsealed letter/circular rate to US (first reported example)
- 22. Early usage of “Corbatas” to be put in general circulation (1) to Germany and (2) to England
Turned mourning cover (hand-made) US-Mexico, franked with strip of 4 “Corbatas” (unique)
Registered cover with 20c. “Corbata” and “Dollar Sign” ovpt sent from Territory of Quintana Roo to England (unique); Usage of high value 50c. “Corbata” on package of between 120-140 grams.
- 24. **Strip of 4x1p. “Barril” (surcharge on *Complementarios*) registered cover to New York (last day of 4p postal rate);** 2.50p. surcharge on *Complementario* single franking on cover to Mexico City.

The major philatelic references of this period are:

Nicholas Follansbee, *The Stamps of the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1916* (Chicago, Illinois: The Collectors Club of Chicago, 1996), 226pp.

Mexicana, quarterly journal of Mexico Elmhurst Philatelic Society Inc., the specialist society for the study of Mexican philately.

- It should not be forgotten that the issues of the Revolutionary Period also garnered much contemporary scholarship, viz. George Ward Linn’s article “The White and Green Seal Issues of Sonora,” first published in 1916. (*Billig’s Philatelic Handbook*, Volume 20 (1954).

Historical Background to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917

The Mexican Revolution was both a social and a political revolution. While Mexico in 1910 was primarily an agricultural country, with large, feudal-type haciendas worked by the peasantry, certain sections of the economy were highly developed, with profitable mining, oil and transportation sectors controlled largely by American, British and European capital. Politically, certain sections of the landowning class and bourgeoisie wanted more freedom for themselves, and a share in the modern sectors of the Mexican economy dominated by foreigners. On a social level, increasing dissatisfaction among Mexico’s downtrodden and exploited peasantry, buttressed by growing unrest among sections of the urban working classes, had found expression in the populist military caudillos Emiliano Zapata in the south and Francisco Villa in the north of the country. All these groups saw themselves represented by Francisco Madero, a wealthy landowner and liberal, and Diaz’s opponent in the fraudulent presidential elections of 1910. In November of that year, Madero issued his *Plan de San Luis Potosi*, calling for the forceful overthrow of the Diaz government, followed by the holding of genuinely free elections.

The *Gobierno Constitucionalista* of 1913
The Civil War – Phase I

At first, the political and social struggles lent each other mutual support. Perennial President Porfirio Diaz was forced to resign on 25 May 1911, and the promised free election was finally held. In the election, Francisco Madero was victorious and took office on 6 November 1911 as the new President of the Mexican Republic.

As the Madero presidency was seen to be a new beginning for many Mexicans, Emiliano Zapata took the opportunity to issue his *Plan de Ayala*, a revolutionary program for land reform. As Zapata and his peasant armies waged a virtual class war on the great landholding *hacendados* in the states of Morelos and Guerrero, army generals began to plot against the new president. Several

attempted rebellions were crushed. Assaulted from both “Left” and “right”, the new President failed to bring about either order or reform. By late 1912, less than one year after Madero took office, the country was again in turmoil.

In February 1913, the leader of the Mexican armed forces, General Victoriano Huerta, rebelled against Madero, whom he considered “ineffective” against the growing social turmoil. There followed the so-called *Decena tragica*: the ten days of bloodshed in Mexico City that ended with the assassination of President Madero.

Resistance against Huerta did not take long to develop. The following month, a group of Madero’s supporters gathered in the northern states of Coahuila, Chihuahua and Sonora and on 26 March 1913, issued their *Plan de Guadalupe*, calling for the overthrow of Huerta and launching a rebellion against this Presidential usurper. Venustiano Carranza, Governor of the State of Chihuahua, became chief (*jefe*) of *this Gobierno Constitucionalista*, joined by other leaders such as Obregon, Gonzalez, Maytorena, Villa and Zapata. Again for a time, the social and political struggles were united against the Huerta regime.

Four major armies were fielded by the Constitutionalist movement against the Federal forces under Huerta. Obregon led an army on the west coast of the country, Gonzalez on the east, Villa in the centre, and Zapata in the south. Fighting occurred throughout Mexico, with Federal garrisons controlling the major cities and revolutionary forces attacking them from the countryside. It was the first war to be fought along the railway lines. The major battles of the civil war occurred between January and August of 1914. Both Obregon’s army, moving down the west coast from Sonora, and Villa’s “Division of the North” converged toward Mexico City. In July 1914 Huerta resigned as President and on 15 August the Treaty of Teoloyucan sanctioned the unconditional surrender of the Federal regime, and the dissolution of the Federal army. Obregon and 6,000 revolutionary troops entered Mexico City to confirm the Constitutionalist victory. The first phase of the civil war within the Mexican Revolution had come to an end.

The Rupture of the *Gobierno Constitucionalista*
The Civil War – Phase II

The unity of the social and political struggles within the Constitutionalist revolutionary movement, represented by Villa and Zapata on one side and Carranza on the other, quickly fell apart once victory over the Federal armies was achieved. It hinged upon a growing rift between Villa and Carranza. Villa’s military successes were seen by Carranza as a threat, while Villa accused Carranza of dictatorial ambitions.

In October 1914, a Convention of Military Chiefs met in Aguascalientes in an attempt to mediate the growing crisis within the Constitutionalist movement. The Convention declared itself sovereign, and ordered Carranza to deliver executive power to a new provisional president. Carranza refused, and the Convention declared him in rebellion. In mid-November, Obregon, commander of the Constitutionalist forces in the capital, denounced the Convention, declared his support for Carranza, and formally declared war on Villa. The die had now been cast.

In December 1914, Obregon and Carranza withdrew to Veracruz, while Villa and Zapata occupied Mexico City. The Carranza faction retained the name “Constitutionalists”, those opposing them and supporting the decisions of the Convention were known as “Conventionists”. The war between the two factions, evenly matched with about 70,000 troops on either side, was to be even more bitter than the one the revolutionaries had won against Huerta.

The fighting lasted for nearly two years. By early 1916, Villa and his Conventionist army had been reduced to a shadow of its former self, and Zapata had once again been confined to his home State of Morelos. While both continued to make trouble for the Carranza government, this second phase of the civil war had ended with an attenuated Constitutionalist victory.

This victory was crowned with the approval and ratification by the Constitutional Congress of a new Mexican constitution on 5 February 1917..

- **Mexico City**

The control of the capital city and the *Distrito Federal* (the Federal District surrounding the capita) changed hands numerous times during the revolution:

From (Date)	To (Date)	Faction/Party
*Prior to 15 August 1914		Huerta (Federalist)
15 August 1915	23 November 1914	Carranza
24 November 1914	5 December 1914	Zapata
6 December 1914	25 January 1915	Villa
26 January 1915	9 March 1915	Carranza
10 March 1915	9 July 1915	Villa
10 July 1915	16 July 1915	Carranza
17 July 1915	1 August 1915	Zapata
**Subsequent to 2 August 1915		Carranza (Constitutionalist)