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IN THIS ISSUE

Australian Postal Rates 1937- 53 Part 4

**The Last Cancellation from the Australian Settlement
Colone Cosme**

**The Picture Postcards of the FRANCO-BRITISH
EXHIBITION 14 May—31 October 1908**

Hand-Held Date-Stamp Notes

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THE LAST CANCELLATION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN SETTLEMENT COLONE COSME

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I am sure most of us have an accumulation of papers we intend to study in more detail when time permits. Recently I began looking at such a pile in a corner of my study and discovered a letter written to me by Norman Wood from Asunción, Paraguay in 1982. He had enclosed with the letter an envelope with a Colone Cosme postmark no longer in use. (Fig4) He had gone to considerable trouble to obtain the mark. The canceller was in such bad repair they had to use tape to hold it together.

Norman and his brother Bill, at that time in their 80's, were one of the few direct descendents from the Australians who settled in Colone Cosme in 1895. Bill was born in Australia and travelled to South America as a baby. Norman was born at Colone Cosme. Their parents were William and Lilian wood who left Australia seeking a better life in South America.

The history of this Utopian colony, including its postal history, is well documented (see References at the end of this article). The movement was begun by William Lane, journalist and editor of Australia's first union owned newspaper. Disillusioned by the ineffectiveness of the shearers' strike and the drought in Queensland he formed an association of people looking for a better life. Eventually this led to a group sailing to South America and settling in Paraguay in a colony they named New Australia.

There were, however, problems from the earliest days of the utopian colony and in 1896 Lane broke away and established Colone Cosme. This colony, too, was not a great success and was disbanded in 1904. William and Lilian Wood were amongst the few who remained and their descendants live to this day in Paraguay.

The main philatelic interest is in mail from the colony during the period to 1904. Cancels or part cancels on the stamps of Paraguay, which can be identified, are very collectable (Fig1&2).



Fig.1 Used about 1903.



Fig 2 Used in 1961

Colone Cosme no longer exists but until, at least 1961, a post office was still operating using a Colone Cosme cancel. (Fig 2)

The rubber cancellation sent to me by Norman Wood is difficult to reproduce for illustration. It is inscribed 'CORREOS PARAGUAY/ COL COSME/DPTO CAAZAPA'.

Colone Cosme was remote from Paraguay's capital Asunción. Mail was sent from Asuncion to Maciel by rail, from Maciel to Caazapa, a distance of 8 miles, by mule and finally the 12 miles to Colone Cosme by horse. (Map Fig 3)



Fig.3. Location of Colony Cosme.

Norman Woods wrote (1982) with regard to Colone Cosme, that *"They (the Wood Brothers) don't remember ever having a post office there and the name has now changed to Hugo Stroessner. They don't stamp their letters in Cosme now. They send their letters with the money to Caazapa and there they may stamp them or they may not"*.

Although the colony had an agreement with the government of Paraguay to supply postal staff there was probably never a post office building there. Postal operations would have been conducted from the post master's home. After the cessation of the colony the numbers of residents fell dramatically. In 1901 there were 44 adults but by 1908 it had fallen to 9 men and 5 women.

Several writers have asked whether the Colone Cosme post office still exists. The answer clearly is that it does not.

Just when this third cancel was used is not known but it seems likely that it was the last cancel identified as Colone Cosme; the last philatelic connection with Utopian colony settled by Australians.



Fig. 4 Stamps cancelled per favour in 1982 with a Colone Cosme cancellation.

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