

Venezuela Formular Cards 1880-1884

The Exhibit

Venezuelan philately, in general, has never been profusely studied. And Formula Cards are undoubtedly the least studied aspect of it. Most international and even local catalogs include everything in one entry without mentioning any variety except the existence of "more than a hundred colors," which is, by the way, false.

By reviewing 19th century philatelic magazines, I found much more valuable information, including the actual number of printings that existed and an incipient identification of the different types. Unfortunately very cumbersome to follow, and still with many errors and incomplete information. However, a giant leap compared to what we had these days!

In the eighties of the twentieth century, colleague Finn Stjernholck greatly improved on what had been started in previous studies, showing better organization and much more details. This was, without a doubt, the starting point for my attempt to expand what Mr. Stjernholck left us.

In this exhibit, you'll find printings, types, ink colors, paper colors, varieties, errors, as well as the earliest and latest usages.

The History

Until now, the date assumed as official for the release of these formular cards was July 12, 1880. My personal study found out that the actual date of the decree was one month earlier, June 11, 1880.

The decree itself is misleading because even when it mentions that the card should have a stamp, it doesn't mention that it should be pre-printed. It is safe to assume that that was the reason why these are the forerunners of the actual postal stationeries of Venezuela.

It's worth to mention that nothing has been found after the original decree, so there's no word about printings, how many pieces were printed, or by whom.

This exhibition tries to answer some of these questions by doing a statistical analysis on this and other collections of statistically meaningful size.

Plan

This exhibit shows each printing and its different types. Along the exhibit, you'll find contextualized QR codes so if you want to know more about one specific topic don't hesitate to scan the closest QR code.

Scarce pieces are framed in blue and rare pieces in red borders.

- i. Introduction and Plan
- ii. Key to the Types Legend
- iii. Rosette Layout

1. First Printing – Mid 1880

2. Second Printing – 1883

2.1. Paper Colors

3. Third Printing – Early 1884

3.1. Paper Colors

4. Fourth Printing – Late 1884

4.1. Paper Colors

5. Varieties and Errors

Applied Literature

- "Venezuela Formular Cards Catalog" by Will Castillo, Self Published, Atlanta, 2019
"Venezuela" by editor, The Philatelic Record, Vol 21, October 1880, Pemberton, Wilson and Co., London, p121
"Les Cartes Postales du Venezuela" by editor, Le Timbre-Poste, #259, July 1884, Jean-Baptiste Moens, p54-55
"The Post Cards of Venezuela" by "A Post Card Collector", The Philatelic Record, Vol 68, September 1884, Pemberton, Wilson and Co., London, p157-160
"Venezuela" by editor, Le Timbre-Poste, #263, November 1884, Jean-Baptiste Moens, Brussels, p94-95
"The Formula Cards of Venezuela" by Finn Stjernholck, The Mainsheet, Vol 13, #48, November 1987, Brian Moorhouse, Peterborough, p3-10
"Leyes y Decretos de Venezuela", Tomo VIII, Caracas, 1884, p457-462
Color Atlas, A. Kornerup & H. Wanscher, Denmark, 1961



ii. Key to Types Legend



The key sections, and their acronyms, need to be memorized in order to correctly identify the different printings and types.

...or you can use the QR code up there!

**Unused copy of Type 3.2,
early 1884.**

a. First Line (FL)

Its length is a critical key to identify the correct printing and type.
Measurements include parenthesis

b. Second Line (SL)

Its length is a critical key to identify the correct printing and type.
Measurements includes periods if any

c. Links

Help identify many types. Usually called by number and direction (not counting corner).
I.e.- Third link from right on top chain.

d. Outer Border (OB)

External bold line surrounding the whole card

e. Outlier Rosette

Helps identify one type.

f. Frame (F)

Thin line between chains and inner part of the formula card.

g. Chains

Chain of links around the card. Usually called by its position: Top Chain (TC), Bottom Chain (BC), Left Chain (LC), and Right Chain (RC).

h. U Alignment (UA)

Position of the middle of U of "UNIVERSELLE" compared to the word "DE" below.

i. Double Border

Double border of the space for the stamp. There's a Vertical Border (DVB) and a Horizontal Border (DHB)

j. Middle Chain (MC)

Its links or surrounding borders helps identify some types.

k. Inner Border (IB)

Inner fine line, close to the outer border

iii. Rosette Layout (RL)



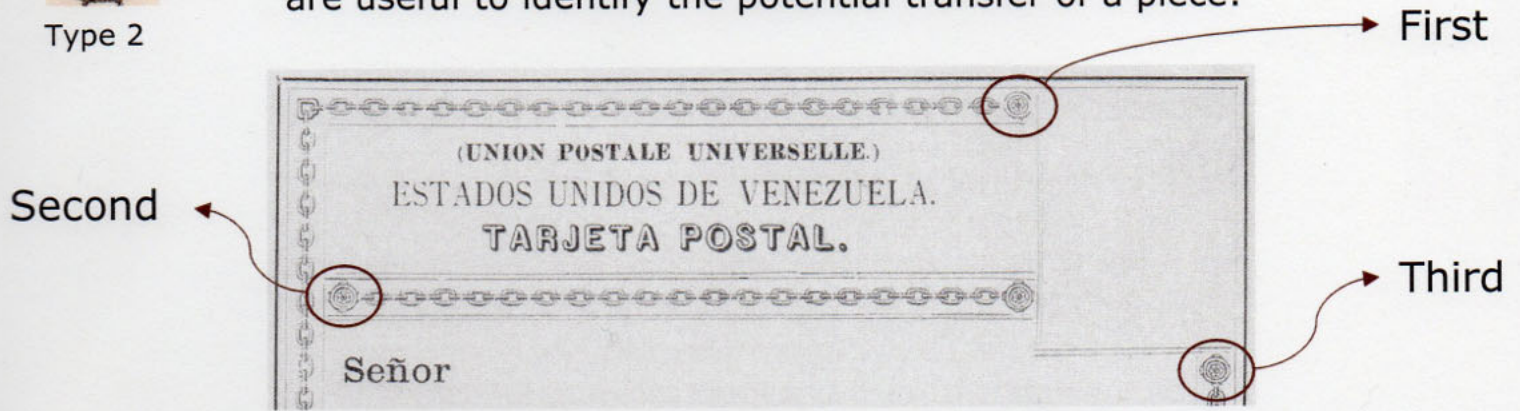
Type 1

The rosettes are present in two different shapes:
Type 1 showing only one petal on the top,
and Type 2 showing two petals on the top.



Type 2

There are four positions these where rosettes were added to the design of the card but only three of them are useful to identify the potential transfer of a piece:

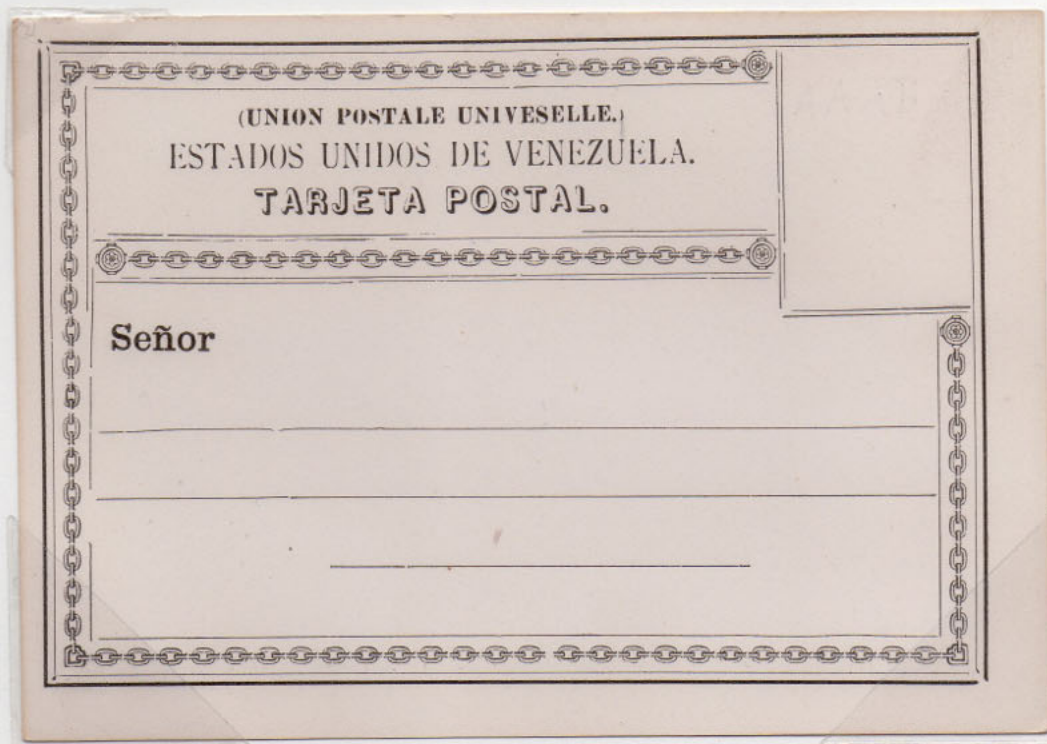


Only one of four different arrangements can be found on these cards:

111, 112, 212, and 222

The most common arrangement is **112**, which means that only the third rosette shows two petals on the top.

Unused copy, Type 2.1 from 1883, showing the default Rosette Layout, 112.



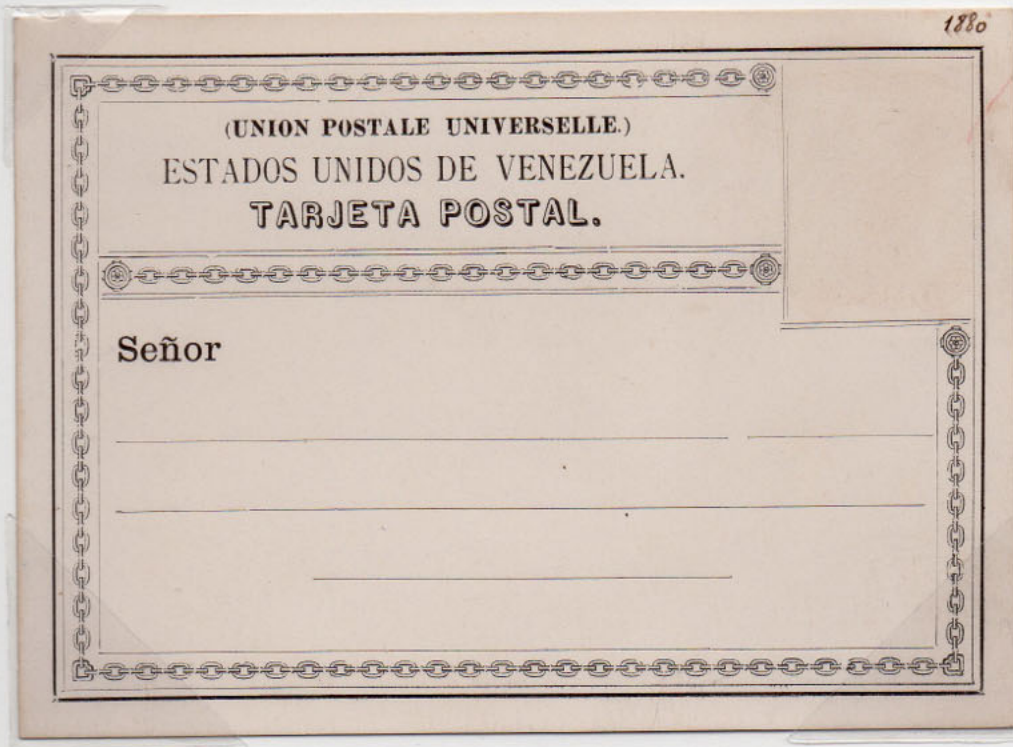
Can't recognize its type yet? Don't worry, by the last page you'll be an expert on Venezuelan Formular Cards!

1. First Printing (Mid 1880)

Type 1.1

UA: Over DE
FL: 52.5mm
SL: 67.5mm
RL: 212

- Break on 4th link from right on TC, on 3rd link from right on BC, and on 8th link from top on LC.
- Break on top part of DVB.



The first printing was printed only on white paper using three different colors for the ink: Black, Blue and Red.

Cards with red ink are scarcer
on a ratio of 1:85



No card with blue ink has
been recorded for type 1.1

1. First Printing (Mid 1880)

Type 1.2



UA: Over D
FL: 52mm
SL: 67.5mm
RL: 222

- Break in 5th link from right on TC and on 5th link from left on BC.
- Break on F by 4rd link on right.

Sometimes stamps were affixed at the post office before the cards were sold.

Here we have an example with two blue 5 cents stamps from 1880, which was the rate for both internal and external correspondence from June 11th, 1880 through November 23rd, 1880.

Personal investigation has shown that this printing is by far the most scarce one being about 5 times rarer than the most common one, Printing III.



Cards with blue ink are scarcer on a ratio of 1:250

The example above shows a 10 cents carmine (first setting) from 1880

1. First Printing (Mid 1880)

Type 1.3

UA: Left side of D
FL: 52mm
SL: 70mm
RL: 111

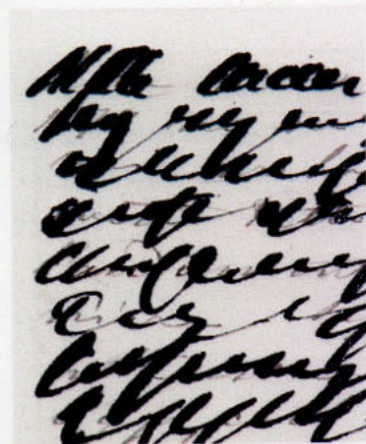
- Break in 3rd link from right on TC.
- Break in 6th and 7th link from left on MC.
- Break in 2nd and 11th link from right on BC.



Formular card sent from Caracas via paquebot to an unknown destination on September 6th, 1880, which represents **the earliest usage recorded so far**. Two blue 5 cents stamps from 1880 were used.

Sometimes people used the same card more than once using different techniques like writing on a different direction or with different pressure than the original manuscript. Or like the example above, scratching the old text and marks.

It seems that this time they gave up in the middle of their endeavour!



Reproduction of a detail of the reverse, showing a bolde handwriting over the original faint one



No card with blue ink has been recorded for type 1.3

1. First Printing (Mid 1880)

Type 1.4

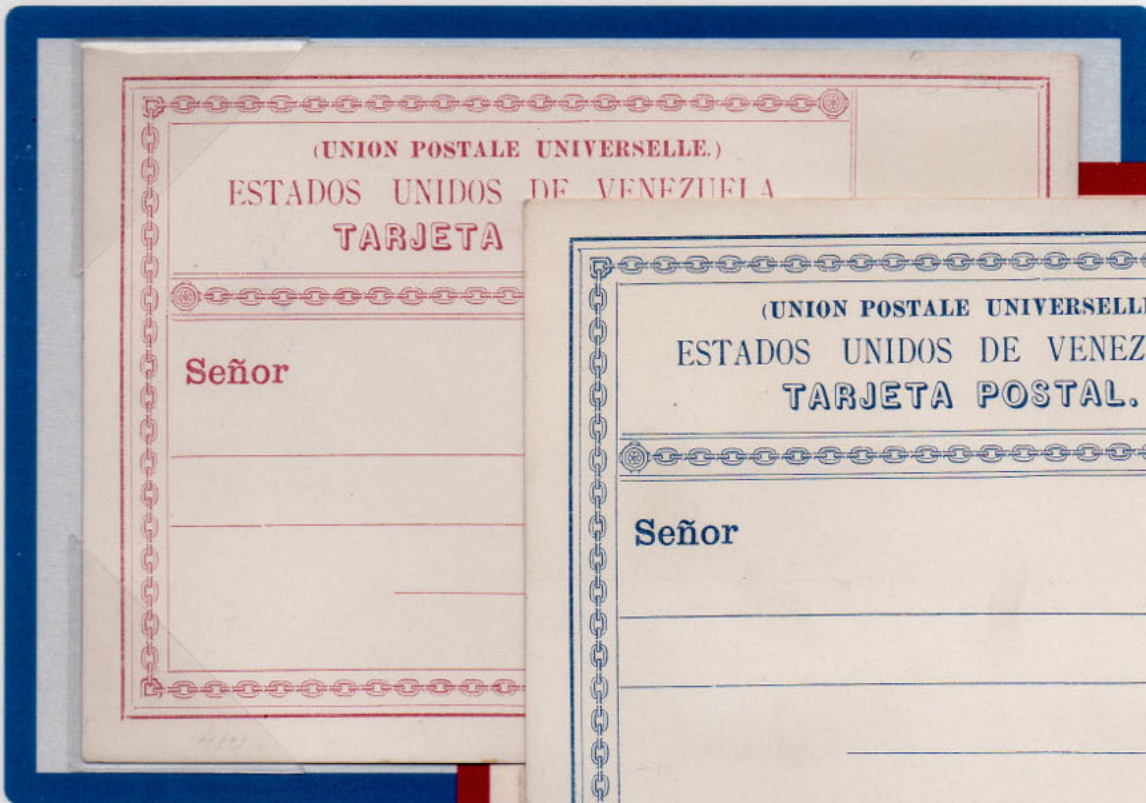


UA: Right side of D
FL: 53mm
SL: 72mm
RL: 222

- Break in 4th link from right on TC.
- Break in 6th link from right on BC.
- Large gap between ESTADOS and UNIDOS.

Formular card sent from La Guayra to Marseille, France, on March 21st 1893, which represents the latest usage recorded so far.

Circular reception mark in black dated April 12th, 1893. Shows a 10 cents vermillion (second setting) from 1880.



Pre-franked with a 1879 1 Centésimo revenue, officially authorized for postal usage. 1 centésimo equals 10 cénts

The correct rate for 1880.

2. Second Printing (1883)

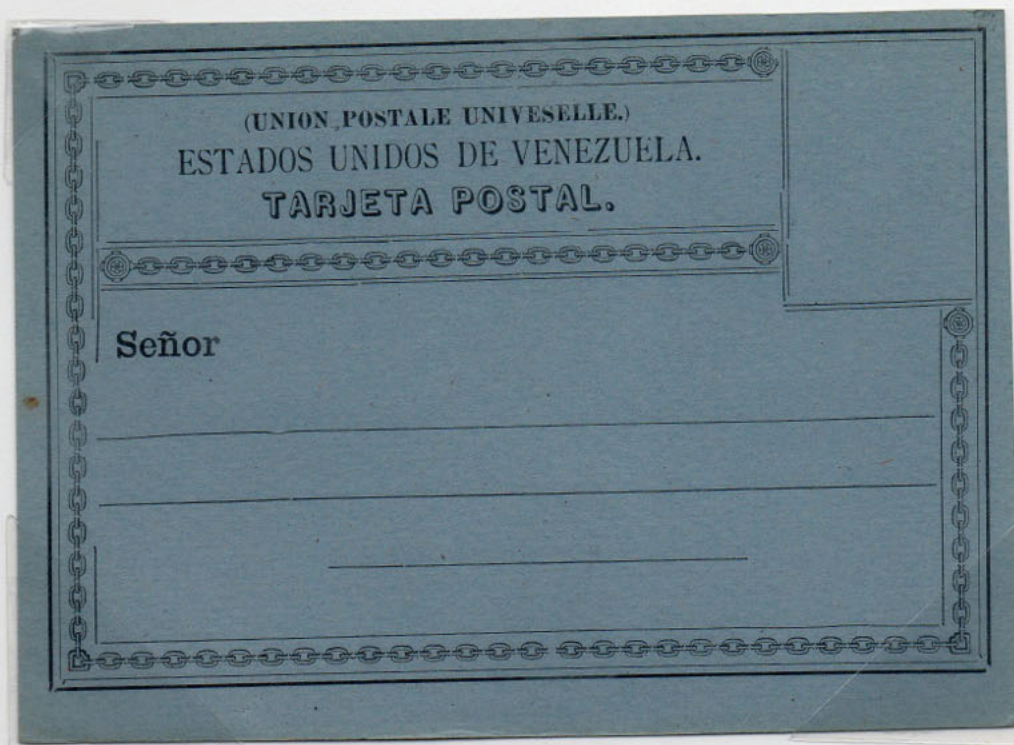
Type 2.1

UA: Right side of D

FL: 49.5mm

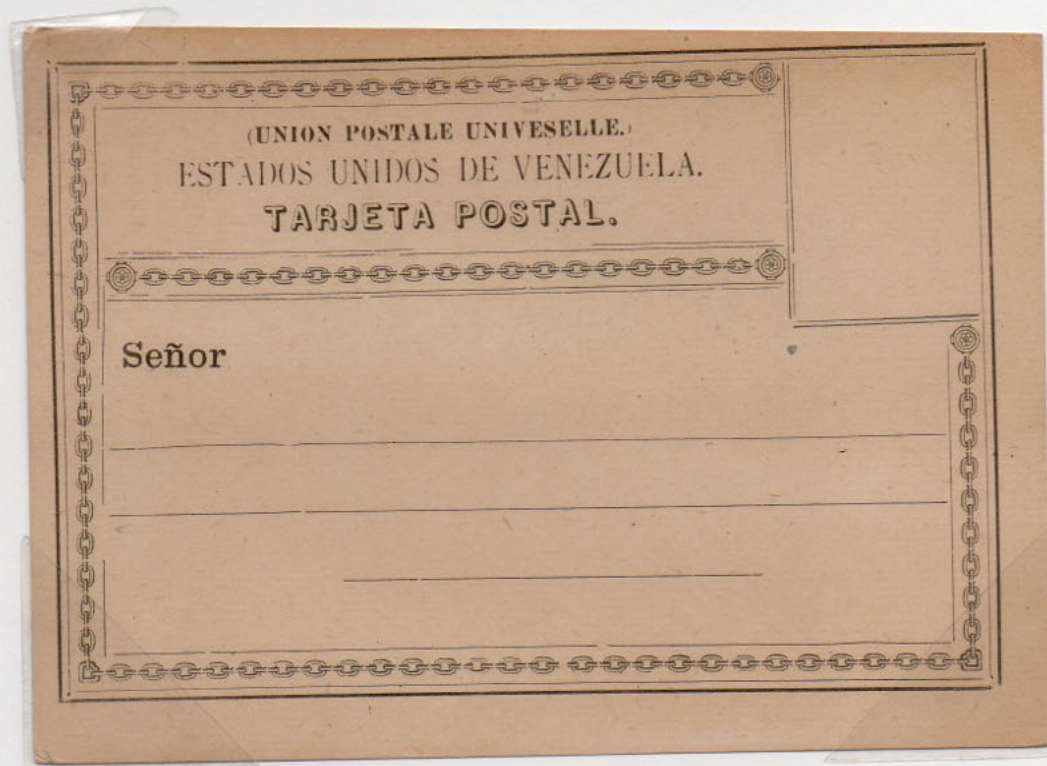
SL: 67.5mm

RL: 112



- Missing R in UNIVERSELLE.
- Broken F by 4th link from bottom in LC.
- F double by 11th link from bottom in LC.
- Gap between 12th and 13th link from right on BC.

Given the number of cards printed and the quality of the plate used, it was getting worn. That caused having slightly different variations between cards printed early in the process versus those printed late.

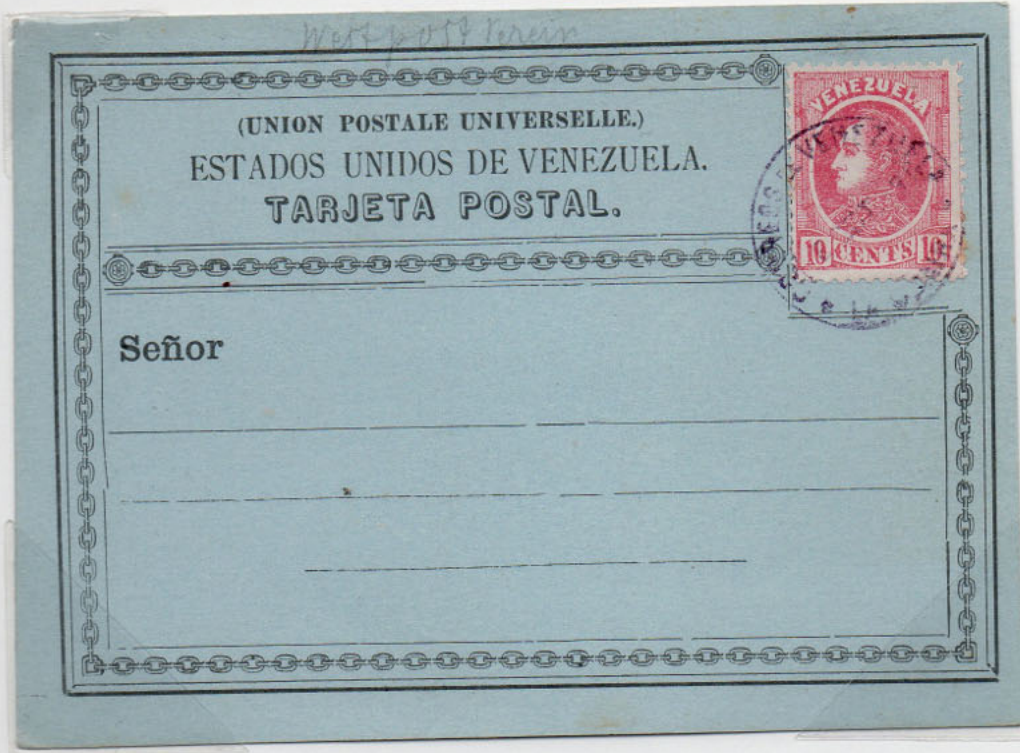


Late Impression. Notice how the lead line in the stone, on the left border by ESTADOS, dropped all the way down to the rosette. Other marks missing on MC.

2. Second Printing (1883)

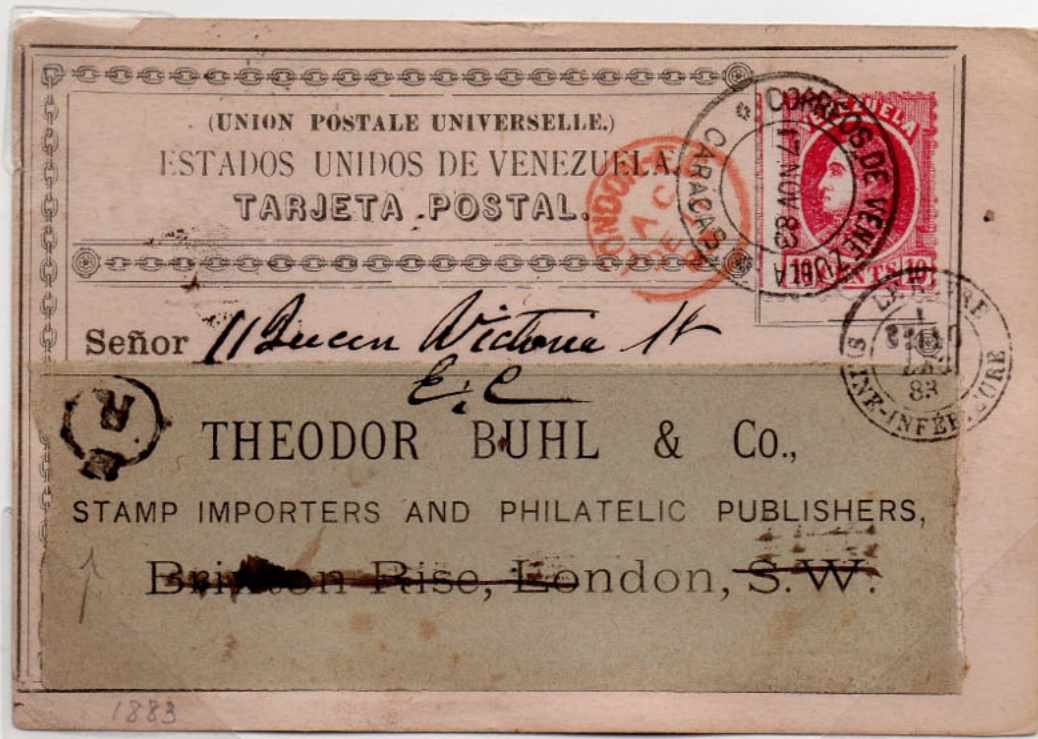
Type 2.2

UA: Left of D
FL: 52mm
SL: 67mm
RL: 112



- Break on 3rd link from top on RC
- Small gap between the 4th and 5th link from top on RC.
- DVB mostly inexistent.
- Break in 3rd link from left in MC.
- Black dots in 5th links from left in both TC and BC.

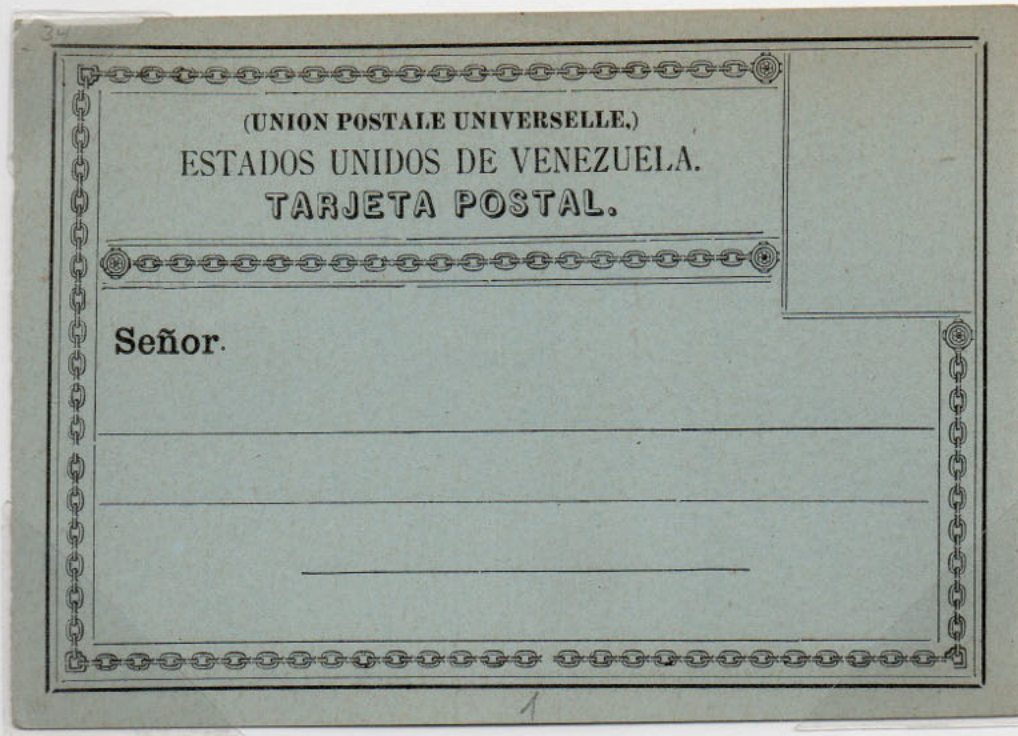
The second printing was printed on at least 15 different papers using only black ink.



Late Impression. Sent from Caracas to London, UK, on Nov 17th, 1883 using a 1880 10 cents carmine. Shows transit by circular Le Havre cachet and circular London reception in red.

2. Second Printing (1883)

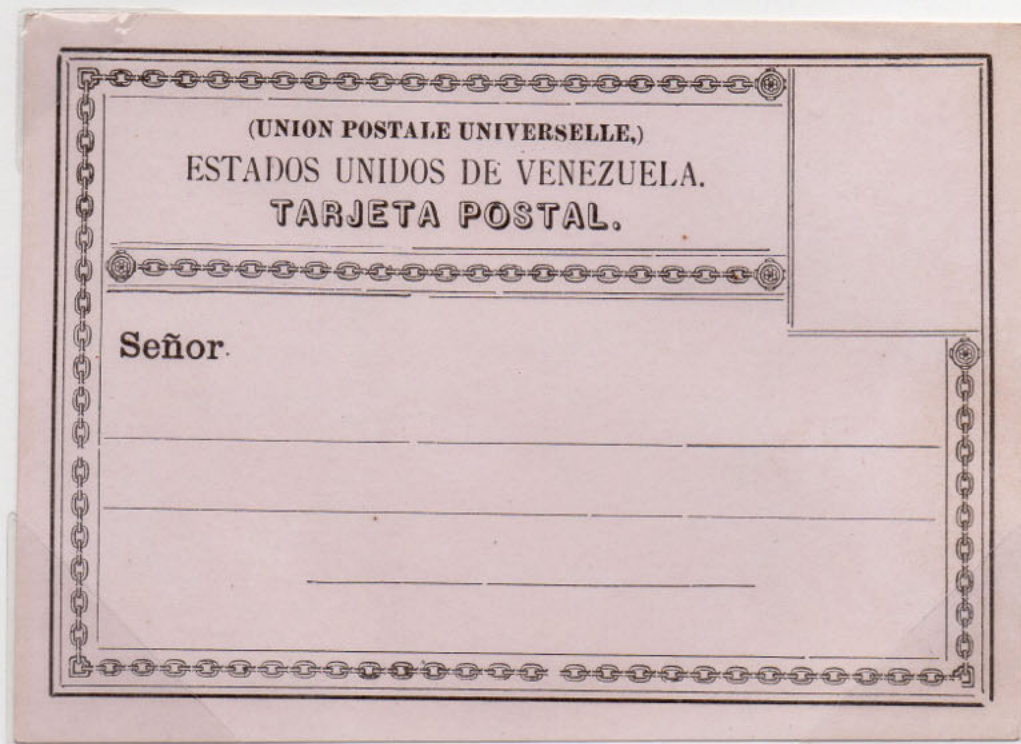
Type 2.3



UA: Left side of D
FL: 51mm
SL: 67mm
RL: 111

- Comma instead of period in FL
- Gap between 12th and 13th link from right in BC
- Gap between 11th and 12th link from top in LC
- Black spots on 9th and 10th links from left in BC

Statistical analysis made on several collections shows that for every card from Printing II there are two cards from Printing III.

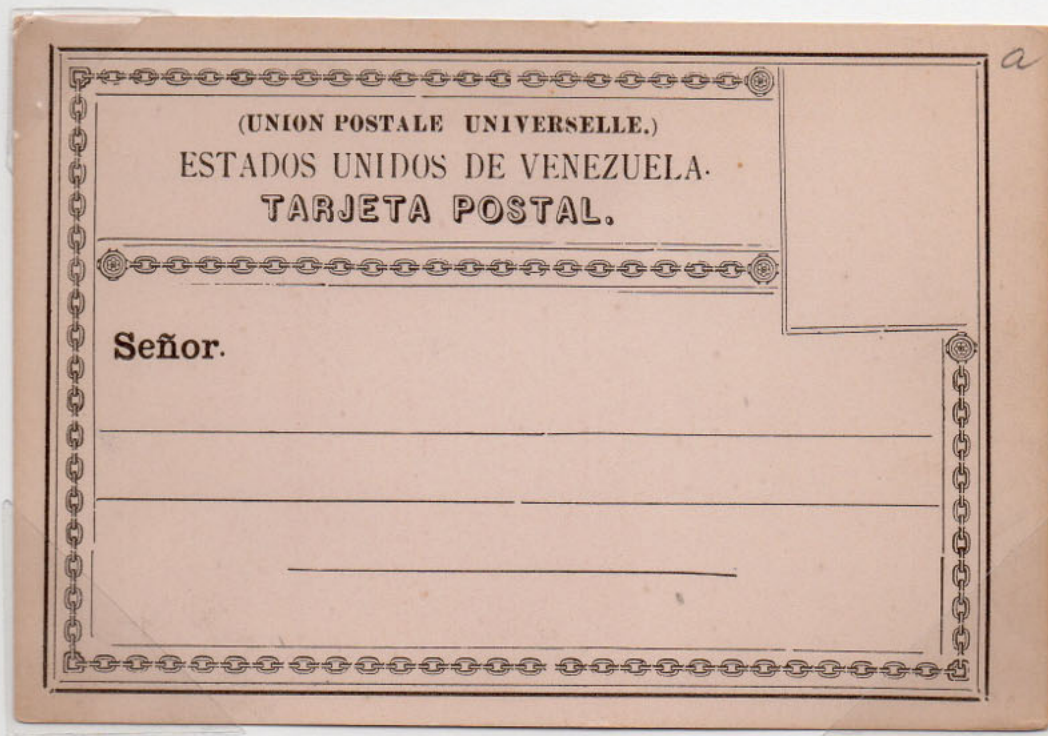


Late Impression. Notice how the lines for the address appears at times broken compared to the early impresión above where it is a continuous line.

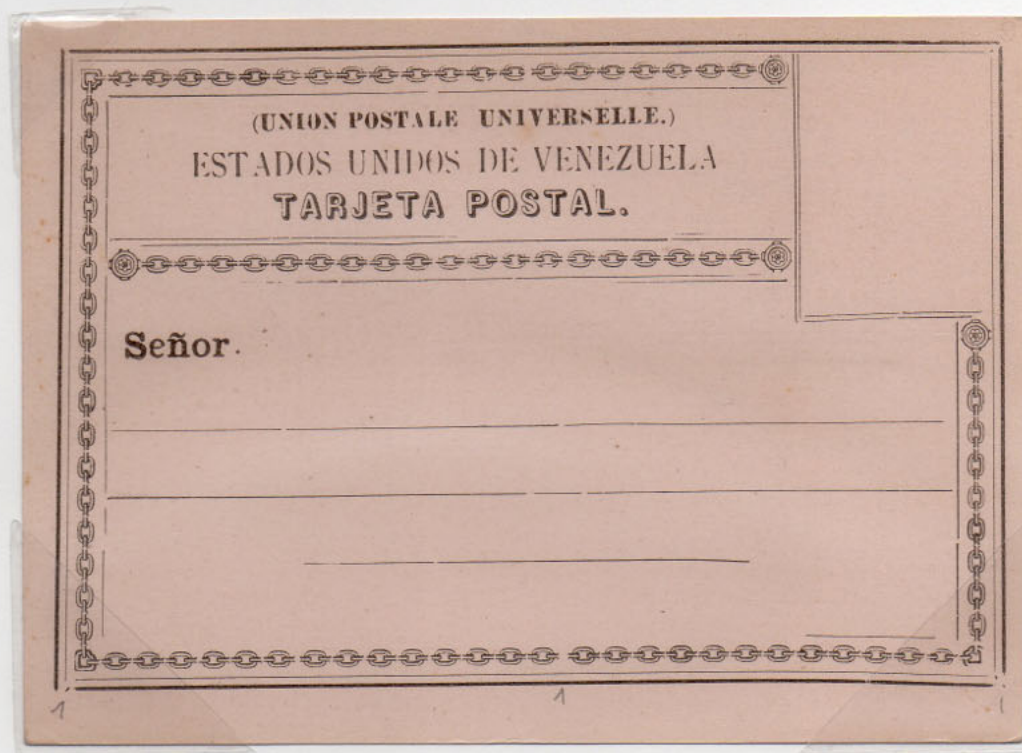
2. Second Printing (1883)

Type 2.4

UA: Over D
FL: 54.5mm
SL: 68mm
RL: 112



- No period in SL.
- Gap in BC between 12th and 13th link from right.
- Bottom F visible over five links on the right (rest either gone or faint.)
- Left F broken twice by 4th and 5th link from bottom.

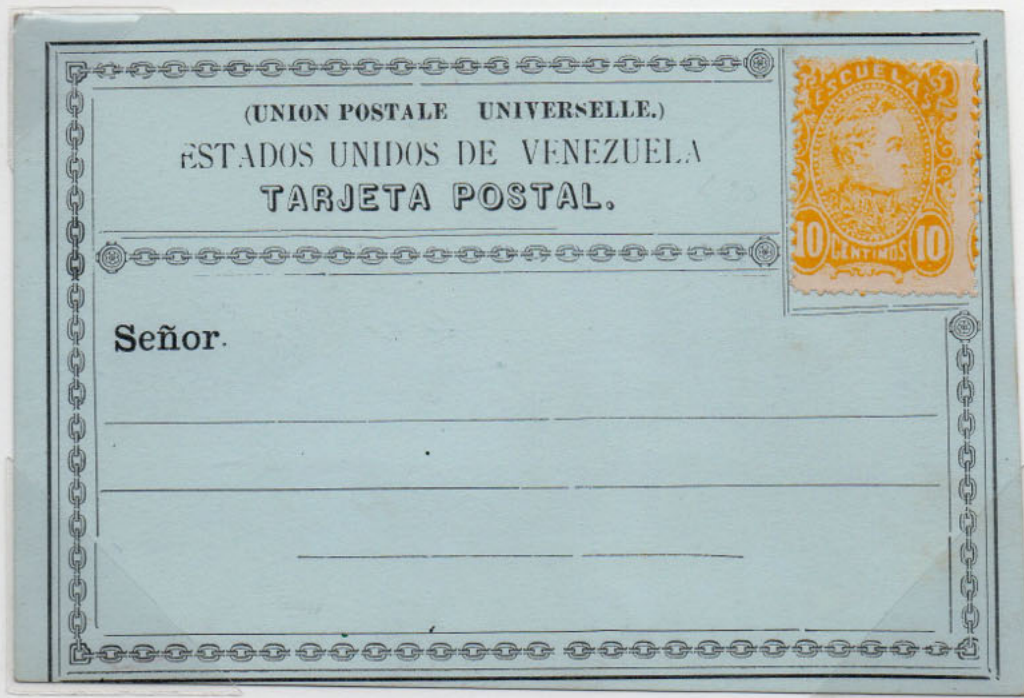


Late Impression. Notice the absence of the lower inner frame compared to the piece above.

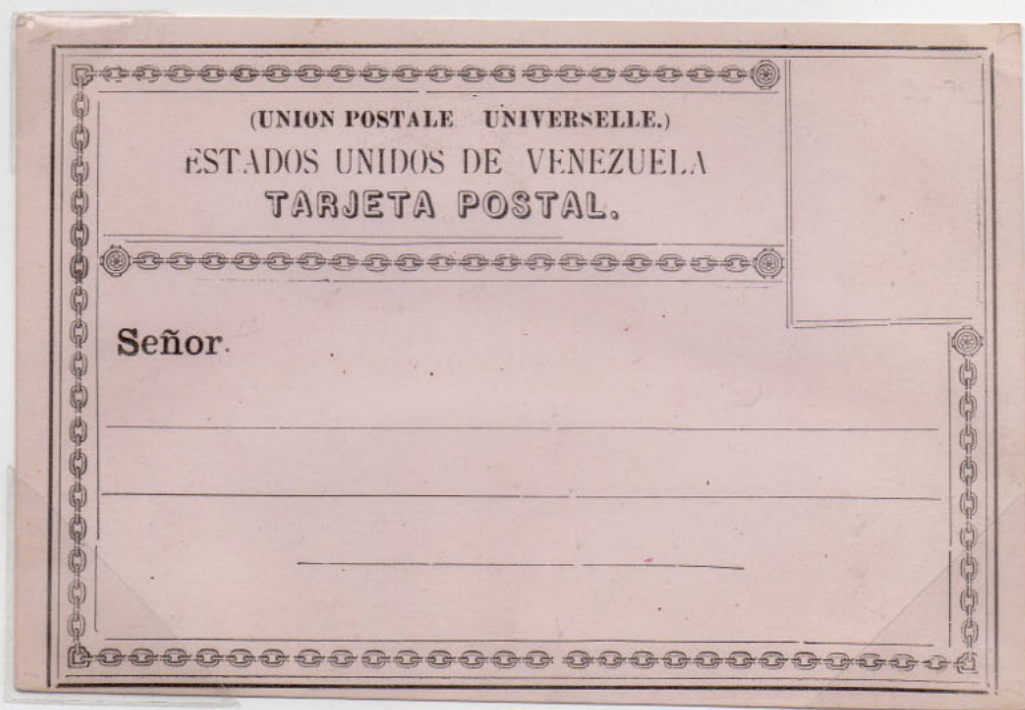
2. Second Printing (1883)

Type 2.5

UA: Over E
FL: 54mm
SL: 67mm
RL: 112

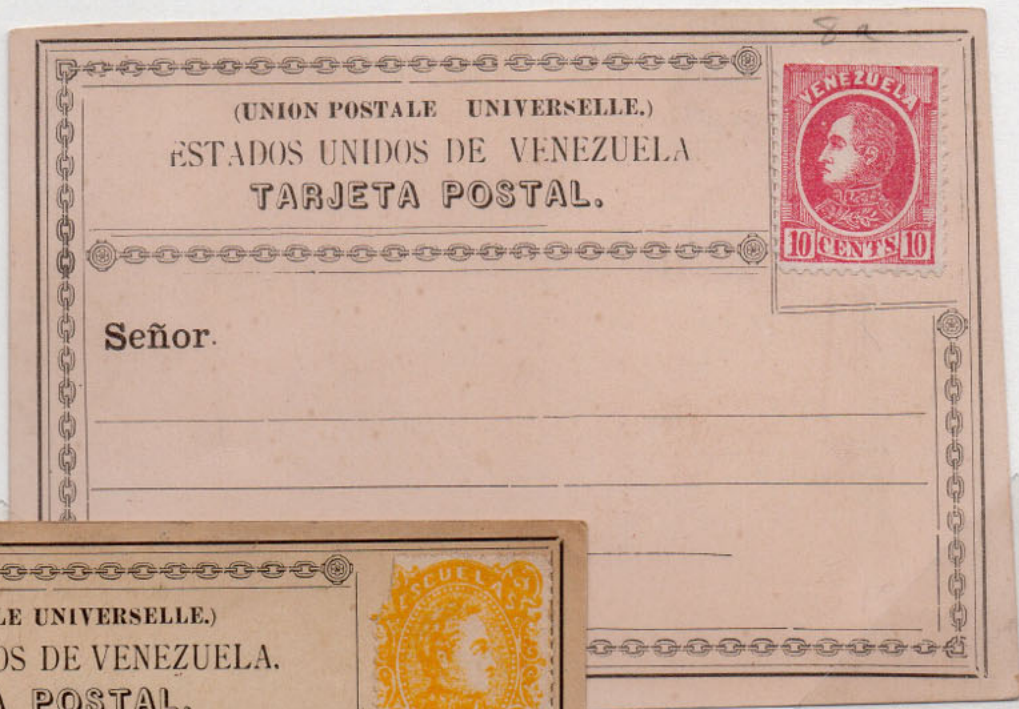


- No period in SL.
- Gap in BC between 12th and 13th link from right.
- Left F broken between 3rd and 4th link from bottom.
- Break in 1st link from left in TC and 1st from right in BC.



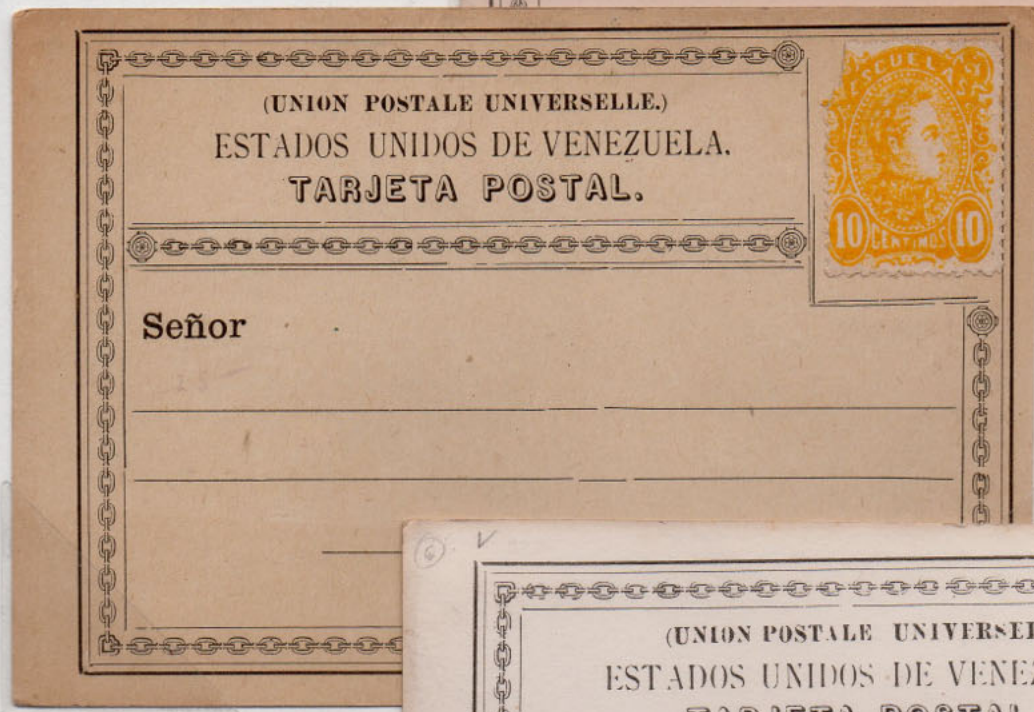
Late Impression. The stone for this transfer seemed to hold up better than the others.
Only slight presence of worn has been seen on this transfer.

2.1 Second Printing (1883) – Paper Colors



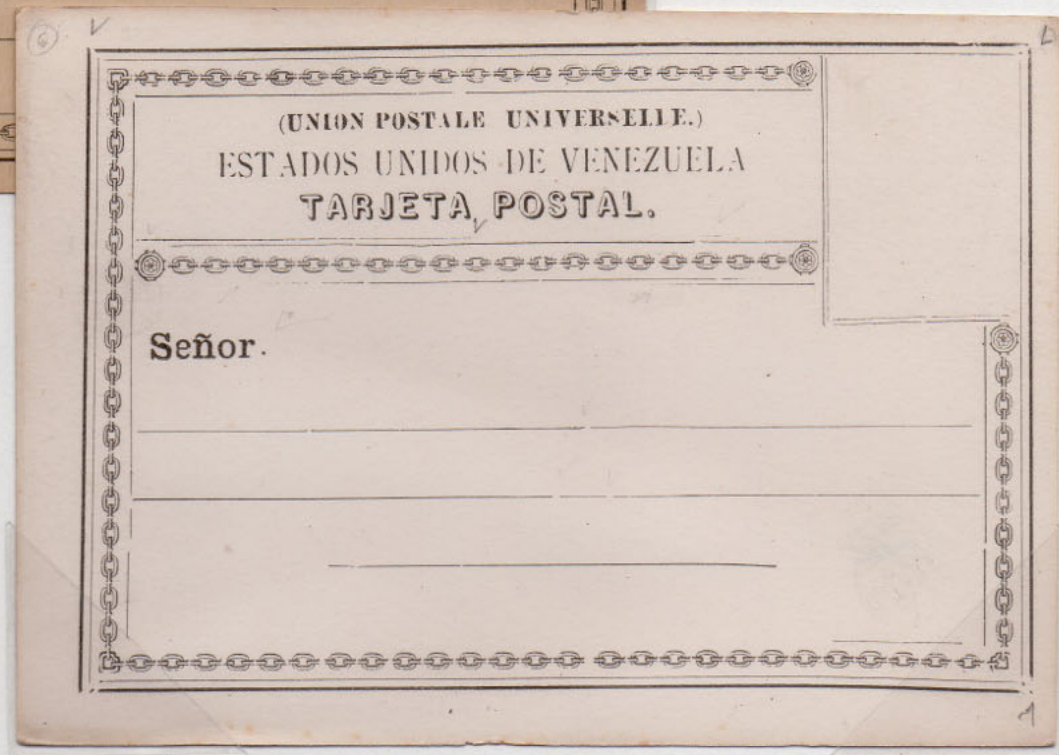
(UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE.)
ESTADOS UNIDOS DE VENEZUELA
TARJETA POSTAL.

Señor.



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TARJETA POSTAL.

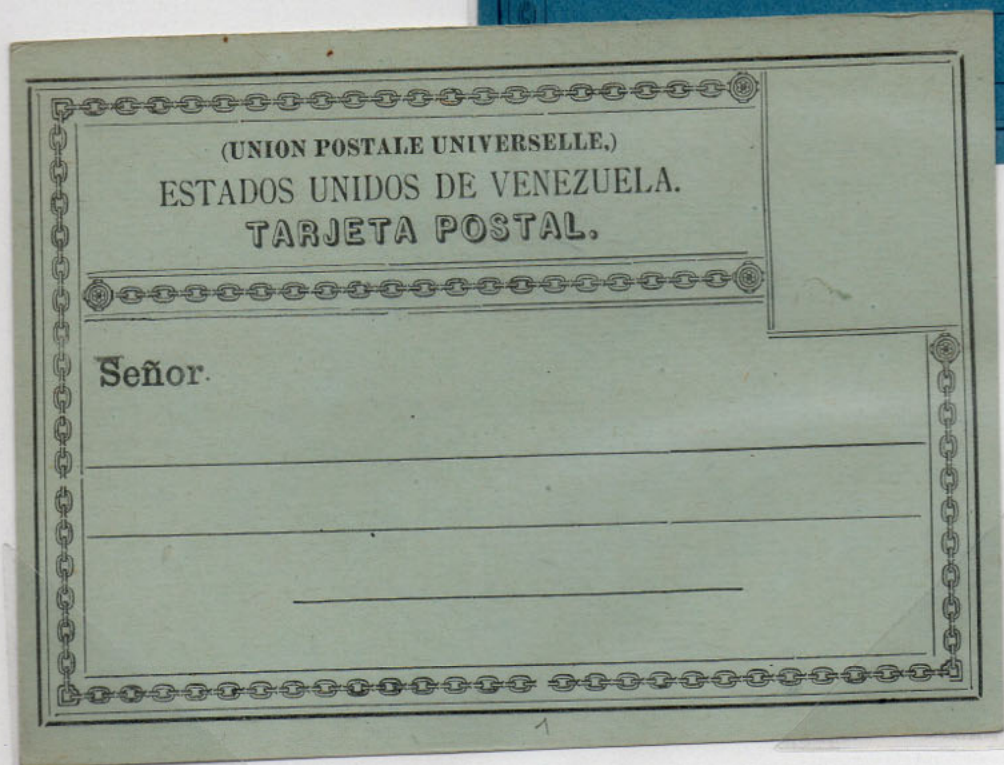
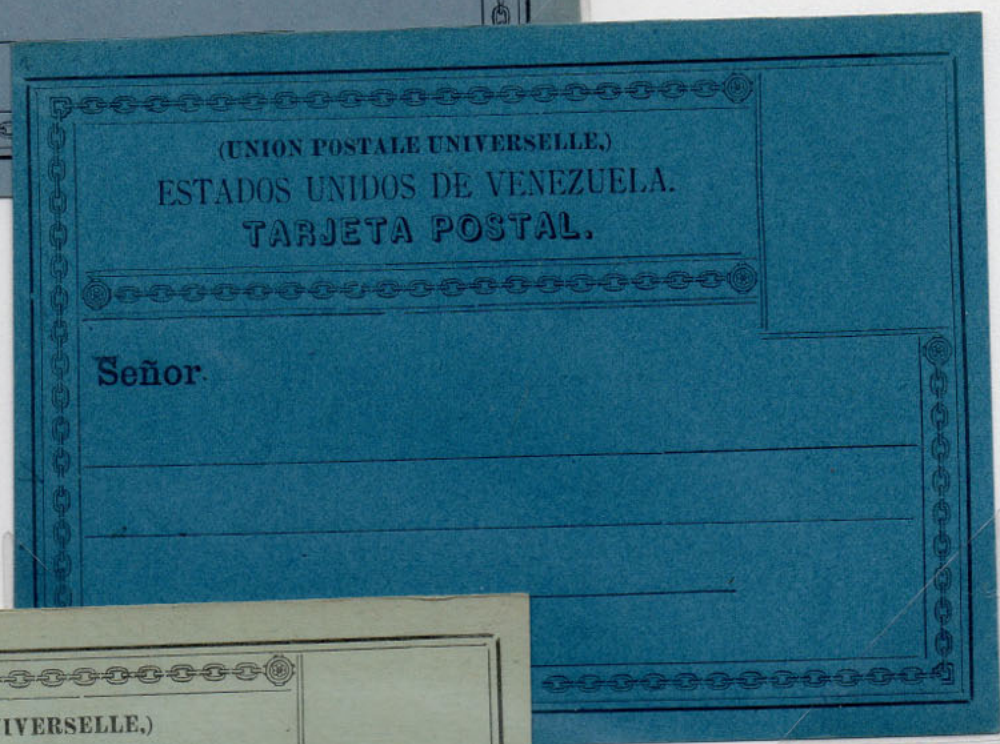
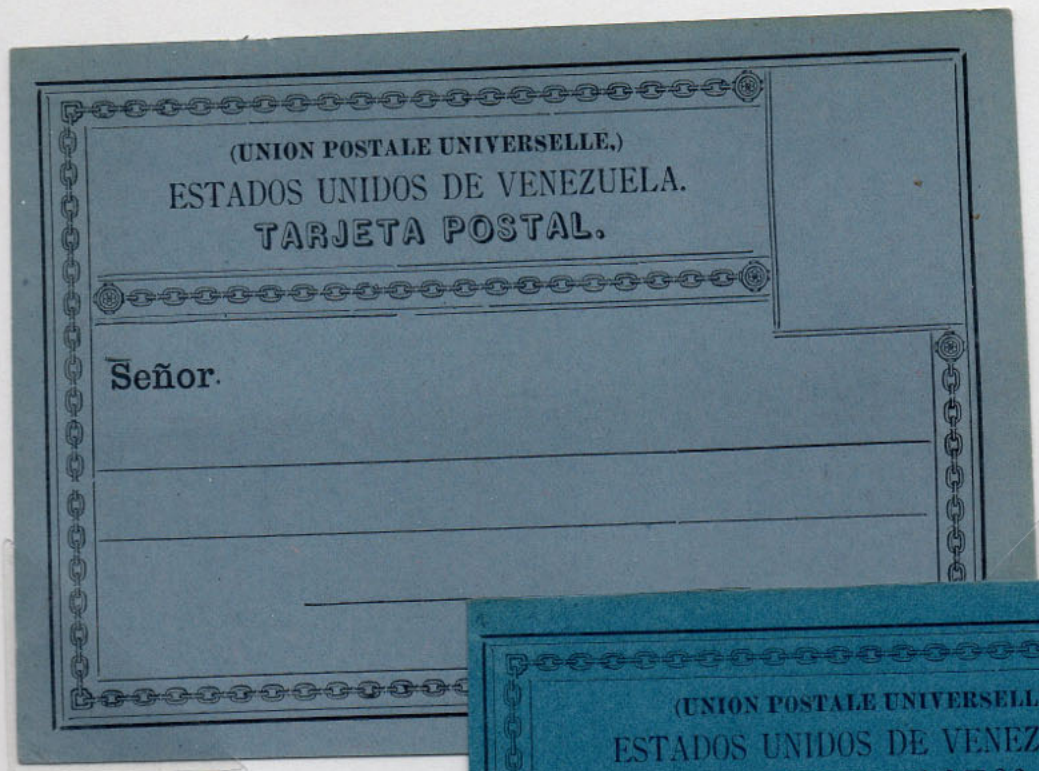
Señor



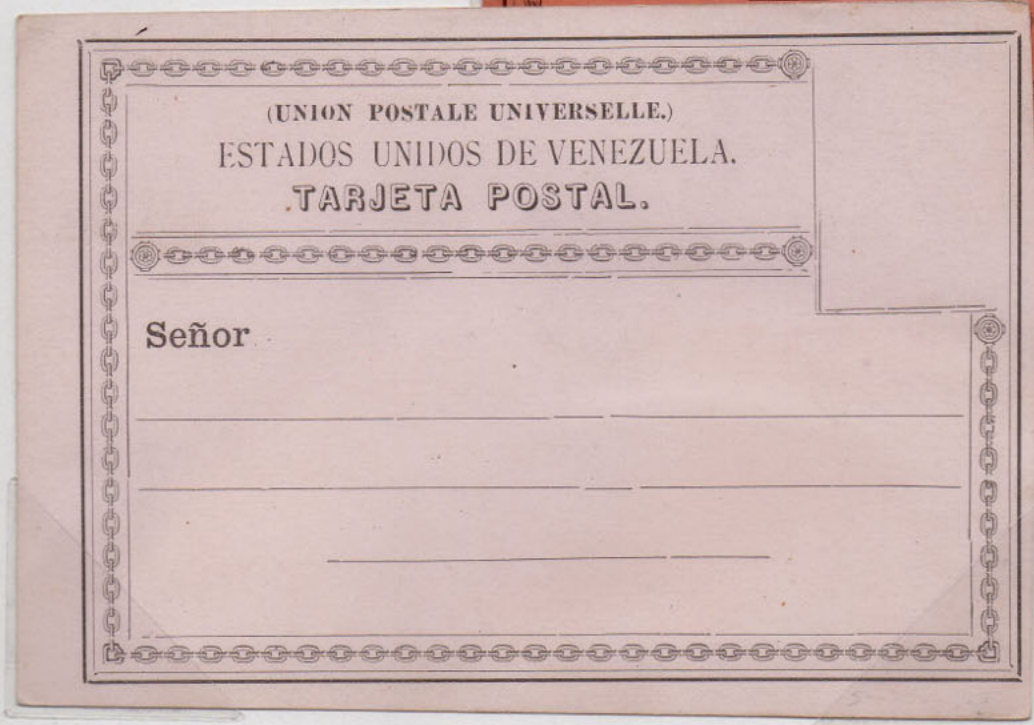
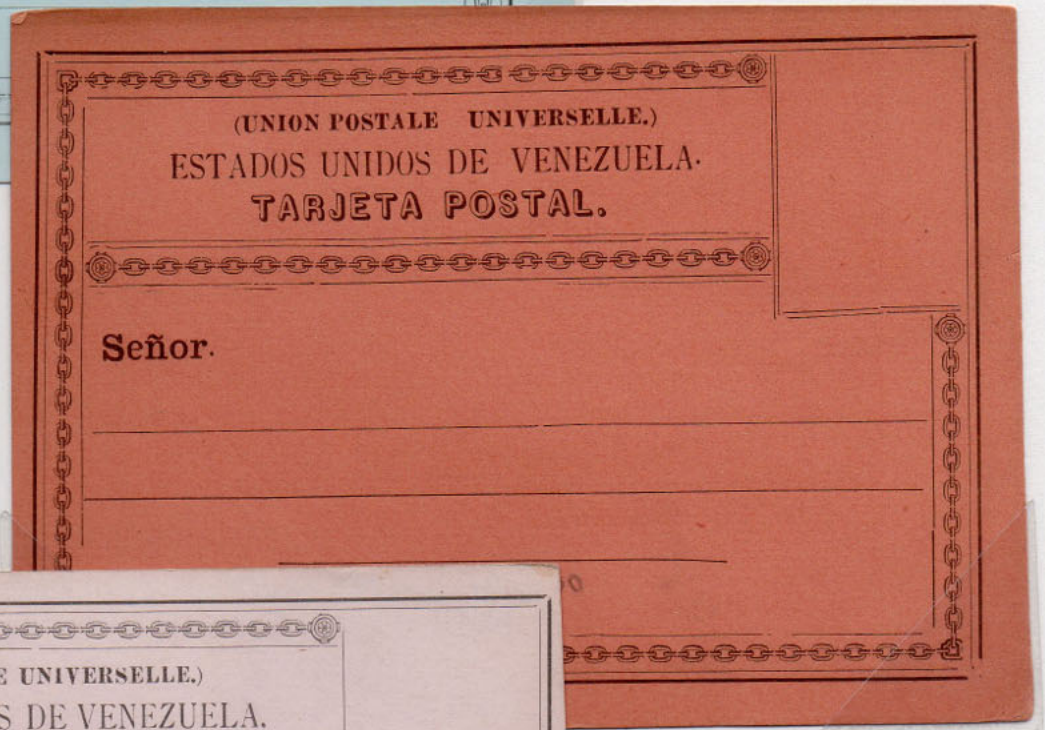
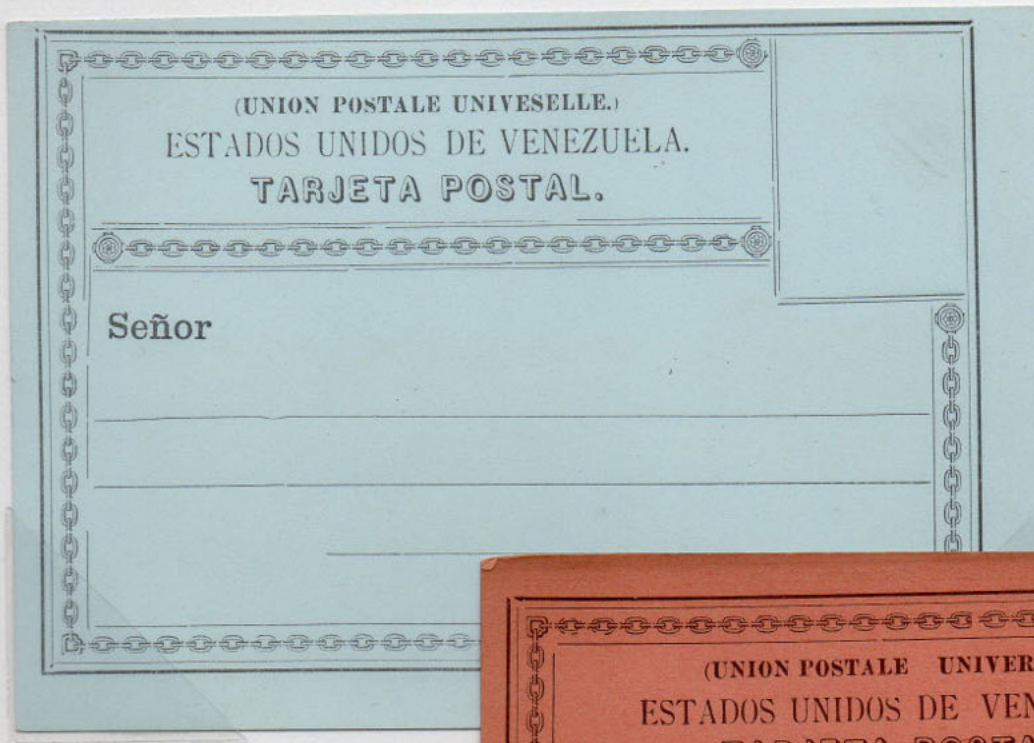
(UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE.)
ESTADOS UNIDOS DE VENEZUELA
TARJETA POSTAL.

Señor.

2.1 Second Printing (1883) – Paper Colors

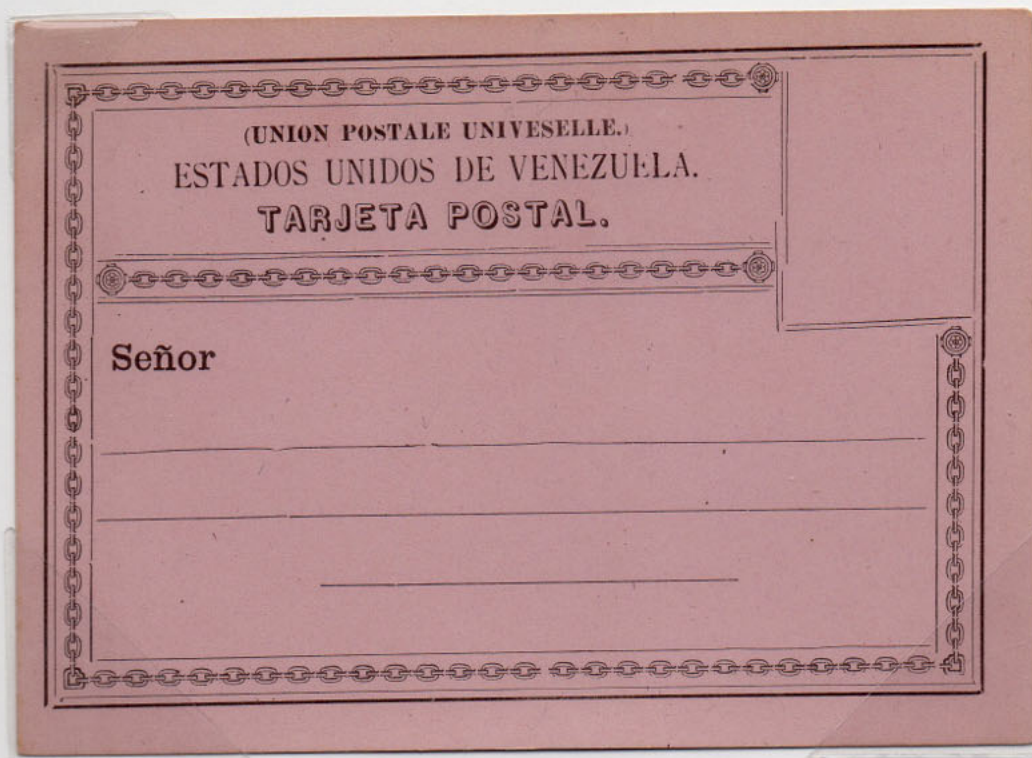


2.1 Second Printing (1883) – Paper Colors



3. Third Printing (Early 1884)

Type 3.1

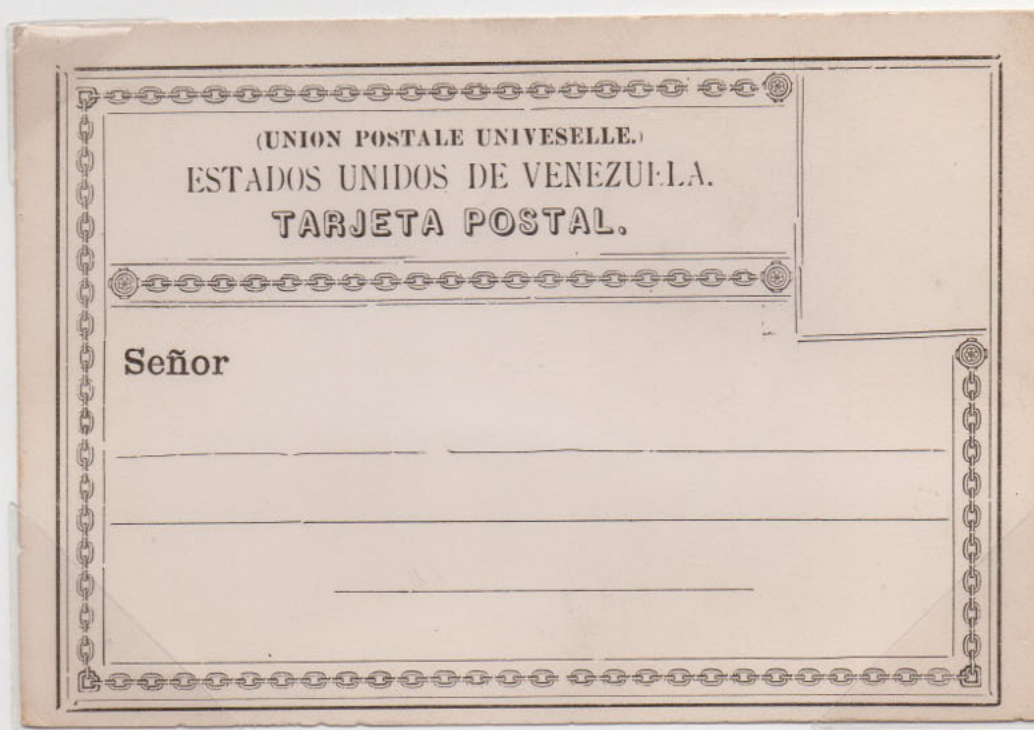


UA: Right side of D
FL: 49.5mm
SL: 68mm
RL: 112

- Missing R in UNIVERSELLE.
- Gap between 12th and 13th link in BC
- Gap between 2nd and 3rd link from right in TC.

Given the number of cards printed and the quality of the plate used, it was getting worn. That caused having slightly different variations between cards printed early in the process versus those printed late.

Oddly, evidence of worn out on this printing has only been found on 3.1 and 3.4.



Late Impression. Compare the inner frame lines and the line for the address with the card above.

3. Third Printing (Early 1884)

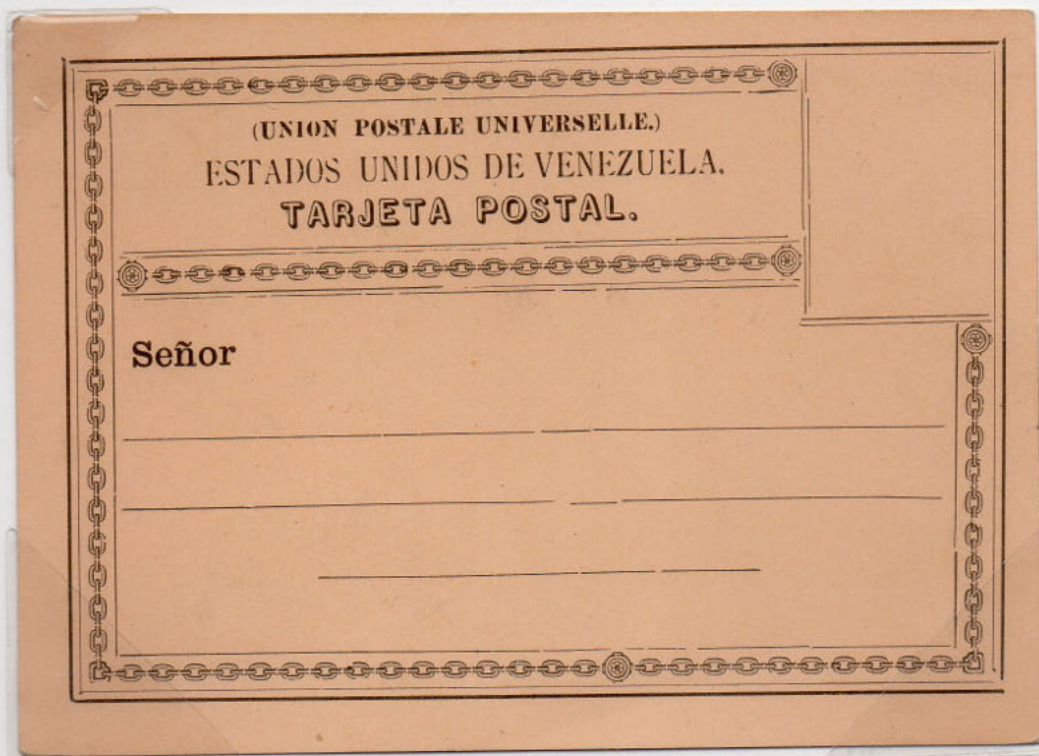
Type 3.2

UA: Left of D

FL: 53mm

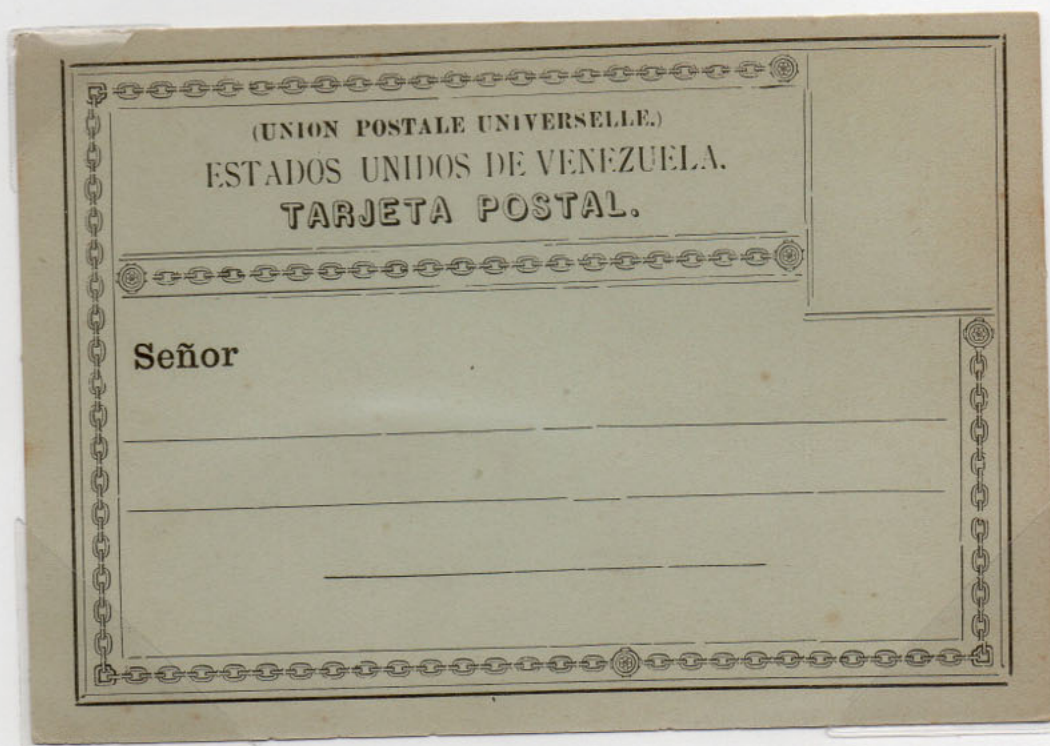
SL: 67mm

RL: 212



- 11th link from right on BC replaced by a rosette.
- 1st link from top on LC misaligned with its corner link.
- Break on 4th link from top on RC.

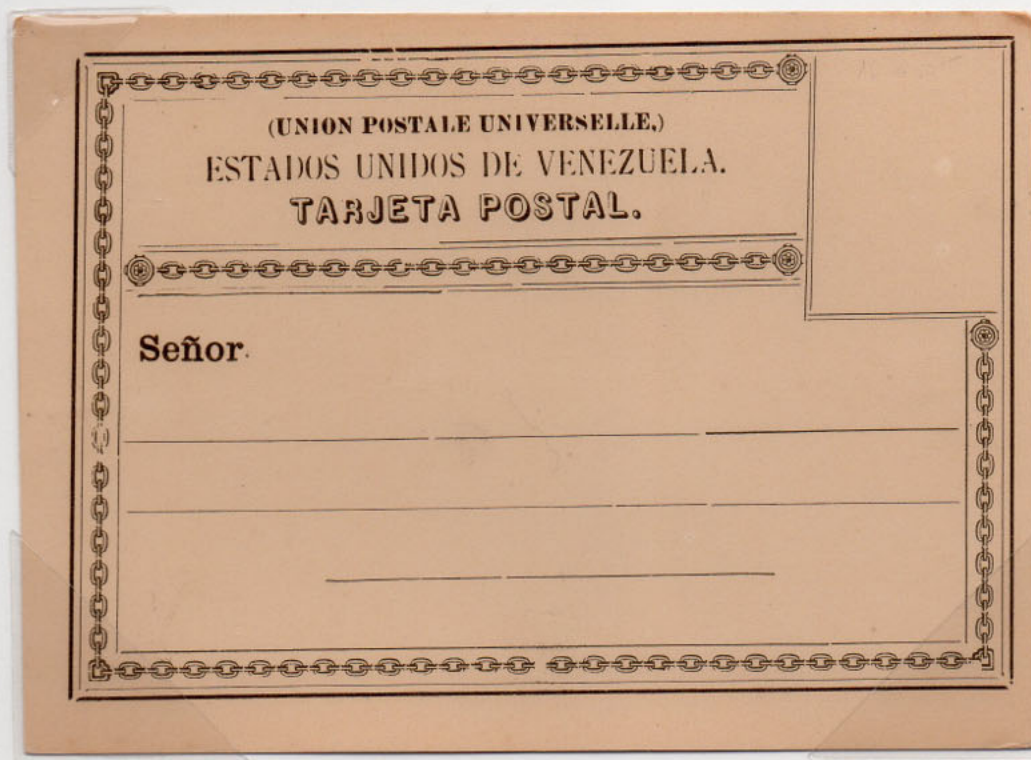
The third printing was printed on at least 20 different papers using only black ink.



So far, no clear signs of wear have been found on this transfer.

3. Third Printing (Early 1884)

Type 3.3



UA: Left side of D

FL: 51mm

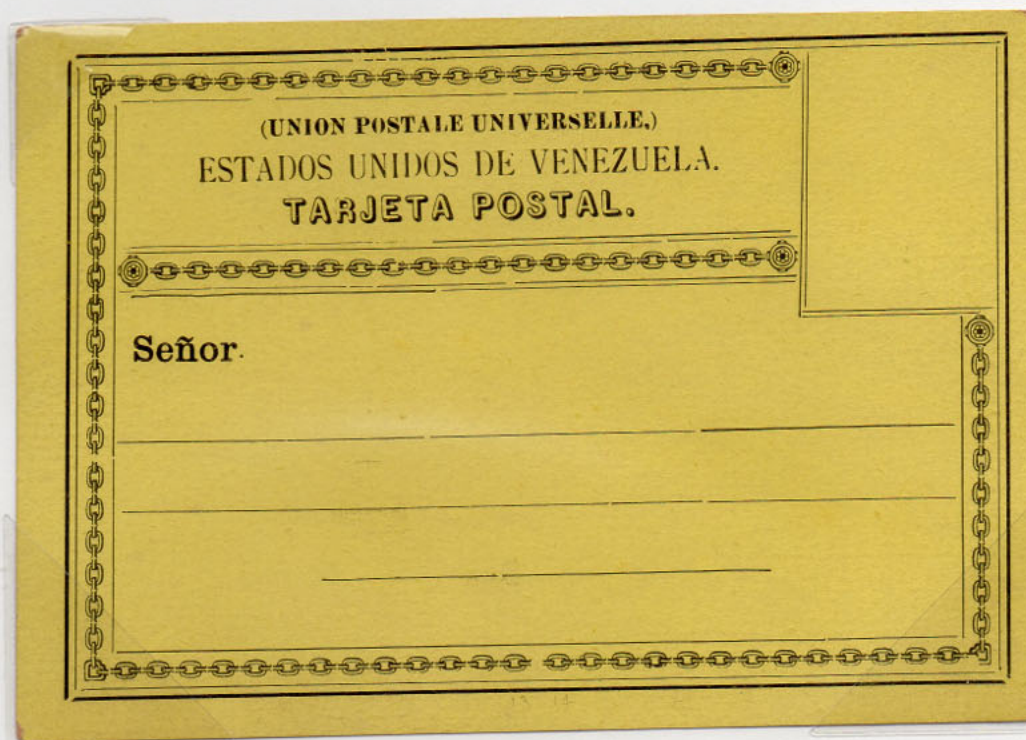
SL: 67mm

RL: 112

- Comma instead of period in FL.
- Scratch in OB and IB over POST of POSTALE
- Gap in BC between 13th and 14th link from right.
- Break on 7th link from bottom on LC with a gap below the link.

Statistical analysis made on several collections shows that this is the most common printing of the whole series.

For that reason, this printing was used as the control group to establish a scarcity level for the rest of the series.

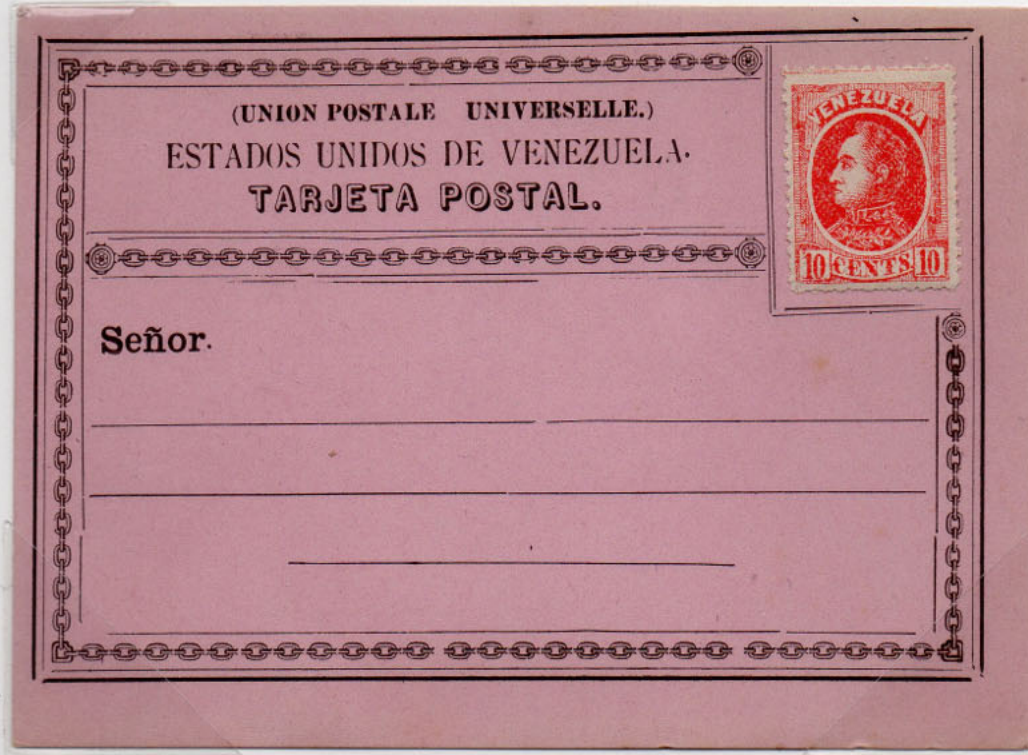


So far, no clear signs of wear have been found on this transfer.

3. Third Printing (Early 1884)

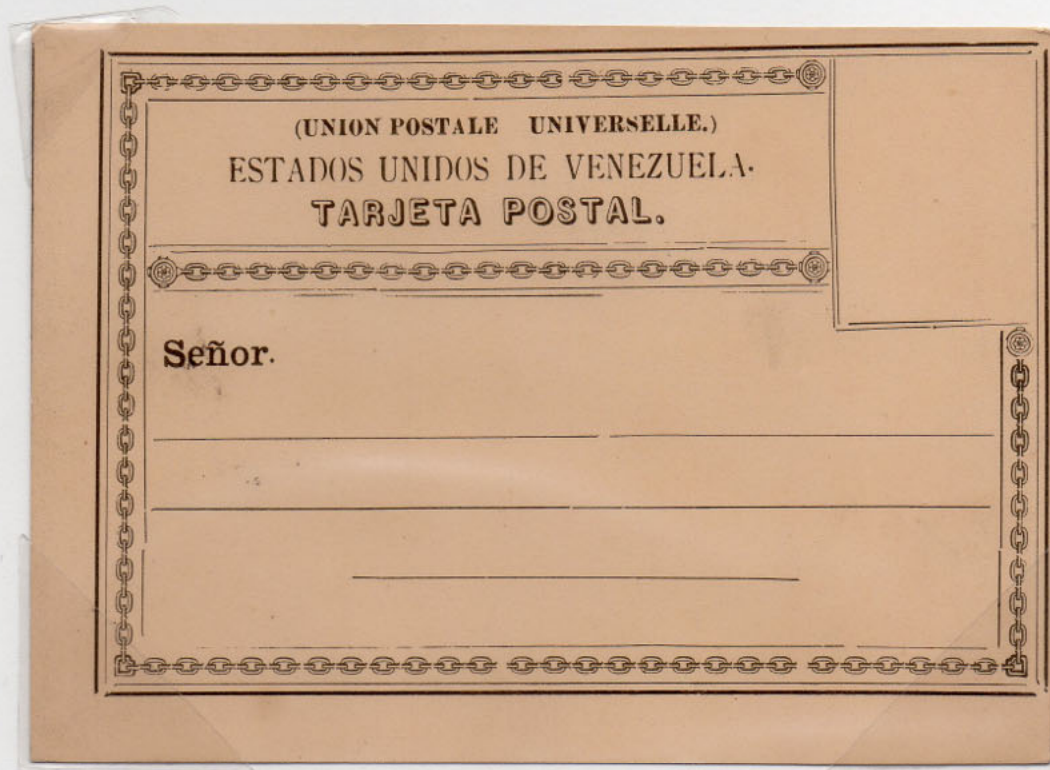
Type 3.4

UA: Over E
FL: 54.5mm
SL: 67.5mm
RL: 112



- Gap in BC between 6th and 7th link.
- Gap in BC between 15th and 16th link.
- High period after VENEZUELA.
- Break in 7th link from right in MC.
- Gap between 7th and 8th link from right in TC.

This transfer, and 3.1, are the only one in this printing that shows evidence of a worn out plate.



Late impression. The left side of the lower inner frame shows sign of wear.

3. Third Printing (Early 1884)

Type 3.5

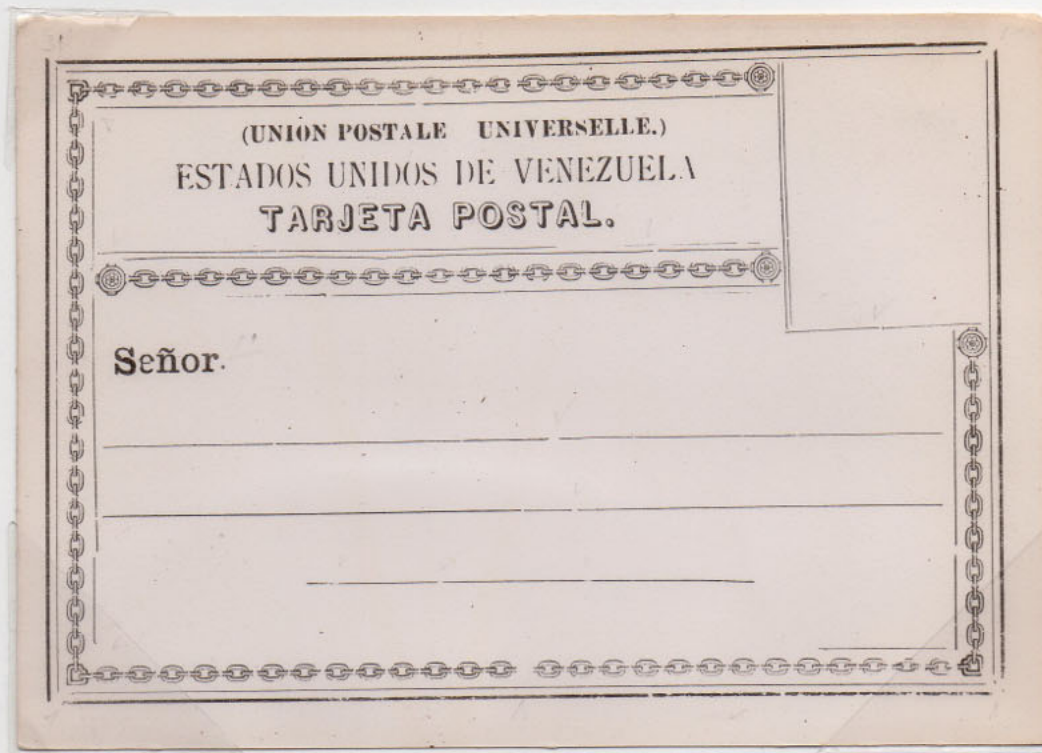


UA: Over E
FL: 54.5mm
SL: 67mm
RL: 112

- *Period missing on SL.*
- *Gap between 13th and 14th link on BC.*
- *Break on first two links on right on BC.*
- *Break on first two links on left on TC.*
- *Line above BC missing from 5th link from right all the way to the left.*
- *DHB missing showing only one line.*

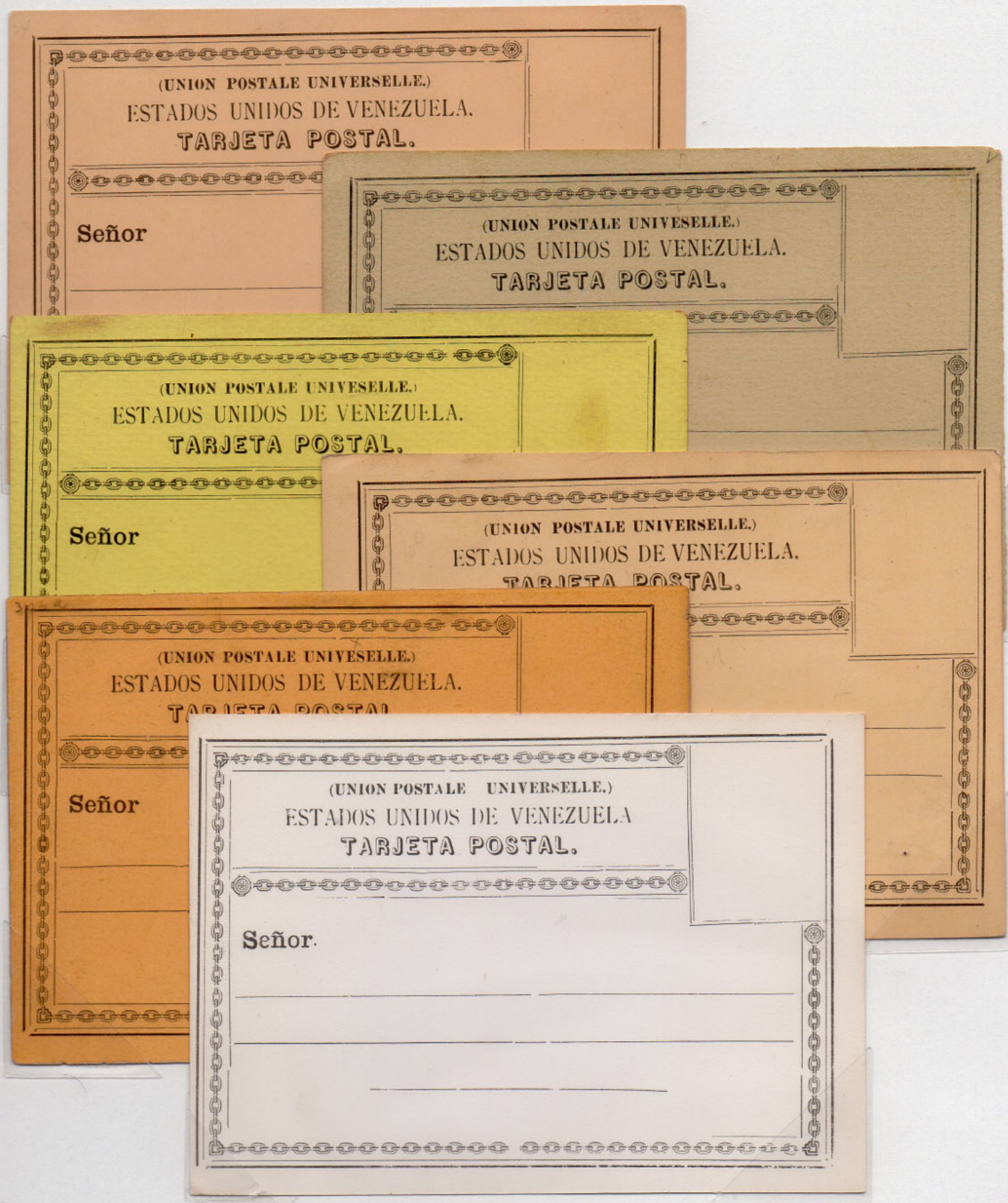
This transfer is a mystery. All the transfers seen so far show the same signs of wear, like an almost missing inner frame on the bottom.

It is possible that the plate worn up faster and all these transfers are actually "late impression." Until such pieces show up no further conclusions can be made.



So far, no clear signs of wear have been found on this transfer.

3.1 Third Printing (Early 1884) – Paper Colors



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TARJETA POSTAL.

(UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE.)
ESTADOS UNIDOS DE VENEZUELA.
TARJETA POSTAL.

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ESTADOS UNIDOS DE VENEZUELA.
TARJETA POSTAL.

(UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE.)
ESTADOS UNIDOS DE VENEZUELA.
TARJETA POSTAL.

Señor

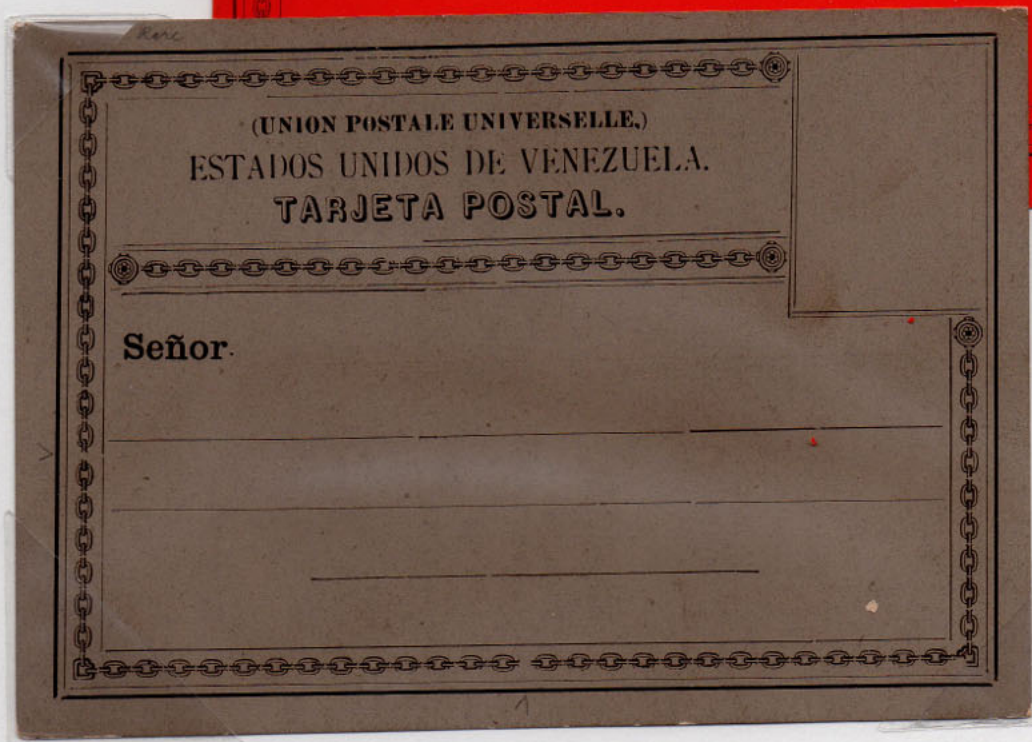
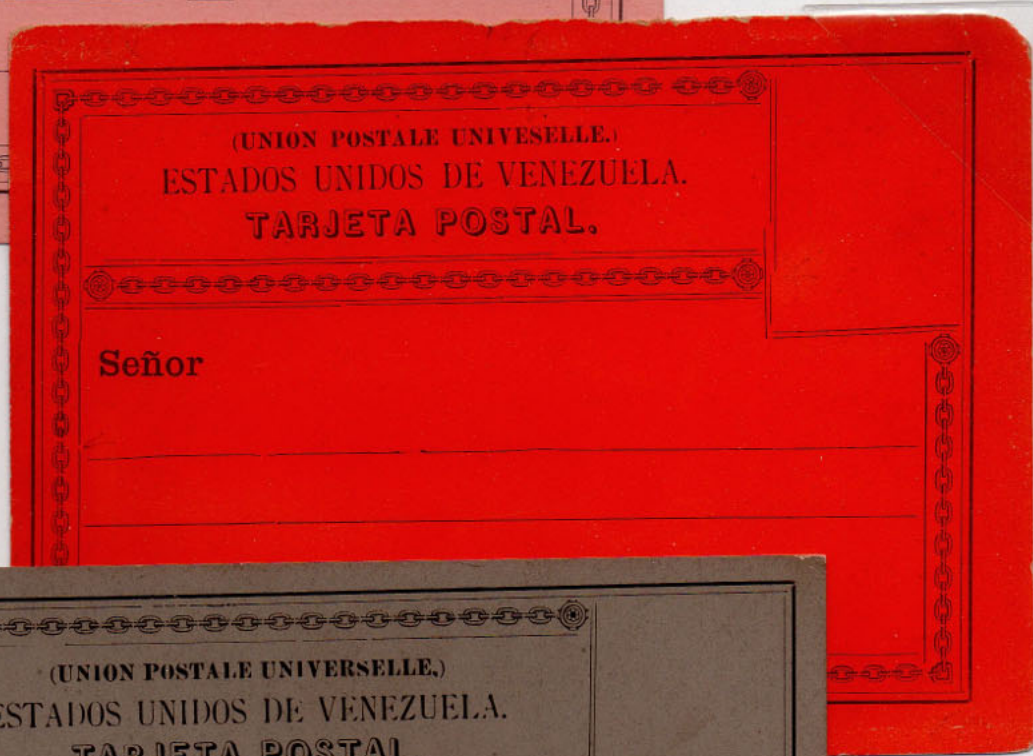
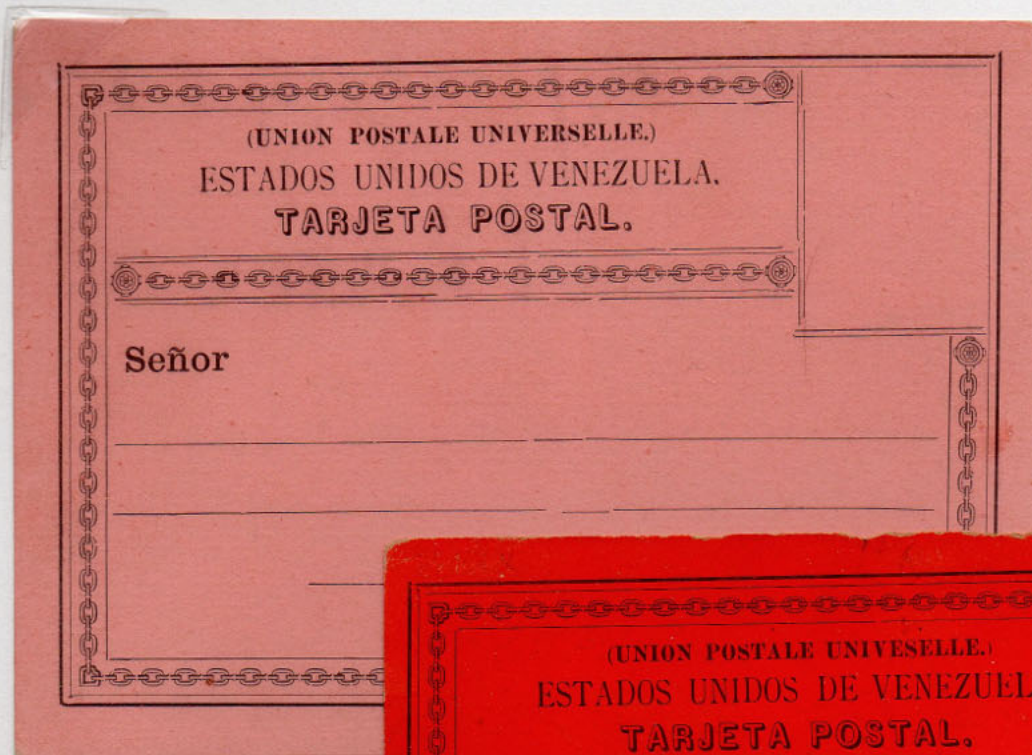
(UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE.)
ESTADOS UNIDOS DE VENEZUELA
TARJETA POSTAL.

Señor.

3.1 Third Printing (Early 1884) – Paper Colors

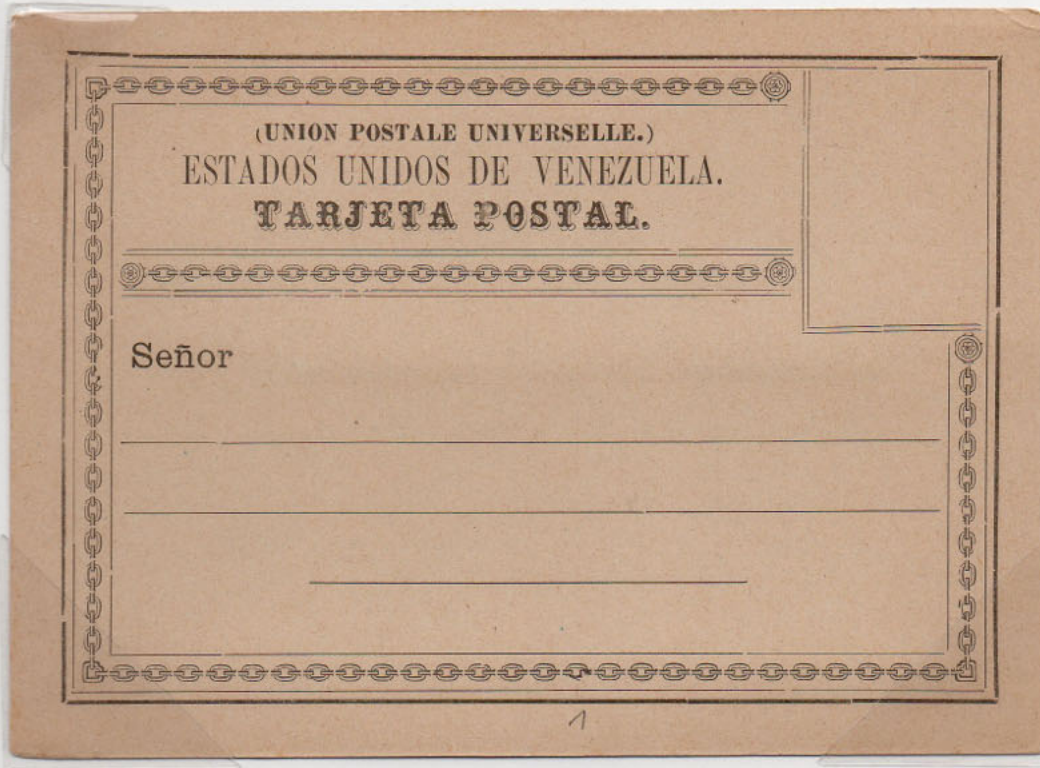


3.1 Third Printing (Early 1884) – Paper Colors



4. Fourth Printing (Late 1884)

Type 4.1



UA: Left side of D
FL: 51.5mm
SL: 70mm
RL: 212

- TARJETA POSTAL in solid, fancy letters.
- Break on 12th link from right on BC.
- Break on 9th link from top on LC.
- Breaks on left OB by 2nd links from top and bottom.
- Break on left IB by 2nd link from top.

The fourth printing was printed on at least 10 different papers using only black ink.

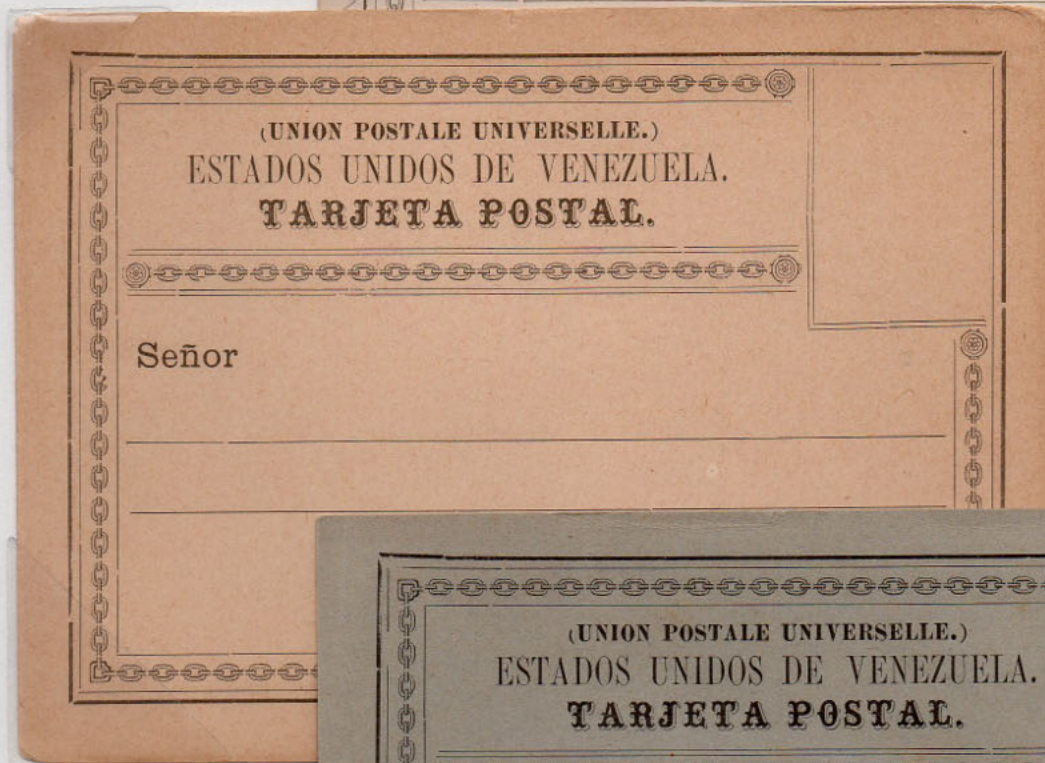
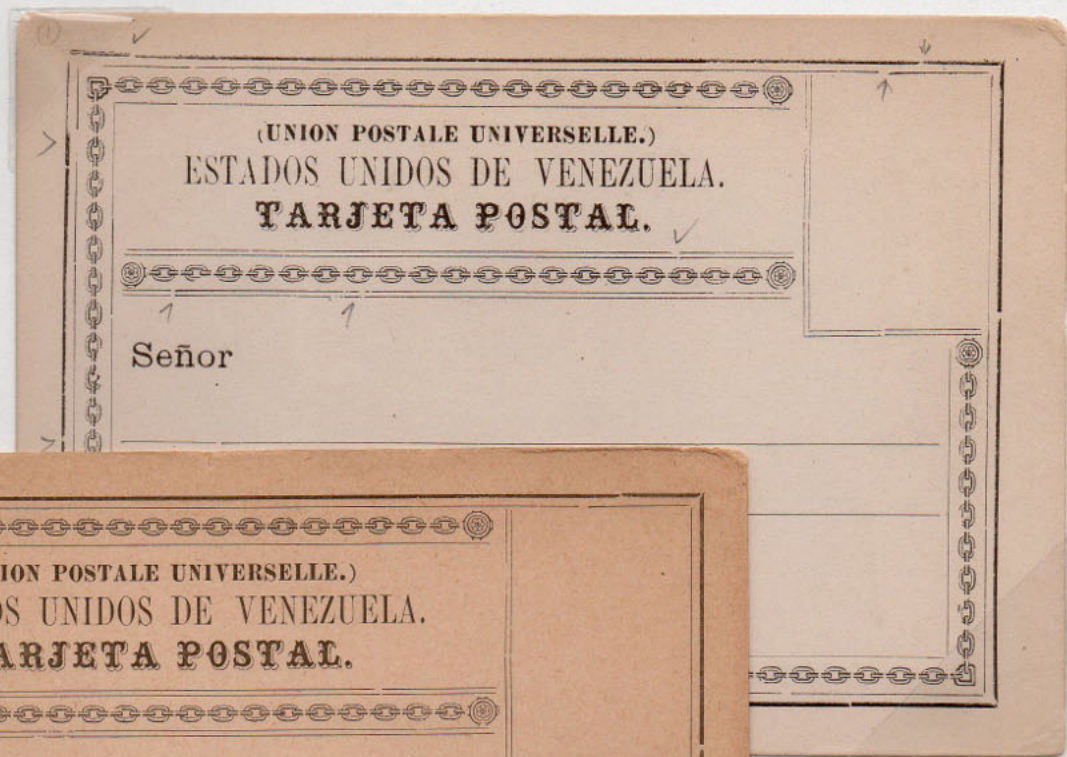
This printing is three times scarcer than the most common, Third Printing.

Only one transfer was used.



Forged Piece showing a faked PUERTO CABELLO circular mark.

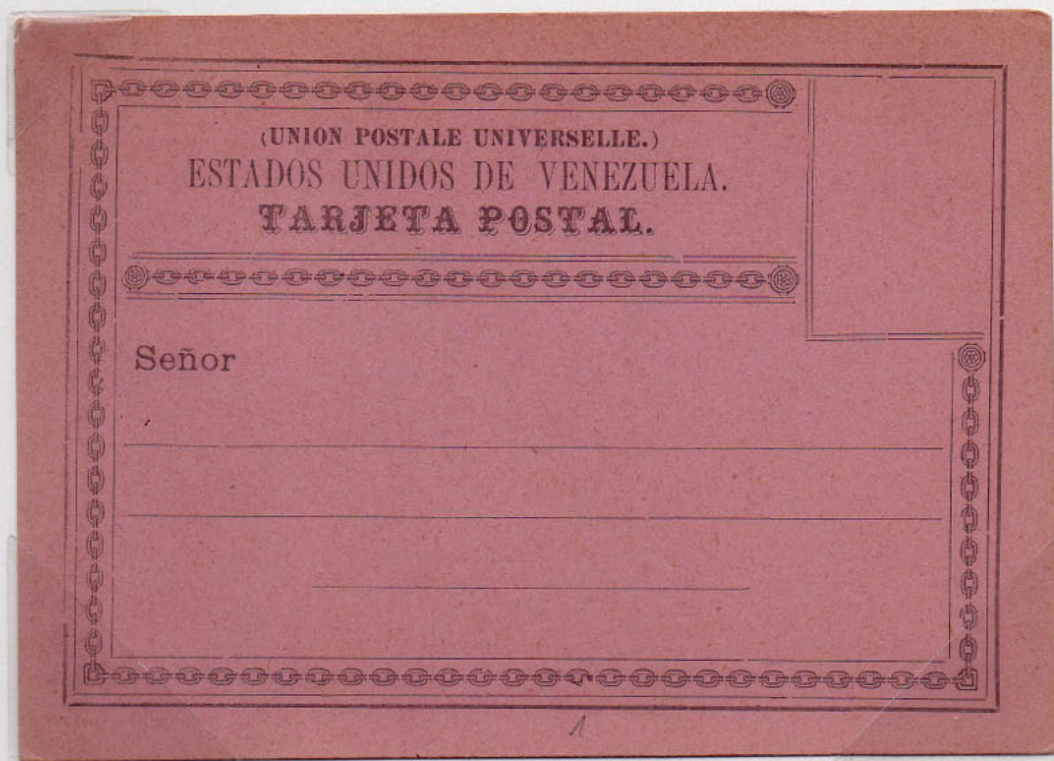
4.1 Fourth Printing (Late 1884) – Paper Colors



4.1 Fourth Printing (Late 1884) – Paper Colors



4.1 Fourth Printing (Late 1884) – Paper Colors



5. Varieties and Errors



The printing process was, in general, good. The plates, though, were not of the best quality so they worn out quickly and, some times, varieties for the same types can be found.

Errors are rare. I have discovered only one, shown below.

Type 3.3 from the Third Printing partially printed on the back.
Caused by taking it off the printing press and putting it over a still-wet copy.



The thickness of the paper may have had something to do with it too. It is by far the thickest paper I have found on the whole series, at 0.068mm versus an average of 0.037mm for the rest of the series.

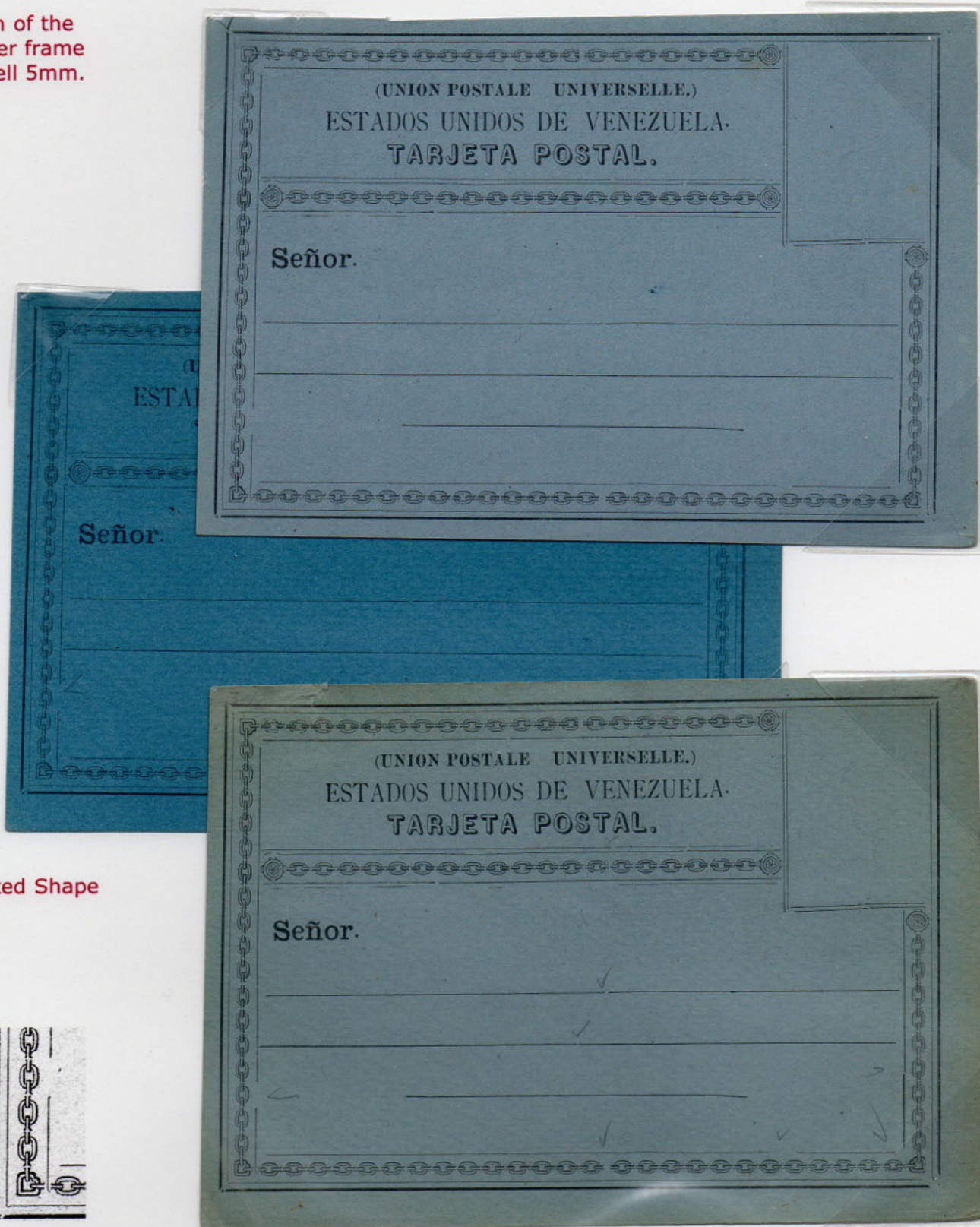
5. Varieties and Errors

Varieties has been found only on Printing II and III.

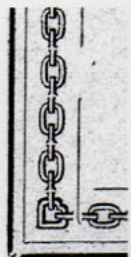
Printing II

Only one variety found, always on Type 2.5, in at least three colors.

The bottom of the left thin inner frame broke and fell 5mm.



Expected Shape



This variety

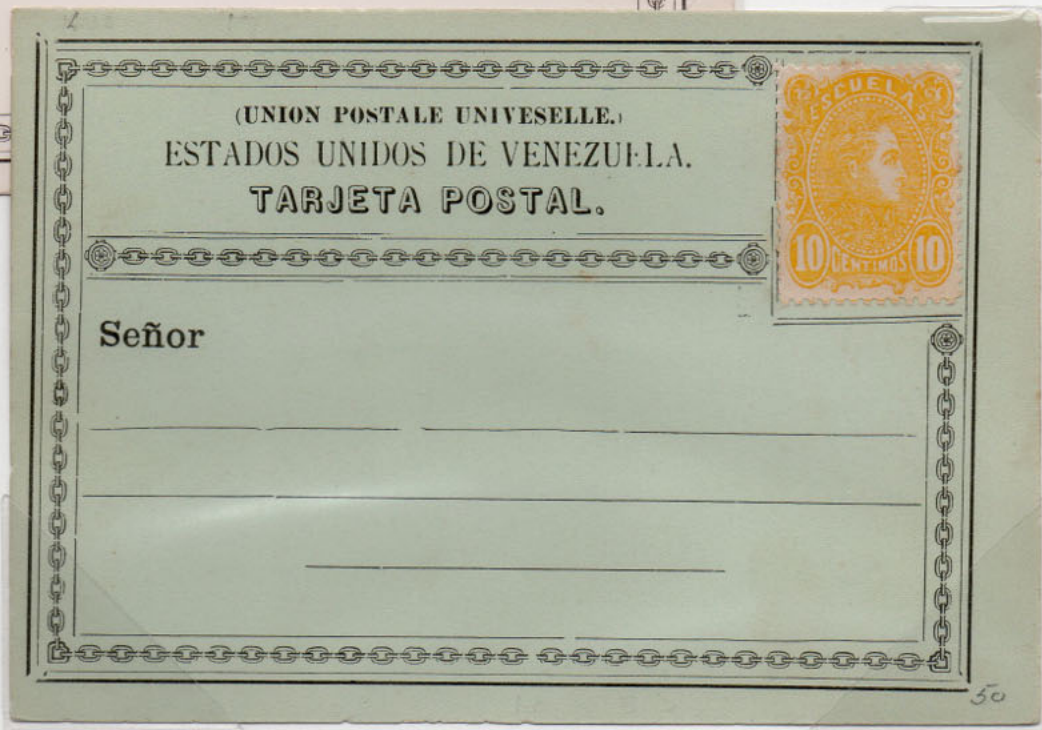
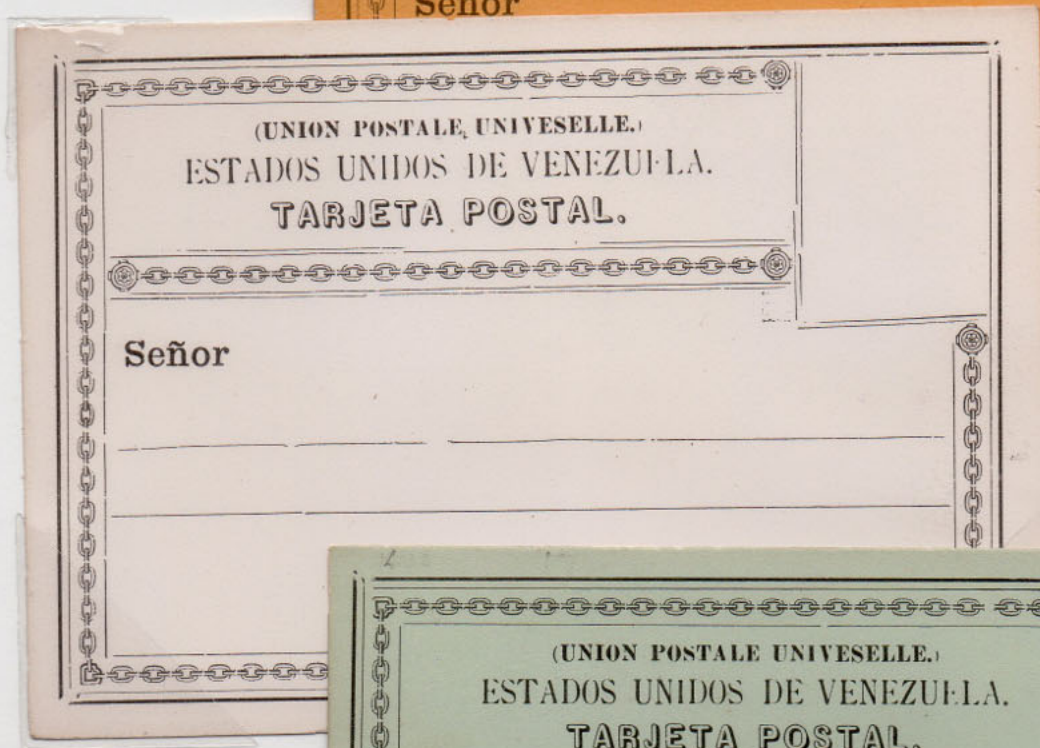
5. Varieties and Errors

Printing III

Three different varieties found.

Variety found on Type 3.1 in at least three different colors.

Small square shown
below the right
rosette of MC.



Expected Shape

This variety



5. Varieties and Errors

Printing III

Three different varieties found.

Variety found on Type 3.3.

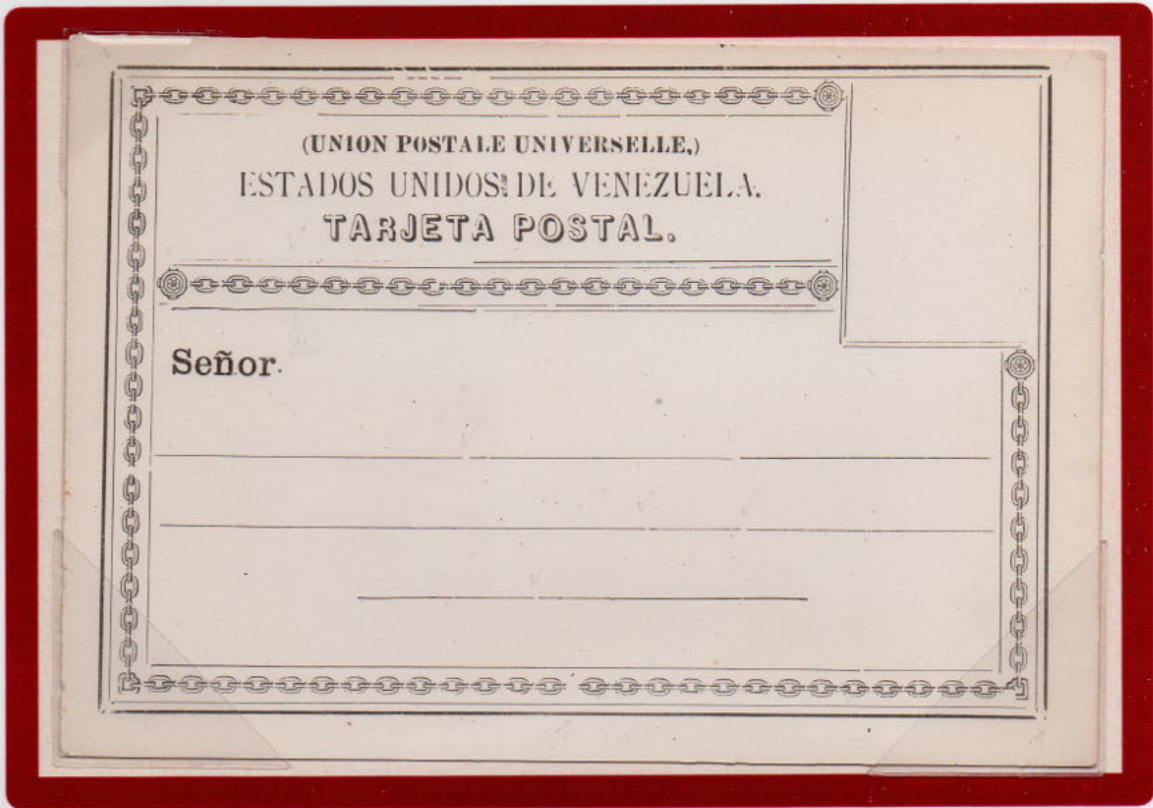
Expected Shape

LE UNI
OS DE
A B C

Black thick bar, similar to
letter I, after UNIDOS.

This variety

LE UNIV
OS DE
A B C



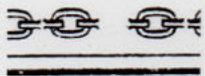
5. Varieties and Errors

Printing III

Three different varieties found.

Variety found on Type 3.5 in at least two different colors.

Expected Shape



Faint black bar, similar to letter I, between links 13th and 14th from right on BC.

This variety

