

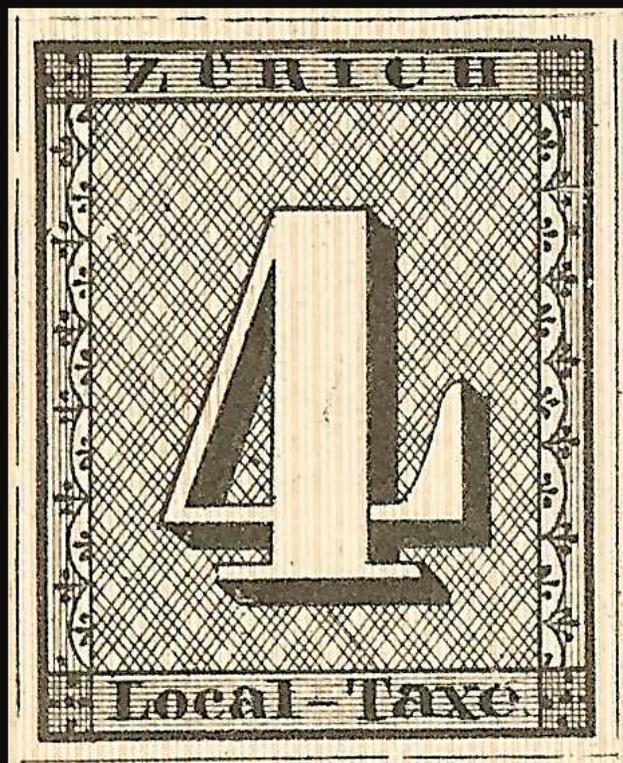
Switzerland: A Panorama of Its Stamps



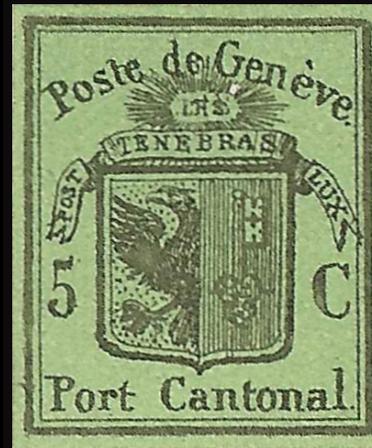
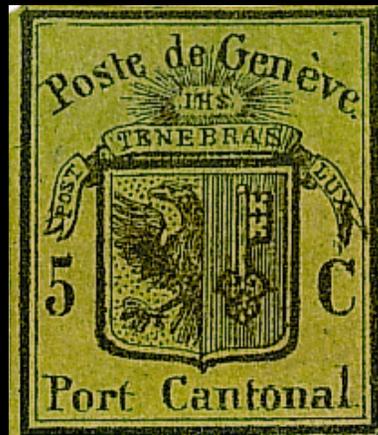
by
Harlan F. Stone



“Switzerland: A Panorama of Its Stamps” has been prepared by the American Helvetia Philatelic Society, Affiliate No. 52 of the American Philatelic Society. The mission of AHPS, a non-profit, tax-exempt, educational organization, is to serve the philatelic community through programs that promote and advance the knowledge and collecting of Switzerland’s stamps, postal history and related literature. Its services include the bimonthly journal *Tell*, mail and on-line auctions, sales circuit books, presentations such as this one, annual national conventions, and special exhibit awards.



The canton or state of Zürich issued the first two stamps in Switzerland in 1843, when it followed the British example and became the second postal administration in the world to use adhesives for the prepayment of postage. The 4-rappen stamp paid for local mail going within the district served by any one post office, and the 6-rappen stamp paid for mail to any place within the canton. Many forgeries of these and Switzerland's other cantonal stamps exist.

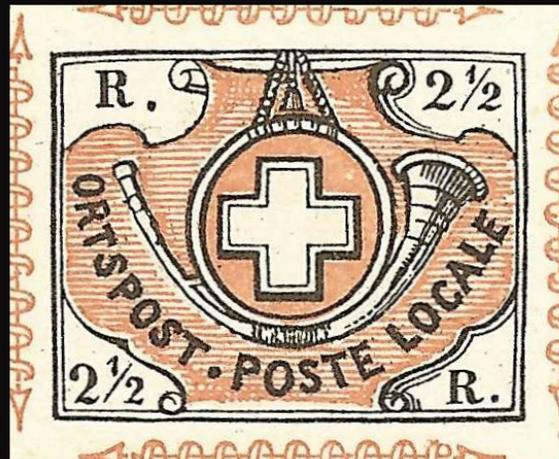
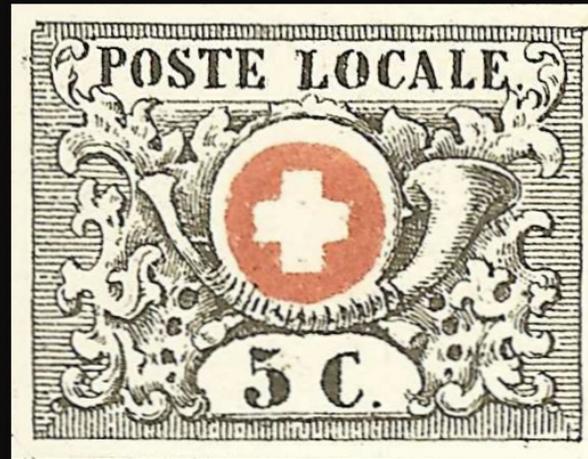
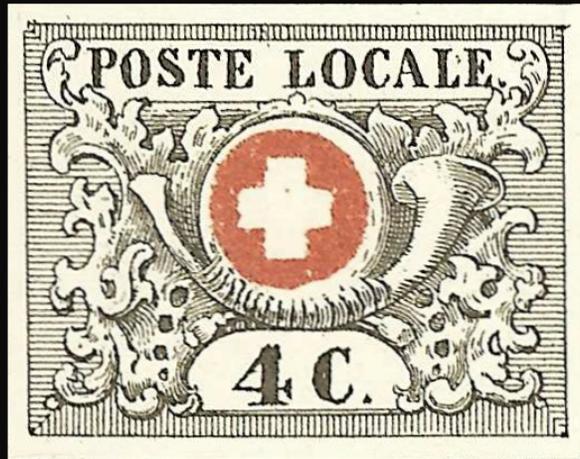


Later in 1843 the canton of Geneva followed the Zürich example with its “double Geneva” stamp. Half paid the local rate of 5 centimes, and the whole stamp paid the 10-centime rate from one commune to another within the canton. Because the public was unenthusiastic about prepaying postage for letters, Geneva reduced its cantonal rate to 5 centimes in 1845 and issued a stamp on light green paper showing a “small eagle”, so-called because its wing does not touch the inner line of the shield. In 1847 it replaced this stamp with a “large eagle” design in which the wing does touch the line. In 1848 it issued another “large eagle” stamp on dark green instead of light green paper.



In 1845 Basel became the last of three cantons to issue stamps. Its only stamp is known throughout the philatelic world as the “Basel Dove” because of the central prominence of a dove, which is carrying a letter in its beak. This was the first stamp in the world to be printed in more than one color (black, crimson and blue), the first to involve more than one printing method (typography for the frame and background and raised embossing for the dove), and the first to show a bird.

In 1848 the Swiss cantons adopted a federal constitution, which declared that a unified postal system would be under national control. While Switzerland's new postal administration prepared during 1849 and 1850 to issue the country's first stamps, four more cantonal stamps appeared with federal approval, three from Geneva and one from Zürich. These so-called "transitional" stamps are misnamed the Vaud (top two stamps), Neuchâtel (bottom left stamp) and Winterthur (bottom right stamp) stamps. They include denominations that reflect special local rates in cantonal currencies. They also show the Swiss federal cross in recognition of the new central postal administration.

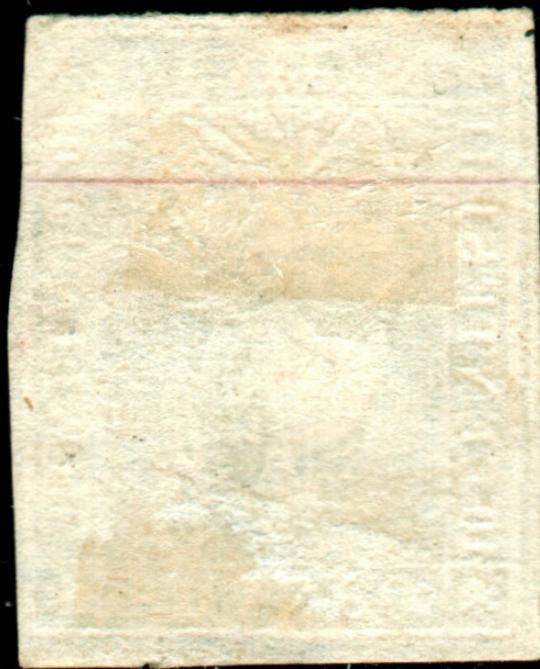




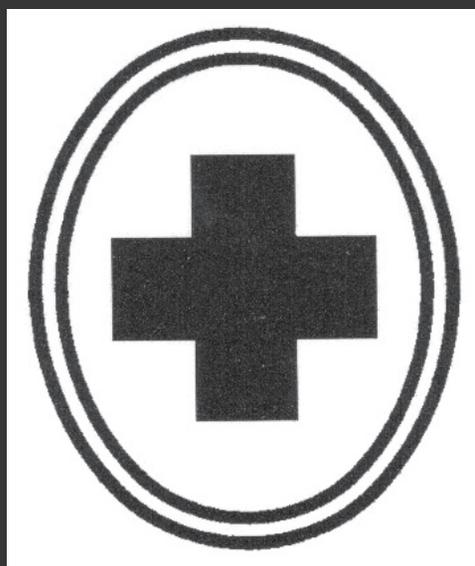
The first two federal stamps appeared in 1850. Distributed to major towns throughout the country, they paid the new, uniform, reduced rate of 2½-rappen postage for local letters within each town. These stamps are known as the “Orts-Post” and “Poste Locale” after their respective German and French phrases meaning local post. Both stamps exist in 40 types, distinguished by the different patterns of the hand-drawn vermicular lines that make up their backgrounds.



Later in 1850 and in 1851 the postal administration issued stamps for letters going outside a local district. These 5-, 10- and 15-rappen stamps, known as the Rayon I, II and III, reflect a system of rayons or zones for new postage rates based on distance as well as weight. The Rayon III stamp was printed with three versions of its 15-rappen denomination. All of these issues also have different patterns of background lines making 40 types of the two Rayon I stamps, 40 types of the single Rayon II stamp, and 10 types of the three Rayon III stamps.



In 1854 Switzerland began to release stamps in a new design called by its critics "Strubeli" after "Strubel Peter", a boy with similarly unkempt hair in a well-known Swiss children's book. Surrounding the allegorical figure of Helvetia is the value of each stamp in German, French and Italian, all three of the country's official languages at that time. Different colored silk threads, such as this red one, were imbedded in the paper as a safeguard against counterfeiting. When the Swiss Federal Mint in Bern finally equipped itself to produce the stamps in 1854, it released not only those it printed but earlier ones printed in Munich. Identifying the different Munich and Bern printings has always given collectors considerable difficulty.



In 1862 the first in a series known as the Sitting Helvetia stamps appeared. This issue is notable for several reasons. The Latin name *Helvetia* for Switzerland replaced the cumbersome use of German, French and Italian on each stamp. This issue is also the first with perforations. As a protection against forgery, the postal authorities included a control mark showing the Swiss cross in a double oval, which was impressed into the finished paper. The last stamps in this series appeared in 1881 on a safety paper that also contained red and blue silk fibers, known as “granite” paper.



In 1882 a new issue of stamps marked another innovation by the postal authorities, two designs in the same series. On the low denominations is a cross and numeral design, and on the high denominations a Standing Helvetia design. Because these stamps remained in use until 1924, they include a wealth of printing plate flaws and, in the case of the Standing Helvetias, retouches as well. In total there are four basic types of the Cross & Numeral and 11 basic types of the Standing Helvetia, taking into account the various combinations of white and granite paper, wide and narrow control marks, Switzerland's first and only watermark in the shape of a large cross, and four different perforation gauges.



In 1900 Switzerland issued its first commemorative stamps, a set of three showing Helvetia with symbols of communication. The occasion was the 25th anniversary of the effective date of the Universal Postal Union, which was founded in the Swiss capital of Bern in 1874. Because the Federal Council ordered the Postal Department to issue the stamps at almost the last minute, there was insufficient time to prepare the engraved plates properly. The result was many printing plate flaws. Researchers have identified more than 1,000.



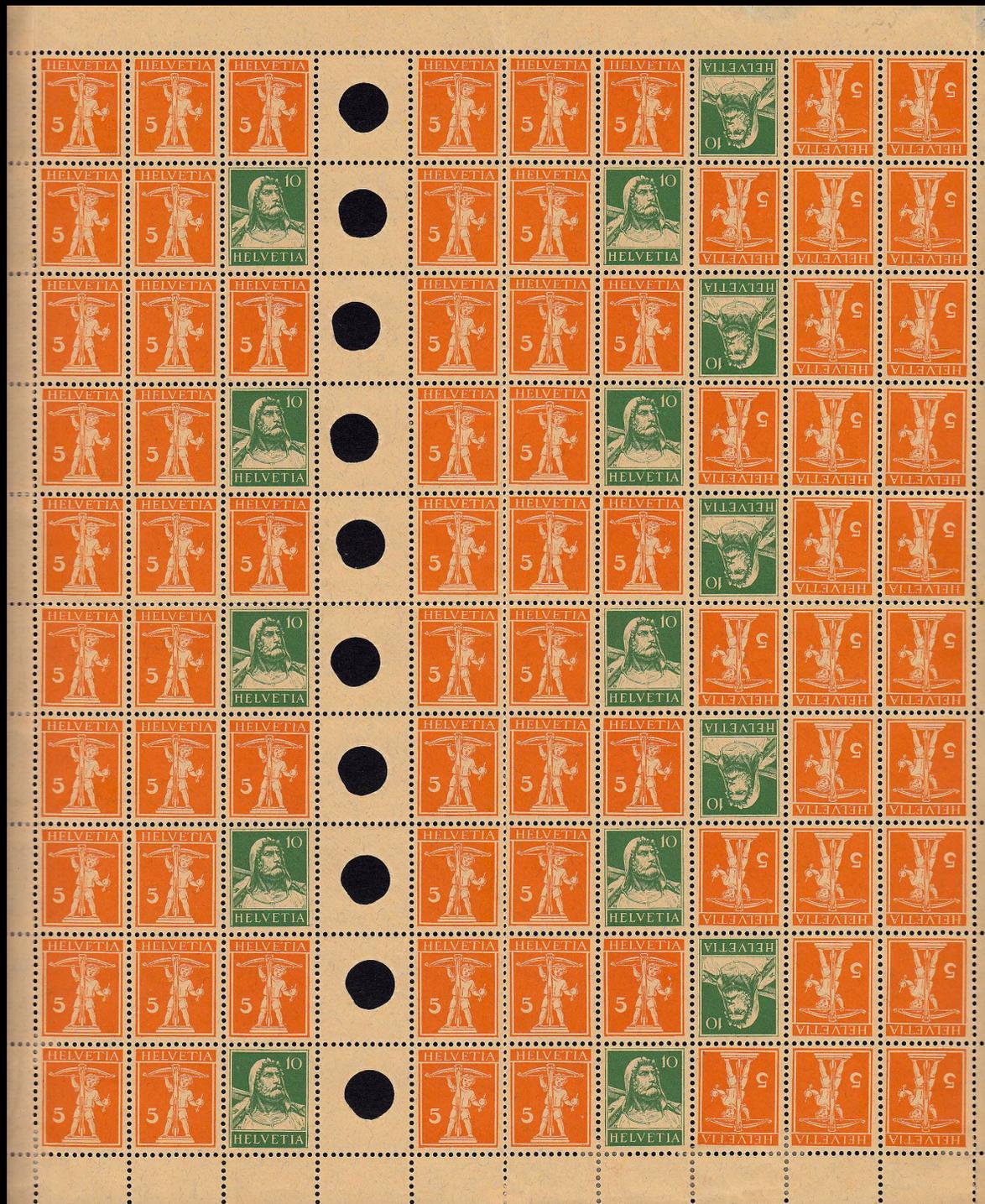
To replace the utilitarian and out-of-fashion Cross & Numeral and Standing Helvetia stamps, the postal administration held contests twice for new designs. A public competition in 1901 produced 51 essays, none ever used on an issued stamp. A 1905 invitation to several eminent artists resulted in the adoption of another two-design issue in 1907 showing, on top, William Tell's son Walter with a crossbow on lower denominations, and a bust of Helvetia on slightly higher denominations. These designs were publicly ridiculed at the time. In 1909 these stamps were reissued in the redesigned versions below.



In 1908 Switzerland continued to replace its 19th century issues with still higher-denomination, bi-colored stamps in a long series known as Helvetia with Sword. By 1940 a total of 26 of these stamps were available, taking into account different types of paper. Some of these stamps were the first to receive grilled gum. To prevent curling of the gummed stamps, the printers applied a grill to the paper after gumming it. This grilling is visible across the entire back of a stamp, even after the gum is removed.



In 1914 the postal administration modified one of the designs from the 1901 public competition and used it for the widely recognized William Tell series of 21 stamps. These stamps are the first in Switzerland printed on tinted paper. William Tell is, of course, the folk hero who shot an apple off his son's head with a crossbow rather than bow to the hat of the tyrannical Austrian bailiff Gessler on top of a pole.



A number of the Tell Boy, Helvetia Bust, Helvetia with Sword, William Tell and later stamps exist as *se-tenant* and *tête-bêche* pairs for a very good reason. The arrangement of sheets containing both types enabled the postal administration to make maximum use of the sheets for the production of booklets with panes of six stamps. Some of these panes contain stamps in two denominations needed to meet different postal rates. In a typical sheet containing 90 stamps, the left-hand selvage served as the margin needed for stapling the first three vertical rows into booklets. The blank 4th row provided the margin needed for the 5th through 7th rows. Because the 8th through 10th rows were printed upside down, the right-hand selvage became the margin for stapling those rows into booklets.



To prevent counterfeiters from using the blank row from these booklet sheets for printing stamps, the Swiss postal administration at first punched a circular hole in each blank. Since this was a hand operation with a metal punch and hammer, the holes are irregular in circumference. Later the postal administration perforated the blanks down the middle. Finally it adopted the printing of zig-zag lines on the blanks.



As postal rates changed and the need arose for new denominations, a number of these early 20th century stamps were also overprinted with new values, first in 1915, again in 1921, and finally in 1930. All together 15 different “new” stamps fall into this category. Faulty and misplaced overprints provide a number of collectible varieties within this group.



Occasionally Switzerland has issued souvenir sheets, usually to commemorate a philatelic event or to raise funds for a national purpose. The first souvenir sheet appeared in 1934 to publicize a national philatelic exhibition in Zürich known as NABA. This small sheet contains a block of four stamps from a typographed series of seven small landscapes issued that same year as definitive stamps for regular use. These stamps are noteworthy because for the first time each denomination in a Swiss definitive series bears a different design.



In 1936 Switzerland repeated and lengthened this series of miniature landscapes to nine stamps showing physical features of the country. This time the printing process was steel engraving; and the designer, Karl Bickel, used it in superb fashion to bring out details of lakes, mountains, castles and bridges. These stamps are among the earlier of the many Swiss issues by Bickel that gave him a world-famous reputation as a stamp designer and engraver.



In 1937 Switzerland issued the first of several commemorative stamps for a series of mobile post offices that began that year to handle the large quantities of mail sent by visitors at exhibitions, public festivals and other special events. These specially-equipped buses contained sales counters, stamp vending machines, writing facilities, mail boxes and telephone booths. Although the last post office bus has retired, Switzerland's ubiquitous yellow buses, which carry mail as well as passengers, still provide the postal link with otherwise isolated villages high in the mountain valleys.



As war in Europe approached in 1939, two unusual sets of stamps commemorated Switzerland's national exposition of its culture and products in Zürich that year. The postal administration returned to the use of all three official languages. Each set of stamps appeared in three versions with its inscription in German, French or Italian. One set shows symbolic scenes of Swiss life, and the second set shows a flowering branch and a crossbow symbolic of Swiss craftsmanship.



As World War II raged around neutral Switzerland in 1941, the postal administration issued a nine-stamp definitive series of historic figures recalling the country's own famous military history. These stamps show early Swiss patriots and warriors, including William Tell with his crossbow, and the three cantonal representatives who declared unity against Austria in 1291, thereby creating the Helvetic Confederation. The American Helvetia Philatelic Society has adapted the William Tell image as its logo.



As World War II continued, Switzerland turned its postal thoughts toward maintaining its economy. It issued propaganda stamps urging cultivation of all available land for food, and reclamation of all used materials for recycling. The so-called salvage sheet, regarded as one of Switzerland's ugliest stamp designs, includes a different stamp in each of the three official languages. These three stamps appear *se-tenant* in sheets of 25 containing 12 in German, eight in French and five in Italian. The stamps are arranged so no two in the same language appear side by side.



The end of World War II in 1945 brought forth one of Switzerland's most attractive and famous sets of stamps, the Pax issue, named after its Latin inscription for "Peace". For the three highest values the great Swiss stamp engraver Karl Bickel created masterful designs that surpassed even his own many earlier philatelic images. The crocuses, the gnarled hands of his mother folded in prayer, and the heads of his mother and father are universal symbols of renewed hope through peace.



In 1949 the postal administration issued a definitive series on technology. The 12 stamps show a variety of engineering feats, most of them associated with the country's waterways and mountain routes. Two relate to postal services, portraying a powerful rotary snow plough used to keep mountain roads open in winter, and showing two postal buses approaching a hair-pin curve from tunnels on a mountain road.



An extensive messenger and architectural monument series of stamps began to appear in 1960, eventually comprising 39 values. The lower denominations illustrate early Swiss means of forwarding mail by foot messenger, pack mule and horse rider. The higher values show architectural landmarks in each of the 22 cantons at that time. Minute differences in the designs of the messenger stamps signify whether they come from sheets or coils. Stamps issued in 1963 as part of this series were the first in Switzerland with phosphor coating for high-speed sorting of mail. Stamps with this fluorescent tagging are distinguished by violet instead of red and blue fibers in the paper. Stamps from this series are still in use today.



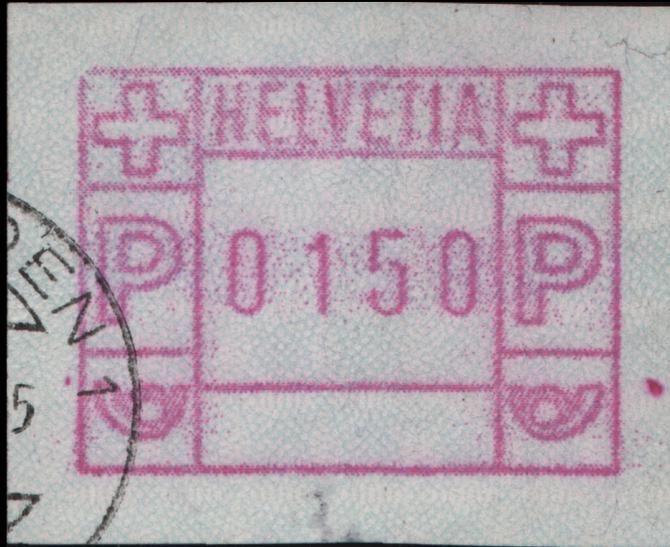
In more recent years the postal administration has periodically issued new series of definitive stamps for regular everyday use on themes that highlight Switzerland's way of life. In 1973 came stylized regional landscapes, a short-lived series because the death of the designer prevented the postal administration from extending it. Instead folk customs became the subject in 1977, then Swiss scenes with signs of the zodiac in 1982, methods of mail transport in 1986, and people at work in 1989. Every year the postal administration has also continued its policy, dating back to 1954, of issuing publicity sets to recognize important anniversaries, organizations, achievements and personages.



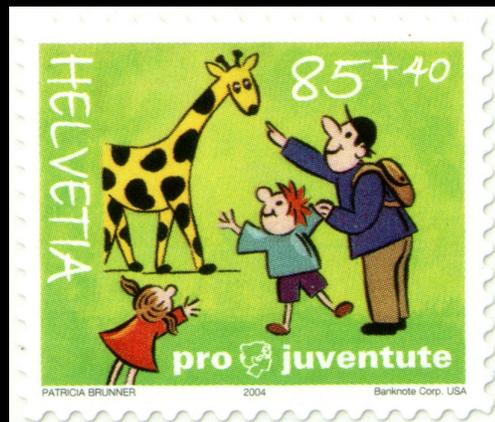
In 1996 the postal administration issued a most unusual stamp to promote its separate five-year-old A- Post and B-Post delivery services, with a higher postage rate for one-day delivery of A-Post letters. The design is an aerial photograph of some 11,000 gymnasts from all over Switzerland wearing colored T-shirts and caps in a Bern sports stadium during a national gymnastics festival that year. The Guinness Book of Records has accepted this stamp as the “World’s largest living postage stamp represented by human beings”. Also amazing is the fact that the stamp was on sale in post offices only five days after the photography.



Like a number of other countries, Switzerland has issued unique novelty stamps to capture the public's attention. In 2000 it released the world's first embroidered stamp. Stitched to the front of the stamp's fabric are custom-dyed polyester threads in a classic lace pattern, and coating the back is a self-adhesive glue. In 2001 came a small sheet that not only looked like a chocolate bar but also was the world's first to smell like chocolate. The printing process included a clear coating of micro-bubbles that release a chocolate perfume when gentle rubbing bursts them. In 2004 appeared a wood stamp made from strips of spruce veneer only 0.7 millimeter thick, printed with white ink applied through a screen, back-coated with self-adhesive foil, and individually punched out of the wood strips.



In 1976 Switzerland became the first country to introduce self-denominated labels that postal patrons could print out of automated machines. These are called FRAMA stamps after the name of the vending machines' manufacturer. The desired postage amount is printed on a piece of paper cut off a roll inside the machine. This paper has become more attractive over the years with pre-printed background images of seasonal scenes and postal conveyances.



Switzerland's well-known Pro Juventute semi-postal stamps, issued to raise funds for youth programs, have appeared every year on or about December 1st since 1913, with the exception of 1914. Proceeds from the surtaxes go to the Pro Juventute Foundation, a national organization formed to bring together more than 3,000 child welfare associations. A great many of these Pro Juventute stamps have similar designs, making extended series that lasted up to a decade or longer, including cantonal and municipal coats of arms, cantonal costumes, famous Swiss personalities, flowers, insects, animals, and childhood stages.

1953

PRO JUVENTUTE

1953



Preis - Prix - Prezzo Fr. 8.-

Among the Pro Juventute issues is a well-known butterfly sheet that contains both *se-tenant* and *tête-bêche* pairs of two stamps from the 1953 set. The stamps are arranged so when the sheet is divided into quarters, four panes of six stamps remain, each with a left-hand margin for binding them into stamp booklets. Each pane contains four red 20-centime stamps and two green 30-centime stamps.



Equally famous Pro Patria semi-postal stamps have appeared every year since 1938 to commemorate Switzerland's national Day of Confederation on August 1st, the anniversary of the declaration of alliance in 1291 by the three cantons that formed the nucleus of the present confederation. The surtaxes on these stamps provide money for the country's charitable, civic and cultural organizations. These stamps also run in long series. Among the repeated subjects have been places and monuments associated with Swiss history, different types of regional houses, Swiss landscapes, Roman artifacts, church frescoes, castles and folk art.



Swiss air mail came into the philatelic spotlight in 1913 during a series of 11 special flights with special stamps. The private committees that organized these pioneer flights to promote aviation printed a commemorative stamp for each one for use on the mail it carried. Although the postal administration did not authorize the stamps, it did permit the use of special postmarks on them. As a result, these stamps are considered semi-official and the forerunners of Switzerland's later air mail stamps.



An official air mail stamp first appeared in Switzerland in 1919 when the military airport outside Zürich started a regular air mail service to Bern and later to Lausanne and Geneva. For prepayment of the extra charge for this service, the postal administration overprinted the 50-centime Helvetia with Sword stamp with a red winged propeller, the Symbol of military aviation in Switzerland. A second attempt at regular service began in 1920, with a similar 30-centime overprinted stamp for air mail from Basel to Germany. Lack of sufficient public use led to the suspensions of both services.



By 1923 when planes were flying regular routes, not only within Switzerland but also to other countries, the postal administration decided it was time to begin issuing a definitive series of air mail stamps. These bear several designs, including early planes, a pilot wearing goggles, the mythical Icarus in flight, and a letter with wings.



Switzerland's air mail stamps, like its regular postage stamps, include a now-familiar landscape series issued in 1941. Designed and engraved by the well-known stamp artist Albert Yersin, each of the eight values shows a different scene with a plane overhead. As it has turned out, Switzerland has issued very few new definitive or commemorative stamps for air mail usage since these. In the absence of new stamps, mail by air from Switzerland in recent years has normally borne regular postage stamps.



One air mail commemorative stamp of particular interest to collectors in the United States was valid for use only on the maiden flight of Swissair from Geneva to New York on May 2, 1947. This flight brought the Swiss government's famous conveyor-belt philatelic exhibit for the International CIPEX exhibition in New York. Bad weather diverted the plane to Washington, and Swiss postal officials had great difficulty getting the invaluable exhibit safely to New York by night train.



Postage due stamps first appeared in Switzerland in 1878, showing a large numeral of value surrounded by 22 stars for the number of cantons at that time; but these stamps include no obvious identification of the country since they were intended only for internal postage accounting records. From 1878 to 1910 there were an extraordinary 35 printings of this design involving many combinations of white and granite paper; blue, blue-green, green and olive frames; carmine and vermilion figures of value; wide and narrow control marks; and the large cross watermark. There are also a normal frame (left) and an inverted frame (right), depending on whether a corner wheel touches a triangular frame line at upper right or lower left. One needs a specialized catalog to collect these many varieties.



Over the years Switzerland changed the design of its postage due stamps only three times. A series with smaller denominations, the Swiss cross, and a backdrop of mountain peaks appeared in 1910. Changing postage rates led to overprinted values on some. In 1924 a more popular design showed two youths holding a shield bearing the denominations, and the name of the country was included for the first time. In 1938 the final design reverted to a modern adaptation of the first, with a large central numeral of value. In 1956 the postal administration withdrew all postage due stamps after the successful substitution of regular stamps for collecting unpaid postage.



The first official stamps for government use in Switzerland appeared in 1918 for the Industrial War Economy Section of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs. The German name of the agency, whose initials are IKW, was overprinted on current regular stamps in two styles, thin letters with serifs and thicker letters without serifs. These official stamps helped the agency to simplify the mailing of its correspondence at a time of substantial increase in the volume due to the demands that World War I placed on Switzerland. Because the overprints were made by a printing company with easily available type, there exist hard-to-identify forgeries created after the war with similar type.



The second issue of official stamps, this one for use by all government offices, did not appear until 1935. In this case current stamps were perforated with nine holes forming a cross. In 1938 the postal administration also made available an overprinted cross on current stamps, and in 1942 it replaced both issues with current stamps diagonally overprinted "*Officiel*". Collectors should realize that the perforated cross can be easily duplicated.



Switzerland has also issued overprinted stamps for exclusive use by different international organizations with offices in Geneva, beginning with the League of Nations in 1922. Since then five other organizations have also received current Swiss stamps overprinted with their names in French. These organizations are the International Labor Office, International Bureau of Education, World Health Organization, United Nations European Office, and International Refugee Organization.



Starting in 1955 the postal administration went on to issue official stamps designed specifically for the exclusive use of nine international organizations: International Labor Office, International Bureau of Education, World Health Organization, United Nations European Office, World Meteorological Organization, Universal Postal Union (in Bern), International Telecommunications Union, World Intellectual Property Organization, and International Olympic Committee (in Lausanne). Finally in 1969 the Swiss government signed an agreement allowing the United Nations to handle its own postal affairs in Geneva and issue stamps for itself and affiliated agencies.



Beginning in 1911 the postal administration issued free franchise stamps to public welfare and charitable organizations for use on their official correspondence. These franchise stamps were similar to the 1910 postage due stamps and overprinted with a different control number for each institution, from No. 1 to No. 844. In 1935 three stamps with new designs were added showing a deaconess, a nun and Henri Dunant, founder of the International Red Cross in Geneva. Users of the franchise stamps until 1944 included hospitals, orphanages, asylums, schools and benevolent societies.



When the postal administration started telegraph service in 1852, customers had to send and pay for their telegrams at designated telegraph offices, usually in post offices but also in resort hotels and railroad stations. To reduce the work of the clerks who had to count the words in each message, it issued in 1868 a series of telegraph stamps whose denominations reflected standardized message rates. Telegraph stamps remained in use until 1886, when the postal administration ended this method of recording telegram charges. Eight of the 1868 stamps are reproduced on a 1952 centennial commemorative sheet.



Beginning in 1913 the Swiss Federal Railways began to issue special stamps to show payment of freight service charges on shipments. Freight station clerks wrote the service charges on bills of lading, then affixed the railroad stamps with the corresponding values, and finally cancelled the stamps with the station postmarks to show payment of the fees. Seven issues of these stamps, in use until 1960, differ in styles of type, papers, perforations, control mark or watermark, and fluorescence.



Revenue stamps in Switzerland fall into three categories: federal, cantonal and municipal. The first came from the canton of Ticino as an all-purpose tax stamp in 1855. So far 23 cantons have issued some 14,000. The first municipal stamp came from Lausanne in 1878 for use on door-to-door sales permits. More than 700 cities and towns have employed about 15,000. At the federal level the consular services created the first in 1915 for use on passports. Today 289 federal tax stamps are known. The purpose of all revenue stamps has been to collect taxes on almost everything imaginable: advertising posters, hotel bills, bicycle licenses, birth certificates, check fees, identity cards, fishing licenses, copies of wills, and exemptions from fire brigade service. Their face values range from 2 centimes up to 1,000 francs.

PHILATELY OF SWITZERLAND

AN INTRODUCTORY HANDBOOK



EDITED
BY
RICHARD T. HALL

This panorama of Swiss stamps has been only a brief overview. It has excluded many varieties of these stamps and detailed descriptions of their many uses. For fuller information on all Swiss issues and their postal history, the American Helvetia Philatelic Society has published a 350-page book entitled *Philately of Switzerland — An Introductory Handbook*. It contains 32 chapters, color illustrations, literature lists and collecting tips. It is designed for new collectors, whether young or old, who are interested in Switzerland. We believe that Switzerland can fulfill all your philatelic desires. The hard-bound first edition has sold out. A second edition has been prepared and published as a CD.

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