CORRIENTES AND ITS STAMPS

Extracts from Dr. Morley’s Letter
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The province of Corrientes, anterior to the breaking out of the war for the liberation of the Spanish colonies from the tyranny of the mother country, formed part of the vice-royalty of Buenos Ayres (sic). At the consummation of the struggle for independence, at Tucuman, on July 9th, 1816, the vice-royalty was divided into four separate governments – Paraguay, Bolivia or Alto Peru, as it was formerly called, the Banda Oriental, and the United Provinces of La Plata. Corrientes being one of the thirteen provinces composing the latter. The territory of Corrientes comprises an extent, from north to south, of nearly five hundred miles, and about the same from east to west, with a population not exceeding seventy thousand inhabitants. It is intersected by several navigable rivers and a large number of lakes. The land is very fertile, and only needs, the enterprising citizens of the United States to make it one of the richest countries in existence.

The inhabitants are active and temperate, but disinclined to work. The men are skillful horsemen, and the children can usually mount a horse as soon as they can walk. The women are generally goodlooking and graceful, polite and attentive to strangers.

The products are tobacco, cotton, sugar, indigo, and cochineal.

The city of Corrientes is probably one of the oldest of La Plata; it was founded about the year 1588, soon after the settlement of Buenos Ayres and Santa Fe. It is admirably placed near the confluence of the Parana and Paraguay and about seventy miles from the mouth of Vermejo. It has an extended water-front, and the anchorage admits of a near approach to the shore, where vessels are removed from the influence of the currents. The town is laid out in the usual style of Spanish American cities, with streets intersecting each other at right angles. There are many public buildings and churches, the private houses of the richer class are spacious, and the open courts are adorned with orange trees and beautiful flowers, giving them a delightfully cool appearance. It is decidedly one of the finest inland cities to be found in South America. It now numbers about 20,000 inhabitants.

I suppose you are getting impatient to know what I have done for Philately; but so far I have been able to accomplish but very little, owing to the ignorance of the post-office officials, one of them assuring me that there never had been any other stamps than those in present use, and the set before them (1864 and 1867, issues of the Argentine Republic.)

From the best information I can obtain, it appears that Corrientes was the first province to issue stamps in the Argentine Confederation; they being emitted in the early part of 1856. Buenos Ayres followed in 1857, with the little known Gaucho series. The first emission for the entire Confederation was issued in 1858; but it is with the Corrientes stamps that we have more particularly to do with now. They were engraved on wood by order of the Governor, Justo J. Urquiza; but from the want of skill on the part of the workmen, there is not two out of the eight blocks prepared, that are exactly alike. They are, as you are aware, nothing but a very poor copy of the stamps of the French Republic. They are
printed on blue paper, of a peculiar texture; it is of a native manufacture. The value was one real which was intended to carry a letter to any place within the Confederation. In 1860, for some reason I have not been able to ascertain, the postage was raised to three reals and to save having new dies cut, they simply ran a pen-mark over the old value. In 1861, the postage was lowered to 5 centavos, on which the authorities cut out the portion of the die that contained the value (what a pity that our own government does not take a few lessons on economy from them) and printed them with a blank space instead of the denomination; but they were still impressed on the same paper. In 1863, the postage was further reduced to 3 centavos, and the stamps were still printed from the same dies, but this time on yellowish-green paper.

They have not been reprinted. I enclose you two sheets. You will perceive that they have made another color in the reprint, viz., blue-green, which shade is never found in the original.

In 1864, they were discontinued, and the stamps of the Argentine Republic used in their place.

I calculate on staying here till the latter part of September, and then D.V. shall proceed to Buenos Ayres, and hope to be more successful in discovering the origin of the Gaucho series. Should I be able to obtain any information worth publishing, I shall take pleasure in preparing a long article for the Journal, from that city.