

Who's Who on Plastic Notes in Latin America



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I still remember when I found the first polymer note for my collection. It was a commemorative note with the nominal value of one dinar from Kuwait, issued in 1993 (PCS1). Since then, I have become interested in knowing more about the people who appear on polymer notes issued in Latin America, but first I would like to share a little of the history of this new generation of bills using this material.

The National Bank of the Republic of Haiti put in circulation a set of paper money printed on Tyvek plastic in 1979. This is considered the first emission of banknotes in this material even though, according to UNESCO, Haiti has been regarded, several times, as the poorest country in the world.

The Central Bank of Costa Rica later issued a Tyvek note of 20 colones in 1983 (P252). Tyvek did not perform well in trials—smudging of ink and fragility were among the problems reported. Only Costa Rica and Haiti issued Tyvek banknotes in Latin America. Test notes were produced for Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras and Venezuela, but never placed in circulation.

Twenty years later, the central banks of several Latin American countries considered the idea of issuing banknotes in a new material. In the new millennium, the Central Bank of Brazil issued its first polymer note to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of their country (P248).

Australia was responsible for the development of the new generation of bills. In 1988, the Reserve Bank of Australia, through its subsidiary Note Printing Australia, produced and exported the 'creaseless cash' to countries throughout the world. Unlike paper bills, these notes resist moisture, water, sweat and oil, and therefore don't carry as many bacteria and other contaminants as paper money.

This new technology persuaded the Government of Mexico to get on board. The first polymer note, combined with additional security features, appeared in Mexico in 2001. Today, the lowest denominations are made of this material. In 2004 the first polymer banknote appeared in Chile.

The most recent issue was in Guatemala. In 2006, the Bank of Guatemala issued its first polymer note. More polymer notes of different denominations are expected in this Central American country.

In early 2008, the Central Bank of Nicaragua received approval to produce new banknotes. The 10-, 20-, and 200-cordobas notes are to be printed on polymer, whereas the denominations of 50, 100, and 500 cordobas will be printed on paper.

BRAZIL

Pedro Alvarez Cabral (10 Reals)

Pedro Alvarez Cabral (1467-1520) was a Portuguese navigator. Cabral departed for India on 9 March 1500, to capitalize on the discovery by Vasco da Gama of a sea route to India. Cabral was in command of a fleet of thirteen caravels, one squadron of which was commanded by Bartolomeu Dias, the first Portuguese to round the Cape of Good Hope. On 18 March the Canary Islands were sighted and four days later, on 22 March, 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 Verde Islands until he crossed the Doldrums, then southwest to take advantage of the trade winds, until the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope, and then east to approach the Cape.

On 22 April, 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 2 May, the fleet resumed its 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 rounding 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. However, credit for the discovery of Brazil properly belongs to a Spanish navigator named Vicente Yanez Pinzón, who reached the easternmost point of South America on 26 January 1500.

Alvarez Cabral appears on the Brazilian notes of 1,000 cruzeiros (1961-1963), and a new issue of one cruzeiro novo on 1,000 Cruzeiro (1966-1967). He also features on a 1,000-escudo note (1996-1998) issued in Portugal.

The Central Bank of Brazil launched a waterproof-plastic (polymer) banknote in the year 2000 as part of the country's 500th anniversary celebrations of Cabral's discovery. This 10-real note (P248) served as a trial run, prior to the entire Brazilian paper currency being renewed. The front of the 10-real note features Pedro Alvarez Cabral in the center, a digital image of a map of Brazil at center-right and a navigational instrument at the left. In addition, five vessels of Cabral's expedition are shown at the right and the Portuguese Cross of the Order of Christ, a symbol carried by the Portuguese vessels of that time, is at the far right. On the back is a map of Brazil and many portraits, representing the ethnicity of Brazil.



Pedro A. Cabral on Brazil's 10-real note, P248.

CHILE

Manuel Rodríguez (2,000 Pesos)

Manuel Rodríguez was born in Chile in 1785. His father was Don Carlos Rodríguez, a customs officer of Peruvian nationality and his mother was Maria Loreto, who was a young Chilean aristocrat. Rodríguez entered the Carolino College, where he studied law at the Royal University of San Felipe, subsequently becoming a lawyer in 1807.

In May 1811, Rodríguez was named attorney for Santiago de Chile. Later, he was appointed Secretary of War, and later conscripted into the army with the rank of captain. In 1813, Rodríguez and his brothers were detained and charged with conspiring against Jose Miguel Carrera, who by that time had seized control of the Chilean government. After the disaster of the Battle of Rancagua, the Spanish took back control of Chile and Rodríguez, along with many other patriots, fled to Mendoza, Argentina.

In Argentina, José de San Martín, welcomed the Chilean exiles with open arms and organized a 'Liberation Army', which included Chileans and Argentineans. San Martín saw in Rodríguez the ideal spy. He became the most wanted man of the Spanish rulers in Chile and was one of the heroes of the Battle of Chacabuco. After the victory in this battle, Bernardo O'Higgins, the commander of the Chilean army, ordered the arrest of Rodríguez. Escaping, Rodríguez was hidden by General San Martín, until San Martín was able to intervene on Rodríguez' behalf. San Martín conferred on Rodríguez the rank of lieutenant colonel.

After the surprise attack by the Spanish forces at the Battle of Cancha Rayada, Rodríguez uttered his most famous quote 'We still have a fatherland, citizens'. After these events, Rodríguez was imprisoned by orders of General O'Higgins, and later the soldiers of the 'Andean Hunters' killed him in Til-Til on 26 May 1818. His body was mutilated and abandoned in a trench. Rodríguez' execution was extrajudicial, and was widely attributed to the head of the government.

In 1847, a bronze equestrian statue of Rodríguez was created by the Chilean sculptress Blanca Merino and inaugurated to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his death. This monument is displayed in Bustamante Park in Santiago, Chile. The plaques on the pedestal record the admiration of him by the Chilean Army and the Historical Society of Chile.

In 1997, the *Banco Central de Chile* issued a note of 2,000 pesos (P158). On the front there is a portrait of Rodríguez wearing the uniform of the *Húsares de la Muerte* appearing at the right and also as the watermark; in the center there is a statue of Rodríguez on horseback. The *Iglesia de los Dominicos* (Church of the Dominicans) is depicted on the back of the note.

In 2004, the first polymer banknote appeared in Chile (P160). In a similar design to its predecessor, Rodríguez' portrait appears again at the right. The back carries the central design features of the Church of the Dominicans, which was declared a national monument in 1983. The church has simplicity and the purity of lines that are a hallmark of Joaquín Toesca, the church's architect. At the bottom left and at the top right on each side of the note is the value in figures, '2000'.

COSTA RICA

Cleto Gonzalez (20 Colones)

Don Cleto de Jesus Gonzalez Viquez was born in Heredia, Costa Rica, on 13 October 1858. He began his political career while still very young, becoming the mayor of San Jose; represented several government departments; and later became the president of the Lawyer's College.

In 1906, Gonzalez was chosen President of the Republic, being an example of respect for law and public liberties. Worried greatly by the lack of public hygiene and municipal services, under his presidency, he expanded the system of water pipes of San Jose and other cities. He also built the Old National Library building. His major achievement was to conclude the railroad to the Pacific in 1910.

In 1928, Gonzalez was again elected president. During his second administration, he began the paving of the streets of San Jose and improved some highways in the Central Valley. He finished the electrification of the railroad to the Pacific Ocean, inaugurated the dock of Punta Arenas, created the attorney general's office of the Republic, and founded the National Patronage of the Infancy and the First National Business of Air Transportation in 1932.

Gonzalez also confronted the Great Depression, which had begun in the United States in October 1929. Gonzalez died in San Jose on 23 September 1937. He was declared 'Hero of the Country' in October 1944.



Manuel Rodríguez on Chile's 2000-peso note, P160.

In 1972, Gonzalez' portrait appeared on the front of the 20-colone note (P238). There are buildings and palm trees to the right of his portrait and there is an allegorical scene of 'Justice' on the back. The note was printed by the ABNC. Although the same design was kept, this denomination was not included among the commemorative issues with the circular overprint of the '150 Years of the Independence 1821–1971' and the 'XXV Anniversary of the Central Bank of Costa Rica' in 1975.

In 1983, the *Banco Central de Costa Rica* issued a design similar to the 1972 issue, but in Tyvek plastic. Maintaining the design features of the paper note, the plastic note of 20 colones (P252) was dated 28-6-83 (28 June 1983) in Series Z. This Costa Rican note was printed and delivered by the ABNC to the Central Bank of Costa Rica at no charge. Information on the quantity printed varies, with some sources suggesting 500,000 notes were printed, while others suggest 1,000,000 notes. This was the only time Costa Rica experimented with banknotes printed on Tyvek, but in the future this Central American country might issue polymer notes.



Cleto Gonzalez on Costa Rica's 20 colones, P252.

HAITI

François Duvalier

François Duvalier, also known as 'Papa Doc' was born in Port-au-Prince in 1907. He was educated at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Haiti. From 1934 to 1946, Duvalier served in hospitals and clinics, specializing in the treatment of tropical yaws, while gaining a reputation as a humanitarian. During this time, he also became a Haitian political leader.

From 1946 to 1950, Duvalier was director of the National Public Health Service and Secretary of Labor. After 1950, Duvalier led the resistance to President Paul Eugene Magliore and, in 1957, was elected president of Haiti for a six-year term. In 1964, Duvalier had himself declared President for Life. His dictatorial regime oversaw military and government purges, mass executions and the institution of curfews, all enforced by the dreaded *Tonton Macoute*, his personal and violent secret police.

During that time, the *Banque Nationale de la République D'Haiti* issued a set of paper money on which 'Papa Doc' Duvalier appears on the lower denominations (1, 2, 5 and 10 gourdes – P196 & P200, P197 & P201, P198 & P202 and P203) for the first time and on the 500 gourdes (P207). The coat of arms is shown at the center on the back of the notes, which were printed by Thomas De La Rue and Company (TDLR).

In 1971, the legislature amended the constitution to permit Duvalier to name his son, Jean Claude Duvalier, as his successor and the young Duvalier (known as 'Baby Doc') assumed the presidency of Haiti on his father's death.

Under *Loi du 17 Aout 1979*, the *Banque de la République D'Haiti* put into circulation a new set of paper money. 'Papa Doc' Duvalier appears again on notes of a similar design made of polyethylene fibres marketed as Tyvek and developed by DuPont.

The notes were printed by the ABNC and released between 1980 and 1982. The denominations issued in Tyvek included: 1 gourde (P230A), 2 gourdes (P231A), 50 gourdes (P235A), 100 gourdes (P236A), 250 gourdes (P237) and 500 gourdes (P238). These notes also included a larger serial number.

Like his father, 'Baby Doc' Duvalier also appeared on Haitian paper money. In 1973, he is pictured on the front of the 25 gourdes; there is a satellite dish to his right and the National Palace is shown on the back. This note was printed by TDLR. Later, under Law 1979, 'Baby Doc's' portrait appears on the denominations of 5, 10 and 25 gourdes released in 1985. As usual in that time, the coat of Haitian arms is at the center on back. In response to three months of protests against his government's political and economic repression, 'Baby Doc' Duvalier fled the country in early 1986 and settled in France.



'Docteur François Duvalier', president for life, on Haiti's 2-gourde note, P231A.

GUATEMALA

General Jose M. Orellana (1 Quetzal)

Jose Maria Orellana Pinto was born in the department of El Progreso, Guatemala, in 1872. His father was Esteban Orellana and his mother Leonor Pinto. He began his military career in the Guatemalan army and became a political leader. As a member of the Liberal Party, he was elected a deputy for several consecutive terms.

In 1920, a civic-military movement led by the generals Jose M. Lima, Miguel Larrave and Jose Maria Orellana overthrew the government of Don Carlos Herrera. After imposing an interim government, Orellana was elected constitutional president, taking office in December 1921. There were major setbacks during his presidency, when he confiscated the printing machines of the newspapers of *El Día* and *El Imparcial*, because he disagreed with their journalism. He also suspended constitutional guarantees in May 1922.

Orellana's government established the Normal School and built more than 500 miles of roads in the country. During his presidency, he founded the Central Bank of Guatemala and reformed the banking system—probably his major achievements. Unfortunately, Jose M. Orellana suffered from angina pectoris and he died at the Hotel Manchén in Antigua, Guatemala, in 1926; he was buried in Guatemala City with full honors.

Guatemala adopted the 'quetzal' as its currency unit introducing it on 7 May 1925, at par with the US dollar. The quetzal is divisible into 100 centavos. Private banks issued banknotes in Guatemala until 7 July 1926, when the *Banco Central de Guatemala* became the sole banknote-issuing authority.

The quetzal is a brilliantly multicolored bird and the national bird of Guatemala. They are found only in Central and South America. Ancient Mayan chiefs used the long tail feathers of this bird as a symbol of authority and respect. In the Mayan language, 'quetzal' means feathers.

Orellana's portrait appears for the first time at right on the 50-quetzal note (P56, 1967). Since 1972, the same portrait has been used for all series of one-quetzal notes. Orellana appears at the right with the multicolored bird at left. The note is printed by TDLR. In 1983, a new design (P66) shows Orellana's portrait and the Tikal Temple in the background at the right. Tikal was the first great Mayan city, an oasis of civilization amid the jungles of Guatemala. This note was printed by Giesecke & Devrient (G&D). In 1990, Orellana appears on a note of a similar design (P73), but without a watermark. This note was printed by the Canadian Bank Note Company (CBNC). A later issue in 1994 (P87), features Orellana at the right again. The *Banco de Guatemala* building is on the back of all these notes.

In 2006, the *Banco de Guatemala* issued its first polymer note (PNew). General Orellana, in his usual military uniform appears at the right, with a transparent window embossed with the bank logo. The note has a new date and new signatures, but the Bank of Guatemala building is retained on the back. This note was printed by the CBNC. Around 60 million notes were expected to be placed in circulation over the following two years. More polymer notes of different denominations are expected in Guatemala.



Jose Orellana on Guatemala's 1-quetzal note issued in 2006.

MEXICO

Benito Juarez (20 New Pesos)

Benito Juarez was born to an indigenous family in San Pablo Guelatao, Oaxaca, in 1806. For most of his childhood, he spoke only Zapotec, one of 17 native languages identified in Oaxaca State. In the city of Oaxaca, he lived with his sister who was a servant at the house of Don Antonio Maza. He studied at the Santa Cruz Seminary, the only secondary school in Oaxaca.

Juarez later studied law at the *Instituto de Ciencias y Artes*. In 1831, he became a member of Oaxaca Town Council and in 1833 a local congressional representative. For some time, he worked as lawyer, defending indigenous communities. In 1847, Juarez was elected Governor of Oaxaca State. He established a balanced economy and carried out numerous public works by building roads, reconstructing the Government Palace, and founding high schools. He commissioned a geographic chart and a map of the city of Oaxaca.

Under the presidency of Juan Alvarez, Juarez was appointed Minister of Justice and Public Education in 1855. Then, he was elected President of the Supreme Court of Justice. In this position, Juarez abolished the privileges enjoyed by the military and members of the clergy over and above all other people. In 1858, Juarez assumed the Presidency of the Republic. In 1859, with the support of the liberals, he issued the Reform Laws, which declared the independence of the State from the Church; the law on civil marriages and registration; the law on cemeteries; and the transfer of Church property to the Nation.

In 1863, as a result of French intervention, he was obligated to leave Mexico City. He later returned to the capital city and, in October 1867, Benito Juarez was re-elected President. He spent his time organizing the economy of the country, organizing education reform, reducing the size of the army and ending military uprisings. He died in Mexico City in 1872.

In 1992, during a monetary reform, when the New Peso was adopted as the currency, the Banco de Mexico put into circulation a new set of banknotes. On the 20 new pesos (P100) Benito Juarez appears at right. In 1994, a similar design (P106) shows Juarez at right and an eagle on a cactus with a snake (the Mexican coat of arms) at center. The usual legend *Pagará a la Vista al Portador* is omitted. In 2000, the *Banco de Mexico* issued a commemorative note (P111), with the legend '75th Anniversary 1925-2000' at the upper left. In 2001, keeping the same design, the first polymer bank note in Mexico was issued with additional security features (P116). Statues *Hemiciclo a Juarez* with a backdrop of stone archways and a resting lion are on the back. President Porfirio Diaz inaugurated this monument in 1910, at the 100th anniversary of Mexican independence.

In 2007, the portrait of Benito Juarez was used on a new 20-peso polymer note (P122). In the center of this note are the scales of justice and an open book (containing the Reform Laws). Number 20 is on a see-through window. Monte Alban, a pre-Hispanic archeological ruin in Oaxaca, and the Dios del Rayo mask are on the back.

All the banknotes carrying a portrait of Juarez were printed by the Banco de Mexico, including the second 20-peso note issued in polymer.



Benito Juarez on Mexico's first polymer 20-peso note, P116a.



Benito Juarez on Mexico's 20-peso polymer note dated 2006, P122.

José Maria Morelos (50 New Pesos)

José Maria Morelos is regarded as one of Mexico's leading historical figures and an advocate of independence from Spain, whose forces controlled significant areas of the country at the time. Born in 1765 in Valladolid (now called Morelia) in Mexico,

Morelos was forced by the death of his father to support his family from his adolescence.

In 1790, Morelos decided to begin studying for the priesthood. In 1797, the Catholic Church ordained him and sent him to the parish of Tamacuaro in Churumuco but soon Morelos became frustrated at his assignment. The Catholic Church, he felt, saved its positions of power and prestige only for the Spanish lineage.

While there, Morelos heard news of an enormous event. His former teacher, Father Hidalgo, had started an uprising among the native population of Dolores. In 1810, as a military leader, Morelos led troops in the field for several years and established control over large regions of Mexico, though he was never able to topple the Spanish Government.

Many of the soldiers of Morelos' patriotic army believed they were defending Mexico from the threat of French domination. Napoleon Bonaparte had removed King Ferdinand VII from the Spanish throne and seemed to be angling for control of Spain's colonies. Although they acknowledged the risk of alienating many of their soldiers, members of the Congress decided nevertheless to declare Mexico a sovereign nation on 6 November 1813. Calleja's forces captured Morelos at the east coast of the country, took him back to Mexico City, where a perfunctory trial sealed his fate, and the court sentenced him to death. Taken out of Mexico City for fear of public demonstrations against his execution, Morelos died in front of a firing squad on 22 December 1815.

In 1823, another revolution brought independence to Mexico and the new congress brought Morelos' remains to a place of high honor in Mexico City. Later, when the government decided to declare a monument to revolutionary heroes at the *Paseo de la Reforma*, admirers expressed a desire to move Morelos' remains again. Most historians, however, believe that friends of Morelos had already moved them to a grave, the location of which remains unknown to this day. Morelos' hometown of Valladolid changed its name to Morelia in 1828 in recognition of the efforts of the revolutionary leader. In 1862, the government took a portion of what had formerly been known as the state of Mexico and created the state of Morelos.

Morelos is today viewed as a martyr in the cause for independence and one of Mexico's greatest heroes. The *Banco de México* has issued several bank notes with his portrait, such as: 500 pesos (1936, P32); 20 pesos (1972-77, P64) and finally the 50 new pesos (1992, P101).

On the first denomination of 50 pesos in polymer issued in 2006 (P107), Morelos' portrait is at center-right, with a map of Mexico as a registration device at center and a color-shifting

butterfly at the left. Number '50' is on a see-through window at the lower right. An aqueduct in Morelia, Michoacan, and three orange Monarch butterflies are on the back. At left is a representation of the pre-Hispanic symbol of the state of Michoacan. The seal of the *Banco de México* is at the upper left.

Conclusion

In the new millennium, more and more countries in Latin America and around the world are considering the idea to issue banknotes in polymer. For example Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Romania, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Samoa and Zambia, have at least one denomination in this material. Other countries such as China, Kuwait, Northern Ireland, and Taiwan are issuing commemorative polymer notes. In Australia and New Zealand all denominations are manufactured in polymer.

An important reason for using polymer notes is to avoid counterfeiting. In the U.S., there is an average of 150 fake notes per million \$100 bills and in Canada, there are 290 counterfeit bills per million \$100 notes in circulation. However, in Australia, the number is just three bills per million, because the notes are extremely hard to replicate. This type of bill can provide more security features than paper. The difficulty of copying such bills has been their primary selling point in the international market.

Apart from their enhanced security, polymer notes have proven to last longer than paper notes, especially in countries where humidity contributes to paper note deterioration. On average, the durability of polymer money can vary between five to ten years. Now the central banks do not need to bury or burn the old money as they can be recycled into plastic plumbing fittings and other household items.

Miguel Chirinos (miguelchirinos@msn.com) is originally from Venezuela, but has been living with his family in North Carolina, USA, since 1996. His numismatic interests extend beyond collecting to include historical research. He has been contributing articles about Latin American paper money to the *IBNS Journal* for the past decade.

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Maria Morelos on Mexico's first 50-peso polymer note.