The 1920 Panama and Canal Zone 50c Stamp from Photograph to Production

Significance of this exhibit. For the student of Panama and Canal Zone philately and of the American Bank Note Company this exhibit shows the progression from original photographs to photo reduction including the hand drawn essay and its approval by Panama, the approved die proof, the key pieces of the approved plate proofs and the die numbering system. To conclude this exhibit the 1933 cancellation plate proofs are overlaid with the shipping and stamp invoices and top two rows of the finished stamp. It also confirms that an error had been made when the wrong Foreign Order Number was engraved on the vignette plate.

Background. On November 29, 1919 the Canal Zone placed an order for 50,000 fifty cent and one dollar stamps with Panama and included photographs to be used for the designs. Under the Taft Agreement of 1904 Panama was obligated to supply these stamps and placed this order, as well as an identical one for Panama, with the American Bank Note Company. This series of beautifully engraved stamps is similar to the two issues of 1915 and 1917 featuring the Panama Canal.

Highlights of this exhibit. The notes on the production materials show how the ABNCo kept track of the design but several discoveries stand out.

- On the back of a photo of the Balboa Drydock on page 4 the Canal Zone authorities glued a Mexico stamp to indicate the orange frame color it wanted and a label with the title in English and denominated in American currency. Panama changed the language of the stamp to Spanish and the currency to the Panama balboa but surprisingly the language on the selvage of the stamp as issued was English and the currency was American.

- At the top-right of the 1920 frame plate proof on page 10 there are faint scratch marks. No attention had been paid to them until the 1933 cancellation proofs were examined more closely for this exhibit. In the same position on the cancellation frame proof, pages 13-14, scratched into the plate is PANAMA STAMP 50 Cent, F6272. Next to the center guide arrows TOP has been scratched into the plate to help the printer avoid printing any “center inverts”.

- The vignette cancellation plate, pages 15-16, has an error, the order number F-6267, engraved into the selvage. Above it a scratched inscription appears to have been burnished out leaving only a faint 50. Above the penciled out F-6267 on the cancellation vignette proof is this order not Panama and to the right, in pencil, the correct order number F6272.

Published Research. An article based on these materials has been published in the Canal Zone Philatelist and COPACARTA September 2014.

Unless otherwise noted all pre-production and cancellation materials exhibited here are unique.
Official Canal Zone Photograph of Balboa Dry Dock Used as Basis for 50c Stamp Design

November 29, 1919. The Canal Zone ordered 50,000 50 cent stamps from Panama and sent two identical photographs of the Balboa Dry Dock.

The two ships in the dry dock, SS Grunewald and SS Prinz Sigismund were refurnished and renamed SS Gen. Geo. W. Goethals and SS Gen. W.C. Gorgas respectively. The United States took possession of these two ships along with the SS Savoie, and SS Sachsenwald of HAPAG, the Hamburg-Americanische Packetfahrth Aktien-Gesellschaft, after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917. The German crews and their families were interned on Taboga Island and some of their correspondence is displayed in the adjoining exhibit - World War I Censorship of Mail in the Canal Zone.
March 24, 1920. Photo received by ABNCo engraving department after Panama approved the essay. Mexico stamp and label attached by Canal Zone postal authorities who originally requested English title.
Preliminary Work Order

January 7, 1920 Schedule No. 9463, Order F6272. Note that the stamp will not be in English but in Spanish with Panama currency. The requested frame color has been changed from Orange to Yellow.

Date 1/7/20

Model to H.J.B.

POSTAGE STAMP

BANK-NOTES

General description Steel eng. in 2 colors

Quantities 50,000 - B.0.50

50,000 - B.0.50 - surcharged "CANAL ZONE"

FACE PLATE

Title in full

Size of note for work 7/8 x 1 11/32"

DENOMINATION

Words Cincuenta centésimos de balboa

Numerals 50

Text Top: República de Panamá - Correos - 50

Under or over vignette: "Dique de Balboa, Canal de Panamá"

Bottom - 50 - Cincuenta centésimos de balboa - 50

General style Similar to order F5082

Vignette Here with: Dry dock

Title of signing officers

Numbers Series

Date line

Stub Countersign

Remarks Vignette in black

Frame in 59 Yellow

TINT

March 24
Date Order received by Engraving Office on back.
Cincuenta Centésimos (50 c) and Un Balboa ($1) Essay Approved by Panama Dirección General de Correos y Telégrafos

Vignette is a photo reduction and Frame is hand drawn and colored

All handstamps shown below on back or cover of essay

February 3  Essay to be sent to Panama

February 16  Essay to be sent to Panama.

March 23  Essay to ABNCo Superintendent

March 24  Essay Received by Engraving Department

On Un Balboa essay  CARBONERO NEREUS EN LAS ESCLUSAS DE PEDRO MIGUEL  spelled correctly
Reduced Photograph for Vignette on Glossy Paper

April 14, 1920 Order F6272. Vignette Die is Special C1662. Frame Die is C1345.

Reduced Photograph for Vignette on Plain Paper

Order F6272. Engraver, George Lambert
Approved Dry Dock Die Proof

April 13, 1920. Die Proof Approved – Order Number F 6272
Plate Proofs in Issued Colors Approved

May 4, 1920. Plate Proofs of Frame, in issued colors, approved. Foreign Order F-6272

May 13, 1920. Plate Proofs of Vignette, in issued colors, approved. Foreign Order Error F-6267

May 14
Vignette Plate Proofs in Colors as Issued.
Approved by Engraving Office

May 14
Vignette Plate Proofs in Colors as Issued.
Received by Superintendent’s Office
Balboa Dry Dock Die Proofs
1920 Die proofs

Die Proof in Issued Colors
C-1346 Frame number

1924(ca.) ABNCo lines out previous Die Numbers and Renumbers Dies with 5 Digit Serial Number

Vignette Die Proof
No Die Number – one of two known
"Engraved by Geo. Lambert “ on back

Frame Die Proof in Black
Original Number C-1345 New Number 31311

Vignette Die Proof in Black
Original Number C-1662 New Number V 43143
Send the following Cablegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to.

VIA COLON

July 30, 1920.

EHRMAN
PANAMA CITY (Panama)

ERZIBECOT

ERBOMEXEJ

AZWICAHAT

AJJIWFRAP

REGISTERED

CHECK

Send cablegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to.

Cablegram Deciphered: The stamps will be shipped on the S.S. Cristobal August 4th. Registered Envelopes are delayed 2 to 3 weeks.
Above the engraved order number, F-6272, lightly scratched on the frame plate, is PANAMA STAMP 50 Cent, F6272. It is also partially visible in issued color on the frame plate proof on page 10 of this exhibit. Because this text is at the top of the stamp selvage it normally would not show on the printed sheet of stamps. The description was probably intended to make sure that the printer used the correct plates and to prevent the error made a few years previously when the portrait of Codoba from the Canal Zone 2c denomination was printed in the 5c Arosemena frame.

A mirror image with the text in red for legibility shows what the printer would have seen.
Three sheets of the Canal Zone 50c Balboa Dry Dock stamps overprinted SPECIMEN were sold at the ABNCo Archive Sale in 1990. All sheets were in very poor condition. No 50c specimen sheets for Panama were in the sale nor have any been recorded.

At the top of the selvage over the stamp in position 9 is the incorrect Foreign Order Number, F-6267, in the black color of the vignette. The correct number, F-6272, in the orange color of the frame, was printed on the selvage over the stamp in position 10 but was lost during the sale or in transit to the buyer.

Above the engraved inscription on the vignette plate, similar to that on the frame proof, is illegible text with only the very faint number 50 shown in red. This text is at the top of the stamp selvage and it appears that there was an attempt to burnish it out. Note that the order number in error, F-6267, has been lined out and the correct number F6272 added twice in pencil. This order not Panama verifies that F-6267 was an error.