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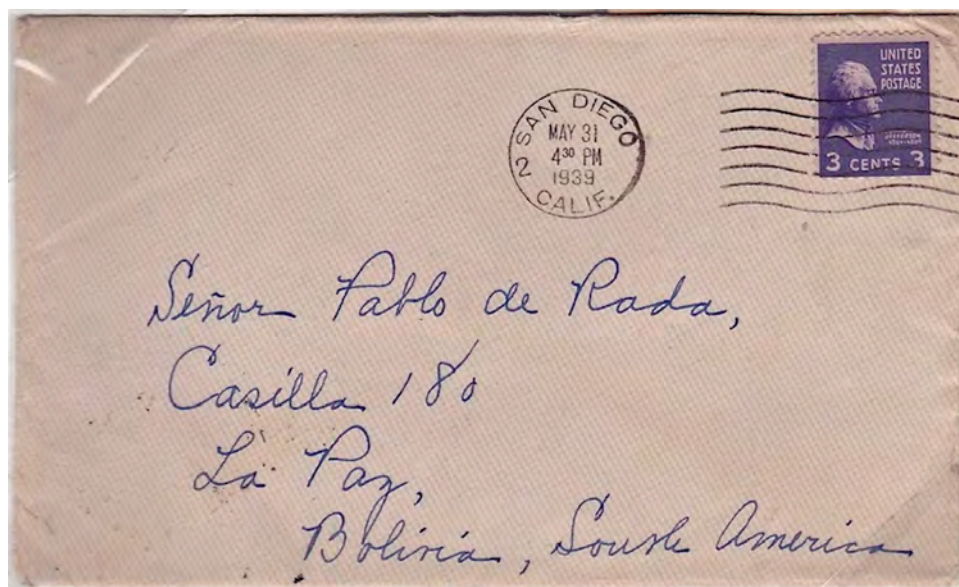
# *The Prexie Era*

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## **The 3-Cent PUAS Convention Letter Rate during the Prexie Era An Introduction with Illustrations**

by Stephen L. Suffet



*Figure 1: 3-cent PUAS rate. San Diego, CA, to La Paz, Bolivia, May 31, 1939.*

From before the United States Presidential Series was introduced in 1938 through the end of October 1953, the U.S. surface letter rate to member states of the Postal Union of Americas and Spain (PUAS) was 3 cents per ounce, the same as the U.S. domestic surface rate. This was in effect 2 cents per piece less than the general Universal Postal Union (UPU) surface letter rate, concurrently 5 cents for the first ounce plus 3 cents for each additional ounce.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1 shows a typical example of the 3-cent

PUAS rate on a 1939 cover sent from San Diego, California, to La Paz, Bolivia.

Philatelists often mistakenly refer to the 3-cent PUAS rate as a treaty rate. It is not. The proper term is convention rate because the United States established the rate under the terms of a convention, or more properly a series of conventions, but not a treaty. The difference is not purely semantic. A treaty is a legally binding international agreement that imposes certain obligations upon its parties.

In the United States, ratification of a treaty requires the advice and consent of the Senate. A convention is a document that states the rules, procedures, or actions that its signatories agree upon regarding a specific topic, but it does not necessarily carry the same force of law that a treaty does. Some conventions are in fact treaties, but the PUAS conventions are not among them. They did not carry the full force of law, and U.S. Presidents were able to ratify them without the advice and consent of the Senate.

What later became the PUAS was founded as a so-called restricted union within the UPU in 1911 at a regional postal congress held in Montevideo, Uruguay. Initially called the International Office of South American Posts, it was also known as the South American Postal Union. As either name implies, its only members were the countries of South America.<sup>2</sup>

At its congress held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1921, the South American Postal Union admitted the United States, Mexico, Cuba, and the independent nations of Central America. In so doing, it reconstituted itself as the Pan American Postal Union (PAPU). Other nations would join, including Spain, which did so in 1926. At its congress held in Madrid, Spain, in 1931, the PAPU changed its name to the Postal Union of the Americas and Spain. At that time its membership consisted of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain,<sup>3</sup> the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

These twenty-three countries would constitute the PUAS membership throughout the 1938-1953 period that is the focus of this article. They comprised all the fully independent nations of the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as Canada, then a British Dominion. Newfoundland, also a British Dominion at the

time, was not a member. Nor were any of the British, French, or Dutch colonies and overseas territories in the Western Hemisphere.

Each congress of the PUAS and its predecessors produced a new convention that superseded any prior conventions.<sup>4</sup> The 1931 PUAS convention, which went into effect on March 1, 1932, contained the following provision:

#### Article 4

##### *Postage rates*

The postage rates of the domestic service of each country will govern in the relations of the countries which constitute the Postal Union of the Americas and Spain, except when said domestic postage rates are higher than those applicable to the correspondence destined for the countries of the Universal Postal Union, in which case the latter will govern.

This provision provided the basis for the 3-cent PUAS letter rate, although the United States “jumped the gun” by raising its PUAS convention rate for letters from 2 cents to 3 cents per ounce on April 1, 1932, while it waited until July 6, 1932, to do the same for the domestic letter rate. (The U.S. letter rate to Canada had already increased from 2 cents to 3 cents per ounce on September 1, 1931, but that was a little over two months before Canada joined the PUAS.)

This same provision appeared again as the first paragraph of Article 5 in the next three PUAS conventions, those of 1936, 1946, and 1950. It was, however, absent from subsequent PUAS conventions, beginning with the one adopted in 1955 in Bogota, Colombia. By that time the United States had already abolished its PUAS convention rate for letters, except to Canada and Mexico. Effective November 1, 1953, surface letters to PUAS countries, other than Canada and Mexico, were subject to the

same rate as letters to other UPU countries, 8 cents for the first ounce and 4 cents for each additional ounce. (At the same time the United States abolished its PUAS convention rate for postal and post cards, but that will be the subject of a separate article.)

Figures 2 through 10 show nine additional examples of the 3-cent PUAS letter rate used during the Prexie era.

Historical epilogue: At its 1990 congress held in Buenos Aires, the PUAS admitted Portugal to membership, and so it became what it is today, the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain, and Portugal (PUASP).

#### Footnotes

1. Rate information throughout this article is from *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996*, by Anthony S. Warukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher (Portland, OR: Cama Publishing Company, 1996).
2. Historical highlights of the PUAS, now the PUASP, and its predecessors can be found in Spanish at: <https://www.upaep.int/upaep/la-organizacion> (Spanish is the official language of the organization.)
3. According to *The Postal Bulletin* of March 12, 1932 (No. 15853) and of March 14, 1932 (No. 15854), Spain also included Andorra, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, and certain Spanish possessions in Northern Africa. See those issues of *The Postal Bulletin* for the complete list. *The Postal Bulletin* of November 12, 1937 (No. 17312) added Rio de Oro, Spanish Guinea, and the Spanish Zone of Morocco. It also specified that Andorra meant Andorra via Spain. During the 1938-1953 era, therefore, the 3-cent PUAS rate would apply to letters going to any of those destinations. The 3-cent PUAS rate would continue to apply to letters going to Canada or to Mexico through July 31, 1958. The 3-cent domestic letter rate continued through that date as well.
4. The PAPU and PUAS conventions can be found online at several sites. Unfortunately the author has not been able to find them all in one place. The earlier ones can also be found in print in the State Department series, *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1949*, compiled by Charles I. Bevans. The series has been digitized by the Library of Congress and can be found online at: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans.php> The later conventions can be found in print in another State Department series, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*. The Library of Congress has not yet digitized the series, although some volumes can be found through Google Books online.





Figure 2: 3-Cent PUAS rate. Used to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from the S.S. *Argentina*, an American passenger ship with New York and Buenos Aires Sea Post facilities on board. July 13, 1941.

Figure 3: 3-Cent PUAS rate. Chicago, IL, to Montevideo, Uruguay. September 21, 1941. 5-centesimo Uruguayan stamp accounted for the fee collected from the addressee for a letter addressed to Lista de Correos (General Delivery).



Figure 4: 3-cent PUAS rate. Washington, DC, to Tartagal, Salta, Argentina. March 7, 1942. U.S. Wartime censorship. Government Printing Office official business usage. Federal government agencies, other than the Post Office Department, were required to pay postage on official mail to foreign countries other than Canada or Mexico.

There are two towns named Tartagal in Argentina, one in the Province of Salta and the other in the Province of Santa Fe.



Figure 5: 3-Cent PUAS rate. Frederiksted, U.S. Virgin Islands, to Cap Haitien, Haiti. April 11, 1942. U.S. and Haitian wartime censorship.

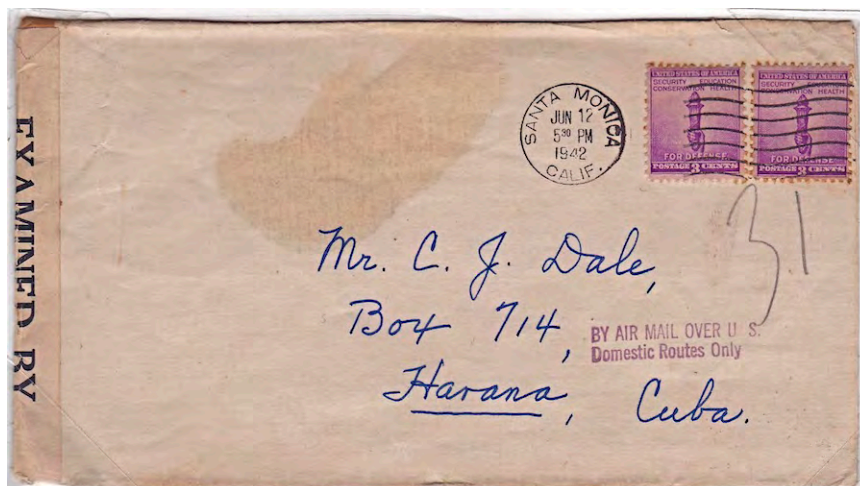


Figure 6: 6 cents = 3-cent PUAS rate + 3-cent per ounce surcharge for airmail service within the continental United States to the exchange office. Santa Monica, CA, to Havana, Cuba. June 12, 1942. U.S. wartime censorship.



Figure 7a, 7b: 3-cent PUAS rate. Washington, DC, to San Antonio Abad, Ibiza, Balearic Islands. December 31, 1943. Ibiza, misspelled "Iviza" on the cover, is one of the Balears or Balearic Islands, a Spanish possession in the Mediterranean Sea. U.S. and Spanish wartime censorship. Returned to sender, addressee gone, as per "PARTI" auxiliary marking on reverse.







Figure 8: 3-cent PUAS rate. Carried by diplomatic pouch from the U.S. State Department in Washington, DC, to the American Consulate in Cali, Colombia. December 20, 1944. This was a personal rather than an official business article, so the postage had to be paid, even though it was carried outside the mail. Since it was carried in a diplomatic pouch, it was not subject to wartime censorship.

Figure 9: 3-cent PUAS rate. Palisade, NJ, to Quito, Ecuador. December 1947 (day illegible). Marked "FRAUDULENT Mail to this address returned by order of Postmaster General" and returned to sender without being dispatched.

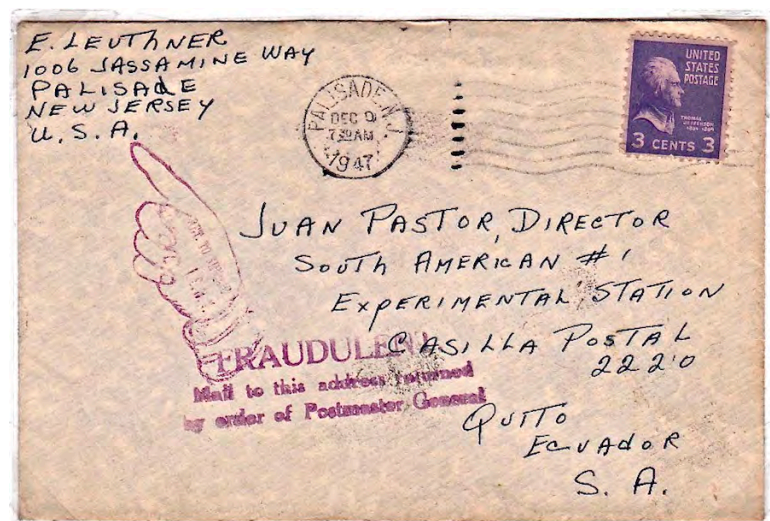


Figure 10a, 10b: 43 cents = 3-cent PUAS rate + 40-cent registry fee to a PUAS member other than Canada. Santa Ana, CA, to Tijuana, Mexico. June 22, 1955 (as per post-

marks on reverse). The 3-cent PUAS rate to Canada and Mexico remained in effect through July 31, 1958, as did the 3-cent domestic letter rate. The 40-cent registry fee to PUAS members other than Canada remained in effect through June 30, 1957. The registry fee to other foreign counties, including Canada, was 55 cents at the time. The registry fee to all foreign countries became 50 cents on July 1, 1957.

## Combined Third-Class Mail with First-Class Mail Attached

by Hal Klein



A combined third-class mail with first-class mail piece is probably one of most rarely seen usages, following one of the lesser known postal regulations of the Prexie era. The Domestic Mail Manual – PL&R (Postal Laws and Regulations) Sec. 583 relates to “Third or fourth-class matter accompanied with communication,” or “Second-class publications accompanied by communication”.

P.L.& R. Sec. 583 reads as follows:

583. When the sender desires that a parcel of third- or fourth-class matter on which the postage is fully prepaid at ‘the rate for the respective class, or a package of second-class matter pre-paid at the rates prescribed in paragraph 1, section 545, or at publishers’ second-class rates,

be accompanied with a communication, or other matter of the first class, which is not a permissible inclosure at the lower rate, the communication may be placed in an envelope, and after the full amount of postage at the first-class rate is affixed to the envelope it may be tied to or otherwise securely attached to the outside of the parcel or package in such manner as to prevent its separation therefrom and not to interfere with the address thereon. The envelope shall be addressed to correspond with the address on the parcel. Combination envelopes or containers having separate portions for a letter and matter of a lower class may be used for mailing together two classes of matter. Parcels or packages with which communications



are mailed in this manner shall be treated as second, third, or fourth-class matter, as the case may be. When second-class matter accompanied with a communication under the provisions of this section is prepaid at publishers' second-class rates, a notice of entry as second-class matter shall be placed in the upper right corner of the address side of the package. Properly prepaid third-class matter inclosed in unsealed envelopes indorsed "Third class" may be mailed with fully prepaid packages of second, third, or fourth class matter under these conditions.

I first encountered the application of this postal regulation, about 60 years ago, in my first after-school job as a "retail store stock boy" (at a whooping 50 cents-an-hour in the 1950's). One of my first jobs was to prepare the store's fourth-

class mailings. I packed merchandise, weighed and computed the postal zone with insurance, wrote-up the shipment in the company's U.S.P.O. firm mailing book, placed correct postage (usually Prexies) on the package, and took the packages to the back dock of the local post office a half-block from the store. Retail customers got a packing slip on the outside of the fourth-class mailing, with separate first-class postage paid. Vendor returns, on the other hand, got a packing slip tucked between merchandise on the inside of the fourth-class mailing, and separate first-class postage that was required but never paid (Don't ask!)

So, about thirty years ago when I decided to specialize in "Prexie" postal history, my hunt for this obscure usage began. Truthfully, I thought I would never find a valid usage, but my search ended this past March.

## Census of Covers Bearing \$5 Prexies Paying Excess Value Registry Fees

by Ed Field

Date	# \$5	Franking	Zone	Decl Value	Source	Comment
10/5/39*	1	\$9.87	6	\$80K	---	IL bank to TX corp
6/14/44*	28	\$141.36	1	\$1281K	Helbock	DE bank to PA bank
??/??/44	16	\$84.26	3	\$600K	ex-Preston	Ithaca NY trust co to NYC broker
10/23/44*	6	\$30.53	4	\$201K	---	Intra-CA BofA; SF-to-SD
??/??/45	1	\$5.04	1	\$42K	Rustad p330	NYC corp to NYC individual
5/17/46*	72	\$361.60	2	\$3012K	Prexie Era #74	CA SF bank to CA Sac bank
5/17/46	48	\$241.19	2	\$2008K	Prexie Era #74	CA SF bank to CA Sac bank
6/16/46*	37	\$186.38	8	\$1034K	Linn's 1/15/18	IL bank to CA bank
??/??/47	5	\$29.16	5	\$180K	Rustad p330	LA corp to OH corp
12/7/47	57	\$283.33	8	\$600K	Rustad p331	NYC bank to CA bank
1/12/48*	1	\$9.11	4	\$56K	Prexie Era #55	OR law firm to CA bank; airmail
illeg	38	\$289	2	~\$2400K	Rustad p67	CT ins co to NY bank; \$99 meter





For the past eight years I have searched for \$5 Prexie stamps on registered covers with high supplementary surcharges. That search has included auction catalogs, exhibits, philatelic literature, the internet, and long-running ads in several society newsletters. So far I have identified a mere dozen such covers. The table summarizes those covers, organized by posting date.

The table above is mostly self-explanatory, but some comments are in order: "Helbock" refers to the frontispiece of La Posta Monograph; Volume 2, 1968. "Rustad" refers to the well known 1994 book, *The Prexies*. An asterisk

(\*) by the posting date indicates the six covers in my possession. Figures 1 and 2, show scans of the October 5, 1939 and October 23, 1944 covers, respectively, for which I know of no published reference.

Incidentally, I am almost through a similar census for \$5 Fourth Bureau Issue covers. That population seems to be about double that of the \$5 Prexie covers.

Any census is a work in progress. I seek corrections and, hopefully, additions. I will provide two-sided scans of the six covers in my possession for anyone interested.



## Resumed Registered Mail Service to Japan, 1948

by Louis Fiset



Resumption of mail service to countries whose postal relations with the U.S. were severed during World War II was a process that began in February 1944 (Italy) and not completed until 1948 (Japan, Germany). The cover shown here provides an interesting example of registered mail to Japan, a service that resumed on February 26, 1948 (*PB* 19109). Airmail service had resumed the previous September.

The letter, posted from Guam on May 5, 1948, bears 51 cents postage. It pays the uniform 25-cent airmail rate to Asia, plus 20 cents registration and 5 cents RRR fees, with a penny of convenience franking. Interestingly, it was missent to Manila, where it received a May 7 transit marking, then on to the Tokyo

destination. The letter was opened and examined by the Allied Civil Censorship Detachment (C.C.D.), likely at Tokyo. Allied censorship of incoming/outgoing international mail continued until 1949.

Newsletter subscriber, Kiyoshi Kashiwagi, takes the cover to a second level of interest with the following translations:

- 1 Kanji denoting airmail
- 2 Kichijohji, a place in Musashino, Tokyo
- 3 Kanji denoting "Under investigation"
- 4 Re chops of two Japanese postal clerks
- 5 Red boxed handstamp reading "Confirmation of Stamps Affixed/Tokyo Central Post Office Foreign Mail Section"

Tokyo postal workers may have been unfamiliar with the airmail rate from Guam, no doubt a scarce origin, requiring an "investigation."