

## *Yesterday in STAMPS:*

# The Swiss Cantonal Stamps

by George W. Caldwell, Governor of the Helvetia Society  
(From *STAMPS Magazine*, December 28, 1940, with images added)

CLASSICS! Wherever philatelists are gathered, this word is apt to be heard. The old issues or so-called classics have an attraction that is difficult to explain. Many countries have contributed these gems, but none are more sought-after than those of the little Alpine republic in central Europe which we know as Switzerland and the Swiss affectionately call Helvetia.

Switzerland is the oldest republic in the world, having been founded in the year 1291. In August of that year representatives from the three forest cantons — Uri, Unterwalden, and Schwyz—met in the meadow of Rutli and gave birth to the first permanent Swiss league. During the years that followed, other communes and valleys joined this league. Today Switzerland comprises 22 cantons.

Strange as it may seem, the Swiss did not adopt a formal constitution until September 12, 1848. Prior to that date the postal service was owned and operated by the respective cantons. The constitution, however, changed all this. Article 33 of that document setting forth that the operation of the postal service was henceforth to be a Federal function. The government announced that beginning on January 1 next, it would attempt to organize and operate such a centralized postal system.

It was during the period of cantonal operation of the posts that three of the cantons, emulating Great Britain, issued adhesive stamps to prepay postage—Zurich, Geneva, and Basel, in the order named.

### **Zurich**

With its issue of 4 Rappen and 6 Rappen stamps (Scott #8-11), appearing during the early days of March, 1843, the canton of Zurich became the pioneer in continental Europe, and the second government in the entire world, to issue postage stamps.

An analysis of the design of these two adhesives which differ in denomination only, indicates clearly that the artist used, as a model, the penny black of Great Britain which had come into use three years previously. There is a fundamental similarity in the side and top panels, the corner squares and in the background, while the large figure of value takes the place of the Queen's head. The lithograph transfer matrix consisted of five hand drawn stamp subjects; hence the five types mentioned in the standard catalogs.



*Left, Great Britain Sc. 1 (with PB initials); right Zurich Sc. 1L1*

This matrix was transferred 20 times to produce the lithograph stone of 100 stamp subjects. For a long time it was believed that 100 subject stones were exclusively used, but information recently has come to light which would seem to prove that later printings were made from a stone or stones consisting of 130 subjects of which 30 were of 4 Rappen denomination.

The printing on thin unwatermarked paper in black was done by Orell Fussli & Co., of Zurich, a firm which was established over 400 years ago, and is still in business. [It also is still in business today. JFD.] In addition to the black impression there is a red impression of alternate single and double lines. These are found running vertically with the stamp, or horizontally, depending on the way the paper was

The printing on thin unwatermarked paper in black was done by Orell Fussli & Co., of Zurich, a firm which was established over 400 years ago, and is still in business. [It also is still in business today. JFD.] In addition to the black impression there is a red impression of alternate single and double lines. These are found running vertically with the stamp, or horizontally, depending on the way the paper was



*Left to right, more visible in magnified view, Sc. 1L2, 6r with red vertical lines; Sc. 1L3, 4r with red horizontal lines; Sc. 1L4, 6r with red horizontal lines.*

placed in the press. Like all the other cantonal issues, except those of the Transition Period, to be mentioned later, these stamps did not have franking value beyond the limits of the canton.

The “Rosette” design was the only killer postmark used by the Zurich Cantonal Post. Generally speaking, red was used in the town of Zurich and black in the rural offices. Stamps with the rosette in greenish have been found on letters postmarked in Stafa and in Regensburg. They are very rare.

Mention should be made of the reprints of



Above right, Zurich usage of Zurich 1843 6r black with vertical red lines (Sc. 1L2), tied by red Cross cancel and matching red “Zurich 6/5

1845” double-circle date-stamp. Above left, Rural usage of Sc. 1L2 tied by black cross in rosette design and matching black “Wezikon 15 Nov. 1844” double-circle datestamp on folded letter to Wald.

these stamps which were made in 1862 in order to comply with a request from the French Government for some old Swiss stamps. None being available, a small printing of the Zurich stamps was made, using the old stones. These are without the red lines and resemble somewhat a stamp that has been cleaned. They are very rare.

**Geneva**

Later in the year of 1843, Geneva followed in the footsteps of Zurich, and on October 1 issued the much sought-after “Double Geneva” (Scott #2; now Sc. 2L1, right), a stamp so-called



because it consists of two parts, a right portion and a left portion, which are practically alike, with a panel across the top containing the words “Port Cantonal,” and the denomination 10 centimes. Each half is labeled “Port Locale,” and carries the denomination—5 centimes.

The reason for this type of stamp may seem strange to present-day users who are accustomed to using multiple stamps, but it must be remembered that the people of that time were not altogether familiar with the use of stamps, and undoubtedly the form was adopted for educational purposes. The five centime covered the local rate, while the 10 centime paid the cantonal rate. Whereas the idea of using postage stamps was copied from the British—we have documentary evidence of this—the design was purely local.

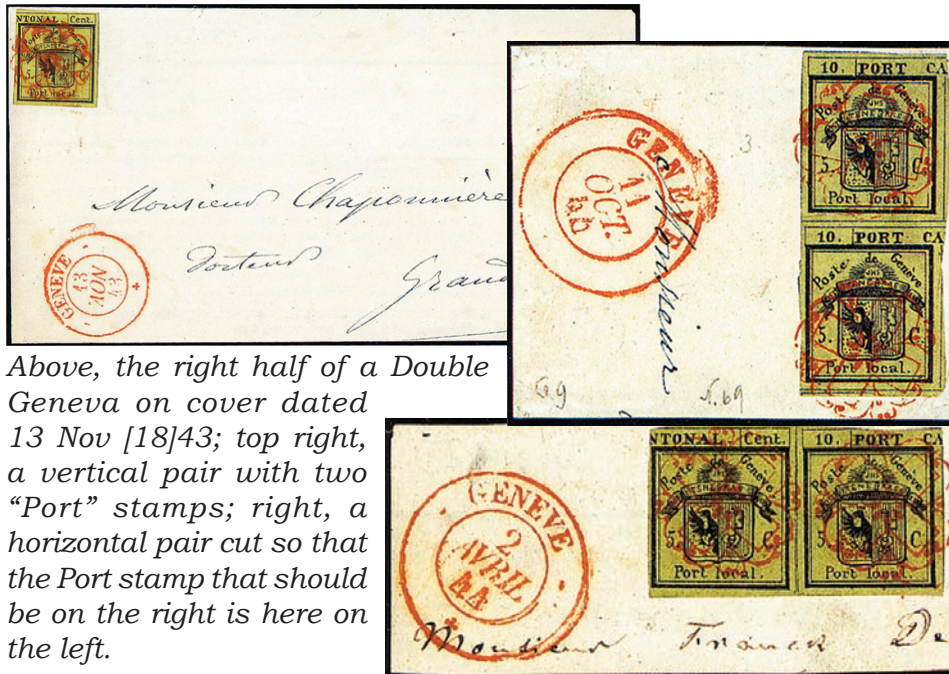


The 1843 Double Geneva, Sc. 2L1, in a strip of three double stamps from the top left sheet margin with complete marginal inscription explaining the method and validity for the double and half-double stamps.

At the time the introduction of postage stamps was being discussed in the state council, the matter of a single rate for the entire canton was under consideration.

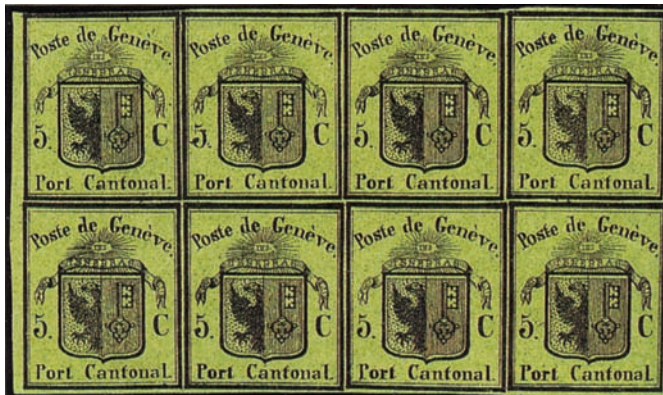


Earliest known use of the 1843 Double Geneva in the Canton, a Nov. 3, 1843 cover



Above, the right half of a Double Geneva on cover dated 13 Nov [18]43; top right, a vertical pair with two "Port" stamps; right, a horizontal pair cut so that the Port stamp that should be on the right is here on the left.

But fearing the revenue would not meet the cost of the postal service, the idea was not approved. Later, however, experience proved that the adhesive stamp, as its sponsor M. Candolle had expected, increased the use of the mail service to such an extent that it was found feasible to establish a 5 centime rate for the entire canton. This resulted in the issuing, on April 1, 1845, of a new stamp of 5 centime denomination and known among Swiss philatelists as the "Small Eagle" (Scott #3; now Sc. 2L2) so called to differentiate it from a subsequent issue containing a larger eagle in the shield.



A mint block of eight of the 1845 Small Eagle, Sc. 2L2

This later stamp (Scott #4; now Sc. 2L3, page 6) came into use in 1846, and appeared on the same apple-green paper as the previous issues. The reason for this new stamp is not



Sc. 2L3

definitely known, but apparently the lithograph stone having become badly worn, could not be replaced, due to either the loss or destruction, or possibly the worn condition of the lithograph transfer matrix. On August 22, 1848, we find this same "Large Eagle" appearing on a dark green

paper (Scott #5; now Sc. 2L4). Again, the reason for this is not known, but undoubtedly it was a matter of paper supply. It



An 1848 Large Eagle, Sc. 2L4, tied to a lady's decorative envelope by a red Cross rosette cancel, also with 25.Nov.48 c.d.s.

is probable that in those early days of the use of stamps, the government was not so particular about consistency, counterfeiting not having come into the picture as yet. This printing on dark green paper is very much scarcer than that on the apple green.

All of the above stamps of Geneva were lithographed by Schmidt of Geneva.

The first killer postmark used by the Geneva Cantonal Post consisted of the Swiss cross surrounded by a foliated design (see Sc. 2L3, above); a variation of this with the cross omitted is also found (see Sc. 2L6 single, page 7). Later a more simplified form consisting of what might be termed a double lined Swiss cross came into use. Several modifications of this latter increases the total to five distinct types. These are usually found in vermilion and occasionally in black or blue.

### Basel

Unlike those of the other two cantons, the stamp of Basel (Scott #1; now Sc. 3L1, right) commonly known as the "Basel Dove," was typographed, and in three colors with the dove embossed. It



is without question the most beautiful of the stamps of its time. Designed by Berry, an architect, and engraved on copper by Krebs, it was printed in Frankfort-on-Main. July 1, 1845 was the first day of issue.

Very little is known concerning the issuing of this stamp. It was of 2-1/2 Rappen denomination and primarily for use on mail within the town of Basel. Mail addressed to points outside of the town required two stamps. The idea of adhesive stamps was not popular in Basel, and after about two years, practically



*The Basel Dove in black, green and vermilion, footnoted in Scott as a proof*

fell into disuse. The “Basel Dove” is often found in green and brick red in place of the pale blue and vermilion, and as such is commonly known as an essay. This is

a misnomer, for it has been definitely established that this item is actually the first printing, which was accepted but not put into use. It is important to note that this so-called essay has been used a number of times to create a counterfeit of the genuine stamp by bleaching the green to blue.



The “Basel Dove” has been counterfeited probably with greater success than any of the other cantonal stamps, some of them being extremely dangerous.

The postmark used at this time consisted of two concentric circles with the name Basel, the time of day and the complete date, and is usually found in vermilion. This was a French type of postmark and was introduced in a number of the cantons in 1833. However, neither Geneva, nor Zurich used it as a “Killer.”

*A pair of the Basel Dove on piece with “Basel 3 Aout Vor-Mittag” cancel—the only known pair with the “before noon” postmark. The bottom stamp shows the “Hood on Dove” plate error.*

## TRANSITION PERIOD

### “Vaud”

As mentioned above, the Federal government announced that beginning on January 1, 1849 it would attempt to organize and operate a centralized postal system. This was a major operation in view of the fact that there were so many individual postal systems, with varying rates, routes, and regulations. It was not until April 5, 1850 that the work was completed and it could be said that the new Federal postal department was operating fully.

Among the early acts of the department were the establishing of rates for the whole of Switzerland and the dividing of the entire country into eleven postal districts. In the meantime Geneva which as we have seen, was accustomed to the use of adhesive stamps, issued for local use, the so-called four centime “Vaud” (Scott #12; now Sc. 2L5) late in 1849, probably in November.



An 1849 4c, Sc. 2L5 early usage, tied by red rosette and “Geneva 20 Nove 49” c.d.s.; right, a single with black rosette cancel.

Very little is known about this stamp, but apparently it was in use for just a few weeks when it was replaced on January 22, 1850 by the five centime “Vaud” (Scott #13; now Sc. 2L6) which was for use throughout the canton. It seems to the writer that this four centime stamp which was the nearest equivalent in Geneva currency to the 2-



Sc. 2L6 with red rosette without cross cancel



1/2 Rp. Federal rate, which of course was in Swiss currency, was adopted by the Geneva district postmaster for local use in accordance with the Federal law dated June 8, 1849 and effective for local letter mail on October 1. However, the difference between four centimes and the five centime cantonal rate to which Geneva was accustomed is so trifling that it is quite possible that arrangements were made whereby Geneva could continue its five centime cantonal rate.



*1850 5c Vaud issue (Sc. 2L6) tied by diamond barred grid, with "Geneve 15 Juin 54 12 M" c.d.s. on an 1854 locally-addressed folded letter.*

These stamps were lithographed from stones of 100 subjects, by Schmidt of Geneva, the original four centime stone having been made from a single subject transfer and the five centime stone having been simply the original stone with the figure of value altered. In the latter case we naturally have 100 definite varieties, which has made possible the reconstruction of the 100 subject sheet.

**“Neuchatel”**

One other Geneva stamp of this period should be mentioned, namely the so-called “Neuchatel” (Scott #14; now Sc. 2L7), issued about August, 1850.



*Sc. 2L7*

Whereas its appearance came after the date established as the closing of the transition period, it is convenient to include it in the latter. It is fair to assume that after the exhaustion of the supply of five centime Vauds, Geneva issued this stamp in place of the 2-1/2 Rp. Federal local.

Due to the difference in monetary systems it would have been necessary for Geneva to sell the Federal stamps at four or five centimes in place of the indicated value of 2-1/2 Rappen. Undoubtedly to avoid confusion, this stamp was

authorized. In design it resembles somewhat the Federal local in that it shows the Swiss shield in the center, and across the top the words “Poste Locale,” while in the background the irregular ornamentation of the Federal local is somewhat simulated. The killer postmark used was almost invariably the Federal grid in blue or black. This stamp continued in use until at least January 1, 1852 when the French monetary system was made standard for the whole of Switzerland.

### “Winterthur”

In its advice of January 18, 1850 the postal department authorized district postmasters to issue stamps, at the local rate, to those communities in which the local rate was authorized or desired. In view of this, the district postmaster of Zurich issued, probably in February or March, 1850, the so-called Winterthur (Scott #15; now Sc. 1L5) for use in the major towns of his district. As in the case of most of the cantonal stamps, very little is known about this one. Lithographed on thin white unwatermarked paper, probably in sheets of 50 subjects, this stamp shows the Federal cross surrounded by a post horn and, in addition to the figure of value, it contains the words “Ortspost—Poste Locale.” An unusual feature of this stamp is the ornamental design placed between the stamp subjects.

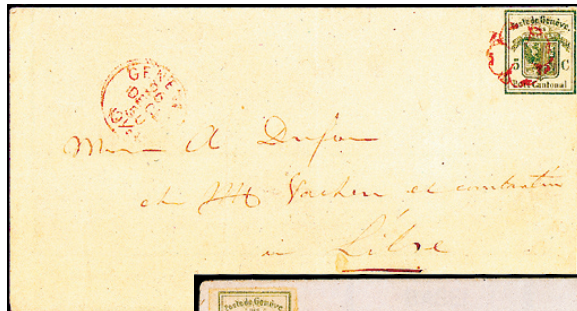
This consists of a double headed arrow entwined with a ribbon. The complete stamp therefore should show this design, or a portion of it on each of the four sides. It was in use for a very short time, as the Federal local appeared generally throughout Switzerland on April 5, 1850.



*A Sc. 1L5 single showing portions of the ornamental design on all four sides.*

*An April 22, 1850 usage with an irregular block of eight of Sc. 1L5, showing the full ornamental design between stamps.*

In concluding this sketchy account of the cantonal issues of Switzerland, and with an aim to completeness, mention should be made of the Geneva “Cut-Square” (Scott #6; now Sc. 2LU1). At the time the postal service was taken over by the Federal Government a quantity of stamped envelopes—remainders of an unpopular idea of the cantonal post—were found in the Geneva postoffice. Rather than waste these, the Federal Department ordered them cut from the envelopes and used as adhesives. Used copies are not plentiful, but tied to cover they are extremely rare.



Top to bottom: a rare entire envelope used December 26, 1850;

An 1849 cutout from the 5c envelope, tied by red rosette, used November 25, 1850;



Two cutout singles from the 5c tied by black grills on an April 15, 1851 cover—the only known double franking.