

Love for Sale: The Prostitute Stamps of Rosario, Argentina



By Tom Fortunato
A Presentation for the
Rochester Philatelic Association





This is the brief story of a philatelic connection to what is claimed to be the oldest profession in the world. In fact, here is proof that almost anything can be taxed, but maybe not in the way you think. And yes, it all boils down to money!

Who?..... Prostitutes

What?.... A preventative “health” tax

Where?.. The city of Rosario, Santa Fe,
Argentina

When?.... 1893-1928

Can you “make out” what’s on the “menu”?

Argentina has had a long history of municipal rather than federal taxation as a way of funding the majority of local needs of all kinds. The city of Rosario, about 175 miles northwest of the capital of Buenos Aires, was the second largest city in the country at the turn of the twentieth century with a population of 112,461 based on 1900 census figures. It more than doubled in size from 15 years earlier when an influx of mostly young male immigrants arrived from Europe. By 1900 native born Italians and Spaniards made upwards of 50% of the residents.



Rosario's harbor was a Mecca for the import/export trade and many immigrants were hired in related commercial businesses.





"I SPENT HALF MY
MONEY ON GAMBLING,
ALCOHOL AND WILD
WOMEN. THE OTHER
HALF I WASTED "

WC FIELDS

With so many young male laborers, and “boys being boys,” it is no wonder that after-work entertainment and expenses mirrored W. C. Fields’ famous quote, “I spent half my money on gambling, alcohol and wild women. The other half I wasted.” That latter vice is what this presentation deals with.

Historically known as consumption, tuberculosis was the primary infectious disease of the era bringing sickness and death. But other plagues of usually lesser severity—blamed on a more pleasurable source—were a bigger problem in Rosario, namely venereal diseases like herpes, syphilis and gonorrhea. Sexually transmitted diseases of all kinds were rampant around the region. Something had to be done.

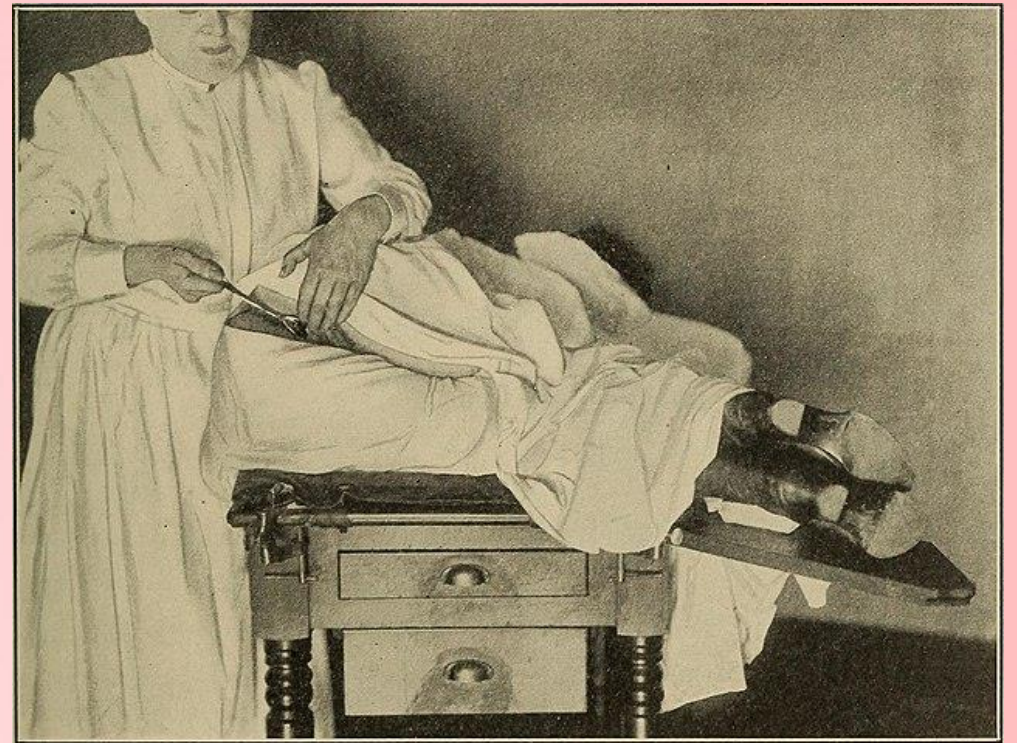


**KEEP
CALM
AND
SAY NO
TO STDs**

Prostitution was legal in Rosario at the time and “Ladies of the Evening” were licensed professionals. Each had an official identification health book issued by the local Servicio Sanitario (Sanitary Service health department) and by law was required to take a twice-weekly health exam at their own (or a Madam’s) expense.



Dept of
Health
building,
Rosario,
1910





half page

That's where these revenue stamps come in. The basic denomination stamp at the time paid the fee for the initial checkup, with higher values available for any follow up procedures or fines. They were stuck to the health book pages, marked accordingly based on the test results and provided proof to clients as to their current condition. Later issues also bore cancellations with the exam date and name of the clinic used.

A test result was noted on the stamp, handwritten or stamped in various ways, using one of five conditions...

SANA or S (healthy)

CON REGLA (menstruating)

ENFERMA (sick)

OBSERVACION (observation/treatment)

REPUESTA (recovered, *not shown here*)



While stamps were first produced in 1893, new stamps were printed yearly from 1896 onwards, often with changed colors in two or three denominations. The more common values were printed in the 15,000-30,000 range, while 1,000 or fewer were made for the higher values up to 4.5p.

The stamps can be broken
into five groups:

Series 1 1893-1895

Series 2 1896-1899

Series 3 1900-1911

Series 4 1912-1926

Series 5 1927-1932

key items

| | |
|--|---|
| 1893 Type A - Only known copies | 1902 1st surcharge – only known copy |
| 1902 5 th surcharge - overprint at bottom | 1903 High value stamps |
| 1903 Emergency issue – only 525 printed | 1903 1p yellow – only known copy |
| 1906 2p deep blue – only 2 copies known | 1906 4p dull orange – 3 known copies |
| 1907 High value stamps | 1908 4p - Strip of 3 imperforate vertically |
| 1910 1p emergency surcharges | 1914-15 Surcharges |
| 1915 1.5p blue - only 2 known copies | 1915 4.5p carmine - only 2 known copies |
| 1916 1.5p orange - 4 copies known | 1917 1.5p brown - only known copy |
| 1920 1.5p carmine - two of 4 known | 1921 1.5p green - only a few known |
| 1926 1.5p vermilion - only 3 copies known | 1927 1.5p light green - only known copy |

These were first documented in the 1915 Forbin revenue catalog, but is woefully incomplete to that year.

Stamps issued before 1897 and after 1913 are the least available in dealer stocks. The rarer health condition markings of enferma, observacion and repuesta are also most prized.

Let's look at some of these stamps and various health marks year by year.

168

Catalogue Fiscal A. Forbin

1888. — 25×28. *Chiffre dans un cercle. Dent. 11 ½.*

| | | |
|---|-------------------|------|
| 6 | 10 c. brun-violet | 2 » |
| 7 | 10 c. carmin | 1 25 |
| 8 | 20 c. bistre | 4 » |

1890. — 30×40. *Armes dans un cercle. Dent. 11 ½.*

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|
| 9 | 2 c. bleu LIT FLEUVI | 0 75 |
| a. | 2 c. bl. ES ANGRAPH O | 0 75 |
| b. | 2 c. bleu (sans nom d'imprimeur). | 0 75 |

SERVICIO SANITARIO

1893. — 32×42. *N° de contrôle la plume. Dent. 11.*

| | | |
|----|-------------------------|------|
| 1 | 1 p. noir (cont. vert.) | 2 » |
| a. | 1 p. (cont. rge) (1.94) | 1 25 |
| b. | 1 p. (papier épais) | 2 » |

1895. — *Id. Contrôle au composteur.*

| | | |
|----|-----------|-----|
| 1c | 1 p. noir | 4 » |
|----|-----------|-----|

1896. — 34×53. *Grande marge en bas avec n° et contrôle noir. Dent. 11 ½.*

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-----|
| 2 | 2 p. bl. l.c. (1896) (1.4.000) | 4 |
| 3 | 2 p. rose (1897) (1.16.000) | 2 |
| 4 | 2 p. br. (1898) (1.12.000) | 2 » |
| 5 | 2 p. gr.-v. (1899) (1.8.000) | 3 |

1900. — *Id. Contrôle en chiffres noirs.*

| | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|
| 6 | 2 p. verm. (1900) (1.5.000) | 2 50 |
| a. | 2 p. (cont. violet) (1900) (1.5.000) | 2 50 |
| 7 | 2 p. émer. (1902) (1.5.000) | 3 » |
| 8 | 1 p. bl. cl. (1902) (1.1.000) | 7 50 |

Ne pas confondre ce timbre avec celui de 1904. Il est oblitéré en violet d'une des lettres S R O.

Juin 1902. — *Id. Surchargés :*

en haut : a. Un Peso en bleu
 b. UN PESO en bleu
 c. 1 PESO en bleu
en bas : UN PESO en rouge

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------|
| 9 | 1 peso s. 2 p. émeraude | 10 » |
| Surch. a (t. 995) | | 7 50 |
| Surch. b (t. 1250) | | 20 » |
| Surch. c (t. 250) | | 20 » |

Le n° a existe dans la surcharge en bas tirage 5.

Août 1902. — *Id. Surch. 1 PESO en violet.*

| | | |
|----|------------------------------|------|
| 10 | 1 p. s. 2 p. émer. (1.4.800) | 3 » |
| a. | Surch. en bas (t. 210) | 20 » |

Sept. 1902. — *Id. Surch. UN PESO en bleu.*

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 11 | 1 p. s. 2 p. émer. (1.50) | 30 » |
|----|---------------------------|------|

Déc. 1902. — *Id. Surch. Un Peso en bleu ou violet.*

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 12 | 1 p. s. 2 p. émer. (1.50) | 30 » |
| a. | Surch. violette (t. 725) | 3 » |

1903. — *Id. N° de contrôle en bas ou au milieu, grandes marges.*

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----|
| 13 | 1 p. vermillon (1.15.000) | 2 » |
| 14 | 2 p. violet | » » |
| 15 | 4 p. jaune foncé | » » |

Déc. 1903. — *Id. Contrôle en haut. Petites marges.*

| | | |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 16 | 1 p. rouge terne (1.525) | 10 » |
|----|--------------------------|------|

1904. — *Id. Grandes marges. Contrôle en bas ou au milieu.*

| | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----|
| 17 | 1 p. bleu (1.12.000) | 2 » |
| a. | Sans numéro de contrôle | |
| 18 | 2 p. émeraude (1.1000) | 5 » |
| 19 | 4 p. brun (1.1000) | 5 » |

1905. — *Id. Très grande marge. Contrôle en bas.*

| | | |
|----|--------------------------|-----|
| 20 | 1 p. brun-rge (1.15.000) | 2 » |
| 21 | 2 p. violet | 5 » |
| 22 | 4 p. émeraude | 5 » |

1906. — *Id.*

| | | |
|----|----------------------------|-----|
| 23 | 1 p. violet terne (1.1000) | 5 » |
| 24 | 2 p. bleu foncé | 6 » |
| 25 | 4 p. vermillon | 6 » |

1907. — *Id.*

| | | |
|----|-----------------|-----|
| 26 | 1 p. vermillon | 5 » |
| 27 | 2 p. brun-rouge | 6 » |
| 28 | 4 p. émeraude | 6 » |

1908. — *Id.*

| | | |
|----|------------------|-----|
| 29 | 1 p. carmin | 3 » |
| 30 | 2 p. jaune foncé | 5 » |
| 31 | 4 p. bleu | 6 » |

1909. — *Id.*

| | | |
|----|-----------------|-----|
| 32 | 1 p. vert terne | 3 » |
| 33 | 2 p. violet | 5 » |
| 34 | 4 p. brun | 6 » |

1910. — *Id.*

| | | |
|----|-------------------|-----|
| 35 | 1 p. bistre clair | 3 » |
| 36 | 2 p. vermillon | 5 » |
| 37 | 4 p. bleu foncé | 6 » |

1911. — *Id.*

| | | |
|----|------------------|-----|
| 38 | 1 p. violet vif | 3 » |
| 39 | 1 p. émeraude | 5 » |
| 40 | 4 p. violet-brun | 6 » |

1912. — *Id. Millésime*

| | | |
|----|-----------------|-----|
| 41 | 1 p. bleu foncé | 5 » |
|----|-----------------|-----|

1913.

| | | |
|----|------------|-----|
| 42 | 1 p. rouge | » » |
|----|------------|-----|

<http://sanitariostamps.com/>

FORBIN 1915 UNRELIABLE:

- The 1893-95 issues are not sufficiently differentiated.
- The numbers given for quantity issued (tirage) are far from correct for the years before 1902. The same is true for 1906, the last year for which a quantity is given.
- The 1900 and 1901 issues are combined, and a non-existent "control number violet" variety is added.
- The 1910 emergency issue is missing.
- The 1 peso stamp for 1911 is given in the wrong color.

FORBIN 1915 RELIABLE:

- Dates and quantities for the 1902 issues—including the complicated overprints—seem remarkably accurate.
- Quantity and date for the rare 1903 emergency issue also appear to be correct.
- The single minor variety listed after 1902—the 1904 stamp without control number—does in fact exist.
- With the possible exception of 1911, the scarce-to-rare higher values are correctly described.

Gems Ex. Ackerman: <http://sanitariostamps.com/documents/akerman-exhibit.html>

Series 1 1893-1895

The design measures 32 x 39½ mm and is focused on a small round vignette that displays the arms of the city, with a blank panel for the control number just above it. The stamps are printed in black or grey and printed in sheets of 25. All are denominated one peso moneda nacional (M/N). There are three different perforations, the most common being 11½, and four different varieties.



1893 Issue – 1 peso – Manuscript control numbers in red or black.
Health conditions written in pen or with cancels per below.



“R” for con regula (menstruating)



stamped SANA
(healthy)

Series 2 1896-1899

The design changed for the second series stamps that measure 29 x 38½ mm. A rate increase took place from one to two pesos beginning in 1896. The printed control number was moved to the wide bottom margin preceded by the ordinal indicator "Nº". The stamps were printed in a different color each year and available in January.



1896 Issue – Note the large control number at the bottom.

1897-1899 Issues – Slightly smaller control number at the bottom.



1896



1897



1898



1899

Specimen perfins are known of the 1898 issue that span two stamps as shown below. Jacobo Peuser is believed to be the printer of the stamps who founded a chain of stationery/book shops across major cities in Argentina, later publishing tourist guides and post cards.



MUESTRA
JACOBO PEUSER

Series 3 1900-1911

Note the absence of the "Nº" in front of the control number. Those from 1900 to 1903 had smaller bottom margins. The color was changed every year except for one. The basic stamps were two pesos until mid-1902 when they were overprinted to one peso. Starting in 1903 two and four peso stamps were printed in quantities of 1,000. Emergency issues were produced in 1903 and 1910 when others ran out in December before the following year's issue had been delivered. Both are rare.



1899-1901 Issues – Paper quality continues to deteriorate and perfs become more ragged in 1899, improved in 1900. An oval health dispensary condition cancellation was used beginning in 1899.



1899



1900



1901



Sana
(healthy)



Enferma
(sick)

1902 Issue – A new stamp was apparently not issued in early 1902 pending a basic exam rate change. 1901 2p light green stamps were used until the new 1p ultramarine was released between May 10-12 with the change. Here is a sequence from health book pages.



← Front page with exam dates of April 28, May 2, May 5 and May 9 using 2p stamps

| May | | | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Su | Mo | Tu | We | Th | Fr | Sa |
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |

→ Back of the same page with exam dates of May 12, May 16, May 19 and May 22 using 1p stamps



1902 Surcharge Issue – Excess 1901 2p stamps were surcharged to 1p to meet the demand in a variety of formats, used with a new date stamp cancel design that can be found through 1905.



UN PESO in blue (top)

UN PESO in red (bottom)

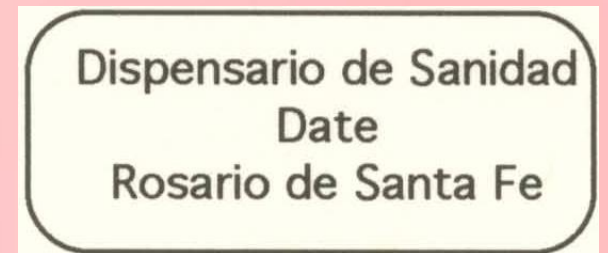
Note the different fonts used.



1 PESO (top)



Un Peso (top)



1903 and 1904 Issues – Basic exam rate was reduced from 2p to 1p between May 9-12. Remainder 1901 2p stamps were surcharged to 1p in several formats with a blue 1p stamp later being issued.



1903 1 peso shades and size variant



1904 1 peso

1904 Issue – All three denominations from 1904 had excessive remainders and were specially cancelled to void them, translated City Accountancy, Rosario de Santa Fe.



1905 Issue – Two different dies were used to produce the basic 1p brown stamp. Remainders are shown here bearing a different accountancy cancellation design than that used in 1904.



Die Type 1
ROSARIO
SA touch



Die Type 2
ROSARIO
SA gap



1906-1908 Issues – As usual, the colors have changed in the basic denominations. A small portion of the 1908 1p issue was printed with aniline ink, bleeding through the back. The 1906 issues mostly have the health finding stamped on the bottom margins.



1906



1907



1908 with regular and aniline ink

1909-1910 Issues – Nothing special, but...



1909



1910 1p remainder



1910 2p
unnumbered
remainder



1910 4p
unnumbered
remainder

1910 Issue (continued) – There was an emergency need to have additional 1p denominated stamps to fill the basic exam rate, so unused 2p stamps were overprinted \$1.00 (1p) and used.

1911 Issue- Nothing special.



1910



1910



1911

Series 4 1912-1926

The design change is distinguished by the year of issue in two horizontal panels on the sides of the vignette. In 1914 the Dispensario de Salubridad (Prostitute Registry) changed the exam fee to 1.5 pesos, and a series of overprints and surcharges resulted. Higher denomination stamps followed. All stamps issued after 1913 are scarce, a large percentage are unique, and there are several years for which no stamp has been reported.



1912-1913 Issues – Notice that the ink color used by the health dispensary's rectangular cancel used since 1906 changed from blue to green.



1912



1913

1914 Issue – Another basic exam rate increase, this time from 1p to 1.50p, necessitated a surcharge on the original blue 1914 issue.



1p



1.50p



4p remainder

Most post-1914 “Servicio Sanitario” items are extremely elusive.
Here is a sampling of some of them, thankfully dated...



By the way, Argentine philately is replete with revenue issues of all kinds during this same time period. Compare these stamps below. What did you notice? Be on the lookout for “sanitario” imposters!



That's right, the same design for the post-1911 "Service Sanitario" stamps was used in the work of City of Rosario veterinary inspectors, with a minor change. Why re-invent the wheel? Collectors and dealers sometime mix them up, too!



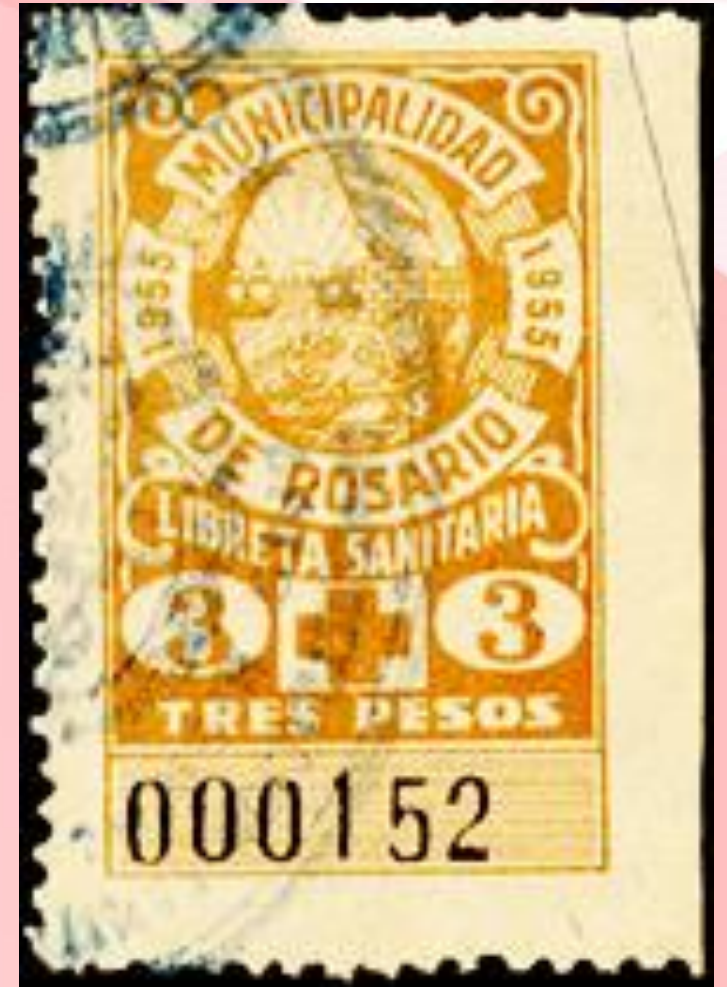
Series 5 1927-1932

These were made as a much smaller stamp, the design measuring 20 x 34 mm. The copy shown here from 1927 is believed to be the only stamp reported from this series. Revenue stamp collecting dropped off around this time, which might explain why so little material after this era remains. The 1936 Law of Social Prophylaxis prohibited all municipalities in Argentina from operating brothels and mandated prenuptial medical examinations for all men (Law 12.331- [in Spanish here](#)).



Afterwards

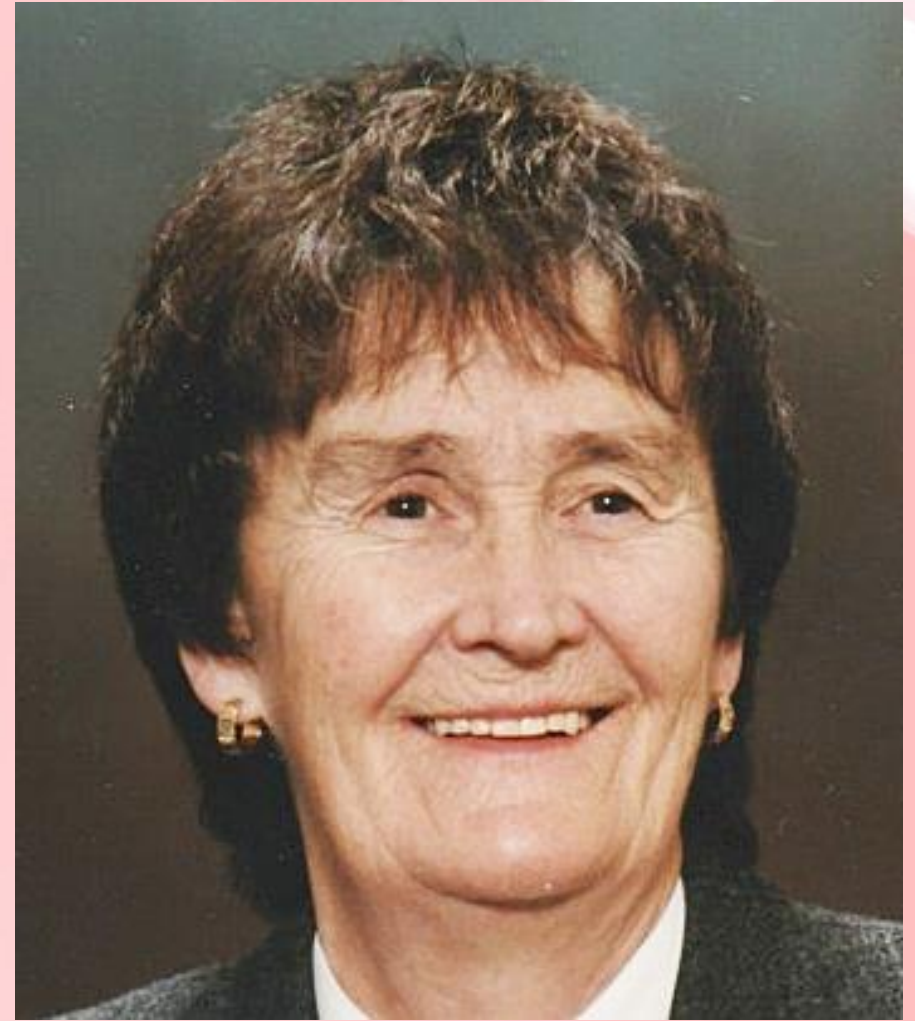
There was no need for SERVICIO SANITARIO stamps once prostitution was illegal. However similar stamps were issued later inscribed LIBRETA SANITARIA (health booklet). Laws required any worker having regular contact with the public or food to minimally have a yearly medical examination and use stamps in a booklet as proof. This area of philately is yet to be explored, with expectations of finding items dating from 1936 to the mid-1960s.



In tribute to Ann Triggles, RPA member and the original “Hooker” philatelist who brought the collecting and research of these stamps from obscurity into the limelight. Much of the material here is from her groundbreaking 1998 one-frame exhibit on the subject, then expanded on by collector and exhibitor Ben Termini.

See her exhibit online at:

<http://www.rpastamps.org/presentations/ladies/index.html>.



Ben went on to prepare and publish the definitive catalog to date specifically on the various revenue issues from Rosario, and has written extensively about them.

CATALOG of SANITARY SERVICE STAMPS, VETERINARY INSPECTION STAMPS and TUBERCULINIZATION STAMPS ISSUED by the CITY OF ROSARIO de SANTA FE, ARGENTINA

Benedict A. Termini, M.D.



Stamping Around

Newsletter of the Mid-Cities Stamp Club

Activities Meeting: First Wednesday @ 7:30 p.m.

Bob Duncan Community Center, Vandergriff Park

Lunch Meeting: Third Wednesday @ 7:30 p.m.

Garden & Arts Center, 906 Sester

Late Lunch Meeting: 4th Tuesday @ 7:00 p.m.

The Rock House at the Tarleton State University Langdon Center



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<http://www.mid-citiesstampclub.com>

August 2009

Prostitute Revenue Stamps

By Ben Termini, MD

Postage stamps have only one job – to facilitate mail delivery. But revenue stamps, on the other hand, can be involved in just about every phase of human activity, from writing checks to airport departures. Perhaps the weirdest revenue stamp usage I have seen comes from the city of Rosario in the Province of Santa Fe in Argentina.

Approximately 100 years ago, prostitution was legal in that city, and the “ladies of the evening” were licensed, given an identity card, and required to undergo monthly medical examinations. To pay for the examination, each woman had to purchase a revenue stamp issued by the Servicio Sanitario (Sanitary Service). The stamp was placed on her identity card and at the completion of the examination it was stamped SANA (or S) if she was healthy or ENFERMA (or E) if she was infected. If she was having her period, it was marked CON REGLA (or R). The stamps were also marked with the name of the examining clinic and the date.

The prostitute was required to show her card to prospective customers, so if she got an E, some fancy explaining was probably in order. There was no requirement that the customer prove that he was free of disease.

These stamps are listed in the Forbin Revenue Catalog, and were issued every year from 1893 until the 1920s. They come in a variety of colors and after 1895 had a black control number printed at the bottom. In 1912 the design was modified to include year dates. The examination fees varied between 1 and 2 pesos. Some of the stamps have values as high as 4.5 pesos however, and it is believed that the higher value stamps were used to pay fines for failing to be examined regularly or failing to get treatment. A few of these stamps are shown in the nearby illustration.

These are fairly common stamps and are not expensive. At the February APS show in Arlington, I was discussing these with a dealer. It turned out that he had some in stock and I bought them all for two bucks each.



Audi Number 5

By Peter Elias

Mid-May marked the addition of the fifth Audi in my life! While my current trusty 20 year-old Audi still looks and runs good (while getting very close to that 300,000 mile mark—only 6 tanks of gas to go!), I know that some day I will have to let go ...

So, in order to avoid being “Audi-less” again, I decided to purchase a good used 2003 Audi A6 Avant Quattro (don’t you just love German car names? - but not nearly as bizarre though as Volkswagen with their Phaeton, Touareg & Romain model names ...)

In Audi-speak, “Avant” basically means station wagon, and “Quattro” (from the Italian word for “four”) means that the car has permanent all-wheel drive.

While the old Audi 100 has a very large trunk, there are still limits to its cargo carrying capabilities. Since I did not necessarily want to get an SUV or MiniVan, I figured that a station wagon might not be a bad idea. The main trouble was that Avant models are kind of difficult to find in Texas. According to one of the Audi salespeople, people apparently either like to purchase sedans or SUV’s (apparently Avants are much more popular in states like Washington and New Jersey).

Being the good philatelist that I am, I couldn’t resist ordering a personalized stamp of the new car! And just for



A very complete web site on these issues was active for many years between 2010-2015 run by Steve Olson. It is partially archived here: <http://web.archive.org/web/20150421190405/http://sanitariostamps.com/>



*How about collecting
this subject for a
different take on
“social” philately?*