

Colombia's Revenue Stamps 1858-1908 - Synopsis

History of **Colombia's** fiscal stamps begins in **1858**, over the subsequent 50 years to 1908, reflects a period of profound political decentralization chronic fiscal need. These stamps were not created for postal use, but as instruments of **state revenue**, affixed to legal documents, commercial contracts, court filings, passports a wide range of official transactions. From onset, they reflected **Colombia's** unstable constitutional structure recurring civil conflict.

Colombia's earliest fiscal stamps appeared during **Granadine Confederation** and expanded rapidly after creation of **United States of Colombia** in 1864. Federalism granted extensive autonomy to the sovereign states - such as Cundinamarca, Bolivar, Boyacá and Tolima – each of which developed its own fiscal systems stamp issues.

Early issues were crudely printed often by typography or lithography, w/ simple designs emphasizing denominations fiscal purpose rather than national symbolism. Paper quality, perforations ink varied widely, even within a single issue, reflecting limited printing resources decentralized production.

Between the 1860s 1880s fiscal stamps became ever-present in Colombian public life. Each state issued stamps for multiple categories of taxation, including:

- Judicial legal fees
- Notarial acts
- Commercial licenses
- Civil registry passport fees

This period experienced an explosion of varieties, surcharges, provisional issues locally printed stamps, often created in response to shortages or emergency fiscal demands. Because many stamps were printed locally distributed unevenly, surviving examples today range from common to exceedingly rare.

The Constitution of 1886 abolished federal system replaced it w/ a centralized republic, **The Republic of Colombia**. The former sovereign states became departments, fiscal authority increasingly shifted to the national government. As a result:

- National fiscal stamps became more standardized in design and production.
- Departmental issues continued but were now subordinate to national authority.
- Overprints Habilitations (Provisional Overprints) were frequently applied to adapt existing stocks to new legal frameworks.
- Despite centralization, economic instability administrative inefficiencies ensured that provisional issues remained common.

- **Thousand Day's war (1899-1903)** marked the most chaotic phase of Colombia's early fiscal stamp history. Prolonged civil conflict devastated government finances, disrupted printing and distribution and forced authorities to rely heavily on:
 - Emergency surcharges
 - Hand stamped or manuscript provisional stamps
 - Reuse of obsolete issues with new values or purposes

During this period, fiscal stamps became essential tools for extracting revenue under extreme conditions. The improvisational nature of wartime issues makes some of the most complex sought after items in Colombian fiscal philately.

By the end of war in 1902, following separation of Panama in 1903, Colombia entered a new phase of fiscal administration. Printing quality gradually improved, national control tightened, experimental, locally driven character of 19th century fiscal stamps gave way to more uniform 20th century issues.

Years 1903 to 1908 represent a transitional but critical concluding phase of this study. In the aftermath of civil war separation of Panama, Colombia undertook fiscal administrative stabilization. Revenue stamp production reflects this shift: issues became increasingly standardized in design, while emergency surcharges manuscript provisionals declined in frequency, though not entirely disappearing. Habilitations and overprints continued to be used, but within a more structured administrative framework. This period marks the culmination of fifty years of evolution from decentralized, locally improvised fiscal instruments to a more coherent national system.

Exhibit represents a comprehensive study of most complex philatelic classic revenue fields of Latin America. It integrates national, state, local issues within their historical administrative context, combining extensive research, scarce material, systematic classification. By documenting issues only sparsely treated in standard literature, it contributes significantly to philatelic knowledge of Colombian worldwide revenue stamps.

References:

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Morley, Walter (1904) *Catalogue of the Revenue Stamps of South America*, London: W, Morley pp. 37-102

COLOMBIA'S REVENUE STAMPS 1858 -1908

FIFTY YEARS OF FISCAL EVOLUTION

I. ORIGINS of COLOMBIAN FISCAL STAMPS

GRANADINE FEDERATION - 1858 - 1862

FIRST ISSUE - 1858 -1859 - 20 Cts.

Colombia's first REVENUE stamp was ordered by Law of June 10, 1858, which defines its use. Decree of July 29, 1858 refers to the design and production of the stamp. The contract was signed by printer Martinez Brothers of Bogota, August 10th, 1858.



Mint - Different shades



Manuscript cancels



Introduction and Scope - This exhibit presents the fiscal (revenue) stamps of Colombia from 1858 through the post-war reconstruction period concluding in 1908. These stamps were issued for the collection of taxes and fees on legal, judicial, commercial and administrative documents and are **distinct from postal issues**.

The exhibit encompasses the full development of Colombian fiscal administration, from the decentralized authority of early sovereign states to the increasingly centralized national system that emerged following the Thousand Days' War and the separation of Panama in 1903.

Purpose and Philatelic Significance – The revenue stamps of Colombia during this fifty year period provide primary documentary evidence of changing political structures, regional autonomy and fiscal policy under conditions often marked by instability and reform. Their wide variety of designs, printings and provisional adaptations – often produced under adverse circumstances - makes them a complex and historical significant field within classic Latin American philately.

The exhibit demonstrates how these issues reflect both the fragmentation of authority in the federal era and the subsequent consolidation of fiscal control at the national level.

Plan and Organization

I. Origins of Colombian Fiscal Stamps (1858-1862)

Early stamped paper and first adhesive revenues under the Confederation and emerging federal states

II. Federal Expansion and State Autonomy (1881-1886)

Revenue issues of sovereign states under the United States of Colombia; diverse regional designs and departmental issues.

III. Centralization and National Control (1887-1898)

Constitutional reform and the shift toward national fiscal administration; coexistence of national and departmental issues.

IV. Fiscal Pressures and Provisional Issues (1899-1902)

Emergency measures during the Thousand Days' War; surcharges, overprints, and locally produced stamps reflecting instability.

V. Post War Reconstruction and Fiscal Consolidation (1903-1908)

Reorganization following the war and the separation of Panama; increasing standardization, strengthened national control, and the transition toward modern fiscal administration.

Rarity & Condition – Many of the items shown are of considerable rarity, particularly early state issues, provisional wartime emissions, and surviving documentary usages. Due to their fiscal function, revenue stamps were typically affixed to documents and subsequently destroyed, resulting in limited survival, often with faults consistent with their intended use.

🔍 Denotes personal research Important items are boxed in red