Abstract

The early Argentine adhesive postage stamps for pre-paid postal services were issued by the Provinces of Corrientes (1856), Buenos Aires (1857), the Argentine Confederacy (February 1858) and Cordoba (October 1858).

This paper aims at establishing the ways in which those pre-1862 postage stamps allowed the visualization of some aspects of competing political centralization projects. Postage stamps were a part of the symbolic national corpus, a metaphorical transposition of the conflicts arising from the fundamental issues relating to the organization of the State. The debate on the invention of tradition and how iconographic and technical decisions were articulated through postage stamps will be discussed.
Introduction

The nationalization of postal services was decreed in 1814 under the rule of the first Supreme Director Gervasio Antonio de Posadas, but it was not until the signing of the Peace Treaty between the Argentine Confederacy and the State of Buenos Aires in 1854 that a new control system for the Postal Services Administration was established. The treaty mandated a postal rate and required the sub-post offices to give a monthly accounting of their sales.

After the Argentine Proclamation of Independence in 1816, the time was right for a definitive constitution of a new nation. However, as José Carlos Chiaramonte pointed out “independence takes place when the maturity of the various colonial social sectors involved was still far from rising above regional differences. Thus, the backdrop, against which regional events unfolded, was conditioned by the power vacuum caused by the collapse of the old structures (Viceroy, Audiencia –an appellate court, Intendents –mayors) and the decline of the authority of Cabildo and Church.”

We can consider two scenarios which the political units follow Spanish rule differentiate themselves from the former Viceroyalty. In 1814, the creation of four “intendencies”, or municipalities, and in 1815, Artigas brought together the Banda Oriental, Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe and Córdoba to form the League of Free Peoples. In 1826, political fragmentation was apparent as there were now fourteen autonomous provinces.
A description and analysis of postage stamps prior to 1862 highlight the aspects which show the relationship between postage stamps, postal services, imagery, icons and identity.

Ceres

Postage stamps were State documents and their circulation was controlled by the State. The State decided, through the Postal Services Administration, the image they should depict and the postal values issued. It would become a system which would revolutionize the collection of revenue for Confederation and Argentina.

Historian Donald Reid underscores the relationship between the “postage stamp revolution” from the 1840s and the British imperial policy within a world market progressively dominated by capitalism including a dynamic, growing trade with Latin America. However, in our case it was the province of Corrientes, part of a larger political unit, which was the first to issue a postal stamp on August 27, 1856.

José Carlos Chiaramonte stated “the most refractory structures to the dissolution process following Independence were those units called ‘Province-regions,’ a socio-political unit, the first stable product of the collapse of the Spanish Empire representing the height of social cohesion the former colony had to offer in the face of the disappearance of the old institutions.” Nevertheless, it can be shown the Confederation always harboured a special interest in centralizing postal services under one single jurisdiction.

On September 26, 1855, the National Government provided in the National Law, Article 2:
“Empower the Government to add to its running of the national messenger services, post houses and roads, the general control of the Confederation’s postal services, excluding, for the time being, those in the federalized territory and in the Province of Corrientes.”iv

Until then, correspondence circulated “free of charge for now” in the province of Corrientes, but, “…taking account of the ability of the provincial coffers to sustain the expense of the upkeep of the postal services on a weekly basis leaves little capital for the interior provinces, and it being in the public interest the preservation of this easy means of communication...”v The provincial government established pre-paid postage of correspondence in order to secure the collection of the revenue. The rates of correspondence were determined and the adhesive, fixed-value postage stamp system was adopted.vi

Both Chiaramonte and Haydée de Torres, among others, agreed one of the key questions in the debate around national organization was the firm decision by a great number of Buenos Aires men to not surrender control of foreign trade and the navigation of rivers without interference from other provincesvii.

Opposed to this policy the Corrientes spearheaded one of national unity. Chiaramonte wonders whether it actually was, and what its goal was. In other words, this author asks himself whether this was a true nationalistic expression which fostered the formation of a national State or just a defence of its provincialism shielded behind national claims.
Unlike what took place in other provinces, Corrientes witnessed an early constitutional formulation, with a representative regime and an administrative, military and revenue organization sustained over time by governors who succeeded each other in office in accordance with the Constitution. One of its most prominent political figures, Pedro Ferré, differentiated himself from other political bosses by focusing on a national organization with a staunch demand for economic protectionism and urgency in achieving national unity, which was the opposite of Rosas’ politics.

During the 1820s and 1830’s, Corrientes consolidated its institutional structure and experienced considerable economic growth. After the Battle of Caseros, in July 1852, the Legislature overthrew governor Benjamín Virasoro, and appointed Juan Gregorio Pujol, who governed until December 1859. Pablo Buchbinder sated in his book *Caudillos de pluma y hombres de acción* “Pujol and the governing Corrientes elite intended to replace the “autonomous” military power and the “strongman spirit” for a “rational, humane” municipality authority. One of his main collaborators, Vicente Quesada, believed the future for Corrientes would be associated with forestry exploitation and the development of farming communities and the ‘pastoral crowds’. Pujol may have been trying to establish an imaginary for Corrientes which could evidenced by a new path the province should follow in pursuit of its liberal direction. Governor Pujol charged the Director of the State’ Press, Pablo Emilio Coni, with the responsibility of making of the stamps.

Born in 1826 in Saint Malo, France, Coni graduated in Paris as a master printer. In 1851 he sailed to Montevideo, to Paraná, where he worked at the printing press of the *Ejército Grande*, Great Army, where Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was a journalist. He
became acquainted with Juan Pujol, who offered him the position to run the Provincial Printing Press, and to modernize and bring the Press back to working order\textsuperscript{xi}.

Coni moved to Corrientes, where he stayed from 1853 to 1859, reactivating the press and broadening the scope of State printed matter. The Director of the Press commissioned Matías Pipet to create the engraving for the new postage stamp\textsuperscript{xii}. Pipet came to Corrientes from Rouen, France. Coni gave Pipet, as a model a stamp from the 1849 French issue of Ceres and a copper plate. Lowey\textsuperscript{xiii} points out Pipet made eight individual engravings in the copper plate, which was then cut into eight parts. Regarding the technique used, the analysis by José Ramón Merlo’s showed:

“... the printing tool with which these stamps were made is not worthy of the name matrix was used in a typographical press. Judging by results, this press was of a most elemental sort...”\textsuperscript{xiv}

This first stamp, whose value was One \textit{Real Moneda Corriente}, was pressed using black ink on blue, bluish grey, light blue and greenish blue sugar paper. The edges were not perforated. The paper came from Buenos Aires for wrapping goods and, owing to its frailty, suffered variations. Every time stamps were needed, the Province’s General Tax Collection Office, which had the typographic plate under custody, delivered it to the State Printing Press to print stamps.\textsuperscript{ xv} Because of the characteristics of the plate, each \textit{cliché} was different (Fig. 1).

![Fig. 1. Ceres. Corrientes.1856.](image-url)
Gauchitos (Little Gauchos)

In 1857 the Province of Buenos Aires, having seceded from the Argentine Confederation, commissioned a postage stamp later known as “Gauchitos”, whose vignette depicts a postman on horseback (Fig. 2). It was commissioned by General Administrator of Postal Services Juan Manuel de Luca and printed by the German-born lithographic printer Rodolfo Kratzenstein.

![Fig. 2. Buenos Aires. Correo a caballo-Gauchitos. 1857.](image)

As we have claimed in a previous paper\textsuperscript{xvi}, even though the above postage stamps did not circulate due to a rate increase, this was the first postage stamp in which the Postal Service claimed itself as the agent guaranteeing franking, epistolary exchange and the distribution of other mailed products.

In its iconic aspect, the choice of design is meaningful in order to conceive the socio-political network which influences this design. Alfred Gell wrote “instead of placing emphasis on symbolic Communications, it was the negotiation, intentionality, causality and the transformation from which objects derive their meaning through social interaction, when they act as mediators of social actions.”\textsuperscript{xvii}
Stamps enable the visualization of at least two aspects: the celebration of the Postal Services which uses color and other elements, as a distinguishing feature for different values and the paradoxical fate of their name, i.e. Gauchitos (Little Gauchos).

On November 27, 1855, the Governor of Buenos Aires, Valentín Alsina, signed four decrees and seven notes were dispatched by the Government and Foreign Affairs Ministry to the Postal Services Administrator, Juan Manuel de Luca. One of those decrees discussed the “…the furtive introduction of correspondence by ship captains…”

The proponent of this reform project was Manuel Pérez del Cerro, an Officer with the Economy Ministry from July 1855 and a member of the Club de Mayo, the source of the reform. Between July 2 and 6, 1854, Pérez del Cerro published in the La Tribuna newspaper a study on “Postal Services, in their origin, progress, current state…” under the pseudonym of “Mr A”.

On 17 November, he signed an editorial with the pseudonym “Constitucional” concerning the pre-payment of postage and its implementation.

The approved design depicted a Correo a Caballo (Postman on Horseback), known in philatelic circles as Gauchito. Four lithographic stones were made together with a group of 48 stamps each, matching the denominations of 4, 6, 8, and 10 Reales. The paper, ribbed vertically, was thin and transparent, without watermarks.

There is a horseman on horseback in a courageous attitude riding towards the setting sun, from Buenos Aires to the West, which to Walter Bose represented the direction of
the interior provinces. The sun design is discussed in Mónica Farkas and Guillermo Stämpfli’s “Idealización y barbarie. El sello postal Labrador.” The design of a galloping horseman is seen in numerous representations of the day, both by local artists and by traveling painters and engravers. What draws our attention is the prominent denomination of the Gauchitos stamps (its philatelic denomination in catalogs), in the context of the implementation of a system to revolutionize Revenue.

It appears to be unlikely the State of Buenos Aires in 1857 should put forward the figure of a gaucho as the vignette for this “minute emissary of the nation”, as Harvey D. Wolinetz stated. It derived part of its legitimacy from the sole fact the establishment of the postal service was perceived as a token of modernity and sovereignty.

As Cattaruzza and Eujanian claimed, in that day and age, in the cultural production of illustrated groups, native traditional elements were expunged and, at the same time, they tended to see some habits they assumed to be of the gauchos as omens of social unruliness. These authors cite the testimony of school inspector Guillermo Wilcken, warning against the danger immigrants acquire the vice of the pulpería (tavern and general store) from “our gaucho crowd”.

Lucio V. Mansilla, as well as others, made a distinction between the adjective and the noun, as remarked by Emilio A. Coni: “They are two distinct types: A gaucho countryman is someone with a fixed abode, work habits, respect for authority. A gaucho is a wandering native, who is here today, over there the next…alien to discipline, running away from service when it befalls him…” The stamps had already been printed
and delivered to the General Postal Services Administration; however they were not put into circulation and remain categorized as unissued stamps.

To Pezzimenti and Bose, they were to be used for a rate increase, which raised heated protests and a delay in the debate in Congress, until the new Rate Law is passed on June 27, 1857, and then the rates of the new stamps did not match the new rates.xxiv

The postal service recruited administrators and justices-of-the-peace in the interior to sell stamps as evidenced by the existence of a considerable circulation of travellers need for a reliable postal network.

**Barquitos (Little Ships)**

On September 22, 1857, General Postal Services Administrator Juan Manuel de Luca appointed Cataldi as “Government engraver”. Nine months later, on April 28, 1858, the postage stamp *Barquitos* was issued for Buenos Aires (Fig. 3) replacing the *Gauchitos*. Not only did Cataldi make the plates with the image of a steamer ship, but he also “…presented a steel stamp, to mark on letters day, month and year they are dispatched…” xxv

![Fig. 3. Buenos Aires. Barquitos. 1858.](image)
This was the first dating cancellation device used by the Postal Services on Argentine territory. The Buenos Aires Bank and Mint was in charge of its printing which was supervised by a special commission. The plates were subjected to the same restrictions as the ones regulating the issuance of paper money with respect to its storage and custody.xxvi

Pablo Cataldi was born in Sicily and immigrated to Buenos Aires in 1857. He became friends with Rosario Grande and they both became official engravers. Later in the year Bartolomé Mitre commissioned the design of the steamer. Around 1867, he settled in Entre Ríos, where he worked for General Justo José de Urquiza. Urquiza created the Arts and Crafts School in 1868 and appointed Cataldi as its director, who dedicated himself to the striking of medals and the manufacture of native-style silverwarexxvii. He became a member of the George Washington Lodge in Concepción del Uruguay.xxviii

Victor Kneitschel said the cliché (An individual unit consisting of the design of a single stamp, combined with others to make up the complete printing plate) was engraved in copper, “…according to the theory of traditionalists, or in boj wood ….”.xxix The design depicts a steamer with paddles on the side and flying colours in an oval frame. It is sailing on the surge and, on the left a rising sun comes out from behind the horizon.xxx

Many such depictions were circulated in those days, like the advertisement featured in the El Nacional newspaper on November 25, 1856. The 1859 Postal Services General Administration Yearbook describes the mail routes and activities carried out by the expanding steamer network.
Cabecitas (Little Heads)

When Gervasio Antonio de Posadas took over the Postal Services General Administration, the Barquitos were being printed. In a letter addressed to Mariano Balcarce, Argentine Minister in Paris, he reflected how the Postal Service was neglected and yet it was so important. He asked him about “….the price of a completely allegorical stamp…,” the inks, and the gummed paper to print it. According to Dr Domingo Rey, his aim of replacing the issue of the Barquitos was self-evident. In a letter dated September 22, 1858, Posadas requested the stamp should bear the head of a woman representing Freedom or the Republic, with the inscriptions: Buenos Aires Postal Service, Frank, One Peso and Two Pesos.xxxi

Nouguier replies he has “…seen the most renowned engravers…” xxxii, but it was not possible to hire them for the offered price and the steel stamp made by the engraver in the Economy Ministry will cost seven hundred francs.”

Posadas replied “…if I told you I am impatient as a child to get those objects, I wouldn’t be exaggerating….” He also requested copies of the sketches, the dimensions and explanations for the carriages for the Postal Service.xxxiii

The stamps were engraved by M. Jacob and printed in typography, on wove paper, with no perforations or watermark by the Buenos Aires Bank and Mint, with the assistance of typographers Ignacio Casas and Roberto Lange (Fig. 4).xxxiv
The apparent contradiction between the inscription and the design demonstrates the visionary nature and the political project to which Posadas’s government adhered: a national postal service, of which the *Escuditos*, little Coats-of-Arms, will be the first postage stamps to bear the inscription Argentine Republic (1863).

**Argentine Confederation**

Composed of thirteen provinces and centered round its capital Paraná, the Confederation hired the Rosario firm Carlos Rivière and Cía. to print the stamps. According to Victor Kneitschel “…the lithographers printed a stamp of a primitive art, the heraldry adjusted to the whims of the draughtsman…the coat-of-arms in a horizontal oval devoid of laurels.”

Enrique Rosasco confirmed the printing was done in the Government House and supervised by Coronel Jerónimo Espejo and his secretaries. The design articulated Hugo Mancebo Decaux’s Studies by French engraver Luciano Mege, who struck the 1844 Uruguayan coin *Sol de cabellera*, Long-haired Sun and designed in 1856 the first Uruguayan postage stamps, called *Diligencias*, Stage Coaches. The stamp illustrates the close ties between the Argentine Confederation Government and the Government of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay. To Rosasco, the similitude between the sun image and a
halo of rays in the stamps suggests Rivière took Mege’s models as a reference (Figs. 5 & 6).

![Fig. 5. Confederación Argentina. 1858.](image1)

![Fig. 6. Uruguay. Diligencias. 1856](image2)

**Córdoba**

The 5c and 10c stamps were commissioned to the Larsch studio of Buenos Aires. They depict a castle or turret with seven flags and two rivers at the base, inspired by the coat-of-arms of the Cabildo and Ayuntamiento de la Colonia (Fig. 7).

![Fig. 7. Córdoba. 1858.](image3)

**XX**

**Conclusions**

A common feature in these early stamps is the participation by foreign engravers. In the case of the Corrientes Ceres stamp, various authors tell of Coni’s concern about Pipet engraving the plate.

It should be mentioned in 1850, before Rosas’ fall, French physician Auguste Brougnes put forward a scheme with a view to establishing the first farming colonies in the
province Buenos Aires. However, owing to Rosas’ lack of interest, the Governor of Corrientes, Juan Pujol, welcomed the immigrants. For Argentine intellectuals (who had a key role in political circles following the disintegration of Rosas political movement, e.g. Sarmiento, Alberdi, Quesada), colonizing meant not so much civilizing by means of the culture the European immigrants could transmit, but rather materializing the great expectations invested in the revolution which would entail the introduction of agriculture. As a result of this process, the desert would be eradicated including its undesirable social and political products, and a desired kind of sociability would be built, which still did not exist.

Regarding the Postal Service, it was also associated in the International imaginary to be a progressively more complex organization of state administrations and, therefore, was also regarded as an indicator of progress.

Although the Government Minister of Buenos Aires province had instructed Juan Manuel de Luca, General Administrator of Postal Services, Post Houses and Roads\textsuperscript{xxxvii}, to implement the use of postage stamps in November 1855, the government of Corrientes led the way, which was seen as an indicator of Pujol’s progressive attitude. This attitude was expressed in Issue 318 of \textit{El Comercio} newspaper on August 21, 1856:

“The public is advised as from the publication of this that no more letters will be accepted for the interior postal service, which are not franked with the right stamp.”

And this comment was added:
“Progress: (...) We hail this innovation which will honor the Province and be so useful to Commerce, since everyone will be able to frank letters, without having to go to the Administration. Double, triple letters must bear the right number of stamps.”

Jack Child pointed out the index nature of postage stamps would be especially related to the Nation which that particular stamp comes from, and is inscribed on its face. What does the Corrientes image portray? Is it suffice it to say the design for the first Argentine postage stamp was Ceres, Roman goddess symbolizing fertility of the land and the renovation of life’s cycles, but also Freedom and the Republic, taken from the French? Or is it necessary to analyze what resulted from the change represented by the stamp?

To Aby Warburg, the “iconographic affiliation” of postage stamps is nothing but one aspect of the analysis.” The Corrientes’s political project, where this stamp originated, also saw in the iconographic affiliation only one aspect of those which a bureaucratic, multidimensional State-created device could offer in order to confront with Buenos Aires and a national history being written from the point of view of the metropolis.

In connection with the *Correo a Caballo-Gauchito* (Postman on Horseback-Little Gaucho) uncirculated postage stamps from the perspective of Material Culture we can state, from a theoretical point of view it was the actors who codified the importance of actions and from a methodological perspective, it is actions in movement which illuminate their social and human context.
As we stated above, the Correo a caballo may be read as self-celebratory which is key to guaranteeing communications continue in a young state aspiring to become a Republic. The Barquitos broadened the iconographic horizon and the reach of those connections. Along these lines, as suggested by Eugeny Dobrenko, the postage stamp was a twofold sign, a “token of postage” carrying a “token of space”. It was a presentation of space to the world and to the country. It was at once a token of going beyond space and a token that actively shapes space. A postage stamp was the spatial equivalent of paper money. It lended space to a symbolic dimensión – the exchange of information.xlii

In the key to the design inventory, David Bushnellxlii formulated a progressive leaning towards the allegorical associated with more abstract images of the State, as represented in postage stamps. As an institutional voice, postage stamps permitted one to resume the debate relating to the invention of tradition and turned these official documents into a form of civic education favoring acquaintance with other cultures.

The above analysis discusses the choice of image, making visible the role performed by the Postal Services and their issuing policies in the logical arguments of a fledgling State which gradually assumed itself as a powerful agent for the symbolic construction of the selection and diffusion of symbols and representations. This idea of State being altogether an abstract notion, can be analyzed through the postage stamp.xliv

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iii José Carlos Chiaramonte, Op.cit., p. 26
iv Leonardo Lowey, El sello de Corrientes, Buenos Aires, Talleres Derqui, 1988, p.17
v Published in the newspaper El Comercio de Corrientes, Issue 266, February 21, 1856, and in the Official Registry of the Province of Corrientes, Tome VII, 1953/56.
Social imagines are specific references in a vast symbolic system produced by any community through which ‘it perceives and divides itself, and elaborates its objectives’ (Mauss). By means of these social imagines, a community designates its identity elaborating a representation of itself; assigns the distribution of social roles and positions; expresses and imposes certain common beliefs… To designate its collective identity is, therefore, to mark off its ‘territory’ and its boundaries, to define its relationships with the ‘others’, to form an image of friends and enemies, rivals and allies; by the same token, it means to preserve and model past memories, as much as to project its fears and hopes into the future.”

As with Penny Black, the engraving of the vignette and the background will be commissioned to two different specialists.


In the Postal Services Yearbook (Anuario de Correos for 1879), an entry for June 17 to Mr Eberhardt from Valparaíso, Chile, mentions “some stamps called ‘Gauchos’.”

Phil Deans; Hugo Dobson, “Introduction: East Asian Postage Stamps as Socio-Political Artifacts”. In East Asia, Vol.22, N°2 , Summer 2005, p.4.

Ibidem, p.3.


Postal Services Yearbook (Anuario de Correos), 1859, p. 11.

Note by Juan Manuel de Luca to the Government and Foreign Affairs Minister, Doctor José Barros Pazos.

Antonio, Deluca, Sellos y otros valores postales y telegráficos argentinos, Buenos Aires, Talleres Gráficos de Correos y Telégrafos, 1941, p.41-42.

Dionisio Petriella; Sara Sosa Miatello, Diccionario Biográfico Italo-Argentino, “C”, Asociación Dante Alighieri de Buenos Aires, Argentina, p.100.


Víctor Kneitschel, Catálogo de los Sellos Postales de la República Argentina, Buenos Aires, Talleres Gráficos Lumen, 1958, Tomo 1, p. 93.

It is a curious fact the Argentine Navy’s first propeller ship was called Correo (Post). It was built in Dundee, Scotland, and it arrived in Buenos Aires on December 21, 1851, his captain and owner David MacKenzie was at the helm.


xxxvii Created by Rivadavia in 1826 as a nationalization project for the Postal Service.


xxxix José Carlos Chiaromonte, *El mito de los orígenes en la historiografía Latinoamericana*, Buenos Aires, Cuadernos del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Latinoamericana Dr. Emilio Ravignani. FFyL. UBA, 1991.


