

SWITZERLAND IMPERFORATE SITTING HELVETIA DEFINITIVES

1854-1863 – THE “STRUBELS”

Exhibit Synopsis prepared for INDYPEX 2025

A. Purpose:

To show, in a six frame exhibit, development, production, and use of final imperforate definitive series issued by Switzerland. Subsets of seven denominations were produced during seven distinct printing periods. Printing periods were distinguished by printer location (three periods in Munich, four periods in Bern), inks, paper used, moistened vs. dry paper, and denominations printed.

Strubels are important because period of use was twice as long as preceding federal lithographed stamps in use from 1850-1854 and because of dramatic increase in international correspondence both because of Swiss emigration as well as commercial trade expansion for which communication was facilitated by these stamps.

B. Challenge:

For American collectors, fundamental challenges are presented by home market for this material being in Switzerland, and that most related literature and market information is published primarily in German and French. Add to that, differences among printing periods are sometimes visually subtle, or require specialized equipment to measure paper thickness or non-destructive chemical testing of paper composition. And, as imperforate stamps with very limited margins between them, most suffer from condition issues related to rapid cutting out of stamps from their sheets by postal clerks. Finally, of course, age of material and very limited use, by today's standards, renders some uses, particularly to unusual destinations to be quite scarce.

C. Presented Material:

Examples of all denominations produced in each of seven printing periods are presented including as single stamps with a variety of postmarks, many multiples, and most with single denomination uses on cover or letter. All thin paper varieties are shown.

Letters and covers providing more esoteric domestic postal services or addressed to international destinations often required combinations of denominations to make correct rates and are shown separately from presentation of individual denominations in their printing periods.

A Note on Cancellations:

1854-mid 1857: post office headquarters instructed postmasters to use a diamond-shaped grill cancel to cancel stamps. Some post offices elected to use postmark devices carried forward from pre-philatelic era (<1850 for most towns). These were sufficiently few in number that they are shown with presentation of stamp printing periods before 1857.

In mid 1857, post office's revised mandate authorized use of town markings and circular date stamps as cancellation devices. This led to a proliferation of different cancellation types, particularly of town markings. In order to more impactfully show a variety of less common related cancellation types together, e.g. Strahlenstempel of Ticino canton, I decided to show these cancels organized by cancellation types rather than having similar cancellations types spread across numerous denomination presentations.

D. Organization:

Exhibit first displays a schematic design development hypothesis of Strubel stamps using first issue of Bavaria as a starting point and recognizing Federal Government's adoption of Helvetia as allegorical

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Unused examples of each of seven denominations from second and fourth Bern printing periods (each printing period produced between four and six denominations, no period produced all seven)

PURPOSE: To illustrate the development, production and use of the last imperforate stamp series issued by Switzerland, including the distinctive features of stamps produced during sequential printing periods in Munich (Bavaria) and Bern (Switzerland) and examples of usage including cancellations applied, rates paid, and destinations.

SCOPE: Each type of preproduction material that is available including a unique embossing proof block of six. Stamps and their individual uses are shown from all printing periods along with production anomalies. Uncommon cancellation types are shown including several that were limited to individual regions, or even unique to small villages. Usages on mail franked with combinations of different denominations to domestic and international destinations are shown, and finally scarce mixed frankings of Strubels with their successor perforated definitive stamps. While this title page displays unused examples of each denomination to illustrate their common design appearance and principal colors, the usual practice was for postal clerks to cut the stamps to order and immediately affix them to letters as they were presented for mailing, cancellation, and dispatch.

BACKGROUND: After introducing its first series of stamps in 1850, the Swiss federal post sought replacements using a less expensive printing process than stone lithography. Strubels met cost saving requirements by limiting each stamp to a single color and by using longer-lived metal letterpress clichés.

Because of the frizzy appearance of Helvetia’s hair, the series has been nicknamed the “Strubels” after a similarly uncoiffed children’s book character, Struwwelpeter.

After initially using a Bavarian printer, the Swiss federal mint developed their own printing capabilities, had the clichés transferred from Munich to Bern, and were ultimately able to source a Swiss-based supplier of threaded paper.

A history of ink changes, paper changes, and printing equipment changes yields a long series of distinguishable printing periods which are explored in depth.

CHALLENGE: With only seven denominations, dual printing locations and subtle paper and ink differences resulted in 38 major type varieties, some of which are scarce. Pre production material from the original Munich printing is difficult to find and the Munich printer’s records are lost. Transitions from previous and to subsequent definitive issues were efficiently executed so that mixed frankings are quite limited. Similarly, except for the 5 centime stamp, bisect uses occurred only as a result of emergency stamp shortages. While international letters to Switzerland’s major trading partners (France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain) are not uncommon, examples of letters to some other destinations are.

IMPORTANCE: While Switzerland is a small country when measured by land area and population, it punches above its weight in importance due to its central location on European trade routes across the Alps. With limited natural resources, Switzerland’s economy is very dependent on trade and the advent of railways and improved ocean transportation during the 1850s and 1860s created a booming need for communications which these stamps helped to facilitate. The mid-19th century also saw a boom in Swiss emigration to North and South America and to Australia, in some cases to take advantage of the gold rushes in California and Australia.

EXHIBIT PLAN:

- Planning and Pre-production
- Munich Printings – three periods
- Bern Printings – four periods
- Bisect uses
- Less common cancellation styles
- Denomination combinations on domestic mail
- Denomination combinations on international mail
- Epilogue – Frankings with other issues

KEY: Items of special philatelic interest are bordered in red
Items accompanied by an expert certificate indicating genuineness are noted with an “e”