

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) Issue of 1900

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With the industrial revolution, communications both inland and abroad increased constantly as from the middle of the 19th Century. In consequence, the letter traffic also increased massively and the need for a better organised international postal service became more and more pressing. Unsuccessful attempts were started in 1841 by the German economist J. v. Herrfeldt. The idea lay fallow until the year 1863.



**Montgomery
Blair 1813-1883**

In August 1862, Montgomery Blair, the Postmaster General of the United States, drew attention to the difficulties in the international letter traffic and trading of various American enterprises (there were bilateral agreements, every country had a different tariff, etc.).

Blair was supported by the then President, Abraham Lincoln, and an international conference with 15 participants from European and American countries was organised in May 1863. The objective was to work out common modalities and introduce simplified postal tariffs. The desired

success was unfortunately not achieved, although the tariffs were subsequently simplified somewhat.



**Heinrich Von Stephan
1831-1897**

On 15th September 1874, Heinrich von Stephan, Postmaster General of the North German Confederation at the time, organised

an international conference with the objective of founding an international postal union. The invitation was by the Swiss Federal Councillor Eugène Borel (Federal Councillor from 1873 to 1875, Head of the UPU from 1875 up to his death). The conference took place in Berne and received 22 representatives from 22 different countries.

This conference was the foundation stone for the Berne Agreement of 9th October 1874, which made possible the establishment of the "Union générale des postes". It unified the whole of Europe, the United States of America and Egypt. The "frontiers" between these united countries fell in order to make place for an extended postal confederation. The tariffs were to be unified and reduced.



**Eugène Borel
1835-1892**

The City of Berne was selected as the domicile of the UPU. The official language is French and English was introduced as a working language as from 1994.

The new simplified tariffs came into effect on 1st July 1875, except for France, also a founding member, which introduced the tariffs first on 1st January 1876. At the Paris Conference in 1878, the name of the organisation was changed to "Union Postale Universelle (UPU)".

The following basic international postal rates between UPU signatory states were established as from 1st July 1875:

Printed matter	Postcards	Letters (to 15 grams)
5 centimes	10 centimes	25 centimes

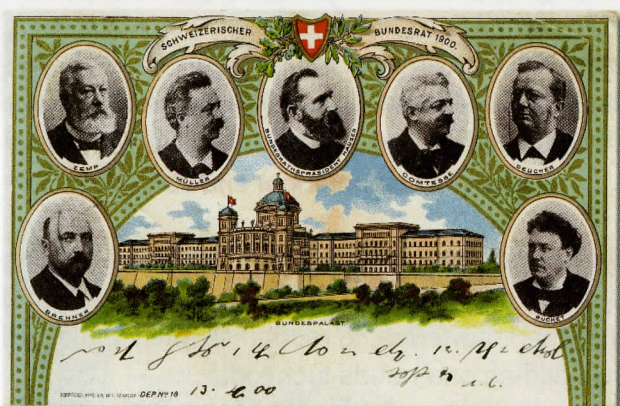
Eugène Ruffy (Federal Councillor from 1893 to 1899) became the Director of the UPU in 1899. In April 1900 he motivated the Federal Councillors and former colleagues to organise a celebration on 2nd July 1900 for the 25th Anniversary of the UPU. Three stamps with the nominal values of 5, 10 and 25 centimes, plus two postal stationery cards of 5 and 10 centimes, were issued for this occasion. The validity of these stamps extended from 2nd July 1900 up to 31st December 1900.



The three values of the first plate (SBK¹ 77A-79A)

As already mentioned, two postal stationery cards of 5 and 10 centimes, with the same validity period as the stamps, were prepared for this event. The green 5 centime card was intended for inland use and the red 10 centime card for international use.

As with the postage stamps, these cards also show numerous varieties, which constitute a special area.



Swiss Federal Council 1900

These stamps were designed by Eugène Grasset (Lausanne/Paris) and were engraved by Florian Frédéric in Paris, whose real name was Frédéric Rognon. The printing from the copper plates was entrusted to Max Girardet, who had printed the standing Helvetia issues among others.

The face values of 5, 10 and 25 centimes correspond to the basic rates and the colours green, red and blue correspond to the new requirements which had been in force since 1896. One can differentiate between three different plates, which specialists have also plated in full (Literature reference 1).



Postcard (PK 033; Literature reference 2) from Berne to Paris. First date of issue with a razor-blade date stamp (4.02; Literature reference 5).

1 SBK stands for Schweizerischer Briefmarken Katalog (Swiss Stamp Catalogue)

The card illustrated below (PK 032) with a supplementary franking of 5 centimes (SBK 77A) sent from Interlaken to Wetzlar shows the variety "Sun in textband" and was further used on the first day of use, 2nd July 1900.



PK 032.P07, so-called "Sun in text-band"

Although the validity period of 6 months, from 2.07.1900 up to 31.12.1900, is very limited, many collecting possibilities remain open. One can, for example, make a traditional collection, which covers the three stamp issues, essays, a wide variety of postmarks, colour varieties and usages on letters. A postal history collection with many different destinations is also possible. One can also specialise in the varieties or even make a plating collection.



Special first day postmark from Frédéric de Coppet for the 25th Anniversary of the UPU

Naturally, a special canceller was made for the 25th Anniversary of the UPU. This was manufactured by Frédéric de Coppet, Lausanne.

This canceller was only used for three days, from 2nd to 4th July 1900.

Philatelic documents with this canceller are naturally very sought after by collectors, especially when they are not selfmade. The following registered letter from Berne to New York fulfils the collecting criteria entirely.



Registered letter from Berne to New York with the special postmark of 2nd July 1900

The more unusual a letter is, the more interesting it becomes. It naturally takes much patience, and also the knowledge, to recognise such items and sometimes one needs luck too.



R.S/& Co (R19, Literature reference 3) Robert Schwarzenbach & Co, Ferggerei, Thalwil; in use from 1899 to 1931.

The next document shows an unusually high franking, one for the 8th weight-stage, with postage of 2 francs (6x79B and standing Helvetia, 74D) for the despatch of a heavy item from Thawil to London. All the stamps were perforated (“perfins”).



Enlargement of one of the perforated stamps;

R, S = Robert Schwarzenbach, below

& Co = and Company

As the last, I would like to introduce to you a registered first day postcard with Yokohama as its destination. Attractive and unusual frankings to foreign countries are not everyday items after the simplification of the rates from 1st July 1875. However, finds can be made at stamp shows and in auctions.



Registered postcard from Seewen via San Francisco to Yokohama from 2nd July 1900.

The UPU expanded more and more and continually improved its services. The stages of this continuous development are characterised by numerous Conferences and Congresses (Partially an historical event, stamp collecting has

ris 1878, Lisbon 1885, Vienna 1891, Washington 1897, Rome 1906, Madrid 1920, Stockholm 1924, London 1929, Cairo 1934, just to mention the first).

The Washington Congress of 1897 brought a further change, under which the stamps of all member states for the three basic international rates had to have the same colours:

Printed matter	Post-cards	Letters (to 15 grams)
Green	Red	Blue

For Switzerland this had the consequence that the stamps of the number design and the standing Helvetia stamps had to be changed.

You can see that there are various ways to have fun and enjoyment with the stamps of this issue in spite of their modest period of validity.

Literature

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