

MANILA MARK APPLIED IN MEXICO

by Geoffrey Lewis

I have been fascinated by an 1841 cover from Manila to London (**Cover**) ever since I first saw it at the London 1990 Exhibition in Fred Stubens' wonderful postal history collection of the Hong Kong area.

The black straight-line MANILA cancellation is not known on any other cover from the Philippines to England. In fact, very few covers to England have any mark applied in the Philippines.

The cover arrived in London on 6 May 1842. The contents of the letter reveal that it was written some time in the second half of 1841.

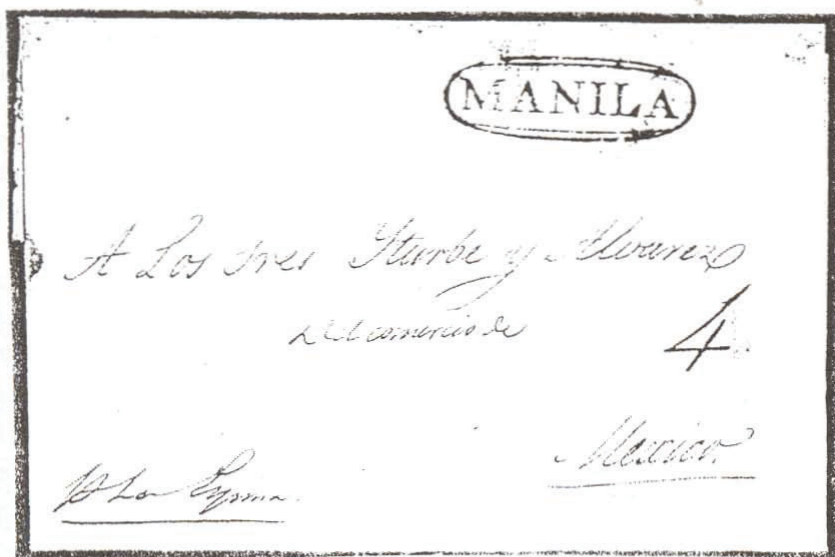


Fig. 1

Other Manila straight-line marks.

Three 1845 covers are known with a straight-line MANILA mark, all in black.

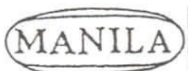
- Manila to Macao (Sorer & Llach, Lot 1496, March 1994)
- Manila to Bulacan, Philippines (Galeria & Torres, Lot 295, February 1992)
- Manila to Spain (Galeria & Torres, Lot 25, January 1991)

Another handstamp is known with MANILA in an oval. There are three known examples, all covers to the same firm in Mexico (City) in 1819 and 1820. The 1819 cover is illustrated in **Figure 1** (Sorer & Llach, Lot 2289, June 1991).

THE STRAIGHT LINE MANILA HANDSTAMP

Actual Size

Plus 40%



A T-G #5



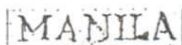
To Mexico 1819-1820 three recorded



B Same oval removed



To Mexico 1819-1820 three recorded



C Improved



Unimproved To London late 1841



D T-G #8



E Improved



Unimproved To Bulacan 1845



F



To Spain 1845

Figure 2. Comparison of "Manila" postmarks, showing similarity of lettering on 1819-20 ovals and 1841 straight-line. Reproduced from *Prefilatelia Española* by Manuel Tizon and Jorge Guinovart. (Barcelona, 1983).

By enlarging the photocopies of these marks (**Figure 2**), Fred came to the conclusion that the lettering on the 1841 cover is quite distinct from the 1845 covers, yet appears to be the same as the mark on the 1819-20 covers.

We were unable to think of any satisfactory explanation.

The Trans-Pacific Swap

Fred (Fred Stubens, a specialist in Hong Kong postal history) and I specialize in the postal history of Hong Kong area, and the Philippines, respectively. The fields are closely related, and over the years we have shared much information through correspondence.

We each had accumulated some covers more appropriate to the other one's collecting interest, and we eventually arranged a swap. This Australia-Canada trade had a trans-Pacific flavour, as one of the covers I sent Fred was an 1842 cover from Macao to Chile. The cover I received is the subject of this article, and we shall see that it also travelled across the Pacific over 150 years earlier.

Translation

Upon receiving the cover, the first thing I did was to get it translated from Spanish (see Appendix) with the assistance of Ted Howard.

The letter bears the signature of a gentleman with the surname Marcaida. There is a correspondence to Huth in London in the early 1840s from a Manila merchant called Juan Marcaida.

The first two paragraphs relate to settlement of accounts for postage. This was unexpected in a letter from a merchant. A closer look at the letter revealed that it was written by another (possibly related) person, Francisco Maria de Marcaida.

The Administrator of Posts

Encarnacion lists Francisco Marcaida as the first "Administrator of Posts" for the Philippines, serving from October 1838 until 1842. From 1783 to 1838, the Governor General of the Philippine Islands was officially in charge of Posts, therefore, Marcaida was the first "Postmaster-General" of the Philippines.

His successor, Gregorio de Borjas y Tarrus, served from 1844 to 1849.

This letter from Marcaida announces that de Borjas will act in this position until his return from Mexico. The signatures of both men appear at the bottom of the letter (**Figure 3**).

*... para correo de las oficinas de los Reyes de España, sus sucesores, y sus descendientes
tanto por su mar de Asia de Manila. J. S. S. N. B.*

Francisco Marcaida

Gregorio de Borjas Ferrer

Figure 3. End of letter signed by Francisco Marcaida, Administrator of Posts in the Philippines in 1841, and Gregorio de Borjas, his temporary replacement.

Routes from Manila to England

In the early 1840s, mail from Manila to England travelled by two routes.

- The faster route was via India, then by steamer to Suez, and across Egypt to Alexandria. Such letters have an entirely different set of markings from this cover.
- The slower route was by sailing ship, round the Cape of Good Hope.

Via Mexico

Two copies of this letter were made, and this is the duplicate (Type "D"). Marcaida says he is about to sail for Mexico in three or four days. Is it possible that this copy went via Mexico travelling on the same ship?

If anybody had the power to authorize a ship to carry mail, it would be Marcaida, in his position as Administrator of Posts.

The MANILA handstamp, has the same lettering as the marks on the 1819-20 covers to Mexico.

Until the early 1800s, mail from Manila to Europe was frequently carried aboard the fabled Galleon from Manila to Acapulco. Letters were then carried overland via Mexico City to the port of Veracruz, and from there to Spain (Lewis).

Arrival in England

The next step to confirm the Mexican route was to investigate ships arriving in England.

The letter has three English marks:

- a barely legible strike of INDIA LETTER / EASTBOURNE in black.
- a London red circular date-stamp of 6 May 1842.
- manuscript 8, representing 8 pence due, the single uniform ship letter rate. This rate does not depend on the origin or the route.

Eastbourne, in southern England, was not often the British arrival point. Although there were no port facilities, there was protection from gales for sailing ships. From these ships, mail was landed and handled by the Post Office at Eastbourne (Robertson).

The Shipping column of the *Times of London* on Monday 9 May 1842 reported the arrival in the Downs of the *Marion* from Mexico. The Downs is the coastal region of Sussex extending to Eastbourne.

The markings and dates on the cover are consistent with it being carried by the *Marion* from Mexico. I checked the Times for other arrivals in the April-May period to see if there were any other possibilities.

Eastbourn/Downs. The only other ship reported to arrive here came from Antwerp, which is not consistent with this cover.

Manila. One other ship, the *Minstrel*, arrived in London on 7 May, having stopped at Cork in Ireland on 21 April. If the cover had been carried by this ship it would have marks from Cork and certainly not Eastbourne.

Mexico. No other ship arrived from Mexico. This was a time of confrontation between Mexico and Texas.

Where was MANILA applied?

Having established that the cover went via Mexico to England, I now claim that the Manila mark was applied not in Manila, but in Mexico.

The four known covers with this lettering are the only four Philippine covers of this period known to travel through Mexico.

There are many examples in the Spanish world of “marks of arrival”. The Post Office in the arrival port applied a handstamp with the name of the place where the letter originated. Such a marking distinguished the letter from a letter originally posted in the port town. This enabled the rate to be correctly calculated at a later point in the letter’s journey.

The three 1819-20 letters were addressed to Mexico City. I believe the MANILA in oval was a “mark of arrival” applied in Mexico; at the port of arrival, Acapulco. On the Pacific coast there is only one substantial port, Acapulco, and it had strong historic and economic connections with Manila.

By 1841-42, it is plausible that the oval part of the cancelling instrument had either worn or been removed. We know that letters to England usually left Manila with no markings. The Acapulco Post Office stamped it with MANILA to distinguish it from letters originating in Acapulco. It also confirms that Marcaida posted it originally in Manila and not in Mexico.

Appendix

Translation from Spanish, by Edward G Howard

Frederic Huth & Co

Duplicate

London

My dear Sirs

I have in front of me your very esteemed letter of the 4th of May, in which were you duplicate to me that of the 4th of January. From the first I note that my correspondence up to the dates indicated are said to be received and which were presented (to you) by Senor Don Vicente Ramos, having franked yourselves for the account of this Administration the correspondence carried which amounted to 3 pound 12 shillings, which was annotated into my account and which I will credit (settle) when you produce the usual annual (account).

In the mentioned (letter) of the 4th of January, you tell me that you placed for my account at the General Ministerial Department of Posts in Madrid [Madrid General Post Office] Rvn 17140 [Reales vellon is the Spanish currency: 20 reales = 1 peso] equivalent to the credit of 857 pesos (to which you) referred. In this same (letter) you noted (debited) me 8 pound 12 shillings 6 pence, which to that date had satisfied the forwarding and postage for the correspondence which had been directed to this Administration, which amount I have reimbursed to Messrs Russell Sturgis & Co [the most important Manila trading firm at this time], whose receipt is dated 24th of July of this year [1841].

A commission placed at my care with the authorization of Government of these Islands, allows me to leave temporarily my present position which I hold, in order to travel to the Republic of Mexico. To perform such, and until my return is verified, will remain in charge of this Administration Senor Gregorio de Borjas Tarrus, Director of same, who will have the honour to communicate with yourselves on the subjects related to the service, covering in the same way as myself the outlays that you make. So that you have knowledge of his signature, which I recommend for your consideration, the present letter will go in duplicate signed also by myself.

From the Republic of Mexico for where I must leave within three or four days, I will have the satisfaction of sending to you my next letters, copying me meanwhile (with your correspondence). Remaining yours (Formal greetings.)

[Signatures of]

Francisco Maria de Marcaida

Gregorio de Borjas Tarrus

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