

# The Travers Papers and Cuba's Postal Stationery

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The article that appeared in the Fourth Quarter 2013 issue of *Possessions* regarding the Travers Papers was rather prophetic when it stated: "...the material posted may have much to offer us."

Much indeed! Just how often does one "discovery" lead to sixty-five (65) new entries in a catalog? That is the number of different Special Request Cuban envelopes that will be listed in the upcoming update of the United Postal Stationery Society's (UPSS): *The Postal Stationery of the United States Possessions and Administrative Areas*, due out mid-2014.

For those who may have missed the previous article, I'll offer a short introduction. The Travers Papers are the correspondence files of the Third Assistant Postmaster General of the U.S. Since that office was in charge of all financial matters of the US POD (including stamp and stationery production), the files contain correspondence between the POD and the contractor(s) producing Cuba's postal stationery.

Sometime late last year, the writer stumbled onto the website of the United States Philatelic Classics Society (USPCS) and their posting of the Travers Papers. The USPCS' decision to share this valuable information with the philatelic community at large is a very generous act deserving of our highest praise and admiration. Thanks are also extended to: the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, the Travers Papers current owners; the Jack Rosenthal family, for rescuing and later donating the papers; and to Arthur M. Travers, for originally saving this information for posterity.

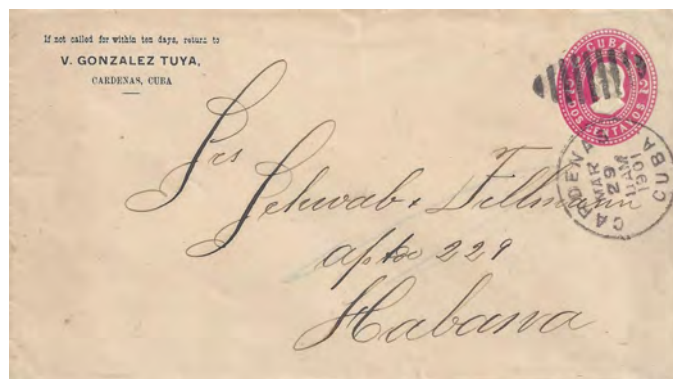
As I sat flipping through page after page of the Travers Papers, I noticed an order form kept popping up. It caught my attention because it was printed in Spanish. I quickly remembered that the Department of Posts – Cuba had a Translation Department (likely responsible for creating the Spanish version of the form). The form in question, form No. 216, was titled: "REGLAS CONCERNIENTES A LOS SOBRES DE SUPLICA ESPECIAL". The form was equivalent to the US POD form No. 3202 titled: "REGULATIONS RESPECTING SPECIAL-REQUEST



**Figure 1. The Miro y Otero corner cards were “privately” printed.**

ENVELOPES”, in use at that time. Special Request envelopes are today known as “personalized” stationery and are ordered using form No. 3203-X. Other than that, the rules remain pretty much the same. The U.S. forms refer to the Act of March 3, 1873 – Sec. 1, pg. 557 of the 17<sup>th</sup> Statutes as stating: “*that no envelope, AS FURNISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT, shall contain any lithographing or engraving, and no printing except a printed request to return the letter to the writer*”. The Spanish version does not quote that law (it was not a law in Cuba), but it likewise excludes engravings. This confirms the engraved Miro y Otero corner cards were NOT Special Request envelopes (the Miro y Otero corner cards were privately printed, see Figure 1).

Even though the Special Request envelope orders found in the Travers Papers are numerous, alas, they are not complete. The first order listed is



**Figure 2. Used example of Special Request envelope from Order No. 22. (Courtesy of R. Littrell)**

Order No. 22, ordered March 16, 1901, by V. Gonzalez Tuya of Cardenas, Cuba. Figure 2 shows an example of that S.R. envelope used on March 29, of that year. Order No. 23 was made by the Masonic Lodge Perfection & Progress (Logia Perfección y Progreso). These envelopes were mistakenly prepared using the rare knife 57, UPSS 10 envelopes, of which only two used copies are known (see Figure 3). Order No. 23 was placed on March 22, 1901. Only three days later, on March 25, Sugar Mill St. Gertrude (Ingenio Santa Gertrudis) also placed an order for 1¢ envelopes. Could a similar mistake have been made with this order? Who knows! But one should certainly snap up a copy, if found.



**Figure 3. Used example of Special Request envelope from Order No. 23. (Courtesy of E. Cuesta)**

During the U.S. Administration and the start of the Republic, a total of seventy-three (73) Special Request Orders were filled (some of the orders were for multiple users, some were repeat orders). The writer has compiled a listing of all the S.R. envelope orders for Cuba which encompasses 65 different users (including 5 Post Office Request varieties). That listing is available online at our society's website.

Orders No. 71–73 were placed in late May, 1902 and printed in June, 1902, a few days AFTER Cuba had been granted its independence on May 20th. The envelope shown in Figure 4 is believed to be from Order No. 71. It bears the corner card of Gonzales y Olaechea of Cardenas, Cuba. The interesting thing about this example is that it was printed on unwatermarked paper! Was the switch to unwatermarked paper made immediately after Cuba's independence? It would appear so.



**Figure 4. Used example of Special Request envelope from Order No. 71.**

Not covered in the Travers Papers find are the F.S. Smith envelopes (UPSS # 3, 6, & 8a) since they were printed in 1899. Fortunately, in this case it is possible to make a determination by simple observation. Note the two misprints of UPSS 8a shown in Figure 5. One corner card is rotated; the other is shifted to the right. In the first case, one can see that the overprint on the envelope's indicium is also rotated the same angle. On the second case, one can also see the overprint displaced in the same direction. Based on these observations, it is evident that both, the corner card and the overprint, were printed at the same time. Therefore, it follows that the F.S. Smith envelopes ARE Special Request envelopes.

**Figure 5a. F.S. Smith envelope misprint, corner card rotated clockwise**



**Figure 5b. F.S. Smith envelope misprint, corner card shifted to the right**



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