

CLIPPERTON ISLAND

This post was set up by the W. Frese & Co. to deliver mail between Clipperton Island and San Francisco, California. W. Frese & Co. and agents of the Oceanic Phosphorus Company, who were stationed on the island to mine for guano.

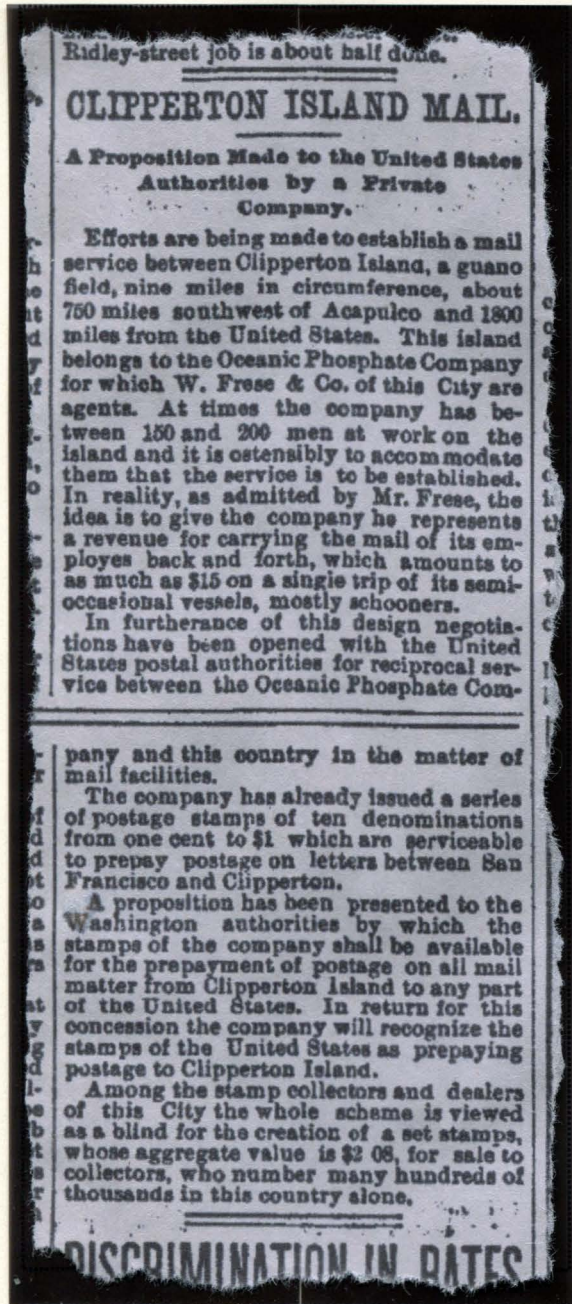
Clipperton Island, off the coast of Mexico and about 2,000 miles from San Francisco, is a small atoll built upon a coral reef. It is named after English pirate John Clipperton, who supposedly used the island as a base in the early 1700s. Over the years it has been claimed by multiple countries including the United States, France and Mexico.

Although generally uninhabitable by humans, it has always boasted a strong bird population.

Sometime around 1893, the Oceanic Phosphorus Company claimed the land and set up an operation on the island to collect the bird guano for fertilizer. The company employed W. Frese & Co. to transport supplies and freight to and from the island.

As W. Frese & Co. were the only ships that regularly visited the island, they issued a set of ten postage stamps for transporting letters between Clipperton and their headquarters at San Francisco. Frese claimed that this service was for the benefit of the workers on the island, speculating that if the mining continued the island could house up to 200 men. Evidence suggests there were never more than a few men on the island at a time, however, and it is likely that most usage of the stamps was purely philatelic.

Unfortunately, in the attempt to have their stamps recognized by the US Post Office, the government opened a case that officially ruled neither the Oceanic Phosphorus Company nor the US had claim to the island.



NEWS ARTICLE FROM THE
SAN FRANCISCO CALL BULLETIN
WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 1895



PHOTOGRAPH OF CLIPPERTON ISLAND
BY STEPHANE DUGAST
FOR NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC 2016

CLIPPERTON ISLAND

CANNOT CLAIM ISLAND.

State Department Says Clipperton Is No Part of U. S.

WASHINGTON, January 23.—The State Department has rendered an opinion that the Oceanic Phosphate Company has no valid claim to the guano deposits of Clipperton Island: that the United States has never had any basis for a claim to the island. In addition to this the Oceanic company has never perfected its own filing upon the phosphates. Secretary Sherman says in his letter to Senator Perkins, announcing the decision, that France has claimed the island by reason of discovery in 1709 and by the raising of her flag over the island in 1858. Going further, it is said that statutes governing such cases have not been complied with in the case of Clipperton Island, and consequently there is no standing for the United States and the California corporation.

In explanation of the decision there is inclosed a letter from Assistant Secretary Adee to the Post Office Department, written in 1895, when there was a question of extending the postal service to Clipperton Island. It set forth that in 1892 Frederick W. Permain of San Francisco filed an affidavit setting forth that on July 4, 1892, while on the schooner Caleb Curtis, he discovered a deposit of guano on an island put down on the charts as Clipperton Island. Soon after Shafter Howard, as president of the Stonington Phosphate Company, filed three affidavits setting forth Permain's discovery and saying that, though this was not the first time the island had been touched, yet Permain was the first man to land in years, and undoubtedly found guano.

In May, 1893, Melvin Chapman, as president of the Oceanic Phosphate Company, laid claim to the island under Permain's discovery and assignment, but nothing on file at the department showed the change of interests. No further action was taken after this, so the State Department held that there was no claim to the island by the United States and no mail service was necessary.

France Owns Clipperton.

The State Department

W. Frese & Co. issued ten stamps, with denominations of 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, 4¢, 5¢, 8¢, 10¢, 25¢, 50¢ and \$1. Six unique designs were used. The 1¢ - 3¢ stamps; 4¢ & 8¢ stamps; and 25¢ - 50¢ stamps shared a common designs, with only the value and color changed. The 5¢, 10¢ and \$1 stamps each had unique designs.

The designs for the stamps all feature an aerial view of the atoll. They are decorated with the fauna of the island - birds (boobies) and crawfish.



GENUINE
3¢ VERMILION
ON WHITE
DESIGN I
CANCELLED
PURPLE HS



GENUINE
4¢ VIOLET RED
ON WHITE
DESIGN I
CANCELLED
PURPLE HS



GENUINE
5¢ BROWN
ON WHITE
DESIGN III
CANCELLED
PURPLE HS



GENUINE
10¢ ORANGE
ON WHITE
DESIGN IV
CANCELLED
PURPLE HS

Most stamps are known cancelled in purple with a "W. Frese & Co. / San Francisco" circular handstamp.

AT LEFT: NEWS ARTICLE FROM
THE HAWAIIAN GAZETTE
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1898

CLIPPERTON ISLAND

All known stamps on cover from this post are cancelled with a "W. Frese & Co. / San Francisco" double circle handstamp. The center of the handstamp reads "Agents / For / O. P. Co.".



GENUINE : 5¢ BROWN
DESIGN TYPE III
CANCELLED BY PURPLE HANDSTAMP
- MAILED WITH -
255 : 5¢ CHOCOLATE
TIED ON COVER BY SAN FRANCISCO CDS BARRED ELLIPSE DUPLEX
AUGUST 17, 1895

The cover above was mailed by the United States Post Office to the Shaw Brothers in Birmingham, England at the 5¢ Universal Postal Union rate for international mail, paid with US postage. It is possible, though unlikely, that it really originated at Clipperton Island, with the local stamp paying for the initial delivery to San Francisco.