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# Cross-border Covers Between the U.S. and Mexico, 1898-1902,

Where have all the US covers to Mexico gone?

by Len McMaster

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I should first explain that I do not collect Mexican stamps or its postal history (other than what I have acquired for this work), and know relatively little of either outside the period of 1898 to 1902. What I do collect is the US 1898 1¢ green Franklin (US Scott no. 279), and all of its manifestations, including its postal use on cross-border covers to Mexico from 1898 to 1902.

The problem is that I have run across very few cross-border covers to Mexico, even fewer bearing “my stamp”, in the last 20 years. Since I have observed numerous cross-border covers to Canada, I assumed the cross-border covers to Mexico were out there waiting to be discovered, but thus far I have not been very successful in doing so. Thinking about this I wondered if there were similarly few cross-border covers to the US from Mexico, theorizing that few covers to the US might suggest that there was very little mail exchanged between the two countries at all.

To my surprise I found many, in fact in just a few hours searching dealer stock on the Internet (three dealers, plus eBay) I was able to locate over 95 examples of Mexican

mail to foreign destinations, including over 50 to the US. By comparison one of the dealer’s stock included both US and Mexican covers and while I found over 100 examples of US mail to foreign destinations, none were to Mexico; yet even this dealer had 10 Mexican covers to foreign destinations, including 5 to the US. I hesitate to conclude too much from what I found from my Internet search, but it does appear that there are more cross-border covers from Mexico to the US available than I have otherwise found from the US to Mexico.

Apart from the Universal Postal Union (UPU) agreement signed by both the United States and Mexico, both countries (and Canada) by a separate treaty also agreed that “articles of every kind or nature which are admitted to the domestic mails ... will be admitted under the same conditions to the mails exchanged between the two countries.... All articles ... are required to be fully prepaid with postage stamps, at the rate of postage applicable to similar articles in the domestic mails in the country of origin” [ref.1]. Thus US mail from 1898-1902 could be sent to Mexico at the prevailing domestic rates, 1 cent (¢) for post cards, 2¢ for letters, etc.,



Figure 1. 1902 post card from Colorado to Durango, Mexico using the correct 1¢ cross-border treaty (US domestic post card) rate

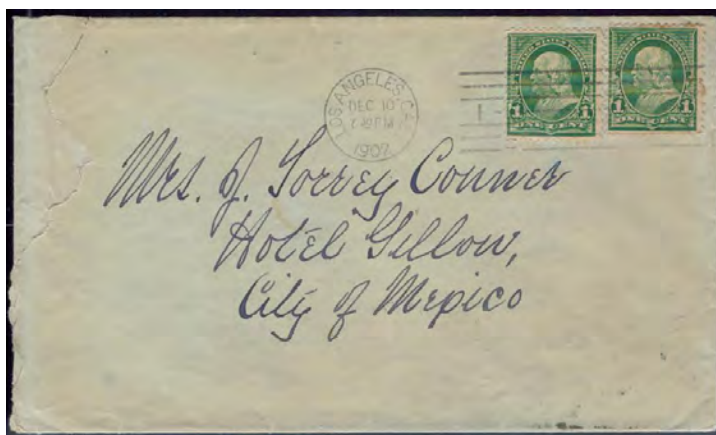


Figure 2. 1902 cover from Los Angeles to Mexico City using the correct 2¢ cross-border treaty (US domestic first class letter) rate

... and Mexican mail could be sent to the US at their prevailing domestic rates, 2 centavos(c) for post cards, 5c for letters, etc. [ref.2].



Figure 3. 1899 postal card from Tijuana to Waterloo, IN paying the correct 2c cross-border (Mexican domestic post card) rate

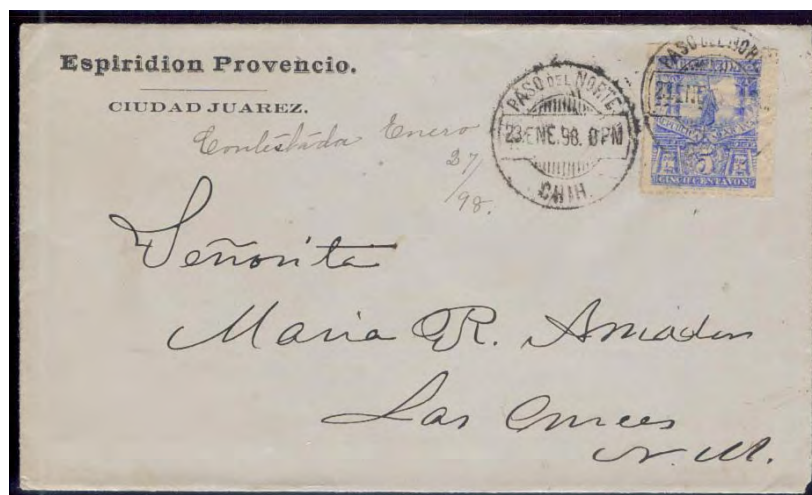


Figure 4. 1898 cover from Paso del Norte to Las Cruces, NM using the correct 5c cross-border treaty (Mexican domestic letter) rate

The UPU rates from Mexico to other UPU countries were 3c for post cards and 10c for letters.



Figure 5. 1900 post card from Mexico to Germany using the correct 3c UPU rate



Figure 6. 1898 5c postal stationery with 2c and 3c stamps from Mexico City to Germany using the correct 10c UPU rate

Occasionally I have found mail from the US to Mexico that used the UPU postage rates suggesting the US population was not fully aware of the cross-border mail treaty with Mexico.



Figure 7. 1898 postal card from Boston to Mexico City using the UPU 2c foreign post card rate, over paying the cross-border (US domestic) rate by 1c

In the case of letters sent with 5¢ postage we know that it's a matter of misinterpretation of the rate required, because even a 2 ounce letter would have required only 4¢, not the 5¢ postage used, which would have been correct only for a letter sent to another UPU treaty country.





Figure 8. 1900 letter from the US to Mexico using the 5¢ UPU foreign rate, overpaying the cross-border treaty rate by 3¢

There are examples of cross-border mail from Mexico to the US using the UPU rates, but one is faced with the difficulty in interpreting the postage used on a letter because 10c would have been correct for a letter whose weight exceeded that allowed for 5c as well as a misinterpretation of the rate required.



Figure 9. 1900 postal card from Mexico City to New York, NY using the UPU 3c foreign post card rate, overpaying the cross-border rate by 1c

There is some unusual cross-border mail to the US, interesting to me because of the use of the U.S. 1898 1¢ Franklin in addition to the Mexican postage. The first example, shown in Figure 10, is a 1c Mexican wrapper addressed to San Francisco and forwarded to Paris, France by adding the 1¢ stamp. Beecher and Wawrukiewicz point out in their book on U.S. domestic rates that “The rules for redirecting were/are extensive and at times complex. Basically ... third- and fourth-class matter has been redirected as if remailed anew from the office of redirecting” [ref.3]. In their book on international postal rates they also point that while “no additional postage was to be charged for the retransmission (redirection) of postal articles within the interior of the Union”, redirection was not free if “readdressed” as in this case [ref.4]. Thus my conclusion is that someone at the home of the original addressee added the stamp to pay the 1¢ UPU foreign printed matter rate as if it were being mailed “anew” from the U.S. to France.



Figure 10. 1¢ wrapper postmarked Mexico City, 1899 to San Francisco, CA (correct cross-border rate for printed matter  $\leq 50$  grams) with 1¢ US stamp added to forward to Paris, backstamped Paris, August 4, 1899

The second example, shown in Figure 11, was first thought to be another example of mixed-franking, but closer examination suggests it was an attempt to use a Mexican postal card within the US. From the message it appears it was written while in El Paso, Texas after visiting Juárez, but where it was mailed is not clear. The first postmark discernable is a Los Angeles, Cal., a Barry machine cancel dated February 26th, but there may be other markings underneath the stamp. There is a purple oval handstamp declaring “Held for Postage, Feb 26, 1901”, and lastly a Los Angeles, Cal. duplex handstamp dated March 11, 1901. There is a purple handstamp in the lower left declaring “This is the letter for which you sent postage”, so the sender did not get away with using the Mexican postal card and the addressee had to pay the US domestic 1¢ post card rate. Since the postal card did not have the required labeling “in the language of the country of origin”, the postmaster could have imposed the 2¢ letter rate, but the sender could have prevented all this by mailing the card in Juárez.



Figure 11. 2¢ postal card to Hartford, CT with US stamp added to pay the 1¢ US domestic post card rate

In summary, while there are examples of cross-border mail from the U.S. to Mexico using the correct rate, there appears to be far less than one would expect, especially in light of the much larger number of cross-border mail from Mexico to the U.S. Should one expect there to be more mail flow from Mexico with a 1900 population of 13.6 million to the US with a 1900 population of 76.2 million, or the other way? What about the trade between the two countries with its attendant correspondence? As they are today, the US and Mexico were active trading partners in 1900, and even though trade with Mexico was a relatively small percentage of US trade (Mexico accounting for only 7% of US imports, and 2.5% of US exports), it was a major percentage of Mexico's trade (79% of Mexican exports and 54% of Mexican imports) [ref.5]. So where is all the commercial mail? Can it be so easily explained that US recipients kept their mail and Mexican recipients did not? Perhaps collecting waste paper may have provided a living for enough people in Mexico to cause a loss of covers? Or is it that the warmer, more humid Mexican climate took a greater toll on the fragile paper used? None of these explanations seem plausible, however, in light of the relatively large number of domestic Mexican covers available. Maybe the use was too commonplace to save, or maybe they are all setting in someone's hoard. Whatever the reason, I continue to search for the elusive cross-border cover from the US to Mexico franked by the 1898 1¢ Franklin stamp. ⚙

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Jim Forte for reading my initial draft and offering suggestions that have been incorporated.

Table 1: Mexican postal rates inferred from Internet cover survey<sup>1</sup>

Printed matter, internal and foreign destinations <sup>2</sup> .....	1c ≤ 50 grams
Business announcements, circulars, greeting cards .....	1c
Inner-city .....	1c
Post card, postal card, internal and US <sup>2</sup> .....	2c
Post card, postal card, UPU countries .....	3c
Letter, postal stationery, internal and US <sup>2</sup> .....	5c ≤ 20 grams
Letter, postal stationery >16 leagues <sup>3</sup> .....	10c
Letter, postal stationery, UPU countries .....	10c
Registry .....	10c

<sup>1</sup> While I was unable to find a complete listing of the Mexican postal rates for the time period of interest, 1898-1901, this list was developed from examining the covers I found on the Internet.

<sup>2</sup> From Wawrukiewicz & Beecher's Special Postal Treaties with Mexico, *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996* [ref.2]

<sup>3</sup> In rural Mexico, the league is still commonly used in the original sense of the distance that can be covered on foot in an hour, typically 5km (3 miles)

## References

1. *U.S. Official Postal Guide*, January 1899, Foreign Postage Table and accompanying notes on pages 1076-1079
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