

1881 - 1888

THE ERA OF SURCHARGES

The 1881-1888 surcharged issues (Scott #s89-136) are deemed to be some of the more challenging stamps of the Spanish-Philippine era to collect. A total of 54 stamps that were surcharged or overprinted are listed in Scott. The existence of numerous "favour" issues, which have genuine surcharges, and a staggering number of stamps with forged surcharges, are a constant frustration to collectors. Although sometimes incorrectly called "provisional" issues, the 1881-1888 surcharged issues are previously-issued postal, revenue, and telegraph stamps affixed with surcharges of the same or different values; or, in a few cases, have overprints on fiscal issues denoting no value change at all, but only the words "HABILITADO PARA CORREOS", meaning "revalidated for postage."

The foremost reason for the surcharges stemmed from the increased use of the telegram for conducting business between the Philippine Islands and Spain, Hong Kong, and key European countries, such as England, Switzerland, and Germany in the 1880s. Rapid transmission through the use of the telegram substantially increased the speed of communications overseas, whereas mail sent by ships could take 30-40 days or more. Interior telegraph service was initiated in the Philippines in December 1872. Overseas telegraph service was first implemented in April 1880, with the laying of a cable from Bolinao, Pangasinan to Hong Kong, connecting with existing lines to Europe.

The telegram was the main reason for the surcharged issues, because it required prepayment of stamps at a considerably higher rate than required of a letter. Telegram costs were determined by the number of words (*palabras*) and the destination. The use of existing postage stamps to pay these fees would have been quickly depleted. The use of telegraph stamps, first issued in January 1874 in higher values, still could not meet the demand for stamps for telegraph usage. Consequently, postal authorities in Manila authorized the use of postal and revenue stamps for use on telegrams as well. As a result, significant shortages of postal issues began to occur as early as 1880. All reports indicate these shortages created a necessity for surcharging stamps, which continued throughout the 1880s, until new values in sufficient quantities were received from Madrid and issued on 1 January 1890.

Secondary reasons for shortages of stamps involved a "blame game" between Manila and Madrid regarding the timely ordering of stamps by Manila versus the timely shipment of stamps from Madrid. It is stated that authorities in Madrid believed shortages of stamps and the need for surcharging were largely preventable if Manila authorities had used proper foresight in making timely stamp orders to Madrid. On the other hand, it has also been stated that there were concerns from Manila that there were delays in shipments of needed stamps from Madrid, thus necessitating the surcharging of existing stamps.

A total of 32 distinct surcharge types are recorded, referred to as 'PG' (Peterson/Gooding) numbers. More than one genuine surcharge type is known for 13 of the 54 surcharged issues. Small, but repeatable differences occur between genuine surcharge types. For some stamps, up to four different, genuine surcharge types are known to have been applied on a single issue.