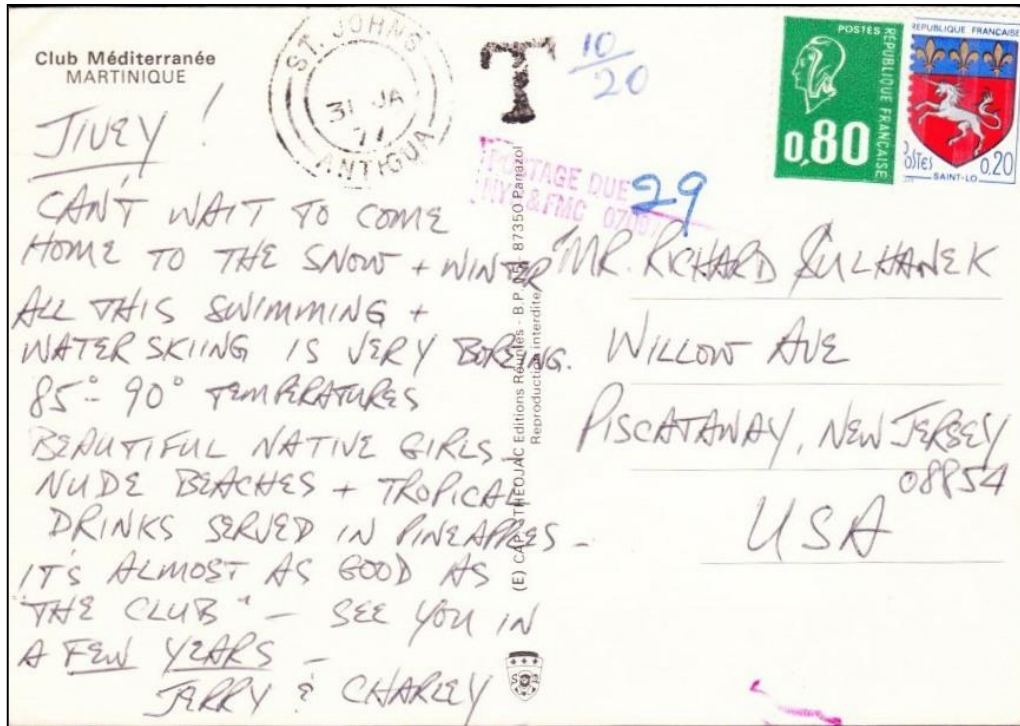


Greetings from The West Indies

by Patrick Crosby

It is the middle of winter in 1977 and Jerry and Charley can't resist rubbing in their vacation fun in the sun to their buddy in New Jersey. They were at Club Med on the West Indies island of Martinique, an overseas region of France. The Martinique stamp below shows one of their "beautiful native girls".



Unfortunately, the two French stamps on the postcard were not acceptable. This is because by the time the card was mailed the boys were a few islands north in the city of St. Johns on Antigua. At the time Antigua and Barbuda (the country name) was an Associated State of the United Kingdom so the French stamps had no postal validity and no postage had been paid. Antiguan stamps should have been used. Antigua and Barbuda includes the islands of Antigua and Barbuda plus the uninhabited much smaller Redonda and some other very small rock/coral islands. The Antigua stamp on the right shows the British connection not only with the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, but also the vignette shows the former naval base Nelson's Dockyard, which is in English Bay.

The Postage Due handstamp shows 29¢ and this amount was figured using a formula first used by the United Postal Union (UPU) beginning in 1976. It doesn't require the destination country to know what currency is being used in the country of origin. A postal clerk in St. Johns, the capitol of Antigua and Barbuda, notices the French stamps, does not deface them in any way, and postmarks the card away from the stamps. Since there is no return address (the first option is to return to writer) he then handstamps a "T" (for the French "taxe" – the official language of the UPU is French) and writes "10/20". The "10" is the shortpaid amount and the "20" is the normal UPU surface (airmail was not requested) letter rate to other UPU countries including the USA. From now on the card is postally considered to be a letter.

When the card arrived in New York City the foreign mail clerk took the "10/20" fraction (or ½) and multiplied it by the USA's standard UPU surface letter rate to another UPU country, which was 18¢.

The clerk then added a 20¢ handling charge. So $(1/2 \times 18¢) + 20¢ = 29¢$. (In mid-1981 the handling charge jumped to 42¢.)

I'm thinking Jerry and Charley heard about their bonehead postage move when they got home. But then again, they weren't really on a "cultural" vacation.

From 1967 to 1981 Antigua and Barbuda was an Associated State of the United Kingdom, then becoming an independent state in the United Kingdom's Commonwealth of Nations. Along with some other island nations they use the East Caribbean dollar

which since 1976 has been pegged to the US dollar at an exchange rate of $\$1\text{US} = \2.70EC . Martinique, where the Club Med is located, now uses the Euro.

Kenneth A. Wood in his stamp collecting encyclopedia *This Is Philately* has some interesting tidbits from the philatelic point of view. Although Antiguan stamps are considered legitimate, only the 1922 issues of Barbuda are considered legitimate by Scott catalogue. A set of 11 Leeward Island stamps (as the one shown) were overprinted "BARBUDA". Stanley Gibbons catalogue does include later issues. Ken Wood mentions Barbuda's "...chief local occupations are fishing, smuggling, and farming". The barren, uninhabited Redonda (once mined for phosphate) also has postal issues, but no one considers them to be legitimate. Here is the rub – the stamps of both Redonda and Barbuda, some being overprints on Antiguan stamps, are valid for use in Antigua.

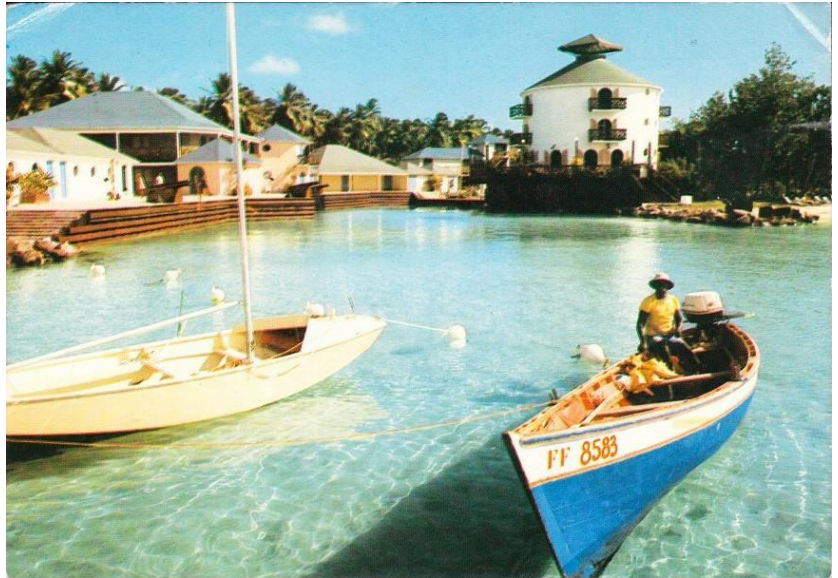
Although the island of Antigua, where most citizens live, was spared a direct hit from Hurricane Irma in September 2017, the smaller island of Barbuda 25 miles north was not. It was in the eyewall of the Category 5 hurricane at its near peak intensity. With nearly 95% of its structures damaged or destroyed by flattening or flooding (including the only two hotels), the island was virtually uninhabitable and the citizens were evacuated to Antigua. Now reconstruction is underway, but recent photos from Google Maps still show extensive destruction and very few inhabitants in Codrington, Barbuda's only town. However, when viewed from the skies the islands of Antigua and Barbuda are gems.

References:

Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, [U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996](#) (Portland, OR: CAMA Publishing Co. 1996) esp. pp. 257-258

Kenneth A. Wood, [This Is Philately](#) (Albany, OR: Van Dahl Publications, 1982)

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal cards, especially used, including first days; the 1886 Grant Letter Card (or Sheet); UC16, the first U.S. aerogram; and postal history on business or picture post cards.



View side of the vacation post card

