



Fiji : The 1880 Queen Victoria Revenue Issue

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Fig. 1: The wood block essay

As a well-established Australian States revenue collector, I have also broadened my horizons by taking in some of the Pacific Islands where the Government Printer in Sydney, New South Wales, printed the revenues within Australia. The Fiji 1880 stamp duty (released in 1883) is one example.

For the past 35 years, I have been tucking away as many of the 1880 series that have come my way. All the time keeping in mind, that one day it would make a nice exhibit.

Previous students of the 1880 series of 10 issues from 1d to £1 have added to the scant research along the way. Snippets have been published in:

- *The Postage Stamps Etc. of the Fiji Islands* by Phillips, 1908.
- *The Postage Stamps of Fiji 1878-1902* by Purves, first serialised in the *London Philatelist* in 21 parts, Vols. 45-48 (1936-1938) published later as a stand-alone handbook ca. 1939.
- *The Postal History of Fiji 1876-1910* by Rodger, 1983.
- *Australia Stamp Archives (Part 2)* by Peck, 1987.
- Finally, W. Grady wrote a fine article in 1996, "Fiji, The Queen Victoria Long Type Duty Stamps 1880-1896," in *Cinderellas Australasia* No. 40, pp. 39-49.

With all these snippets it is now time for an update.

Let us start at the beginning. . .

Mr. J. B. Thurston, Colonial Secretary of Fiji, had discussions with the Commissioner of Stamps in Sydney, N.S.W., late in 1876 for an Impressed Die to replace the use of adhesive postage stamps for fiscal purposes. What became of this order remains unknown, but it would take another three years for adhesive duty stamps to be reintroduced.

A wood block essay die proof has survived in blue (Figure 1). When I say essay, it is more like a bad primitive paste-up. I have never seen such rough workmanship come out of Sydney. You will note the De La Rue head, which was taken from the 1880 series of N.S.W. duty stamps, tilts to the right!

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Fig. 2: Reconstructed proof sheet

The Fijian Government surprisingly accepted this ‘rough’, essay die proof, and a proof sheet of 50 printed 10x5 marked “MAROON” was dispatched to Mr. Thurston for final approval. This proof sheet, which has been poorly looked after, survives today. It was initially cut up into 7 blocks, then painstakingly re-joined to produce Figure 2.

A first printing of this 10-value series was despatched from Sydney on 6 July 1880. Records show that by the early part of 1883, the Colonial Postmaster was being asked when the one-penny duty stamps would be issued. By the beginning of November 1883, it was announced that postage stamps could no longer be used for fiscal purposes. So somewhere in between early in 1883 and November of that year, we may deduce that the fiscal stamps were issued.

My earliest recorded date from the many hundreds that I have is Figure 3, 31 May 1883. Does any reader have an earlier date? If not, then we have to



Fig. 3: The Earliest Recorded Date 31 May 1883 of the Queen Victoria Long Duty Stamps of 1880

take it that May 1883 was the probable month of issue.

A specimen group also exists (Figure 4, next page) believed to be from the records of the N.S.W. Government Printer because the same “Specimen” handwriting and red ink are recorded on many of the postage stamps of the time, and I have also been able to put together a full mint set.

Thirteen years after issue, a Gazetted notice on 26 March 1896, announced that postage stamps could once again be used for fiscal purposes, with all remaining stock of duty stamps destroyed on 25 June 1903.

During the short life of this (some may call it boring) series it has yielded many philatelic challenges and fun for the student. To start with, fifteen printings can be accounted for of some values, all on various un-watermarked horizontal and vertical mesh paper stocks. Each sheet having a papermaker's watermark, with a small percentage of stamps showing parts of a double



Fig. 4: The *Specimen* set: 2/- to £1

lined (capital) watermark. T H SAUNDERS and E. D. & Co./SUPERFINE have been identified with a single letter taking up around half of the size of each stamp.

Add in four colour groups: 1 Orange brown, 2 Chestnut, 3 Lake brown, and 4 Yellow brown, and we then begin to have some fun.

Stir in 7 different perforation gauges, perf. 12½ on all values; perf. 10 on 1d to 2/-; perf. 10x11 on the 1d and 1/-; perf. 12x10 on the 1/-; perf. 11½x10 (rare) on the 1/-; perf. 11 on the 1d, 1/- and 2/-; and perf. 12x11 (rare) on the 1/-. Top all this off with low print runs, and the quest is on.

Of the higher values 3/-, 4/-, 5/-, 10/-, and £1, each had a single print run of only 5000 each. Figure 5 shows my biggest multiple of the £1. After little use and their destruction in 1903, three of the ten values had less than 2000 issued 4/- with 1,942, 10/- with

Fig. 5: The largest multiple of £1



1,181 and the £1 just 1,132. Even the 1d had little use coming in at 306,678. Document survival to date is zero.

Although never valid for postal use, a few slipped by postal authorities and a selection is shown in Figure 6 (next page). From left to right they are SUVA sunburst, SUVA, LEVUKA, SUVA registered & DELNY a possible receiving cancel from Scotland.

One would now think that is just about it for this issue. But wait, there's more! A study of the key plate proof sheet yields a single die was used in the sheet makeup several master transfer flaws have been identified. Subsequently the master transfer plate produced secondary plate flaws which can be attributed to all 50 clichés, all of which can be plated back to the proof sheet, and throughout its life, many minor plate scratches and other minor damage. Add in more value plate flaws and bingo! You're hooked!

Figure 7 (at right) R3S7 shows a nice secondary plate scratch through the Queen's head. In Figure 8 (next page) R1S9, the blank space between "ONE" and "SHILLING" is found for a short



Fig. 7: The 6d with a major plate scratch through the Queen's head (arrows) at Row 3 Stamp 7



(Above) Fig. 6: Various postal cancellations – note also the range of shades on these stamps

period of time, until it was noticed and the plate was cleaned.

Figure 9 shows the only known (not as yet plated) missing period from the “3D.” value plate. With an issue run of just 4,798, this equates to a possible 96 copies in existence.

If you are reading this and have an interest in this subject and would like to correspond with me, I can be contacted at: dave@ozrevenues.com. SAS/O



(Left) Fig. 8: Printing flaw from something on plate



(Right) Fig. 9: Flaw missing period in value