

## PRESIDENTIAL IMAGE

By: Magdalena García Ramírez

**Note:** The translation into English is carried out through the use of software, so there may be discrepancies with the usual use of this language, we appreciate your understanding in this regard.

While in European monarchies it is an everyday occurrence for postage stamps to show the effigy of the current monarch, for some democracies on the American continent it becomes a sensitive issue; and since there are unwritten rules that have more force than some laws, in Mexico it is a fact, **rarely violated**, that a president in the **exercise of his mandate should not** appear on a postage stamp... except for **"honorable" exceptions**...

### The honorable exceptions:

**Venustiano Carranza.** With an issue date of **June 1, 1916**, two “commemorative” stamps were issued of the triumphal entry on April 14, 1916 of President Carranza to Mexico City after the triumph of the constitutionalist forces against the conventionists. Of the Mexican presidential figures in exercise of power that appear on a postal stamp, this is undoubtedly the one that generates the most controversy, due to the turbulent time in which it is issued and because it is a key person in the development of the Mexican Revolution, and these persons are always in the eye of the hurricane, because they make decisions, because they exercise their leadership, because they are statesmen.



Both stamps with a face value of 10 cents, 190,000 pieces were issued for the blue one (**Fig. 1**) and 10,000 for the brown stamp (**Fig. 2**). Nicholas Follansbee points out in his catalog of the Mexican Revolution that only 2,000 pieces were sold over the counter and at prices different from their face value and the rest were marketed by the general postmaster Cosme Hinojosa (1) and his associates and that the stamps were valid only on the day of its issuance. Essays of the stamps also circulated, they are recognized by the horizontal lines that appear in the upper part of the oval background and the rest of the background less shaded, as is the case in **Fig.2**. Few used pieces are known and they are “philatelic pieces”, that is, circulated expressly by collectors (2). I have found aggressive comments against Carranza for having appeared on a postage stamp when not even Porfirio Díaz dared to do so. They seem unfounded

to me for the following reasons: Carranza had many subsequent opportunities to appear on a stamp and did not do so, the issue was manipulated by Cosme Hinojosa as he did with many other emissions to take economic advantage; the issue was withdrawn from circulation the same day without being able to specify whether it was due to the uncontrollable inflation that the country suffered in those months, but it could have been “surcharge” (3), or because it simply fulfilled its purpose of being “philatelic.” Carranza undoubtedly had flaws, but his cult of personality was not one of them. (4).

**Miguel Alemán Valdés.** In the month of **May 1950**, **2 important infrastructure projects** for the country were completed.

On the 21st, the International Highway from Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua to El Ocotil in Chiapas, on the border with Guatemala, was inaugurated. It has a length of 3,446 kilometers. For this reason, 4 postal stamps were issued, 2 for land service on May 5 (SC # 868-869) and 2 air mail (SC#C199-200) on the 21st. In **1923**, during the V International Conference of American States, a project began between the countries of the continent to unite the north and the south by means of a highway of the continent (5). Mexico completed the Mexican part of this road many decades later with the inauguration of this highway, which is why it is known as the **Pan-American highway** (6).

On the **29th**, the Southeast Railway was inaugurated, a project **materially initiated** during the six-year term of Lázaro Cárdenas, in **April 1936**. Construction began at both ends, Puerto México in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz and Tenosique, Tabasco, with a final length of 738.8 kilometers; Given the geographical conditions of the region, it was determined that the line should be the “shortest, firmest, with fewer movements of dirt roads, fewer swamps, fewer curves and a better slope” (7). Construction was slowed by long rainy seasons, tropical diseases and material shortages during World War II, and also took human lives. President Miguel Alemán inaugurated the work and for this reason, on **May 24**, **4 postal stamps** were issued, 2 for land service (SC# 870-871) and 2 for air mail (SC# C201-202), the conclusion of this work meant integrating the Yucatan Peninsula into the Mexican railway system and the integration of the population and a better transfer of goods to and from the region.

Alemán appears on 2 of the 8 stamps mentioned, one in each of the projects, **Fig. 3 y 4** (SC# C199 y SC#202).



Fig. 3 (SC# C199)



Fig. 4 (SC# 202)

With the previous review, the reader can judge whether Alemán's appearance on the stamps was narcissistic or necessary.

**Adolfo López Mateos.** On **April 11, 1964**, stamp **SC#282** was issued (**Fig.5**), which appears President López Mateos greeting President Kennedy of the United States of America (USA) and commemorates the ratification of the Chamizal Treaty (8). In this case it is important to **follow the dates**: the stamp mentions an event in July 1963, the American president, John F. Kennedy, was assassinated months later, on November 22, 1963, the stamp was issued in April of

the following year. During the six-year term of López Mateos it was common to issue postal stamps commemorating the visit of a Head of State and in none of those cases did López Mateos appear on any stamp. I consider it feasible to assume that the stamp was a posthumous deference to Kennedy and the American people, and to show the good relations between both governments, remember that it was the time of the Cold War.



Fig. 5 (SC# 282)

**José López Portillo.** It was not until 1977 that another acting president appeared on a postage stamp. On the occasion of the resumption of diplomatic relations between Mexico and Spain, a series of 5 commemorative stamps is issued, 2 for land service (SC# 1156-1157) and 3 for air mail (SC#C537-539). López Portillo shares the vignette of the stamp SC#C539 with the King of Spain, Juan Carlos I (Fig.6). As I already mentioned, in monarchies it is common for kings to appear on postal stamps, but each country must follow its customs. And those of us who lived through López Portillo's six-year term know that he did commit a cult of his personality...



Fig.6 (SC# C539)

**Sample button.** We have the case of the United Kingdom, during the 70 years of Queen Elizabeth II's reign (1952-2022), her face appeared on stamps of normal or permanent circulation and on the occasion of the 70 years of her reign a special series was dedicated to her of 8 stamps, shown below (**Fig.7**):



**Fig. 7**

Upon the **death** of Elizabeth II, on **September 8, 2022**, her son assumed the throne with the name of Charles III and the Royal Mail issued normal circulation stamps with the face of the new king (**Fig. 8**), their circulation began in April from 2023; the stamps with the face of Elizabeth II would continue in circulation until they run out or are demonetized in the future if stocks do not run out:



**Fig.8**

## Notes:

- 1 Cosme Hinojosa participated in the Revolution not with weapons, but administratively, when postage stamps were an important part of the income of the different factions, his mission was to obtain that money for the groups with which he fought. First in his native Sonora and then alongside Carranza, Obregón and Calles he was involved in Correos.
- 2 A piece is considered "philatelic" when a collector intentionally introduces a stamp attached to an envelope into the Postal system with the intention of giving it monetary value, for which he prepares that all the details are impeccable. It's hard to prove.
- 3 When the face value of a stamp becomes obsolete, due to the passage of time or inflation, and to take advantage of the printed inventory, it is overprinted with a new value using a visible printed message.
- 4 To know President Carranza from the point of view of Luis Cabrera (1876-1954), a notable Mexican intellectual who actively participated in the drafting of constitutional laws and worked with Carranza, his work can be found online: La Herencia de Carranza. INEHRM Constitutional Library, 2017. Cabrera was a lawyer, politician, diplomat, writer and journalist.
- 5 The **continental** Pan-American Highway has a length of more than 25,000 kilometers and connects 14 countries ranging from Canada to Argentina, but there is an unfinished section due to the rugged environment between Colombia and Panama, in the region known as the Darién Gap.
- 6 This national highway section gained popularity due to the Pan-American Race in early May 1950 for the first time, an event that became international and projected the country as a tourist destination; it was carried out for many years and has had changes in modality and even suspension for some years
- 7 Op, cit. in: <https://elmirador.sct.gob.mx/pita-pita-y-caminando/la-conquista-de-la-selva-el-ferrocarril-del-sureste>
- 8 Since 1864, Mexico claimed a piece of land (177 hectares) near what is now Ciudad Juárez, which due to a flood changed the course of the Rio Grande and had remained within the limits of the USA, being that it is Mexican; It was not until 1963-1964 that the conflict was settled. If you are interested in the topic: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47274457>

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