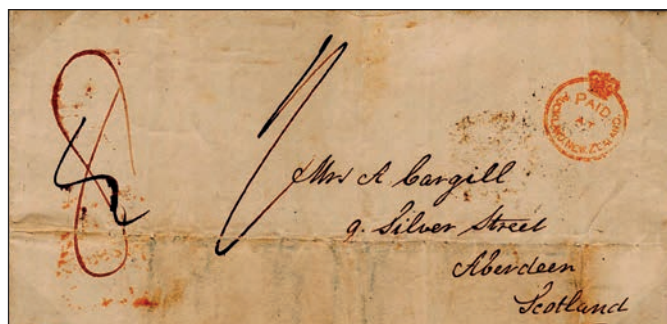


# *Fiji*

## *The Stamps and Postal History of the Islands*

*David Alford and John Ray*



*The Royal Philatelic Society London*

*12 January 2017*



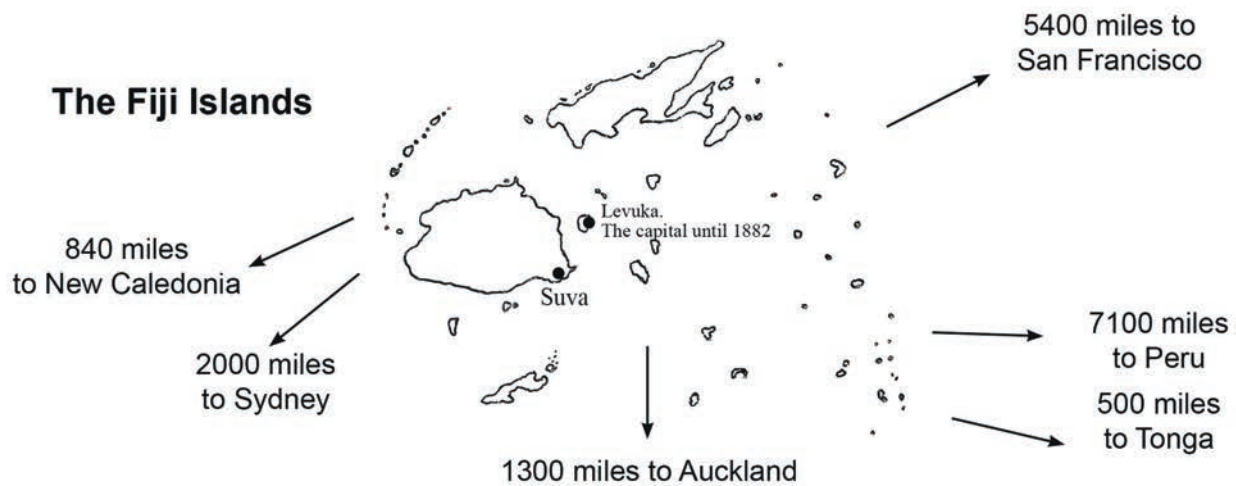
The conversation with Hon. President Frank Walton went something like: *Would John and you like to display Fiji?*

Answer: *Yes please* (after checking with John).

The next JR/DA conversation was: *How are we going to find 500+ sheets.*

Quickly followed by: *How are we going to reduce to 500+ sheets and still give a wide variety of material!*

So this is our display; we've attempted to show the A to Y<sup>1</sup> of Fiji. The map gives an idea of distances from other countries.



Fiji was first discovered by Europeans in the early sixteenth century, but the first major contact was by missionaries in the early nineteenth century.

## Geography

The Fiji islands are situated in the southern tropics, between the Equator and the Tropic of Capricorn, about 1,700 miles to the east of Queensland, Australia. There are over 300 islands in the group, of which more than 100 are inhabited, scattered over 500,000 square miles of ocean. The land area is just over 7,000 square miles, of which the two largest islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, account for almost 90%.

## A (very) Brief History to 1874

Archaeological evidence, in the form of pottery, indicates that Fiji may have first been settled around 1500 BC. The migrants are believed to have come from the New Britain area of Papua New Guinea and are thought likely to have been the ancestors of present-day Polynesians. Changes in pottery style suggest that there may have been a second wave of immigrants around 500 BC, though this is not certain. Melanesians arrived in large numbers between 1000 and 1800 AD.

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<sup>1</sup> We couldn't manage Z; there isn't one in the Fijian language.

The first European to sight the Fiji islands was Abel Tasman, in 1643, with his ships Heemskerck and Zeehaen. He found no anchorage and did not land. In 1774 Captain Cook sighted the island of Vatoa, while bound for the New Hebrides, and a landing party left gifts for the islanders who had fled from the shore. After the Bounty mutiny in May 1789 Captain Bligh and his companions rowed past the Yasawa islands, in the area known today as Bligh Water, pursued by canoe-loads of Fijian warriors. The first sustained contact with Europeans was not until the sandalwood rush of 1804–1810. Settlers, including missionaries, continued to arrive and in the 1830s the Methodists, based at Lakeba, rendered the Fijian language into writing. By 1870 there were about 2,000 Europeans, mainly British and American, in Fiji. The indigenous population was in disorder, with rival tribes vying for supremacy, and there were sporadic outbreaks of war. In 1871 the self-proclaimed King of Fiji, Cakobau, established a government at Levuka. This was unsuccessful and, to prevent anarchy and bloodshed, Cakobau offered to cede Fiji to Great Britain. The British government accepted and, on 10 October 1874, Fiji became a Crown Colony.

**The display is chronological with deviations.**

### Frame 1. Pre-stamp mail

This section starts with missionary covers from and to the UK from various places in Fiji. The mission stations were on outer islands to start, but the missionaries moved as they became more accepted—and less likely to be killed and eaten!



*A Lyth correspondence entire. It took four months to Sydney.  
Unfortunately, it then took another, 10 months to Fiji!*

### UK Consulate post—a box in the office

By this time the British Consulate was acting as unofficial postmaster. Mail was collected from, and delivered to, ships but there was no internal delivery service.



## Frame 2. The Times Express Newspaper Mail.

There was no organised post in Fiji until *The Fiji Times* proprietors needed to get the newspapers to readers. Hence was born the Fiji Times Express Post of 1870–71.



*The Miss Dods #2 Cover.*

## Frame 3. The first official Government post office

A major political event in Fiji during this earliest period was the takeover of the formal government by one of the chiefs of the various tribes, Cakobau. The administration was mostly in the hands of non-Fijians. There were probably no more than 50–100 non-Fijians. The first official stamps were issued in 1871 and the FT Express was suppressed. Three values were issued in Sterling despite the working currency being the US dollar. This was remedied in 1872.



*The first official stamps of Fiji incorporating CR for Cakobau Rex.*

## Frames 4–5. The 1874 Annexation of Fiji by the United Kingdom

VR overprints were used at the takeover. Owing to a lack of type, the printer used two different faces, the so-called Gothic in the top three rows and Roman in the lower two. *Se-tenant* vertical pairs are recorded, mostly unused. Very occasionally, odd Gothic stamps were used in the Roman rows and vice versa. He was also short of the letter A and full stops.

*Se-tenant vertical pair.*



## Frame 6. 1876–77 wove and laid papers

Fiji continually needed to save money, so the original CR printing plates were used again. This time, however, the overprints are actually underprints since the printer used a previously printed VR sheet before “overprinting” the stamps.



*The folded 6d seems to prove the printing of the VR o/p before the stamp because the VR is underneath the fold.*

## Frames 7–8. 1878 with VR engraved plates. Revenues

For the 1878 onward issues, it was decided to use VR instead of CR. Again to save cost, the C was removed and V inserted.

*This issue used the original CR design of 1871, with the C drilled out of the boxwood die and replaced with V.*



The 3d value had been unnecessary from 1871, but each time had been overprinted with 6c or 2d. When new plates were made this continued until the 3d plate was again recut with 2d. The 4d value was first overprinted on the 2d plate then the 1d and finally had its own completely new plate.






### Frame 9. 1881 high values. Print Office stationery

*... It being found desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to have a postage stamp of a higher value than those now existing....* John B. Thurston, Colonial Secretary.



*Die Proof.*

### Frames 10–12. Key Plate. 1891 UPU issue. Cake Fair. 1891 Pirogue and replacement plate issue

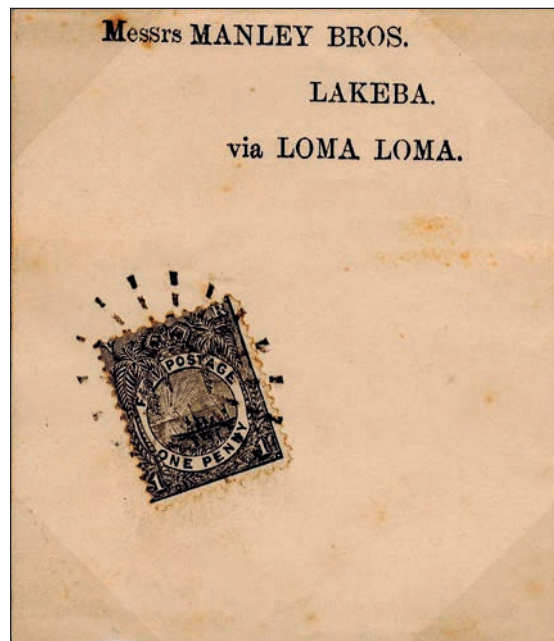
Fiji.			
General Post Office,			
Suva, 789			
Date of Issue	Number Issued		
 1d.	1 <sup>st</sup> March 1892	4,984	
 2½d.	31 <sup>st</sup> December 1890	10,000	
 5d.	25 <sup>th</sup> July 1892	5,000	
 FIVE PENCE	30 <sup>th</sup> November 1892	3,970	Harmer
 FIVE PENCE	31 <sup>st</sup> December 1892	2,970	Barclay

Fiji joined the Universal Postal Union in 1891.

*Post Office sheet showing the UPU overprint issues.*



In 1891 the 1871 design was supplemented by a new design based on the Seal of Fiji which showed a canoe.



*The Pirogue issue. All newspaper wrappers were allowed at the 1d newspaper concessionary rate, irrespective of destination.*



*Cake Fair. Possibly the inspiration for the design of the 1891–1902 Pirogue issue.*



### Frames 13–14. QV and KE VII Postal Stationery

Essays for a postal stationery envelope were produced in 1891 but the first postal stationery to be issued, comprising postcards, reply cards and a letter card, only appeared in 1895. In 1903 the 1½d postcards and reply cards were overprinted HALF PENNY following a change in postal rates and in 1904 postcards and reply cards with the head of King Edward VII were issued.

A formular registered envelope, in three sizes, was introduced in 1910, followed in 1911 by franked envelopes (1d postage + 3d registration) in sizes G, H2 and K, bearing the head of King Edward VII.



*Early use of the letter card, uprated for transmission to Europe.*



*The ½d local rate postcard cancelled on the first day of issue.*

### Frame 15. King Edward stamps

This was the first issue printed by Thomas De La Rue & Co. for Fiji which was one of the early adopters of the DLR key plate system.



*One of the plate blocks in the display.*

### Frames 16–20. King George V Stamps

Again, key plates were used for all values.

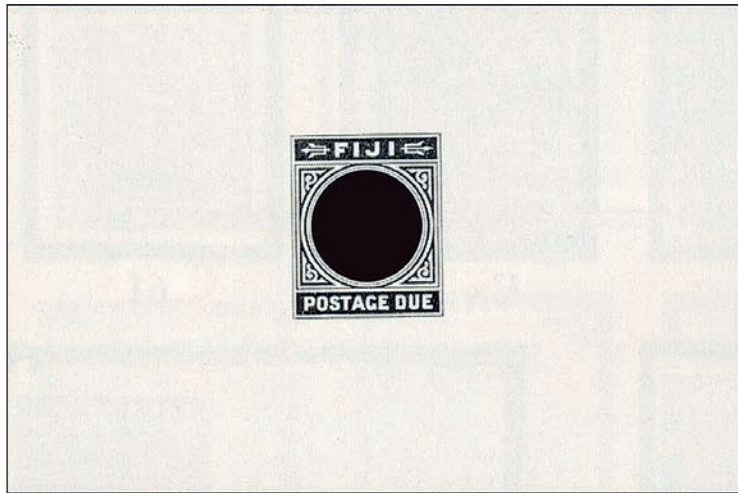
Proof, colour trials and specimens and all the recorded plate block numbers are displayed together with issued varieties.

Fiji issued two values for war tax purposes in November 1915. The tax stopped in June 1920. At the end of the war tax period the postal rates doubled to the postage + tax rate.



*The inverted overprint.*

The first and second issues of postage due stamps were issued during the reign. The vast majority were withdrawn and destroyed.

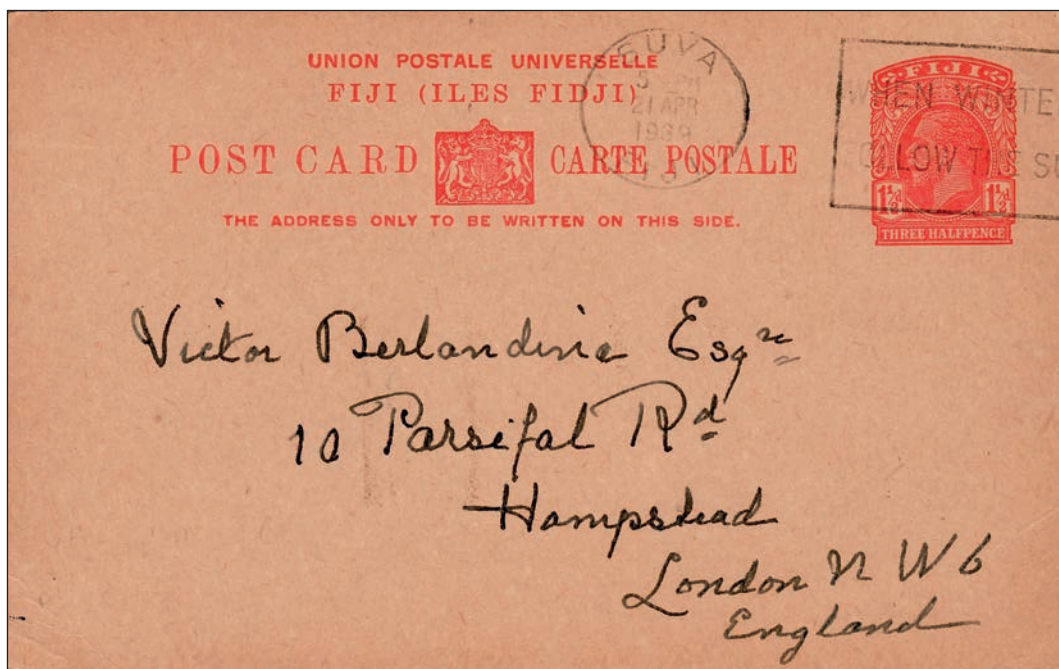


*The second Postage Due issues of 1918.*

There was one commemorative issue for the Silver Jubilee of King George the Fifth.

### **Frames 21–22. King George V Postal Stationery**

Postage envelopes, registered envelopes, a postcard, a letter card and a newspaper wrapper were issued during the King George V period, all of them printed by Thomas De La Rue & Co.

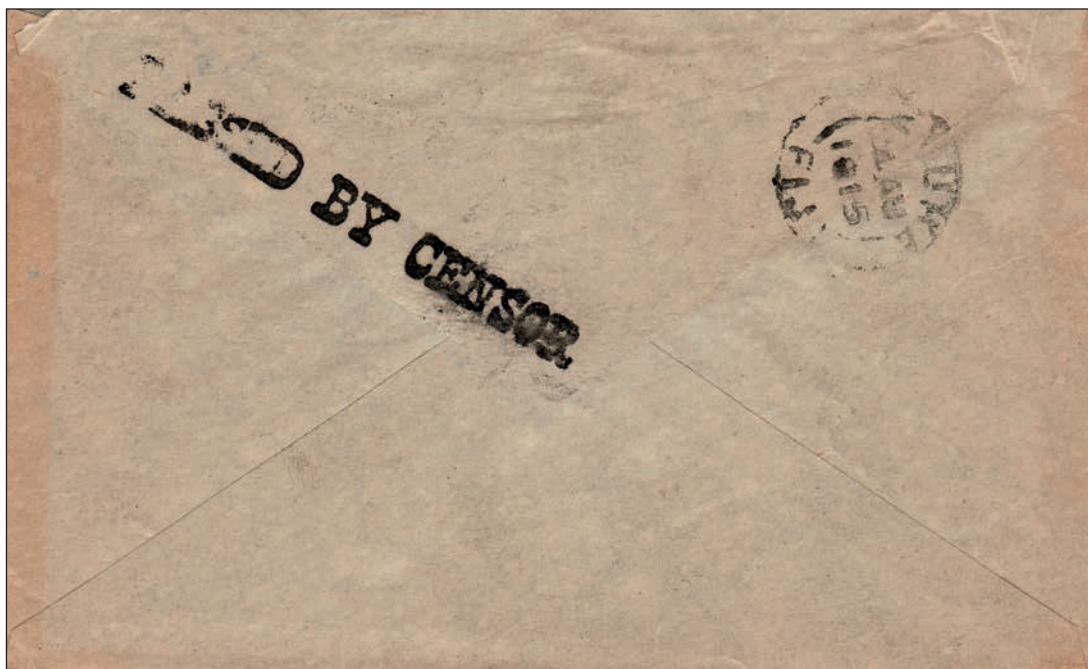


*The 1928 1½d postcard, used to London on 21 April 1939.*



### Frame 23. Civil censorship

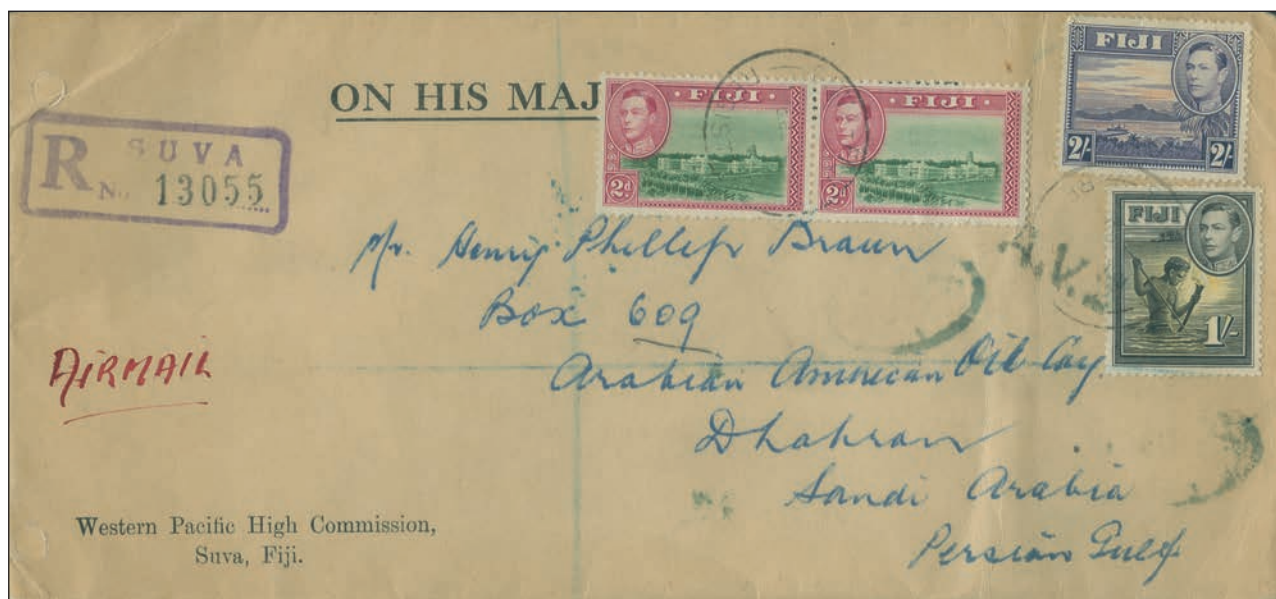
Fiji introduced censorship of mail during WWI and reimposed it between 1939 and 1945. During the latter period a variety of censors' handstamps and re-sealing labels was used and are shown in the display frame.



*Censored cover from Suva to Levuka, August 1915.*

### Frames 24–29. King George VI Stamps

This section concentrates mostly on the usage of the stamps of the reign with a high degree of variety and commercial use.



*1949 cover from Suva to Saudi Arabia showing an unrecorded AV2 type for Fiji.*

### Frame 30. King George VI Postal Stationery

Registered envelopes with the head of King George VI were issued in 1940, in sizes G and H2 and denominated 2d postage + 4d registration fee.

A series of formular air letters printed in New Zealand were sold at post offices at ½d each between 1944 and 1947. The first postal stationery aerogrammes, denominated 3d and 7d and printed by McCorquodale & Co., were issued in 1947.



*3d aerogramme uprated with 3d cutout and 1d adhesive to pay the 7d rate.*

### Frames 31–40. Queen Elizabeth II and Republic of Fiji

Definitive stamps bearing the head of Queen Elizabeth II but making use of the KG VI designs (½d, 2d, 6d, 8d, 1/-, 2/6d, 10/- and £1) were issued in two stages in 1954. These were followed in 1956 by completely new designs for the remaining values (1d, 1½d, 2½d, 3d, 1/6d, 2/- and 5/-); the 5d and 1/5d were discontinued. New values of 4/- and 10d were introduced in 1959 and 1963 respectively, and new designs for the ½d, 6d, 8d, 1/-, 2/6d, 10/- and £1 were issued in 1961. The 8d and 4/- were printed in photogravure, the other values by the traditional recess process. Further new designs, for the 3d, 1/6d, 2/- and 5/- stamps, were introduced in 1962 and a new 9d value, using the same design as the 8d, was issued in 1963. The watermark for the 1d, 2d, 6d, 10d, 1/-, 2/6d, 10/- and £1 was changed from multiple script CA to multiple St. Edwards crown, block CA, in stages between 1962 and 1966, and the 4/- was reprinted in error in a distinct new shade of green in 1964. The transition from the KG VI designs to completely new designs, new values and a new watermark took some twelve years. Mercifully, there are no reported perforation varieties, though some inverted or sideways watermarks are known.

Five new series of definitives were issued between 1968 and 1995, the 1968 set being reissued after a mere six months with new values, following the change to decimal currency in 1969. Some of these later definitives are complex: the 1971 Birds and Flowers set (the last to incorporate the head of the Queen) exists with two different watermarks, both upright and sideways, and the 1979 Architecture set is also found with two watermarks plus the added complications of year imprints and the use of two types of coated paper.

The 1995 Land Birds definitives are relatively straightforward: only one watermark, only one type of paper, no year imprints (apart from the new 18c value issued in 2003) and no reported varieties. Until, that is, overprinting commenced in 2006. Very large quantities of stamps had been ordered in denominations which corresponded with the then-current postal rates. All was fine until 2001, when postage rates were increased, the inland rate for example rising from 13 cents to 17 cents and an airmail letter to zone A from 31 cents to 34 cents. Initially the new rates were met by using combinations of stamps and by the inclusion of appropriate denominations in commemorative sets, but eventually the decision was taken to make use of the considerable stocks of obsolete stamps and overprint them with new values, commencing in March 2006. Inexplicably, the 1 cent stamp was the first to be overprinted, to the extent that stocks were exhausted; belatedly it was realised that a 1 cent stamp was required after all and in May 2007 a 1 cent overprint on the 6 cent stamp was issued. Truly obsolete stamps, commencing with the 6 cents, which had been the inland postcard rate when first issued, were overprinted; by mid-2014 the stocks of 6c, 13c, 23c and 31c stamps had all been used up and attention was turned to the 44c stamps. There have been occasional aberrations, for example the overprinting of some 63c and 81c stamps in 2016 whilst stocks of the 44c were still on hand. There are many variations of overprint, for example in the size and number of the obliterations and the width of the settings; the height and thickness of the numerals can also vary. Some varieties are thought to have occurred on one or two sheets only, and new ones are regularly discovered. Collection and study of these overprints is a considerable and ongoing challenge!



*The 23c on 44c overprint, issued in October 2016. Possibly the result of a misunderstanding.*



Commemorative stamps illustrating Fijian flora and fauna, and events of local significance, have been issued since the 1960s. A selection of these is included in the display.



*Miniature sheet illustrating the diversity of communities in Fiji.*

Postal stationery issues proliferated during the QE2/Republic period. The change to decimal currency, followed by frequent increases in postage rates, resulted in a multiplicity of aerogrammes, registered envelopes and postage envelopes, the latter being re-introduced in 1963 after an interval of over 30 years. Eventually, undenominated “postage paid” envelopes, a postcard and an aerogramme were introduced.



*The 10d aerogramme of 1962 with misplacement of the blue overlay.*

## Frames 41–42. Instructional marks and resealing labels

Many instructional marks have been recorded. Some are specific to a particular post office, for example “Received in damaged condition at Matuku P.O.” Others are of a more general nature, e.g. “Return to sender”. The earliest recorded resealing label dates from 1886.



*Re-sealing label signed by H.P. St. Julian and dated 8.11.1886.*

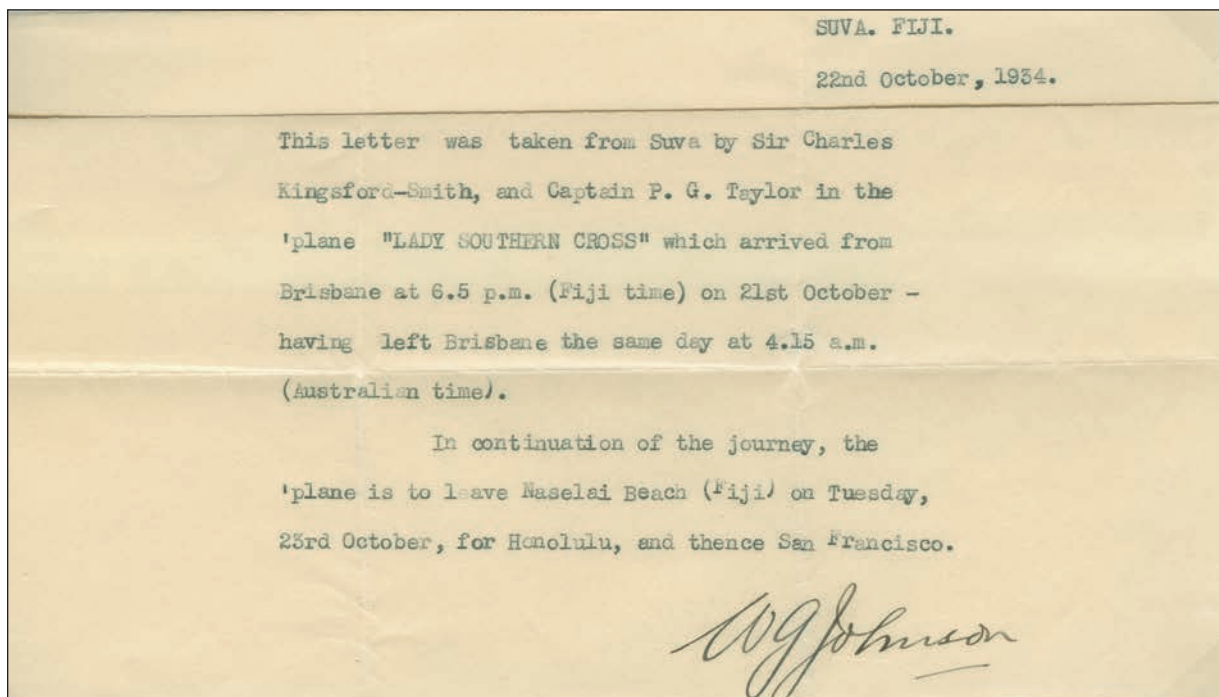
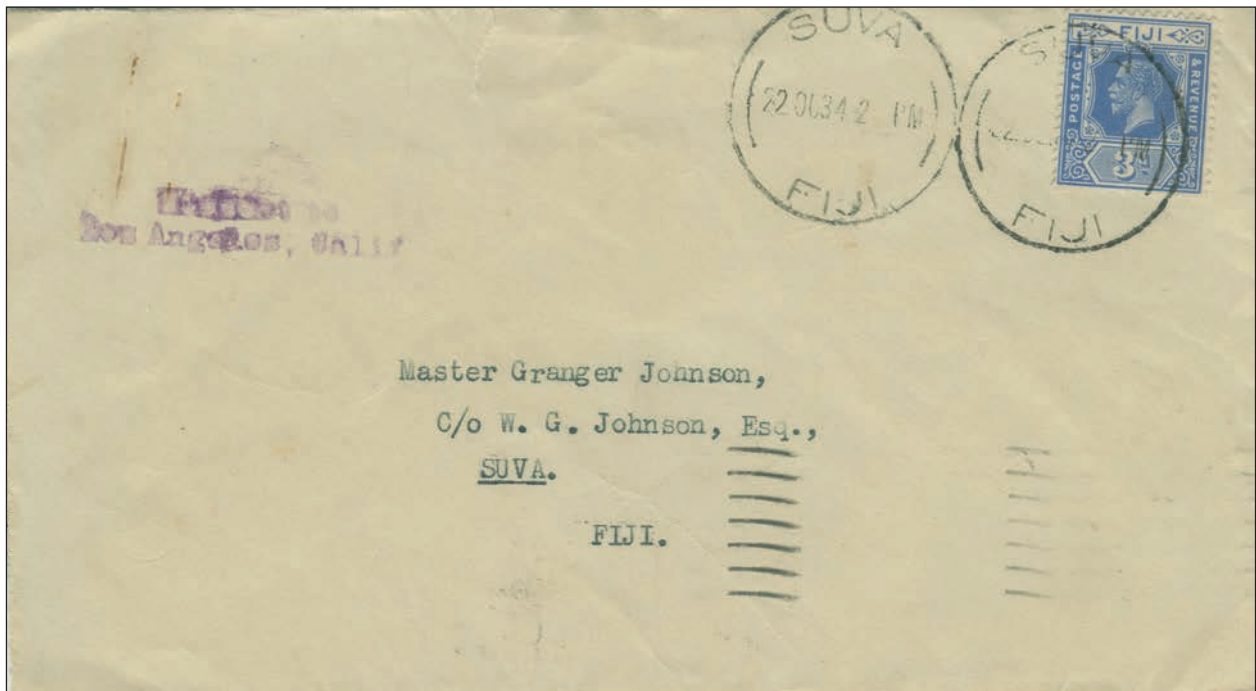


*“INSUFFICIENT POSTAGE FOR AIRMAIL”.*



## Frames 43–44. Air Mail First and Special Flights up to the start of WWII in the Pacific

During the period, no aeroplanes were capable of crossing the Pacific Ocean non-stop, but Fiji was well placed as an intermediate landing place. Apart from one month in 1941, just prior to Pearl Harbor, there were no scheduled air mail services into or out of Fiji.



*Cover and letter sent on the first air mail flight captained by Charles Kingsford Smith from Fiji.*

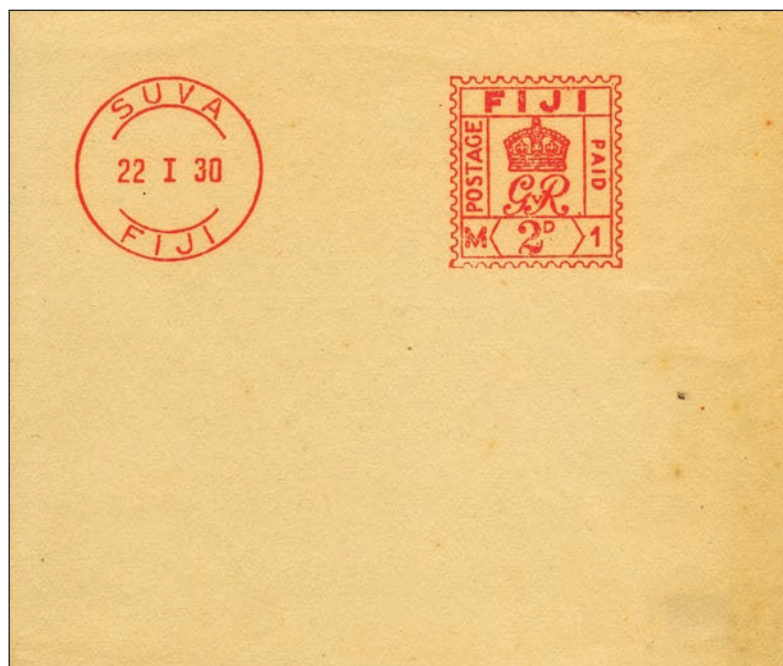


**Frames 45–48. Machine cancels, postage meters, registration cachets and registration labels**

The first machine used to cancel stamps was a hand-operated device acquired from New Zealand in 1909. Postage meters were introduced in 1930 and the first registration cachet, an oval “Levuka - Registered” mark, was sent out to Fiji in 1871. Rectangular registration cachets are known from 1899 and the use of registration labels dates from 1922.



*Machine cancellation with slogan, 19 October 1967.*



*Specimen of meter M1, as sent to the UPU.*

## Frame 49. Post Offices

Some post offices are relatively grand affairs, others are more modest. A selection of photographs, with examples of their cancellations, illustrates the point.

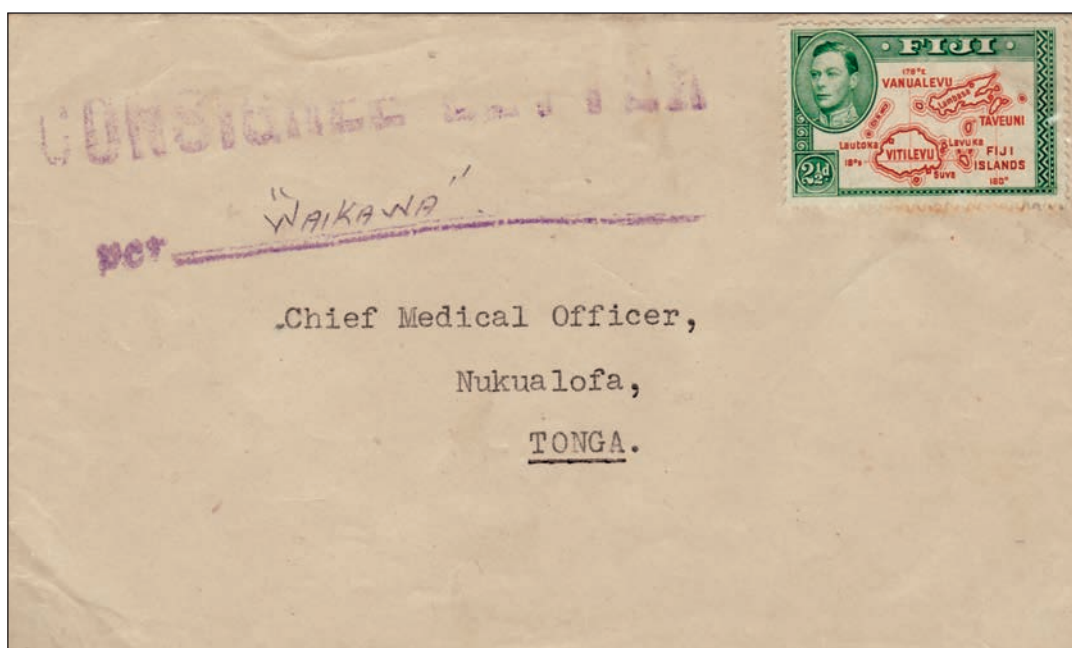


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*Ba Post Office in August 2010.*

## Frame 50. Ship mail including wreck covers

Inter-island shipping was a mainstay of postal communications within Fiji but with the development of air strips on the larger islands it has been to some extent supplanted. Letters of up to 30 grams are carried by air, where a service is available, without surcharge. There has unfortunately been the occasional case of vessels running aground and wreck mail such as that from the *Tui Lau* has been recorded.

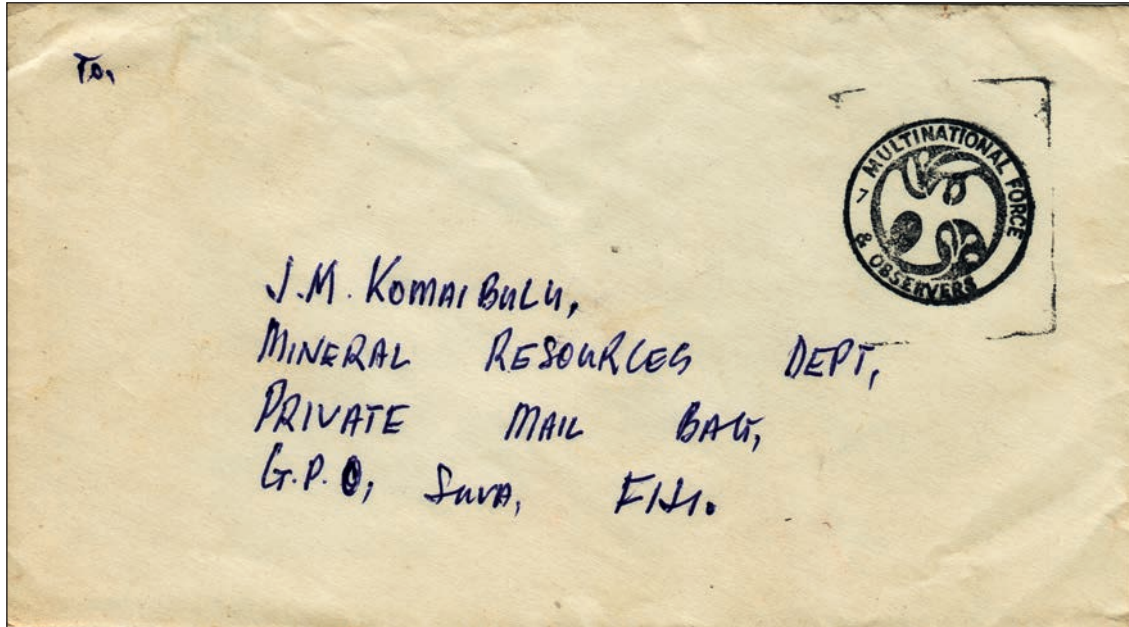


*Consignee letter per SS Waikawa, c. 1946.*



### Frame 51 military mail

Fijian soldiers, commanded by New Zealanders, fought alongside US forces in the Solomon Islands in the Second World War. In more recent times Fijians have served as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and as part of the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai. Mail from these locations is shown here.



*Cover from Sinai received in Suva on 6.1.1983.*

### Frame 52 Official franked mail

Mail from Government departments and official agencies such as hospitals and schools is carried without the need for postage stamps; the application of a frank or cachet serves to authenticate it.



*Department of Inland Revenue pre-printed frank.*



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... my studies reveal Fiji as a really “BIG” country,  
worthy of the attention of any serious student....

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