

REGISTERED MAIL RECEIPTS OF THE SPANISH PHILIPPINES

By Don Peterson

During the Spanish period, the sender of a registered (“certificado”) letter received a receipt for the letter from the post office when it was mailed. These receipts are quite rare and only a handful have survived.

Background on Registered Mail

The first mention of registered mail in the Philippines is found in a Circular signed by Captain-General Antonio de Urbizondo in Manila, dated December 7, 1853 (Hanciau, 1905). The Circular, and the Instruction that accompanied it, became effective on February 1, 1854, with the issuance of the first postage stamps. Although the 1853 Circular and Instruction only applied to interior mail, a General Post Office Department circular from Madrid, dated June 26, 1855, stated that the registration of mail was also applicable to mail from the Philippines to Spain. Ambiguity resulted regarding whether registration applied to mail to other overseas destinations, and at what rate. In practice, the registration procedures evolved to apply to all overseas mail, beginning in the 1860s. However, this was officially implemented in 1877 with the joining of the Philippines to the General Postal Union (later renamed the Universal Postal Union) – in which the standardized UPU procedures for overseas mail, including registration, became effective in the Philippines on September 1, 1879.

Based on information in Peterson and Lewis (2000), the earliest known registered cover was a Manila local, dated March 12, 1855, as evidenced by the addition of the 2-reales registration fee. The only evidence of registration prior to the

1860s was by inference, when the cover showed sufficient postage to cover the 2-reales registration fee. Beginning in 1862, the Manila Post Office began the practice of numbering registered covers. By the late 1860s, the first examples of envelopes with signatures on the back (and occasionally on the front) appeared, indicating that the cover was registered and that it was returned to the sender, as proof of delivery.

Registered Letter Receipts

The 1853 Circular and Instruction provide little information regarding the registration process, and make no mention of a registered receipt. However, from various historical accounts and by the inspection of registered mail and receipts, I have made several conclusions regarding the procedures and practices for registered mail:

1. Registered mail was not to be placed in a mail box as the case of ordinary mail, but instead, it was required to be delivered to the post office where it was "registered," and a receipt was provided to the sender.
2. The receiver (addressee) of the registered letter signed the back of the envelope (or occasionally the front) to prove receipt of the letter and returned the envelope (but not the enclosed letter) to the receiving post office.
3. The receiving post office returned the signed envelope to the post office of origin.

Although, in Spain, registered mail receipts are referred to as Acknowledgement of Receipt, I have never heard this terminology used in Spanish Philippine philately. For all practical purposes, the Spanish Philippines' registered mail receipt essentially serves the same purpose as Spain's Acknowledgement of Receipt.

For reasons now obscured by time, I am not aware of any registered covers (envelopes) returned to the originating post office, and then to the sender, until the 1860s. The earliest known use of a registered mail receipt in the Philippines is from 1880 (Antonio Cuesta, pers. com).

The registered mail receipts provide valuable insight into how the registration process worked. With the help of Antonio Cuesta, we have recorded only five known receipts. Likewise, there are at least five different receipt types, and possibly six. The five types are in two forms: pre-printed with the word PENINSULA, meaning to Spain; or pre-printed with the word EXTRANJERO, meaning to other overseas countries (other than to Spain). A third form is suspected for interior registered mail, with perhaps the word INSULAR as a header. However, none have been seen. Refer to **TABLE 1** for a description of the registered mail receipt types.

TABLE 1
Types of Spanish Philippine Registered Mail Receipts

Type	Description (Headings on Receipt)
1	PENINSULA and CORREOS DE FILIPINAS
2	PENINSULA and ADMON. GENERAL DE CORREOS DE FILIPINAS
3	PENINSULA and COMUNICACIONES
4	PENINSULA and COMUNICACIONES DE FILIPINAS
5	EXTRANJERO and CORREOS DE FILIPINAS
6	Although not seen, I suspect that there may be an interior registered mail receipt, with perhaps the word INSULAR as a header.

FIGURE 1 is a registered mail receipt, dated February 18, 1888 (Don Peterson collection). The pre-printed form (Type 1) contains the word CORREOS on the left side, PENINSULA (meaning to Spain) on the top, CORREOS DE FILIPINAS, the Certificado Number, from sender (Ha entregado), to addressee (uno dirigido a), printed text, date of the receipt, and signature of the post master (El Encargado). In this example, the registered cover was sent from Manila to Santander, Spain.

The left side of the receipts show either the word CORREOS or COMUNICACIONES. Like a check book stub, it was separated from a receipt that remained with the post office (Antonio Cuesta, pers. com.). However, no post office receipts have ever been found.

The pre-printed text on the receipt (**FIGURE 1**) helps explain the registration process. It states (with clarifying words provided in brackets) that:

The sender can exchange this receipt for the original envelope, without cost, when it [the signed envelope] is returned [to the post office of origin in the Philippines], which will be held [for the sender to pick up at the originating post office] no longer than two years [from the date of receipt].

What is not said here or anywhere as far as I know is that the receiver (addressee) would be notified by the receiving post office that a registered letter has arrived for the addressee. To obtain the letter, the receiver must sign the envelope and leave it with the receiving post office. The receiving post office then sends the envelope back to the originating post office. From here on, the story gets a little speculative, since I have not seen any official procedures explaining how the envelope was sent back to the Philippines. Was the letter-less envelope sent like a return-to-sender letter, or was it enclosed (mailed) in another envelope to the originating post office?

(Mod. n.º 28.)

PENINSULA.

CORREOS DE FILIPINAS.

Certificado Núm. 8183

HA entregado D. *José Velarde*
uno dirigido á D. *Pilar Valle*
residente en *Santona Santander*
y se le dá este resguardo para que pueda canjearlo por el sobre original cuando sea devuelto, quedando sin valor este documento á los dos años de su data.

Mañana 18 de Febr de 188 *8*

El Encargado



Figure 1

Perhaps these details were specified in separate postal arrangements or treaties between the Philippines and Spain with other countries, which existed prior to 1877. However, at this point, I do not know.

The pre-printed text on the registered mail receipt clarifies the role of the originating post office by confirming that it provides a receipt to the sender, provides evidence to the sender that the letter was received, and maintains the envelope for at least two years for the sender to retrieve, at no cost.

A great expectation of mine is to match the registered mail receipt with the actual registered cover. I'm not holding my breath.

I especially wish to thank Antonio Cuesta (Barcelona, Spain) for his valuable assistance in clarifying the registered mail receipt process and reporting three new receipt types.

References

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