

# Broken Letters on the Overprinted 1898 1¢ Franklin

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## Introduction

After many years of accumulating, then collecting U.S. stamps in general, some 25 years ago I began a study of the 1898 1¢ green Franklin (Scott No. 279). Although the story of the change in my collecting interests is beyond the scope of this article, my study has led to several interesting finds including some printing varieties on the U.S. overprints. Encouraged by discussions with Rudy Roy concerning the Cuban overprints and the series of articles on "Broken Letters in U.S. Overprints" by Gilbert Plass (1983), I decided to report my findings in hopes that others will be similarly encouraged to examine their collection and report what they find.

Numerous printing varieties are found in the U.S. overprinted stamps, but most are likely due to the inking or other problems occurring at the time of overprinting and not constant or repeating in nature. Only a few have been previously identified as broken letters, either resulting from damage to the overprinting plate while it was being made or sometime later during its use, and fewer yet have been plated or their location in the pane identified. In my collection of the 1898 1¢ green Franklin I have numerous examples of printing anomalies; particularly numerous in the "I.R." revenue overprints, but frequent in the U.S. Possessions overprints as well.

Broken letter varieties are usually uncolored flaws resulting from a portion of the relief printing type being broken away. These generally can be identified by careful examination under a microscope, i.e., the impression normally left in the paper by the relief printing, when viewed from the face of the stamp, is missing. However, if the overprinting pressure was very light, then this technique is of little help and these uncolored flaws can only be confirmed by finding more than one copy with the same features. Colored flaws resulting from broken letters are generally easy to identify, because a part of the letter is displaced from its normal position and readily seen without aid of a microscope. [ref. 1]

Joe Napp notes that "It was the common manufacturing practice of that era to create a master overprint mould of 25 subject (5x5) from which four mini-plates of twenty-five overprint subjects were made ...[the] four mini-plates were assembled into one overprinting form to create the 100 overprints necessary for the overprinting of the post office pane of 100" [ref.2]. Since the overprinting plate was made up of four mini-panes of 25, letters broken in the creation of the mini-panes will show up four times in the sheet of 100; and broken letters, or other printing anomalies, occurring less than four times per sheet most likely occurred after the overprinting plate was created. The exception might be where more than one overprinting plate was made up and the broken letters could appear in one overprinting plate and not another as will be suggested for the Cuban overprints where I possess a full pane of 100 to examine.

In noting the position of broken letters, or other printing anomalies, I have used the convention of numbering the stamps in a pane from left to right, then top to bottom, starting with 01 in the top left corner ending with 100 in the bottom right corner. I apologize for the rather crude drawings of the overprinting errors, but I find that the scanned copies of the example broken letters are not sufficiently clear to identify the shape or location of the broken letters. One additional point - many may consider the discussion of these minor printing flaws “flyspeck” philately, but I accept this label unapologetically as the study allows the plating of the overprinting plates for other studies and is necessary in any case to correct errors, some of them mine, in the philatelic literature.

## Cuba



Fig. 1. Broken E.

The above item, Figure 1, was listed in February on eBay for \$75.00 and described as “USA Cuba 1899 - Franklin 1c on 1c green - Perf 12 - Wmk UPSP, Scott # 221 Unlisted damaged ‘E’ in ‘PESO’.” I have three copies of this broken letter, and it occurs on position 62 on my pane of 100, but since it appears only once in the sheet it would appear that it is a letter damaged after the four mini-plates of 25 were put together for the overprinting process. Since I have been able to purchase most of my broken letters for less than \$10, there is no reason this item should command such a price and a wonderful example of “caveat emptor”. The good thing is that seeing it triggered my writing up my notes of broken letters and other printing anomalies on the overprinted 1898 1¢ Franklin.

One of the more comprehensive studies of the Cuba overprints during the U.S. Administration to date was the Handbook of Cuba, Part II: The U.S. Administration by Bill Jones and Rudy Roy in 1984 [ref. 3]. In fact it was this publication and private communications with Rudy Roy that resulted in my publishing an article in *Possessions* entitled “One-Cent Overprint Plate Varieties” [ref. 4]. In a 1982 article in *Possessions* [ref. 5] Roy notes that “there are three varieties on the 1c. de Peso. The first consists of a much smaller serif on the ‘1’ ... This occurs in positions 34, 39, 84, and 89. The second variety consists of a break in the left leg of the letter ‘A’ of Cuba, which is found in positions 21, 26, 71, and 76.”

The problem with this article, the Jones and Roy book, and my article is that the positions are not consistent with that reported earlier in the February 1899 issue of *Post Office* [ref. 6] ... “of minor varieties in the 1¢ de peso stamp we have noted only

two worth mentioning; in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> stamps of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> rows [24, 29, 74, & 79] the serif of the 1 is very small as compared with the other stamps; and in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stamps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> rows [11, 16, 51, & 56] there is a break in the letter A.” The latter positions listed for the 1 with a small serif, Figure 2, are consistent with the convention described in the introduction and that found on my full pane. The first two of the latter positions [11 & 16] listed for the broken A are also consistent with the convention described in the introduction and that found on my full pane; however, the second two positions [51 & 56] are not consistent with the concept of the broken letters occurring in the same position in the mini-panes of 25 and should be positions 61 & 66. Thus the broken A, Figure 3, occurs in positions, 11, 16, 61, & 66.



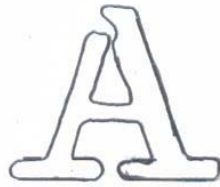
Fig. 2. 1 with small serif.



Fig. 3. Broken A.



Fig. 4. Broken d.



In his article [ref. 5] Roy also notes a “third variety probably occurred after the plate was set up, for it is known only in position 31. This is a broken or deformed ‘d’ in ‘de’.” In a subsequent note in *Possessions* he “corrects” this location to position 41, but according to the labeling convention used here position 31 is correct. Jones and Roy also mention the “deformed d”, Figure 4, as occurring only on position 41 [sic]. However, in addition to finding this broken letter in position 31 on several left plate number strips of three, I have also found it in position 86 on bottom plate number strips of six, which is consistent with the concept of the broken letters occurring in the same position in the mini-panes of 25. The difficulty is that on my full pane, the broken d only appears in position 86, and I have no evidence that it occurs in positions 36 and 81. One answer could be that there were more than one mini-panes produced and more than one overprint plate made up from the different mini-panes similar to that seen in the Porto Rico 36<sup>o</sup> and 25<sup>o</sup> overprints. This is supported by the discussion in the February 1899 issue of *Post Office* ... “There have been at least two plates made for surcharging the 1¢ de peso.” [ref. 6] As will be seen this analysis is complicated/aided by another broken letter anomaly in the same position.

There are seven additional broken letters or other anomalies worth mentioning: a B with the top serif cut at an angle, a B with a notch in the lower right side, a

deformed period after PESO, an E with a notch in it's base leg, the eBay broken E, a broken O, and a broken ES, i.e., more than one example has been observed for each of these.



Fig. 5. B, top serif cut at an angle.

The B with the top serif cut at an angle, Figure 5, appears in positions 31, 36, 81, and 86, the same positions one would expect to find the broken d, consistent with being in the same position on the mini-panes of 25. This broken B appears in all four positions on my full pane, and on every plate number multiple (positions 31 & 86) I have examined, even those that do not have the broken d. At first this might seem to help explain when one could expect to find the broken d, but while this broken B appears to have been on all mini-panes, one is still left with the speculation that there must have been more than one overprint plate with different mini-panes. Correlating the plate numbers examined with the appearance of the broken d may help, but is not conclusive, i.e., the broken d appears on all plate numbers examined from 564 to 769 used in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, whereas it does not appear on the plate numbers examined from 770 to 773 (the full pane) used in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> printing [ref. 7]. One could conclude from this that the broken d could be found in positions 31 and 86 (and possibly in all four positions, 31, 36, 81, & 86) only from the overprinting plate used in the 1<sup>st</sup> printing, and that subsequent printings used a different overprinting plate with the broken d only in the lower right mini-pane, but I am hesitant to draw this conclusion with such limited data. It should also be noted that Jones and Roy mention a “broken upper serif” of B occurring on the 2¢, 2½, and 5¢ overprinted stamps [ref.3], but the drawing in Roy’s Possessions article suggests it is different than that seen here [ref.5].

The B in positions 1, 6, 51, & 56 has a small notch in the lower right side near the intersection with the top half, Figure 6. Not only does it appear in all four positions suggested by the use of mini-panes in making up the overprinting plate on my full pane, but is found in all left plate number strips examined on position 51.



Fig. 6. B, notched lower loop.



Fig. 7. Broken period after PESO.

The period following PESO in positions 42, 47, 92 & 97 is damaged such that it appears flatter on the bottom and squeezed to a point on the right, Figure 7. Not only does this appear in all four positions suggested by the use of mini-panes in making up the overprinting plate on my full pane, but is found in all bottom plate number strips examined on position 97 as well.

The E in positions 21, 26, 71, & 76 on my full pane has a small notch in the bottom or base of the letter, Figure 8. Since these positions are not on plate number strips it is more difficult to know the extent of their presence. However, I have seen several single stamps, such as that shown below, with this anomaly, leading to the speculation that it is prevalent in the overprints. On many of these stamps you can also see a small notch in the upper part or top of the letter, but it is not as pronounced or not visible in many cases.



Fig. 8. E, notched base.

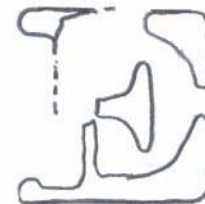


Fig. 9. Broken E.

The broken E seen on the stamp, Figure 1, offered on eBay at first glance appears more like some foreign substance on the overprinting plate preventing the ink from adhering uniformly across the type face, but I have three copies of this anomaly, Figure 9, one on my full pane in position 62. Another of my copies is on a large piece in position 17 or 67, i.e., I can't tell from the limited number of stamps without a margin reference whether it comes from the top right or bottom right mini-pane, but it clearly appears in a second position consistent with its occurring on more than one mini-pane. Since it only appears once on my full pane, it may be like the broken d, appearing only in one position in the later overprinting plates, but in multiple positions on the earlier printings, possibly all four mini-pane positions 12, 17, 62, 67.



Fig. 10. Broken O.



Fig. 11. Broken ES



I have two examples each of a broken O, Figure 10, and broken ES, Figure 11, but have observed them no where else, and their positions are unknown. However, since I have seen more than one example, and a close examination of the overprints did not reveal any impression normally left in the paper by the relief printing if it were an inking problem, I conclude these are broken letters and exist elsewhere.



Fig. 12. Broken right leg of A

I have two examples of the broken right leg of A shown in figure 12, one of which is on my full pane in position 70. Rudy Roy also has examples of this broken letter, not only on the overprinted 1¢ Franklin, but also on the 2¢ regular issue and the 10¢ due, all with straight edges on the right side [ref.8].

I have observed many other printing anomalies, but without more than one example it's difficult to impossible to know the cause. Examples include the three shown below: a small "period" between, and slightly below, the BA in CUBA, Figure 13, likely due to excess ink; a partial "CUBA", a likely under-inking of the overprinting plate, Figure 14; and a possible broken UB in CUBA, Figure 15. Jones and Roy mention a "period" between the B and A on the 3¢ overprint [ref.3], but the drawing in Roy's *Possessions* article suggests it is different than that seen here [ref.5].



Fig. 13. Period below BA. Fig.14. Under-inking. Fig. 15. Broken UB ?

A summary of the “broken letters” among the Cuba overprints with their position on the overprinting plates is shown in the following list. Positions known are bolded except for the broken E where it has been observed in position 17\* or 67\* (but not both) in addition to position 62.

<b><u>Broken Letters</u></b>	<b><u>Position</u></b>
B, notched	<b>1, 6, 51, 56</b>
A, broken	<b>11, 16, 61, 66</b>
E, broken	12, <b>17*</b> , <b>62, 67*</b>
E, notched base	<b>21, 26, 71, 76</b>
1 with small serif	<b>24, 29, 74, 79</b>
B, top serif cut at an angle	<b>31, 36, 81, 86</b>
d, broken	<b>31, 36, 81, 86</b>
period after PESO, broken	<b>42, 47, 92, 97</b>
A, broken right leg	15, 20, 65, <b>70</b>
O, broken	unknown
ES, broken	unknown

While I have noted errors in previous work, including my own, these errors appear to be a problem/difference in position labeling, not in the actual position of the broken letters.

## **Guam**

I have not observed any broken letters or other printing anomalies on the Guam 1¢ overprints, nor do I know of any reference to one in the philatelic literature. In the recent Robert A. Siegel sale 969 catalog of The Whitpain Collection of U.S. Possessions, lot 1132 was described as “Guam, Overprint and Printing Varieties. 22 stamps, incl. so-called "Cap on 'G' Variety", "Broken 'U' Variety", several 2c with slight doubling of ovpt. due to "kiss" print, ... “, but an examination of the lot revealed no varieties on the 1¢ overprints [ref.9].



Fig. 16. Double overprint?

I have examined the stamp in Figure 16, which has a very light second overprint impression, but in a 1987 American Philatelic Expertizing Service certificate, it was described as “no [sic] enough overprint to be considered a double overprint ... [a] slipped overprint variety.” Such second impressions have been observed on other denominations as indicated in the auction lot description in the previous paragraph and other issues, “For the [Cuba] 1 cent, Scott No. 221, a new variety seen is a horizontal pair with a second impression. This is not a true double impression, [but] there should have been at least 100 copies of this.” [ref. 10] To the best of my knowledge, however, no other copies have been reported either for the Cuba or Guam 1¢ overprints.

## Philippines

In a serialized article published in *Possessions* from 1983-1985, Gil Plass discusses the broken letters found on the Philippines overprints. “There are scores of different broken letters ... [on the Philippines overprint] ... aside from a couple well-known examples, the remainder do not appear to have been recorded in the literature.” While he cautions that “ideally at least two copies with the same break should be found before deciding that it is a true broken letter”, he describes more than 25 examples with just one copy observed, asking the readers to report confirming copies. However, he starts with an example of a break observed in three letters that has been “... confirmed on a number of stamps. The first P is missing a fairly large piece out of the top as well as the lower left serif; the H is missing a small piece at the bottom of the left vertical stroke; the third P has an unusual break as though the bottom part of the letter had been smashed ...” [ref.11]. Geoffrey Brewster reports he has this on the 5¢, 4¢, and 8¢, Scott Nos. 216, 220, and 222, respectively [ref. 12].



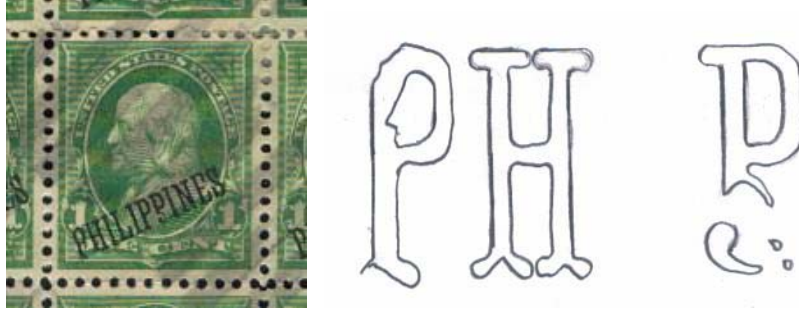


Fig. 17. Broken first P, H, and third P.

I have a multiple of 35, the top left corner of a pane (unfortunately without a plate number), which has these three broken letters in position 16, Figure 17.

Plass lists only one other possible broken letter on the 1898 1¢, a “broken E & S”, which I have not observed, nor seen reported in the literature. In reviewing the possible broken letters he lists on other stamps, there are only a couple that appear similar to examples in my collection, the biggest problem with the comparison being the lack of clarity of the images in the article. As I describe the broken letters I have observed I will note where the Plass article may provide additional support of the existence of the broken letter, but I will only discuss those examples where I have observed two or more copies.

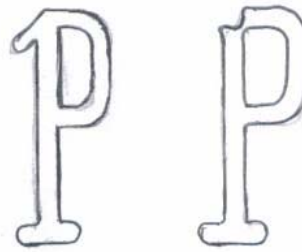


Fig. 18. Broken first P ... “I HILIPPINES”

The only other Philippines broken letter that has been reported in the literature that I am aware of is the broken first P such that the overprint looks like “**I HILIPPINES**” reported by Geoffrey Brewster. “The ‘H’ is also broken, but only slightly, having its upper left outside serif missing. ... To my knowledge this broken letter variety has not been reported previously. Since I have four copies ... it must have been constant on one position on at least a significant portion of the printing(s) of this 1¢ stamp. I do not know the position of this variety.” [ref.13] In addition to his four copies, I also have four copies, Figure 18, but I can offer no additional information about its position.



Fig. 19. First P, broken top serif.



Bend serif  
position 95

Missing serif  
position 96

Based on the number of anomalies in the first “P” of the overprint it must have been particularly susceptible to damage. Two of them are in positions 95 and 96, two of the three stamps adjacent to the bottom plate markings, Figure 19. The P in position 95 has its upper left serif bent downwards, and the upper left serif on the P in position 96 is broken off. I have observed these broken letters on all (ten) bottom plate number strips examined running from plate number 1050 to 1160, according to Napp used in the fourth printing [ref.14]; but they are not observed on any of the 56 plate number strips examined running from plate number 770 to 1000 used in the first, second and third printings. This clearly suggests that at least for these broken letters they were only on the overprinting plate(s) used in the fourth printing.

A broken first “P”, similar to the one I have observed on position 96, Figure 18, is pictured and described by Plass as “A large part of the left top of the first ‘P’ is missing on ... [the 4¢] Scott No. 220” [ref.15]; and later Plass noted that “Joe Napp reports that the broken first ‘P’ on Scott No. 220 illustrated earlier ... occurs on Pos. 16 of several different plate blocks that he has” [ref.16]. Position 16, however, would be inconsistent with positions 96, or 95, for them occurring in the same position of the 5x5 mini-panes, so I conclude that they are not the same broken letter, in spite of the similarity in their descriptions and appearance.

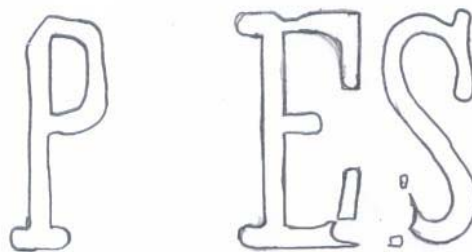


Fig. 20. Broken first P top serif, bottom E S serifs.

On position 60 next to the right plate markings the top serif on the first P, the bottom right serif of the E, and the bottom serif on the S are all missing, Figure 20. I

have observed these broken letters on all (15) right plate number strips examined, again all from the fourth printing, and not on any other plate numbers used in the earlier printings. Geoffrey Brewster reports he has this on Scott Nos. 220 and J1 [ref.12].



Fig. 21. First P missing bottom serif.

I have three copies of the broken letter, Figure 21. While I have seen no other examples, a close examination of the overprints did not reveal any impression normally left in the paper by the relief printing if it were an inking problem. Thus I conclude these are broken letters and likely exist elsewhere, but have no information on their position.



Fig. 22. First P missing bottom of loop.

I have two examples of the first P broken such that it is missing the bottom of the loop, plus missing part of the lower left of the H, Figure 22. While I have seen no other examples, a close examination of the overprints do not reveal any impression normally left in the paper by the relief printing if it were an inking problem; and Geoffrey Brewster reports he has an example in his collection on the 1¢ overprint [ref.12]. Thus I conclude these are broken letters and likely exist elsewhere, but have no information on their position.



Fig. 23. Broken N.

I have two examples of the N missing a small section of the right-most leg, Figure 23. While I have seen no other examples, a close examination of the overprints do not reveal any impression normally left in the paper by the relief printing if it were an inking problem. Thus I conclude these are broken letters and likely exist elsewhere, but have no information on their position. Geoffrey Brewster reports he has an example on a 1¢ overprint in his collection as well as several examples on other denominations, Scott Nos. 220, 222, and 225 [ref.12].

A summary of the “broken letters” observed among the Philippines overprints with their possible position on the overprinting plates, based on the concept of four 5x5 mini-panes, is shown in the following list. Known positions are bolded.

<u>Broken Letters</u>	<u>Position</u> _____
1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> P, H broken	11, <b>16</b> , 61, 66
1 <sup>st</sup> P top serif, ES bottom serifs broken	5, 10, 55, <b>60</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> P top serif bent	45, 50, <b>95</b> , 100
1 <sup>st</sup> P top serif broken	41, 46, 91, <b>96</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> P broken (I HILIPPINES)	unknown
1 <sup>st</sup> P bottom serif broken	unknown
1 <sup>st</sup> P bottom of loop missing	unknown
N, broken	unknown

Gil Plass notes that “John Zug has an ad on May 19, 1900 offering plate number strips of three of the Philippines overprints as follows: 1¢, 15 varieties ...” [ref.17], so there are likely many more broken letters out there that I have not seen and haven’t yet been reported.

## **Puerto Rico**

I have seen only three broken letter varieties on the Puerto Rican overprints, confirmed by observing two or more copies, two on the “Porto Rico” overprints, Scott No. 210, and one on the “Puerto Rico” overprint, Scott No. 215.



Fig. 24. Broken O, "PORTO RICU".

One of these, the broken "O", appearing as "RICU" on the Porto Rico overprint, has been reported by several authors. Gil Plass notes that it was reported in *Post Office* "a careful examination of these [Porto Rico] sheets, discloses a few minor varieties ... The third stamp in the first row [of the overprinted 1¢] has the O of Rico broken at the top, so that it reads RICU" [ref.18]. This broken letter, Figure 24, thus occurs only in position 3 and has only been reported on copies with a straight edge at the top, all from the first printing [ref.19].



Fig. 25. Broken I.

The second broken letter variety I have seen is a broken I on the Porto Rico overprint, Figure 25, in position 31. Examination under a microscope clearly shows a depression in the surface of the stamp outlining the shape of the "I" except where the character thickness narrows from 0.3 mm to 0.1 mm. This variety is probably the result of a small section of the raised letter on the overprinting plate being dented as opposed to being completely broken away. This would explain the slight inking that occurs without any impression being made in the stamp. I have seen this variety on four stamps and in each case in position 31 opposite the left imprint plate number, for plate numbers 567, 769 and 771(2). The use of four 5x5 mini-panes to make up the overprinting plate would suggest the possible existence of this broken letter on positions 36, 81, and 86, as well as 31, but I cannot confirm their existence.

While not a broken letter variety it should be noted that the Porto Rico overprints occur at two different angles, 25° and 36°. "Apparently two different angle mini-plates were produced and combined in varying combinations and locations to produce the 25° - 36° combinations that exist ..." [ref. 20]. The overprinting plate used in producing the 1¢ stamps used a 5x5 mini-pane of overprints at 25° in the upper left corner and 5x5 mini-panes of overprints at 36° for the other three positions [ref.21].



Fig. 26. Broken U

“There is only one slight irregularity in the [Puerto Rico] surcharge [of the 1¢] ... which is scarcely worth mentioning. The top of the U in Puerto is irregularly formed on four stamps in each sheet ... the variety appears on the first and sixth stamp of the fifth as well as the tenth row” [ref.22]. This description would suggest positions 41, 46, 91, and 96, consistent with a broken letter on mini-plate of 25, and I have observed this variety, Figure 26, on positions 41 and 96.

Additional broken letter overprint varieties among the Porto Rico and Puerto Rico overprints are listed in the Scott Specialized Catalogue; “most of these were noticed by dealers at the time these stamps were issued and the positions on the pane noted” including the PORTO RICU variety on the 1¢ [ref.19]. The other broken letter varieties discussed did not appear on the 1¢.

## Summary

I have described those broken letter varieties I can confirm with at least two copies observed, in many cases providing the plate position. While many of them are broken letters in the 5x5 mini-panes repeated four times in the overprinting plates, several others occur only once suggesting they were broken after the overprinting plate was made up, or the possibility of more than one 5x5 mini-pane being used. I have also been able to find many of these broken letter varieties on cover, my favorite, Figure 27, using both the Porto Rico 25<sup>0</sup> and 36<sup>0</sup> varieties as well as the PORTO RICU variety.

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Since this article was submitted for publication, the Cuban overprint with a broken E shown in Figure 1, which was listed on eBay, and triggered my writing the article, was first reduced in price to \$49, then removed or sold. Also of possible interest, two of the Philippines overprint broken 1<sup>st</sup> P(IHILIPPINES) shown in [Figure 18](#) have been sold on eBay, the first sold [March 24, 2009](#) for \$23.28 and the second sold [April 15, 2009](#) for \$12.50."



Fig. 27. 5¢ UPU rate Puerto Rico to New York via Caracas postmarked "Playa Ponce Sta., Porto Rico, Jun 21, 1899" backstamped "P.O.N.Y. 6-27-99".

I would also like to acknowledge and thank both Rudy Roy and Joe Napp for reading my initial draft and offering corrections that have been incorporated.

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