

THE U.S. POSTAL AGENCY IN BARRANQUILLA, COLOMBIA

Synopsis September, 2026

PURPOSE & SCOPE: This is a single frame postal history exhibit presenting the short-lived yet essential service provided by the U.S. Postal Agency in Barranquilla, Colombia from July 18th 1936 until July 14th 1937. As aircrews rested and seaplanes were refueled, two postal clerks worked into and often through the night receiving, recording and distributing the mail for onward transmission. The majority of the mail in transit was in jackets, pouches and bags and only registered articles treated as individual items received the Agency Registered backstamp, making examples uncommon and sought after. The examples in this exhibit are all Northbound. Southbound examples are known, albeit rare, as virtually all southbound registered mail was already distributed and batched before leaving the United States. In addition to the handstamps covered in this exhibit, two steel postmarking devices were produced with a few uses documented on official mail pertaining to official business.

TREATMENT: This exhibit follows a chronological order beginning with the first day of actual service, July 19th, 1936. As supplies, including the registry stamps were in route, some by air others by sea, the clerks resorted to using their “Personal rubber stamps” to process the individual items requiring their handling.



U.S. Postal Agency-BARRANQUILLA, COL. S.A.
JUL 19 1936
U. H. PARRISH

Once supplies arrived, a double ring Registered handstamp was applied to items needing individual handling. Examples from various countries along the FAM-9 route are featured (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Uruguay) as well as an unusual and less frequently seen FAM-5 item (Venezuela).



The discovery of the only recorded “Missent to....” auxiliary marking is a highlight of the exhibit. On a previously exhibited and published cover (ex Kugel) with plenty going for it already, further inspection led to the finding. A number of auxiliary markings were included in the supplies for Barranquilla, and the “Missent to....” is listed by Brett in his seminal Philatelic Congress article. The cover, posted in England and intended for Zeppelin service to the U.S. ended up being missent to Colombia, most probably due to the Columbia, S.C. destination confusing a German clerk, causing routing to “Kolumbien” or Colombia.

Examples of the Agency’s registered process are shown up until a week before closing July 14th, 1937.

IMPORTANCE: The U.S. Postal Agency in Barranquilla, Colombia played an integral role in advancing air transport and communications as routes and technology evolved. The Agency provided for a place to perform preliminary distribution prior to entering the United States, thus saving in-country processing time.

KNOWLEDGE, STUDY & RESEARCH: Being aware of the Agency for decades, I had collected examples originating from Chile, my primary country of interest. Over time, reading and digesting the reference material available and corresponding with other collectors, I decided to expand my scope to examples from any origin country. I was fortunate to acquire the Al Kugel holdings and have obtained examples from other specialists and the philatelic market. I believe this is the first time a single-frame exhibit has been developed on the subject.

RARITY & CONDITION: As explained regarding the process, only articles treated as individual items were backstamped with the USPA Barranquilla, Colombia registry stamps. That in itself makes them rare as the vast majority of mail passing through the agency arrived already separated into registry jackets or bundles. A census of recorded examples of registry and non-registry markings has been maintained and published by James Robinson in the United States Specialist, #1115 and #1117. As of yet unpublished updates record four examples of the Parrish Personal Rubber Stamps used as emergency registry marks on July 19th, 1936, the first day of service. Two of the four (50%) are included in this exhibit. The updated census records 53 examples of the Registered handstamp and 15 (28.3%) are included in this exhibit. The “Missent to....” is a new discovery and has been added to the census as a first report.

Condition is excellent taking into account the light weight paper used for airmail envelopes of the period.

REFERENCES:

Brett, George – *U.S. Postal Agency Barranquilla, Colombia*. Twenty-First American Philatelic Congress October, 1955

Piskiewicz, Leonard – *Foreign Incoming Airmail to the United States 1920 – 1950s* – Collectors Club of Chicago 2025

Robinson, James – *The US Postal Agencies at Barranquilla and Cali: Unrecorded Markings and Usages* -The United States Specialist, 6/2016

Robinson, James - *The US Postal Agencies at Barranquilla and Cali, Colombia Expanding the History, Part I*-The United States Specialist #1115, 1/2023

Robinson, James - *The US Postal Agencies at Barranquilla... Expanding the History, Part II: Registered Mail*- The United States Specialist #1117, 3/2023

West, John – *Panagra Airmail Service in South America, The U.S. Agencies at Barranquilla and Cali, Colombia*-London Philatelist #1238, 9/1996



Digitally enhanced image from Pan Am archives

The U.S. Postal Agency in Barranquilla, Colombia



Digitally enhanced period photograph taken by Erwin Heumann. The Agency was housed in the small corner structure

Purpose: This exhibit presents correspondence handled by the short-lived U.S. Postal Agency in Barranquilla, Colombia. Established July 18th, 1936 to process north and southbound Registered mail. Previously handled in Cristobal, Canal Zone, changes in air routes made Barranquilla a preferred stop, where the mail was processed overnight. The Agency was in operation until July 14th, 1937 after which Cristobal became the overnight stop once again.

Pan American Airways/Panagra revised their FAM 9 (Foreign Air Mail) schedule in 1936 calling for the creation of a U.S. Postal Agency in Barranquilla, Colombia. With approval from the Colombian government, postal officials and with the cooperation of SCADTA (Sociedad Colombo-Alemana de Transportes Aereos), the Agency was officially announced July 14th, 1936 in The Postal Bulletin. Albeit an Agency, Barranquilla was not and did not function as a Post Office. US stamps were not available and it was not to be an origination point for mail, strictly a place for the handling, processing, accounting, and dispatching of registered mail in transit. Located on the Magdalena River, all mail arrived and was dispatched by seaplane.

Two clerks from the Miami Post Office volunteered; H. Vincent Steinhart, named Clerk in Charge, and Ulmer H. Parrish, Clerk. They served for the entire duration of the Agency.

While thousands of registered letters passed through the Barranquilla Agency, the vast majority were in pre-sorted and sealed registry jackets which received a single registration marking on the exterior. **Only** individual registered items, not previously grouped in jackets (required for 5 or more) and requiring additional sorting had the U.S. Postal Agency Barranquilla, Colombia REGISTERED marking applied on the back. This explains their scarcity.

Treatment and Importance: The U.S. Postal Agency in Barranquilla was an integral part in advancing the efficiency of airmail communications at a time when routing and technology were in flux. Material is shown in chronological order within the lifetime of the Agency.

Knowledge and Research: Years of accumulating this scarce material, study of all published works along with correspondence with other major collectors, has led to this exhibit, the first of its kind featuring just the Barranquilla Agency. A first report/discovery of the "Missent To....." auxiliary marking is one of the highlights of the exhibit.

Condition and Rarity: A census of Barranquilla Agency covers has been published by James Robinson in The United States Specialist (#1115, 1117) and a yet unpublished update records 53 examples of the U.S. Postal Agency Barranquilla, Colombia Registered marking. This exhibit includes 15, or 28.3% of all recorded covers. Four examples of the Parrish "Personal Handstamp" used as an emergency registry backstamp on the first day of service are recorded, two, or 50% are included in this exhibit. **All of the presented material is rare, but the discovery/first documented "Missent to...." is noted with a blue dot.** The material is in excellent condition considering the fragile and lightweight paper used for many of the envelopes during this period.

References:

Brett, George – *U.S. Postal Agency Barranquilla, Colombia*. Twenty-First American Philatelic Congress October, 1955

Piszkievics, Leonard – *Foreign Incoming Airmail to the United States 1920 – 1950s* – Collectors Club of Chicago 2025

Robinson, James - *The US Postal Agencies at Barranquilla and Cali, Colombia Expanding the History, Part I*-The United States Specialist #1115, 1/2023

Robinson, James - *The US Postal Agencies at Barranquilla... Expanding the History, Part II: Registered Mail*- The United States Specialist #1117, 3/2023