

# Chilean Disinfected Mail

There were only two times when Chile disinfected mail and applied appropriate hand-stamps. They were during the cholera pandemic of 1886-1888 and a localized bubonic plague outbreak in Antofagasta in 1904. This exhibit illustrates the markings for these two events.

Other than these two events, the only other way Chilean mail would be disinfected would be when they were disinfected outside of Chile for local reasons.



Valparaiso (1 December 1832) to Bordeaux, France (29 May 1833)

*Purifie a Toulon*

Carried by the French warship *La Bonita*, a 26 gun corvette. The ship sailed round the Horn into the Mediterranean where is stopped in Algiers. The letter was transferred to a steam despatch boat and taken to Toulon. As plague was endemic in North Africa at the time, letters emanating from these parts were disinfected (*purifie*) and a handstamp in red was applied.

Palmer, Derek, "¡El Cólera!", *Chile Filatelico*, Septiembre-Octubre 1947, Año XX, pages 100-101.

Vandervelde, V. Denis. "Chile: The Disinfection of Mail, 1887 - 1904" *Pratique*. Autumn/ Winter 1976, v. 2, pages 82-85.

## Cholera Pandemic in Chile 1886-1888

The first and only cholera epidemic in Chile took place between 1886 and 1888. It had originated in India in 1817, extended to Mecca and Alexandria, the Mediterranean, and reached Chile from Argentina. In spite of sanitary measures adopted by the government, the epidemics swept the country, with an estimated 56,838 patients and 23,395 dead (41% lethality rate). Two outbreaks were observed: the first lasted 203 days (1886-87), the second 121 days. Duration varied from town to town, from 16 to a maximum of 288 days.

Even though cholera had been shown to be a water transmitted disease, old habits were hard to replace. Mail was disinfected by heat – accomplishing nothing.

In view of the failure in the first outbreak of the closure of the gaps and mountain passes, of the sanitary cords, quarantine stations and disinfection of mail, in the second outbreak Chile totally eliminated these measures, concentrating all its efforts on the treatment of the sick.

Decree 88 of February 8, 1887 authorized the expenditure of \$259.70 to purchase mail fumigating apparatus from Alejandro Guzman Castro for use within the Santiago post office. The best-known Chilean marking of mail disinfection is the “butterfly” cachet of Santiago. The text reads DESINFECTADA / POR CALOR (disinfected by heat) in black.

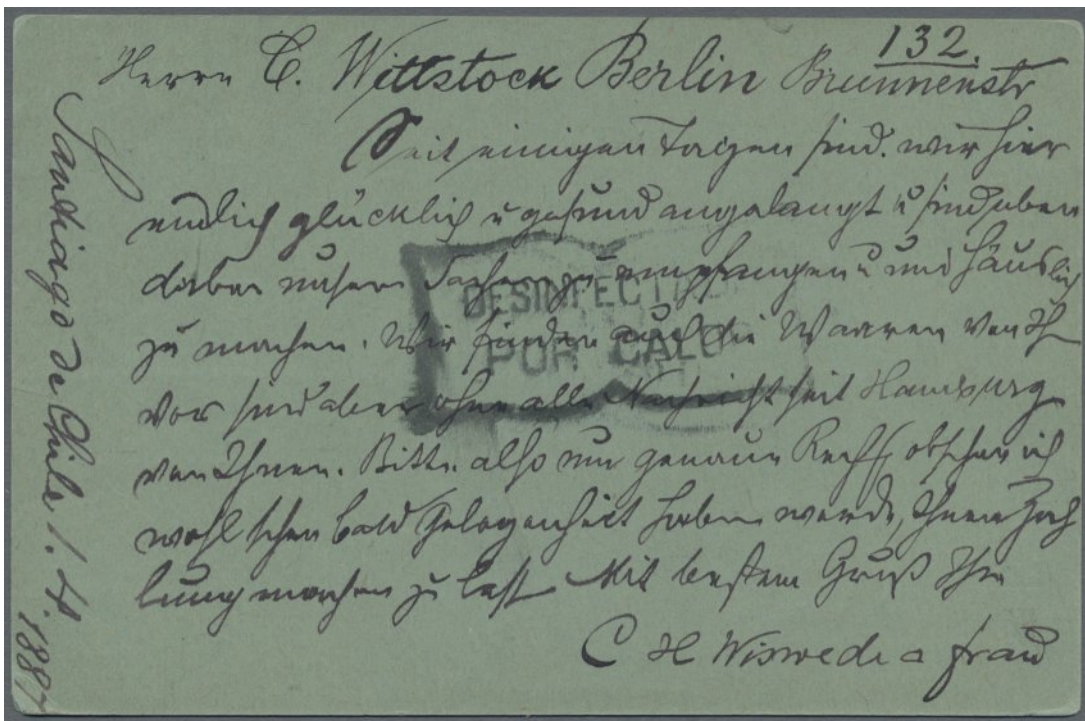


Earliest known use of the butterfly handstamp -- 23 Feb 1887

It is rare to find the butterfly handstamp on the front.

# Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly - Postal Cards

Even postal cards were disinfected.



Santiago (11 April 1887) to Berlin, Germany

# Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly Foreign Destinations

Mail to foreign destinations were disinfected and the butterfly handstamp was applied



Santiago (29 April 1887) to France

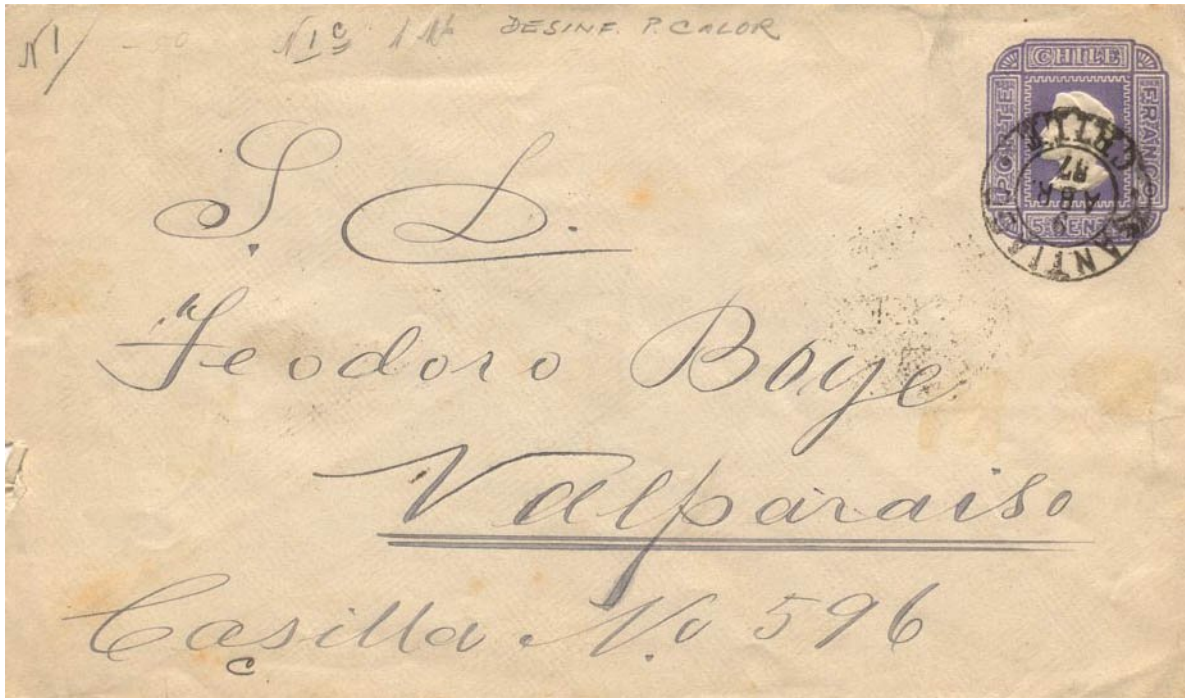
# Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly

25 March 1887



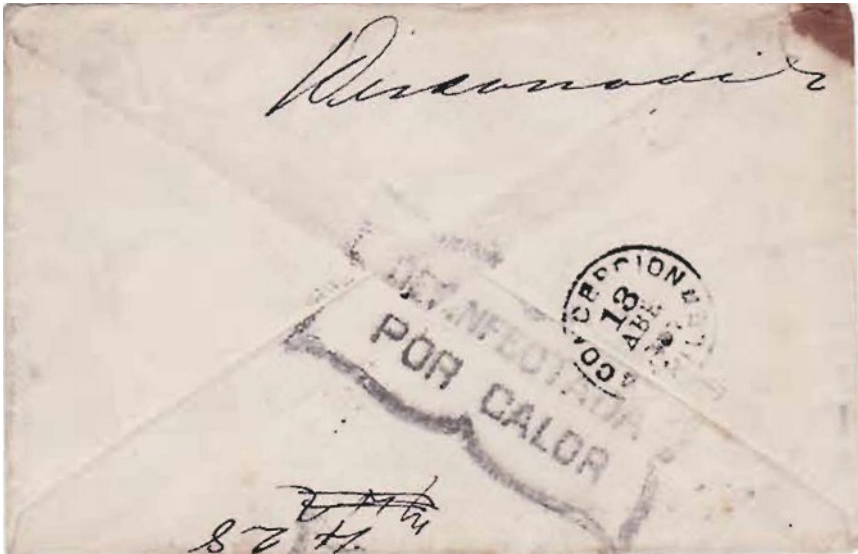
Santiago (25 March 1887) to Putaendo

**Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly -- 9 April 1887**



Santiago (9 April 1887) to Valparaíso

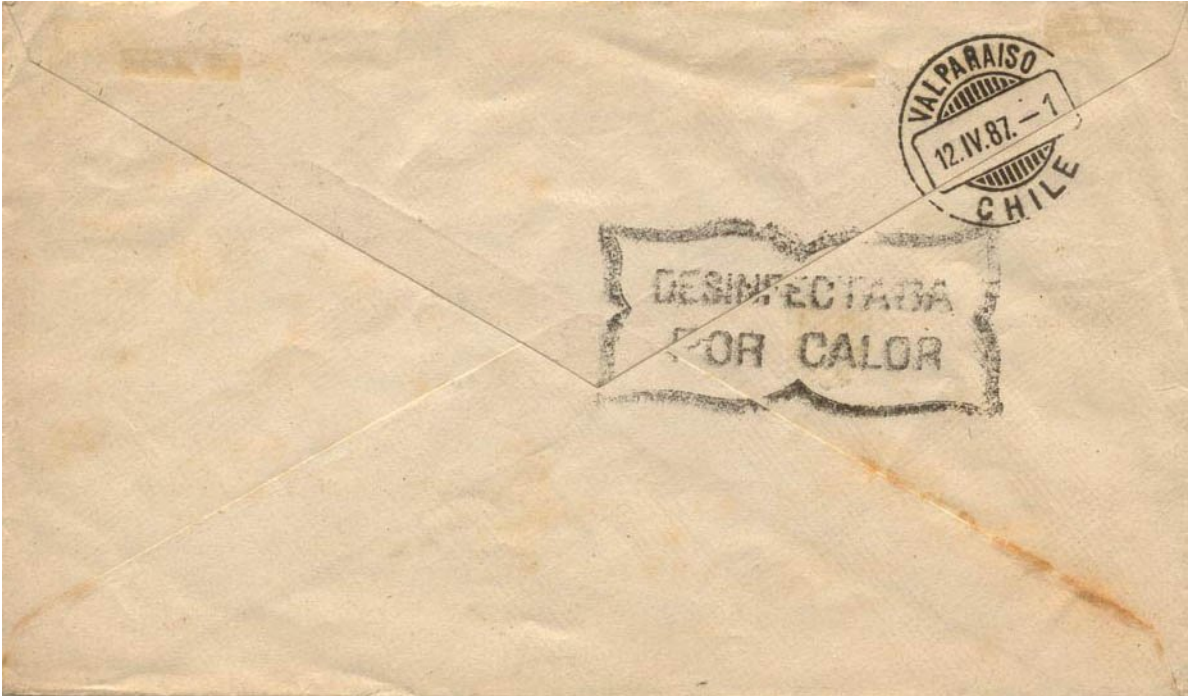
**Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly -- 11 April 1887**



Santiago (11 April 1887) to Concepcion (13 April 1887)

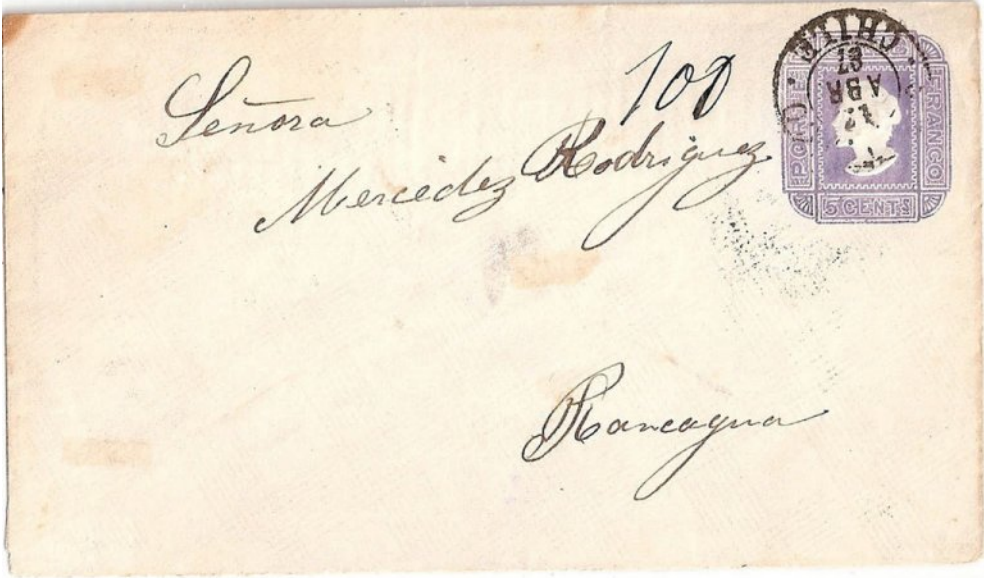
Slight scorching in upper corner.

**Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly -- 12 April 1887**



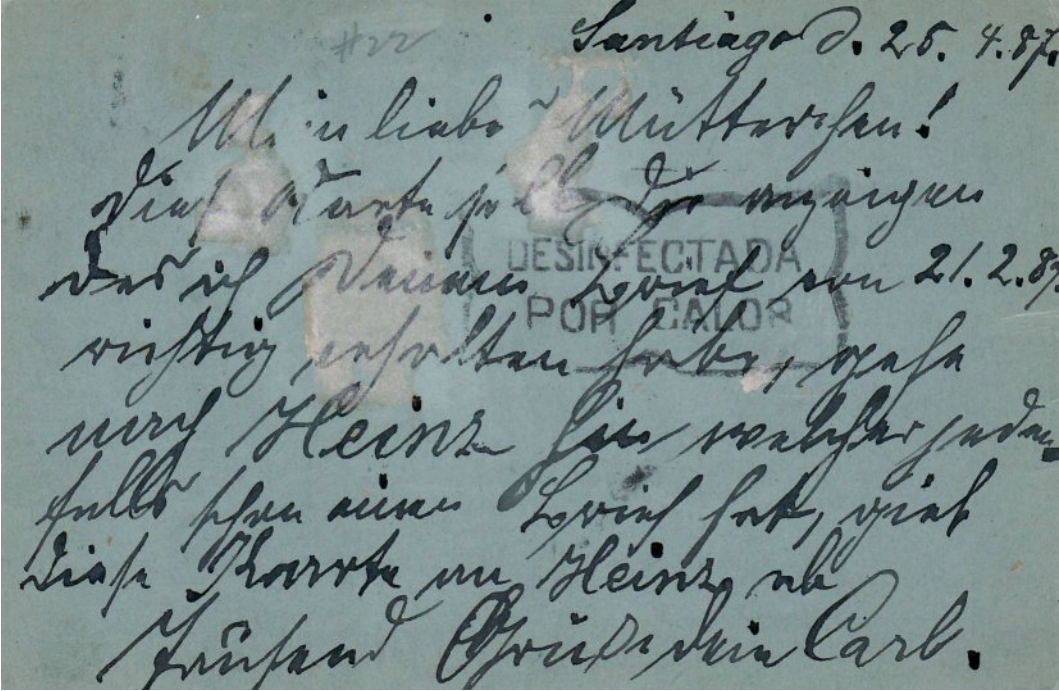
Santiago (12 April 1887) to Valparaiso

**Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly -- 22 April 1887**



Santiago (22 April 1887) to Rancagua

**Cholera Pandemic - Santiago Butterfly -- 29 April 1887**



Santiago (29 April 1887 several days after writing message) to Hamburg Germany

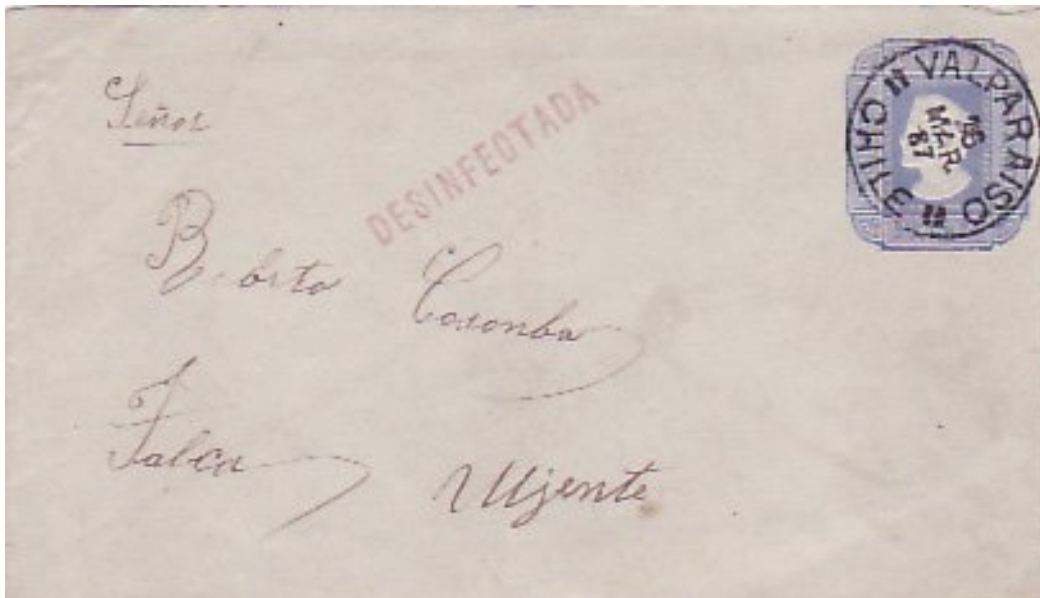
# Cholera Pandemic - Valparaiso Desinfectada

## March 1887

Valparaiso used a straightline DESINFECTADA handstamp in violet. An authorizing decree is not known.



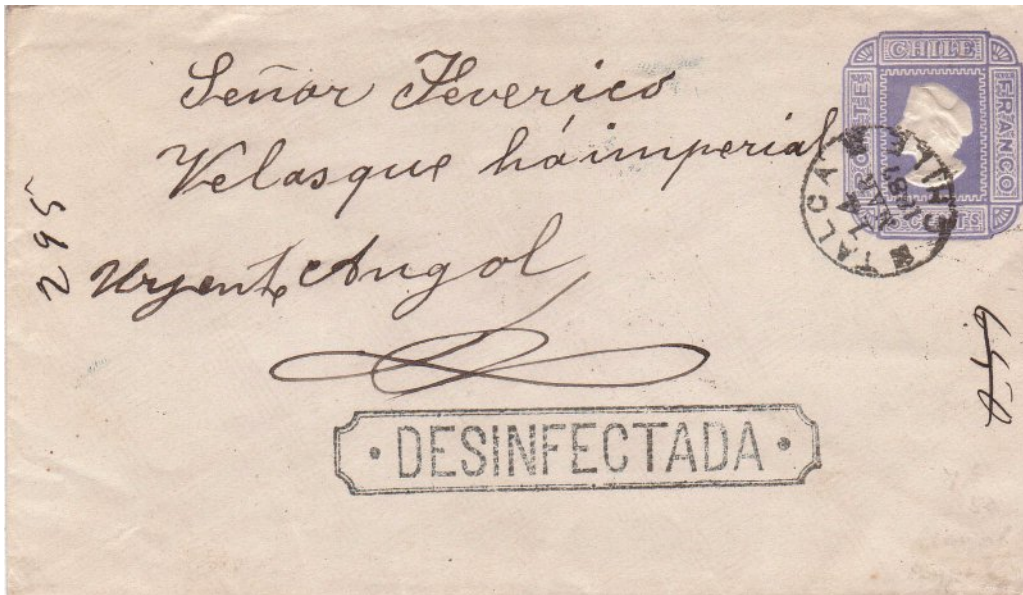
Valparaiso (14 March 1887) to Aarau Switzerland. 10c postage on reverse.



Valparaiso (26 March 1887) to Talca

## Cholera Pandemic - Talca chamfered Desinfectada - March 1887

Talca applied a black DESINFECTADA in a chamfered block. An authorizing decree is not known.



Talca (14 March 1887) to Angol. *Only example known.*

## Cholera Pandemic - Coquimbo - May 25 1887

Message on 3c 1883 ABNC issue postal card to the United States of America.

Mononga  
May 25- 1887.  
I received a mail a few days ago brought by an English man of war. I received the Frank Leslie and Harpers for April. Owing to some Cholera still existing South the Quarantine still holds and steamers do not run through to Callao. However it is expected that it won't last much longer. Last as long as it is in force no one can get away.  
Yesterday the Chilean Squadron arrived to pass the winter as this Port is far safer than Valparaiso  
Nothing new  
Yours  
J. L.

I received a mail a few days ago brought by one English "Man of war". I received the Frank Leslie and Harpers for April. Owing to some Cholera still existing South the Quarantine still holds and steamers do not run through Callao. However it is expected that at most last much longer. Last as long as it is in force no one can get away.

Yesterday the Chilean Squadron arrived to pass the winter as this Port is far safer than Valparaiso.

Nothing new.

## Cholera Pandemic - Burial of the Dead

The Cementerio de Coléricos in Santiago was created to hold the bodies of the victims of cholera in two brick pits 70 meters long by two wide. They were buried in canvas shrouds.



Foto 2: Disposición de esqueletos en las fosas

Image from 2003 archaeological investigation.



Some victims were treated better. Image of coffin pasted on back of 1885 ABNC issue 2c postal card. Hopefully the recipient (Dimelow y Cia) knew who sent the info.

## Bubonic Plague -- Antofagasta -- 1904

A bubonic plague outbreak in southern Peru expanded to northern Chile. Initially a blue Desinfectado handstamp was applied. Known on covers from May 14, 16, 20, and 25.



Antofagasta (16 May 1904) to Santiago with blue Desinfectado handstamp



Antofagasta (20 May 1904) to Valparaiso -- discovery copy of 20 May 1904 date

## Bubonic Plague -- Antofagasta -- 1904

Later the same Desinfectado handstamp was applied with a pale violet ink. June 24 and July 1 have been reported.



Antofagasta (24 June 1904) to Valparaiso with pale violet Desinfectado handstamp