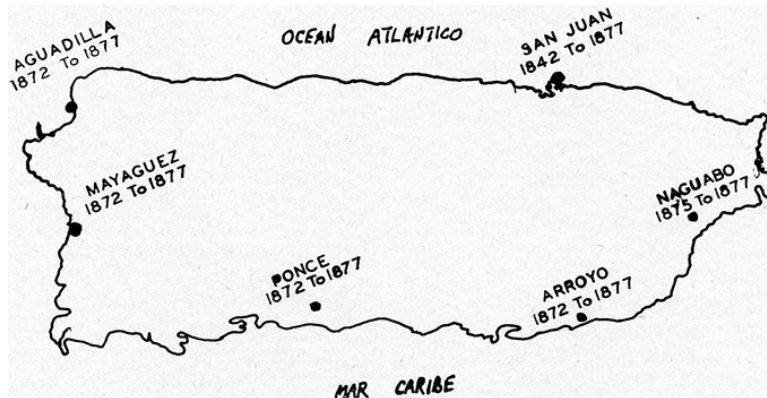


## *Postal History Place:*

# The British Postal Agencies in Puerto Rico

by R. B. Preston (*From The Stamp Specialist Maroon Book, 1944*)



Much has been written in the philatelic press relative to the various British foreign postal agencies, but I do not recall having seen any comment concerning the Puerto Rican agencies, other than brief mention in connection with the subject in general.

There were six Puerto Rican consular postoffices, and each will be mentioned separately in the proper place.

The British are thought to have established a postal agency in the Spanish West Indian possessions as early as 1762 when one was probably opened at Havana, Cuba; however, it was not until about 1842 that one was authorized for the island of Puerto Rico. In spite of the fact that there was no Puerto Rican agency, British ships were calling at Puerto Rican ports, and accepting mail long before that date. Such mail was treated as “ships letters” and carried to the mother country outside of the mails. These early “ship letters,” showing a Puerto Rican date line are not so uncommon, which would indicate that there must have been considerable commercial correspondence. (See page 2.)

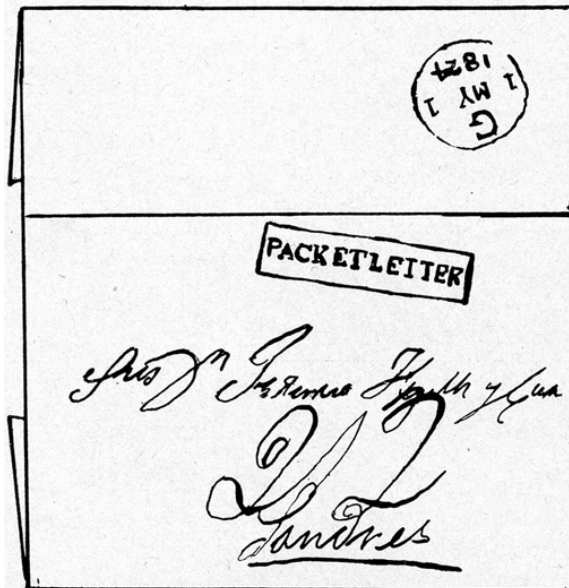
None of these “ship letters” show any Puerto Rican postal markings. They did not pass through the Spanish Puerto Rican postal service, and were either handed

direct to the purser, or master of the ship, or possibly left with the British consul to be forwarded by the next homeward bound English ship. Naturally such letters showing a San Juan date line are most common, as San Juan was the largest port; however they are known from other towns, Aguadilla is known as a point of mailing as early as 1838. No doubt eventually other covers showing Ponce, Mayaguez, Arroyo, etc., as point of mailing will be located.

### **The San Juan Agency**

The first British postal agency in Puerto Rico, and the only one for some thirty years, was established in 1842 or 1844 at San Juan. The usual date of opening has been stated as 1844, however I understand that Mr. Robert G. Stone believes that he has grounds to infer that the agency might have been in operation as early as 1842, thus the mention of the earlier date.

The San Juan agency was under the charge of the British Consul. Previous to the receipt of the first supplies of postage stamps, probably about 1865,



*A Puerto Rico ship letter to London with a San Juan October 30, 1823 dateline, carried by British packet, with May 1, 1824 arrival backstamp.*



*December 14, 1853 black Crown Circle on a cover to New York, also with "Steampship 10" marking and rated 1 shilling in red (manuscript "1/-")*

prepaid letters were franked by means of the “crowned-circle” marking (see also page 2). This marking, on cover, is now quite desirable, and is eagerly sought after by British Collectors.

A postal convention, between the British Post-office and the Spanish Government, was drawn up and agreed to on March 21, 1858; by which the following rates of postage were established:

“For every letter prepaid in the United Kingdom addressed to Spain, the British Post Office shall collect 6d per 1/4-oz. For every letter prepaid in Spain

addressed to the United Kingdom, the Spanish Post Office shall collect two reales de vellon (copper reales) per 1/4-oz. The total amount of postage to be collected in the



*San Juan Agency 1854 cover to Barcelona with black “Paid at San Juan Porto Rico” crowned circle handstamp and “San-Juan-Porto-Rico/ Ap 13, 1854” backstamp, rated “2/ 1” in manuscript (to left of PF in oval) and endorsed “Por el vapor Yngles a Espana Cataluna”, red London transit, Calais entry c.d.s. and “P F” (paid to frontier) in red oval, blue “10” and “Rs” Spanish rate handstamp and red Barcelona backstamp.*



*Cover to London with the earliest known use of the “San Juan Porto Rico” c.d.s. (upper left) dated “DE 12 1845”*



United Kingdom upon all letters addressed to and received from Cuba and Puerto Rico by British Mail Packets shall be 1/6 [1 shilling 6 pence] per 1/2-oz. 3/- above the 1/2-oz. and 6/- between 1 and 2 ozs.”

It will be noted that the above quoted extract relative to the rates of postage between the United

Kingdom and Puerto Rico makes no mention of letters to be carried when prepaid with the Spanish Puerto Rican stamps. As this convention was made before the exchange of mail, as provided for by the Universal Postal Union, such an exchange would only be made by definite agreement; but the

convention does mention Puerto Rican letters but only when prepaid by British stamps.

Although we know that during the last years of operation of the British agencies in Puerto Rico that the Spanish



1858 cover to Southamptow, England with the cachet of the Capitania General de Puerto Rico, the official in charge of the army, also with “Puerto Rico” double circle date stamp upper right



San Juan Agency cover to Spain with two 5d GB stamps tied by “C61” barred oval killer, charged 17 decimes, with three Italy postage due stamps, with “Puerto Rico C JA 11 72” c.d.s. upper left, on folded out back flap

Government objected to their operation, there certainly was close cooperation at an earlier date. [Numerous] covers indicate an exchange of the mail agreement at San Juan between the Puerto Rican postal service and the British postal agency.

I have [seven] covers, five of which were mailed at interior towns in Puerto Rico and carried to San Juan by the local postal service, after arriving at San Juan they were all turned over to the British postal agency and forwarded on to Europe.

Some time after 1860 the rate was reduced to 1/- per 1/2-oz. Also British postage stamps were sent to the San Juan agency about 1865, together with an obliterator, numbered "C61" of the narrow oblong type.

It has been stated that the inhabitants of San Juan did not take kindly to the use of British postage stamps, although the British mail service seems to have been freely used. The *Regent Encyclopedia* states that the prepayment of postage on



Cover to Italy with "Porto Rico FE 12 77" c.d.s., stamps tied by C61 type I barred oval killer, also with London paid and San Juan merchant's oval cachet. A late use as the Agencies closed May 1.



Cover to St. Thomas with 4d GB stamp tied by C61 type II oval barred killer, with Porto Rico Sept. 12, 1875 c.d.s.



letters by means of stamps was not at all popular, as a result the General Post Office (London) decided in March 1866 not to send out any further supplies. For some years stamps are seldom found on Puerto Rican letters mailed through the British postal agency at San Juan because of this ruling; the use of stamps was again introduced in 1872 or 1873. Even after the reintroduction of stamps in the early '70s numerous letters were sent without stamps.

In spite of the fact that the Puerto Rican public seem to have preferred to send their mail "unpaid," they did patronize the British mail service. Possibly the British sailings were more frequent than those of the Spanish mails, or perhaps the British gave quicker transmission. The *Gaceta de Puerto Rico*, a government publication listed the number of letters carried per month, and means by which conveyed, from



A cover to France without stamps, with the second "Porto Rico" datestamp (center), dated December 10, 1874



A cover with the third "Porto Rico" datestamp (top left), dated August 10, 1870, sent without stamp on a cover to Italy, charged 10 decimes, also with an Italy 1 Lire postage due stamp

which the following data has been extracted:

**Mail—Puerto Rico to Spain**

Month	Total to Spain	via Spanish SS	via British SS
Sep.1874	2,515	947	1,568
Nov.1875	5,689	3,037	2,652

Although the English mails were heavy, it must not be supposed that all such mail was franked with British stamps; on the contrary the system of interchange of mail between the Spanish postal service in Puerto Rico, and the British postal agency, was still in force. Postage was still paid, in many cases, by Spanish Puerto Rican stamps, which were honored by the British service.



*Mayaguez Agency cover to Spain with "Mayaguez Porto Rico Unpaid JA 10 76" c.d.s., charged 1 peseta, 10 centimos, paid by six Spanish Puerto Rico 25 centesimo stamps*

There were two types of "C61" killers. The second, upright, oval "C-61" is the form most often seen. (See examples, page 5.) There are various sub-varieties of this killer, showing that a number of handstamps were sent out at various times. The round, dated postmark (also page 5) seems to have been put into use about the same time as the upright oval killer; here again sub-varieties may be noted, the diameter of the circle differing with various markers.

Postmark and killer were furnished as separate hand stamps; the postmark was almost always struck on the cover, well away from the stamps although in rare in-

stances it can be found hitting a stamp, which was always cancelled with the “killer” in addition.

During the life of the British postal agencies there was considerable trouble at times, with the Spanish Authorities, who must have been resentful of the British having anything to do with the postal affairs of the island. The *Regent Encyclopedia of Empire Postage Stamps* states that it was not until strong diplomatic pressure had been brought to bear, on the Spanish Government, that, the protests were withdrawn. About this time five further British Postal Agencies were opened in Puerto Rico.

On October 24, 1872 British Agencies were opened at: ARROYO, AGUADILLA, MAYAGUEZ, and PONCE, followed by one at NAGUABO sometime in 1875. All of these agencies were under the direction of the British Vice Consuls.

### **The Arroyo Agency**

This port town, on the south eastern end of the island, was of considerable importance at this time; in 1860 its population was recorded as 5,063 people, or one sixth the size of Ponce,



*Arroyo Agency cover to England with 1 shilling GB stamp tied by “F83” numeral grid and “Arroyo Porto Rico Paid JU 24 73” c.d.s.*

which has since grown to be a city of almost 100,000 people whereas Arroyo is less than twice the size it was in 1860.

There seems to have been but one type of killer used at the Arroyo Office, which was numbered “F83,” the usual form of circular dated postmark was also provided, and as usual the killer and postmark were separate hand stamps.

Examples of the numeral cancel, when struck on sin-



gle stamps, are not especially difficult to secure. This does not hold true for the circular dated postmark, which are seldom found impressed on the stamp itself. In England stamps with the “used abroad” obliterations have been considered as collectable items for years, and as a result such stamps were carefully saved, usually being removed from the original cover by youthful “stamp hunters,” thus full covers were too often spoiled.

The common stamp, with the “F83” marking is of course the 4d value, which paid postage on the single rate letter at this time. An indication of the relative importance of Arroyo as a port, as compared to others which have since become far larger, is the fact that the British catalogue prices such stamps at only four times more valuable than one used at Ponce, which even in 1860 was the third largest port



*Arroyo Agency, 1875 folded letter to New York, franked by horizontal pair Great Britain 1865 4d Vermilion cancelled by bold “F83” barred oval postmark, with “Arroyo-Porto-Rico/Paid/Jy 12, 75” Type 1 dispatch c.d.s. alongside, also with British “St-Thomas/Jy 14, 75” transit backstamp and “New York/Jul 21/Due 10/U.S. Currency” arrival postmark tying the stamp.*



*Unpaid stampless cover to France, charged 17 decimes (manuscript, center) with rare “Arroyo Porto Rico Unpaid DE ? 75” c.d.s.*

city in Puerto Rico. Arroyo's 4d is only twice as scarce as similar values used from Aguadilla.

The Arroyo agency was closed, with the other British postal agencies, which ceased operation on May 1, 1877 when the Spanish Colonies in America joined the Universal Postal Union.

### **The Aguadilla Agency**

This port town, on the west coast of Puerto Rico, has the distinction of being the point where Columbus is supposed to have stopped for water on November 19, 1493. In 1872 it was a port of considerable importance, with



*Aguadilla Agency cover to London with GB 1 shilling tied by barred "QF" cancel (instead of F84), cover also with a blue merchants oval cachet lower left, "Aguadilla Porto Rico Paid DE 11 73" c.d.s. and London receiver.*

a population of 12,710.2 In , view of the population, and probable importance of the town as a port, it is surprising that Aguadilla markings are not more common.

The Aguadilla agency was supplied with an "F84" numeral cancel, and the conventional type of round, dated postmark.

### **Mayaguez Agency**

Today [1944] Mayaguez is the third largest city in Puerto Rico, in 1870 it had 31,186 inhabitants and was then larger than Ponce. The city is situated at the south



*Mayaguez Agency cover to Italy with GB 1d red, 2d blue and eight 3d singles tied by barred F85 numeral grid killer, cover also with "Mayaguez Porto Rico Paid AU 25 76" c.d.s. and red London transit.*



western part of the island.

The Mayaguez agency was provided with a killer which designated the agency as number "F85," and was also provided with the usual circular dated postmark.

Items from Mayaguez, with

British postal agency markings, are slightly more desirable than those from Ponce, in spite of the fact that Mayaguez was a larger town, but not as important as port.

### **The Ponce Agency**

Ponce, today the second largest city, was then only third in importance, and is situated on the western half of the south coast of Puerto Rico.

The numeral killer assigned to the Ponce agency was numbered "F88".

The usual circular postmark was used

at Ponce. Naturally the markings of this agency would be expected to be relatively common; they are almost



*Mayaguez Agency cover to Italy with GB 1d red (five) and 10d red tied by barred blue F85 numeral grid killer, cover also with blue "Mayaguez Porto Rico Paid MR 25 73" c.d.s., red "PD" and "Insufficiently Prepaid" in rimless oval.*



*Ponce Agency cover to France with "Ponce Porto Rico Unpaid JA 26 75" c.d.s., charged 12 decimes*



as common as those from the San Juan agency, and in spite of the fact that Mayaguez was a bigger town are more common than examples from that agency.

It is a fact, as I mentioned before, that a great deal of commercial mail, addressed to points

outside of the Spanish Kingdom, was carried by the British packets. Many of these letters, were not very clearly marked as having been carried by the British service, (See Figures 10 and 11) and may have been entirely overlooked as having been transported by British packets. This is especially true in those cases where postage was paid by Puerto Rican stamps, as was the case with the cover shown by Figure 11.

At this time the postage, from the United States to Puerto Rico, per single (1/2 oz. ) letter, via British Packet to Havana and then on to Puerto Rico, was .34 per letter. This was the rate in effect on March 1, 1866 and represented a 48% reduction from the rates in effect from 1849.

### **The Naguabo Agency**

This was the last British Agency established in Puerto Rico. It was not opened until sometime during 1875 and being a small town, with little commercial activity, the Naguabo cancellation is by far the rarest of any of the Puerto Rican agency markings. Robson Lowe states that Naguabo was the central port for the shipment of "Museavado" sugar, and had a large direct correspondence with the United Kingdom, however today Naguabo is a small town



*Ponce Agency 1876 folded cover to Geneva franked by Great Britain 1870 1/2d rose red, 1864 1d Rose red and 1873 1/- pale green tied by "F88" in barred oval cancel, also with "Ponce Porto Rico Paid My 25 76" dispatch postmark, red London transit and Genoa and Geneva backstamps.*

of no commercial importance what so ever.

The killer used by the Naguabo Agency was numbered "582" and as mentioned above is exceedingly scarce. Unfortunately I cannot even show



*Naguabo Agency, cover to Germany with GB stamps tied by barred "582" cancels, cover also with a Naguabo circular date stamp, cover also with London transit handstamp.*

a tracing of this rare postal marking. The fact that this cancel was used at Worstead, England before 1874 may account why it is so scarce, because if covers were found and the stamps removed by a "stamp hunter" there would remain no indication that the marking had been used in Puerto Rico. Likewise stamps, which had done duty on domestic mail in England can easily be passed off to an unsuspecting collector as rare Puerto Rican varieties.

The Naguabo agency was in operation only 17 months. All of the British Agencies in Puerto Rico were closed on May 1, 1877.

### **English Stamps Used in Puerto Rico**

It is not my intention to attempt to list the various stamps of the United Kingdom which are known with Puerto Rican Agency post marks. A comprehensive listing will be found in "Gibbons' Priced Catalogue of the Stamps or the World".

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