

Discovers and Explorers On Latin American Notes



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Discoverers and Explorers on Latin American Notes

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Some currency units of Latin American countries have their origin in notable people in history. Before I wrote about Indian Chiefs which appear on Latin American notes. Now, I would like to share with you brief biographies of some discoverers and Spanish explorers whose portraits are on Latin American bank notes. In addition, some cities, historical monuments and places, and of course, some monetary units were named in honor of this group of adventurers.

DISCOVERERS

Christopher Columbus (Colon)

The currency units of the Republics of Costa Rica and El Salvador, located in Central America, were adopted in honor of Christopher Columbus (Cristobal Colón in Spanish and Cristoforo Colombo in Italian).

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) a Genovese sailor and explorer, died after four voyages to the New World, he was convinced that he had discovered a sea route to Asia.

Columbus' desire to sail westward was fueled in part by maps and writings of a Florentine humanist Paolo Toscanelli. When Colum-

bus sailed in 1492, in three ships financed by the King and Queen of Spain, he finally reached land in the West on October 12 of that year. In the course of his own further voyages he explored much of what we know today as the Caribbean and parts of Central America.

Costa Rica was discovered by Columbus in 1502, during his last voyage to the new world, and was a colony of Spain from 1522 until its independence in 1821. Columbus named the territory *Nueva Cartago* (New Cartago). The name Costa Rica (Rich Coast) was not generally employed until 1540. In 1896, Costa Rica adopted the "Colón" as their currency unit.

In 1942, Columbus' portrait appeared on notes of 50 colones.

In 1996, Banco Central de Costa Rica issued a new 5,000 colones 100th anniversary commemorative.

El Salvador was discovered by Columbus in 1502, during his last voyage to the new world. In 1821, El Salvador and other Central American provinces declared independence from Spain. El Salvador named their currency unit "Colón" in 1919.

In 1997, Banco Central de Reserva de El Salvador issued new

notes and Columbus appears on the face of all denominations of this Central American nation.

Also, Columbus appears on notes of the Dominican Rep. (500 pesos) and Bahamas (\$1) commemorative issue of the 500th anniversary of the Columbus voyage (1992).

Pedro Alvarez Cabral

Pedro Alvarez Cabral (1467-1520) was a Portuguese navigator. Cabral departed for India on March 9, 1500, in command of a fleet of thirteen caravels, one squadron of which was commanded by Bartolomeu Dias, the first Portuguese to double the Cape of Good Hope, in order to capitalize on the discovery by Vasco da Gama of the sea route to India. On March 18 the Canary Islands were sighted. Four days later, on March 22, the party passed the Cape Verde Islands, by which time they had lost one ship. Instead of following the West African coast as Dias had done, Cabral, following Vasco da Gama's instructions, sailed south after leaving the Cape Verdes until he crossed the doldrums, then southwest in order to take advantage of the trade winds to the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope, and then east to approach the cape.



Christopher Columbus on the bank notes of the Bahamas and El Salvador.



1 cruzeiro novo on 1000 cruzeiro.



1 balboa note of Panama with Vasco Nenez de Balboa.

On April 22, during Easter week, the fleet sighted Monte Pascoal on the eastern coast of South America, 200 miles (322 Km) south of Bahia (Salvador). Cabral named the land Terra da Vera Cruz and immediately dispatched a ship back to Lisbon, Portugal with the news. The fleet sailed northward to Porto Seguro (present-day Bahia Cabralia), where a landing was made. On May 2 the fleet resumed the voyage to the Cape of Good Hope.

Although most authorities believe Cabral's discovery of Brazil was fortuitous, he may have been carrying secret instructions which caused him to sail farther west than necessary for a doubling of the Cape of Good Hope in order to determine what, if anything, lay at the extreme western part of the area assigned to Portugal under the Treaty of Tordesillas.

Passed over in favor of Vasco da Gama for the command of the third voyage to India, Cabral retired to Santarem, where he died in the 1520s. His voyage firmly established the sea route to India, and his discovery secured Brazil for Portugal. Credit for the discovery of Brazil properly belongs to Spanish navigator called Vicente Yanez Pinzon, who reached the eastern-

most point of South America on January 20 or 26, 1500.

Alvarez Cabral appears on notes of 1,000 cruzeiros (1961-1963) and a new issue of 1 cruzeiro novo on 1,000 cruzeiro (1966-1967) in Brazil. Also, Alvarez Cabral is featured on the 1,000 escudos (1996-1998) of Portugal.

The Central Bank of Brazil plans to launch waterproof plastic (polymer) bank notes in the year 2000 as part of the country's 500th anniversary celebrations. The new 10 real note will serve as a trial run prior to the entire Brazilian paper currency being renewed. The new 10 real note will feature Pedro Alvarez Cabral on the front and a digital image map of Brazil on back.

Vasco Nunez de Balboa

The currency unit of the Republic of Panama is named in honor of a Spanish explorer called Vasco Nunez de Balboa (1475-1519). Balboa was the first man who crossed the Isthmus of Panama in 1513 and discovered the Pacific Ocean. Francisco Pizarro (conqueror of Peru) was with him, and heard an Indian tell of a wonderful land of gold and pearls far to the south. At the time he was not free to follow up this lead, but he joined another

grizzled veteran of the Indies, Diego de Almagro, in organizing a shoe-string expedition of two small ships that set out from the Spanish colony at Panama to explore the wild jungles along the Pacific coast of Colombia.

Balboa recalled from his voyage with Bastidas that a town existed on the western shore of the Gulf of Uraba, and the party sailed across to the Darien River, where they founded the town of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darien (today just Darien). Here the Indians may not have been friendly, but they did not use poisoned arrows, and food and even some gold were available.

The triumph was short-lived. King Ferdinand, heeding the complaints of Martin Fernandez de Enciso and others, appointed Pedro Arias de Avila (better known as Pedrarias The Cruel) as governor of Panama. The latter, filled with hatred and envy, bid his time (he even arranged the marriage by proxy of one of his daughters to Balboa) and then tricked Balboa into relaxing his guard. Arrested by Francisco Pizarro, Balboa was tried for treason to the Spanish Crown and publicly beheaded in Ada between January 13 and 21, 1519.

In 1821, Panama broke from

Spanish rule to become a province of Colombia.

In 1903, U.S. Congress authorized President Roosevelt to pay \$40 million for a French company's rights to dig a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. With U.S. collusion, Panama declared independence from Colombia. Work began on the canal under a U.S.-Panamanian treaty.

El Banco Central de Emision de la Republica de Panama issued notes until 1941. However, balboas circulate only in coins. The U.S. dollar is the paper currency and it is used for all kinds of commercial transactions. The dollar also has contributed to Panama's low inflation rate, the lowest on the continent. Another contributor to Panama's stable environment is the freedom to move funds in and out of the country without charge.

On Sept. 7, 1977 President Jimmy Carter of the United States and Omar Torrijos of Panama signed a treaty. Thereafter, the U.S. presence was gradually reduced until Panama assumed full control of the canal on Dec. 31, 1999. New bank notes of Panama are expected.

Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba

The cordoba is the currency unit of Nicaragua, located in Central America. Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba was a Spanish explorer whose ships reached Yucatan (today one of Mexico's states) in the early spring of 1517. A fleet of ten native long boats, each containing up to forty natives, went to meet the Spanish and some boarded

Cordoba's ship. The next day a party escorted Cordoba and his party ashore into an ambush. The Spanish, armed with muskets, managed to flee to one of the temples. There they plundered much gold and many other valuable objects, which they took to their waiting ships, and sailed from the place that was later to be called Cape Catoche.

Cordoba's ships proceeded along the Yucatan Peninsula, where they encountered more people who regarded them as enemies and attacked them. Cordoba eventually set sail for Cuba to begin telling the world about the Maya people, their cities, and their wealth.

Some historians believe that the markets and trading of the Nicarao may have been stimulated by the great Aztec Empire to the north. Until the Spaniards destroyed the Aztecs in the 1500s, there was an Aztec trading colony located within the borders of present-day Nicaragua. It was believed by the Spaniards that the Aztecs used this colony to bring emeralds up to Mexico from somewhere in South America.

Finding the source of these emeralds first attracted Spanish explorers to the "land of the Nicarao," which would soon become the Spanish colony of Nicaragua. The Spanish conqueror Hernan Cortes wanted to find the source of the Aztecs' emeralds. About 1523 he sent one of his lieutenants, Pedro de Alvarado, known as the "conqueror of Guatemala," south to Nicaragua. Mean-

while, another Spanish conquistador Pedro Arias de Avila, better known as Pedrarias governor of Panama, sent one of his lieutenants, Hernandez de Cordoba, to enter Nicaragua from the South. He was searching for the same gems. In this struggle the Southerners were successful, and Cordoba became the first Spanish explorer of any importance in Nicaragua.

Cordoba founded Granada in 1524 close to Cocibolca Lake (today Nicaragua Lake) and in 1525 he founded Santiago de los Caballeros de Leon close to Xolotlan Lake (today Managua Lake). Over the next three hundred years of Spanish rule, these two cities would become Spain's most important colonial outposts in Nicaragua.

Efforts to settle Central America, encouraged by the Spanish government, were complicated by conflict claims. Gonzalez de Avila returned from Hispaniola and defeated some of Codobas' forces. Cordoba had dreams of making Nicaragua a separate Spanish province, and he rebelled against Pedrarias, who came north to Nicaragua with an army. After a year of fighting, Hernandez de Cordoba surrendered to Pedrarias, who had him executed and then remained in Leon as governor of Nicaragua for a brief period of time, from 1526 to 1531.

In 1821, Nicaragua declared independence from Spain. The next year Nicaragua united with the Mexican Empire of Agustin de Iturbe, then in 1823 with the Central American Republic. When the federation was dissolved, Nicaragua



Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba on notes of Nicaragua

declared itself an independent republic in 1838.

Nicaragua adopted the "cordoba" in 1912 until 1987. This unit was called new cordoba until 1990 and finally it was renamed cordoba oro and remains so.

Sebastian de Benalcazar

Sebastian Moyano was born about 1495 in Benalcazar, located in a Spanish province of Cordoba. Though Moyano was his real name, he became known by the name of his hometown.

He went to the West Indies while in his mid-twenties (sometime between 1507 and 1511) and by 1522 was listed as an *encomendadero* in what is now Panama. He fought with Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba during the conquest of the present-day Nicaragua and Honduras from 1524 to 1527. In 1525 he was listed as one of the founders of the city of Leon in Nicaragua and became *alcalde* (mayor) of the colony.

In 1532 Benalcazar arrived in Peru to help his friends, Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro, conquer the Inca Empire. As captain of the Spanish horsemen, he played a major role in the conquest of Cajamarca and received a share of the vast Incas riches.

When the Inca General Ruminahui led a revolt in Quito in 1534, Pizarro authorized Benalcazar to conquer the city. Departing San Miguel de Piura in February 1534, Benalcazar crossed the barren coastal plain of northern Peru and entered the hills on the main Inca highway. When he arrived at Quito (modern capital of Ecuador) in June

1534, he found that the city had been evacuated and burned. Benalcazar slaughtered women and children and tortured their leaders in his efforts to locate the city's hidden gold, silver and Indian treasures. In 1535, Benalcazar next pushed into the southern highlands of Ecuador and founded the city of Riobamba. Returning to the coast, he founded the port of Guayaquil.

Starting in 1536, Benalcazar pushed farther north, exploring a large area of modern Colombia and founding the modern cities of Popayan (1536) and Cali (1537).

Then, in 1538, he led an expedition into the heartland of Colombia, still searching for the elusive "El Dorado." Reaching the plateau of Bogota, he found that Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada was already in control of the emerald-rich Chibcha Indian realm.

The King of Spain named Benalcazar captain general of the province of Popayan (comprising the territory from Quito north to Cartagena, in modern Colombia). Benalcazar return to Popayan in 1541 and supported the royalist side during the Peruvian Civil Wars (1541-46). In 1541 he killed Jorge Robeldo, who had encroached on his domain while he was away. As a result of the political pressure exerted by Robeldo's widow, Benalcazar was eventually arrested and condemned for the murder. In April of 1551, on way to Spain to plead his case, he died at Cartagena, Colombia.

His portrait appears on the 10 sucres note (1968-1988) of Ecuador in tribute to this Spanish explorer

who founded the modern Ecuadorean cities of Quito, Guayaquil and Riobamba.

Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada

Jimenez de Quesada was born about 1510 in Cordoba, Spain, and studied at the University of Salamanca. He had an established law practice in Granada by 1533, but in 1535 he left Spain for the New World to become magistrate of Santa Marta, a settlement on the Caribbean coast of present-day Colombia. In 1536 he led an extraordinary expedition through the jungle maze and rugged terrain of the Colombian interior, intending to reach Peru.

Traveling along the flooded banks of the Magdalena River during the rainy season, the party survived attacks by crocodiles and other wild animals, plagues of insects, and intense heat. Pressing onward, Jimenez de Quesada and his men covered only one mile a day, hacking their way through dense undergrowth and moving through snake-infested swamps. It took them eight months to reach the Indian village of Tora (present-day Barrancabermeja) on the Magdalena, only 300 miles from their starting point.

Hearing that beyond the mountains lived an advanced Indian civilization that mined gold and emeralds, Jimenez de Quesada decided to abandon the Magdalena River and penetrated farther inland (to the east). By March of 1537 he was in the uplands of present-day Colombia with only 166 men left. After subduing the Tunja and Cundinamarca Indians, Jimenez de Quesada and his men reached the plateau of Bogota the land of the Chibcha Indians, where they found gold, emeralds and semiprecious stones. The Chibcha were friendly to the Spaniards and gave them gifts of gold hearts, each weighing two pounds. Jimenez de Quesada named the new land he had conquered New Granada and founded



Sebastian De Benalcazar on note of Ecuador.

the city of Santa Fe de Bogota.

In 1539 two other conquistadores reached the plateau of Bogota: Nikolaus Federmann and Sebastian de Benalcazar. The three expeditionary forces agreed to leave together to submit their various claims to the Council of the Indies in Spain.

After traveling in France and Portugal from 1541 until 1545, he returned to Spain where he received the title of marshal of New Granada.

In 1551 he went back to Bogota, where he was respected as farsighted and humane leader by Spaniards and Indians alike.

Jimenez de Quesada made one last expedition in 1569 to search east of the Andes for *El Dorado*, the legendary city of gold. Travelling across the mountains and plains of New Granada, he got as far as the Orinoco River where modern Colombia and Venezuela meet. After three years of great suffering from disease and near starvation, those left in his expedition gave up and returned to Bogota, unsuccessful in their quest.

Jimenez de Quesada died in Bogota in 1579, after spending his last years writing an accurate account of his conquest of New Granada. An honest and gifted leader, he managed to explore and conquer a huge area of Colombia without the usual wide-scale bloodshed.

His portrait appears on the note of the 1 peso (1938) as a tribute to a unique Spanish *conquistadores* in that he pursued diplomacy over bloodshed in his conquests.

Pedro de Valdivia

Pedro de Valdivia (1502-1554) was born in the district of La Serena in Estremadura, Spain. Joining the Spanish army early, he fought in Flanders and then at the battle of Pavia in 1525. He reached America in 1535, spent an uneventful year in Venezuela, and moved on to Peru. There he took part on the side of Hernando Pizarro in the battle of Las Salinas in 1538, which saw Almagro

defeated and captured. Valdivia had married in Spain, but in Peru he became attached to the widow Ines de Suarez, who accompanied him to Chile as his mistress.

Early in 1540, with Francisco Pizarro's permission, Valdivia left Cuzco for Chile with a small expedition and one Sancho de Hoz as partner. On the way, Sancho seeking sole leadership, tried to murder Valdivia but failed. He was pardoned but from then on had to accept subordinate status.

In central Chile, Valdivia founded Santiago on the Mapocho River in 1541, and three years later Juan Bohon established La Serena in the Coquimbo Valley. These were followed by Concepcion (1550), Villarrica and Imperial (1551), Valdivia and Angol (1552). Valparaiso, though used as a port by the Spaniards from the start, had no considerable population until much later. Santiago was largely destroyed, soon after its foundation, by Aconcagua Native Americans during Valdivia's absence.

When Gonzalo Pizarro's rebellion began in Peru, the insurgents attempted unsuccessfully to win Valdivia to their side. Early in 1548 Valdivia joined the royal army of Pedro de la Gasca in Peru, and his military experience counted heavily in the victory of Xaguixaguana on April 9 of that year. Valdivia returned to Chile with his position and prestige considerably strengthened.

Earlier, on learning of Francisco Pizarro's murder in 1541, Valdivia had removed Chile from Peruvian control and acknowledged only the royal

authority, an arrangement the Crown found acceptable. Secure now in his own domain, he pushed exploration southward and aided the development of the country by dividing the land among his ablest followers and parceling out the Indians in *encomiendas*. Chile possessed minerals, but Valdivia definitely subordinated mining to agriculture and stock raising.

Valdivia had a clash with the warlike Araucanians beyond the Bio-Bio River in 1550 in which he defeated them but by no means broke their will to resist, a will that grew stronger when the conquistador established the Concepcion settlement in their territory. He moved against them in 1553 and built a fort at Tucapel. He had earlier captured and presumably made friends with Lautaro, an Araucanian youth who became his groom. Lautaro secretly remained true to his own people and rejoined them to show Chief Caupolican a means by which Valdivia could be taken. The Spanish leader was captured on Christmas Day, 1553. Though different accounts exist of his execution, the likeliest is that, Pilmaiquen, hit him in the head with a war club.

Valdivia's portrait is on notes of 20 pesos 1947 and on 500 pesos (1977-1997) in honor of the conquest of Chile.

Juan Ponce de Leon

Ponce de Leon was born about 1460 into a poor but noble family living in the village of San Tervas de



Pedro de Valdivia
on note of Chile

Campos in the province of Leon, Spain. He was given a basic military education and became a page to the prince of Castile, who would later become King Ferdinand of Castile and Aragon. His career as an explorer began when he accompanied Christopher Columbus on the latter's second voyage to the New World in 1493. Then in 1502 he joined Nicolas de Ovando on his expedition to Hispaniola (the Island now occupied by Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Ponce de Leon would spend most of the rest of his life in the New World, faring well politically, financially, and militarily.

First, he became the governor of the Province of Higüey (in present day Haiti) and proceeded to develop the area peacefully, gaining great personal wealth in the process. In 1508 Ponce de Leon explored the island of Borinquen as a result of an invitation by its Indian inhabitants. There he started a settlement and renamed the island San Juan de Puerto Rico.

Ponce de Leon left Puerto Rico on March 3, 1513, with three ships, sailing northwest. He sighted the mainland of Florida on March 27 and landed on April 2 just north of what is now the city of St. Augustine. He named the new land Tierra la Florida (Land of Flowers) in honor of its discovery on Easter Sunday, called Pascua Florida in Spanish.

At sea again, Ponce de Leon sailed south along the east coast of Florida and discovered the Bahama Channel, which proved to be of

inestimable value since it provided a new sea route from the West Indies to Spain. Continuing his voyage, he next traced the contours of the Florida peninsula, skirting the Florida Keys and sailing north along the west coast, perhaps as far as Pensacola Bay, before returning south. He continued sailing along the southwest coast, stopping at some islands that he named the Tortugas (now called the Dry Tortugas). He returned to Puerto Rico on Sep. 21, 1513.

Returning triumphant to Spain in 1514, Ponce de Leon was knighted, given a personal coat of arms, finally granted a royal patent to colonize "the islands of Bimini (north of Cuba) and Florida," and officially named the *Adelantado* Don Juan Ponce de Leon, Governor of the island of Bimini and Florida.

His second expedition, intended to colonize Florida, was not started until Feb. 20, 1521, when he sailed from Puerto Rico with 200 men. They landed on the west coast of Florida, either near to the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River or on Sanibel Island, where they attempted to establish a settlement. During an attack by hostile Indians, Ponce de Leon was critically wounded, and the settlement was abandoned. The expedition sailed as far as Havana, Cuba, where Ponce de Leon died in July 1521.

Today, Puerto Ricans reserve a special place of honor for him, and many places in Puerto Rico (as well as in Florida) proudly bear his name.

An outstanding explorer and

colonizer, Ponce de Leon was also a skillful administrator whose kindness improved the quality of life for the Indians of Haiti and Puerto Rico.

Diego de Losada

Diego de Losada was a Spanish explorer. Son of Alvaro Perez de Losada and Catalina de Osorio. He traveled to the New World like other Spaniard explorers of his time.

Losada participated in the foundation of *Nueva Segovia de Barquisimeto* (1552)-present day Lara State's capital-at northwest of Venezuela. He was a Mayor of this city. In *El Tocuyo* he was *Regidor* (ruler) and also Mayor of this city. Diego de Losada married Catalina de Rojas.

In 1565, The Governor, Alonso Bernaldez de Quiroz (1561-1566) designated him to put down the rebel Indians in Caracas.

Guaicaipuro, Chief of the Teques, and his allies in the north central valleys attacked the Spanish gold mines and settlements. In January, 1567 Losada traveled to Caracas with an expedition of experienced militars.

On July 25, 1567 Losada founded *Santiago de Leon de Caracas*. Caracas was an Indian word for a plant, similar to yucca, that was common in the area, but the Spaniards thought it was the name of the tribe and the place. Caracas' valley was discovered by a Spanish explorer Francisco Fajardo in 1560. In 1577, Caracas became the capital of Venezuela.

At the beginning of 1569, Losada and his army came to Mariara and



Venezuelan note honoring Diego de Losada.

later came to *Valle del Miedo* (Valley Fear), Guaicaipuro's dominion. Spanish forces beat the Indians in a cruel battle. Losada designated Francisco Infante to capture Guaicaipuro but he was killed during the battle.

Diego de Losada died in 1570. Losada appears in a commemorative issue of the 400th Anniversary in a scene of the founding of Caracas (1567-1967) at the center and Bolivar appears at the right. City arms are shown on the left, an early map (1578) of the city is at the center and the national arms are at the right on the back.

Finally, on the 1,000 pesetas note of 1992 in Spain appears others Spanish explorers. On the face is Hernan Cortez (conqueror of Aztec civilization — Mexico today) at the right. Also, another explorer, called Francisco Pizarro (conqueror of Inca civilization — Peru today), is on a vertical format on the back.

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