

SYNOPSIS

“ALL Aboard!” Development, Organization and Operation of Argentina’s Railroads: 1857-1947

Purpose: To illustrate, through railroad-related postal and other materials the development, organization and operation of Argentina’s railroads from 1857, with the inauguration of the first line, until 1947, the year foreign-owned lines were nationalized.

Scope: Chronologically, the scope of the exhibit runs from 1857 to 1947. Note: philatelic materials, i.e., the first railroad-related markings, date from 1865. Traveling and station post offices, railroad-specific markings, parcel post forms, railroad telegraph, postal stationery, post cards and ancillary items such as freight manifests, medals, union dues books, railroad tickets and passes, and even a soccer pennant (the Ferrocarril Oeste squad), all demonstrate not only the importance and centrality of the railroads, but also the ways in which they intersected with society. Many of the pieces are elusive and seldom seen.

Research: Research for this exhibit (although I didn’t know it at the time) dates from my doctoral dissertation and subsequent book on British-owned railroads in Argentina. This background later helped me locate the right kinds of materials and appreciate the scope of the railroad enterprise in Argentina. Much of my research was done in railroad archives in Buenos Aires, in the British Public Record Office (Kew), or was gleaned from company annual reports. An invaluable timetable from the early 1920s for all railroads identified stations, routes, and distances.

It must be understood that Argentina was an under populated country for most of the nineteenth century (the 1850 census totaled only 1,100,000 inhabitants, rising to 4,700,000 by 1900). About a third of the total were concentrated in the city of Buenos Aires. Although there is no census for the number of early covers with railroad markings, in that most of them originated in or were sent to the interior, they are scarce. The exhibit also includes railroad markings unrecorded by the still-definitive Bose and Korth, *Estafetas Postales Ambulantes Argentinas, 1865-1965* and I have identified earlier dates for the appearance of some TPOs.

Difficulty of Acquisition: Highlighted (red matting) covers reflect their scarcity and/or importance. A striking piece is an 1869 cover to the Wheelwright Company, at that time engaged in the construction of the *FC Central Argentino* (Central Argentine Railroad). The most frequently found (although not common) material is for the *Ferrocarril Sud* (Southern Railroad), the largest in the country. Items for the state-owned lines or smaller British and French-owned lines are especially difficult to locate. Much of the ancillary material—much of it unique--was acquired in the 1970s while most of the rest has been added from the 1990s to the present.

Selected Sources:

Bose, Walter B.L. and Rolf Korth, *Estafetas Postales Ambulantes Argentina, 1865-1965* (Buenos Aires, 1974). Bilingual edition.

Ceriani, Juan Alberto and Rodolfo Kneitschel (H), *Matasellos utilizados en las estafetas ambulantes ferroviarias Argentinas, 1865-1892* (Buenos Aires, 1987). Bilingual edition.

Kneitschel, Victor, *Catalogo de los sellos postales de la Republica Argentina y sus derivados*, 6th ed., 1958, 10th ed., 1970 (Buenos Aires, 1958, 1970). Especially useful for identifying parcel post material.