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The Practical Collector II

Becoming a Philatelist

Developing a Speciality in Mexican Classics



Bolivian 50 centavos Condor example

The following correspondence between David McCumber and myself concerns a collector's interest in moving from one country collection to Mexico. I asked him what direction he thought he would like to travel with Mexican philately. This is McCumber's reply :

"Bubba,

After spending more than a decade researching and collecting Bolivia's Condor issues, I've turned my attention to Mexico because I know the country pretty well (and love it) and because the early stamps, reflecting the country's history, are so fascinating with types, shades, paper and watermark variations, districts, sub-districts and cancels adding infinite variety and interest. While I'm still in the mode of acquiring examples of basically everything in Follansbee, I believe I'd like to focus on the Eagles.

I'm wondering if examples are able to be "plated," as I did with the Condors, building plate reconstructions of every issue and identifying each individual stamp's printing history. With the Condors it was time-consuming but intensely enjoyable, as each of the plates had 72 hand-drawn versions of each stamp (a rather crude and laborious process but one that created more goals for collectors) and "plating" every Condor I bought was a wonderful challenge.

I think trying to collect all of the overprints and as many cancels as possible would be the equivalent within Mexican philately but I'm sure there are some interesting plate anomalies as well.

Do you think a focus on the Eagles is still too broad? It certainly might be.

Thanks again for writing, Bubba.

David"



My early collection efforts of 1851-57 USA 3-cent stamps for colors and plates
 Examples of Mexico's First issue of Dos Reales in colors and plates

This is my reply to how I traveled the roads of Mexico's early classics:

"David,

When I started collecting Mexico, I intended to get one of each issue, like yours. It all started with a minor collection I had bought from the grandson of a world collector and a separate album from Mexico. The albums were sparsely filled with stamps. The Mexico collection had the most since the original collector shared that ethnic background. I almost sold that album at a local stamp show but returned to the dealer's table to find he had left. Without that offer, I decided to do a minor collection of Mexico. After all, my parents had retired to Mexico, and I had traveled there many times. My major collections were US Classics of the 1850s and French numeral 19th century cancels. With the Mexico album in hand and another purchase of around 50 green Dos Reales, I was stepping onto the stage of collection that issue for the next 30 years. Having a background in that early three-cent issue of 1851 USA, the plating was something I had some experience with. I thought, "Oh, how hard could that be?" "



Positions 16-17. 3 Mexico w/ Diligencia Cancel
 Plate cracks at the top of both stamps

Assuming something before you jump is not a good recipe for success. I quickly learned from a new acquaintance, Vern Turnburke, that he had been trying to do this for twenty-five years. The problem with the early Mexican issues of the 1856 design was that the single roller die was entered onto the plate one at a time. There were no arrangements for different reliefs to guide the students to the plate. The only way to approach the massive plate three Dos Reales with 190 positions was to make measurements for each position in relation to the four nearest adjoining positions. This had to be done in tenths of a millimeter. The slightest variance would lead the student astray. The only thing that the third plate had to go by was a frame line, but only after the new printer added these plate margin lines. There were also some plate cracks due to the brittle material used for the plate. Only a few re-entries were of any help. Needless to say, by this time, I was selling stamps to buy the more expensive ones I lacked. Plating went by the wayside, but over time, as I told you, all the other interesting things became the object that enriched my hobby more than the tedious work of measuring stamps; in the years since, I have acquired parts of the plates and good photos of the third plate. I can generally find the subject at hand by comparing it to one of these photos or partial plate blocks.



Un Real to Ocho Reales Eagles of Mexico 1864-1866

Regarding your consideration of collecting Eagles, it could be done differently. A collection of types of Eagles in all denominations would be narrow, determined only by the rarity of some of the issues. A district collection of one or more denominations would be only as hard as the rarity of some of the districts. Some people collect consignments, both district and sub-office consignments. This might be done with only one district or all of them. Some collectors go this route but never find all these consignments. Collecting Eagles, as you have already figured out, can be overwhelming. You may never finish, but what a trip.

(Bubba)

I added that plating the Eagles is possible and referred him to Farley Katz, the author of some articles in MEPSI's journal Mexicana. Farley gave him some good ideas about the Eagles and their plating. Like mine, he also voiced the opinion that collecting the Eagles could be directed in particulars that would not require a lifetime involvement.

I am not sure just what David will do in his Mexico Collection, but if the bug has given him a bite, I am sure he will become an outstanding collector of Mexico, just like so many of us have been.

Enjoy!

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