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Autor: Farr, Michael
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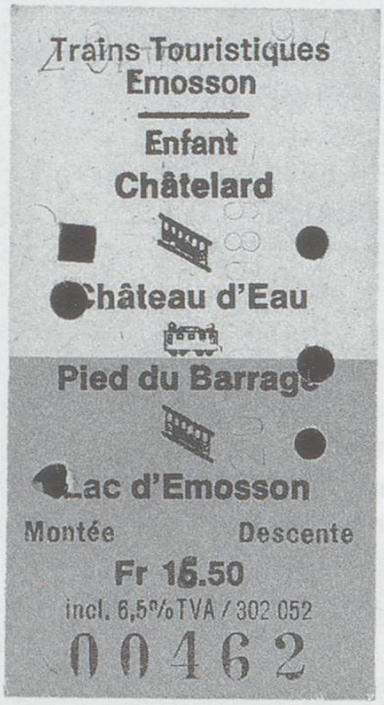

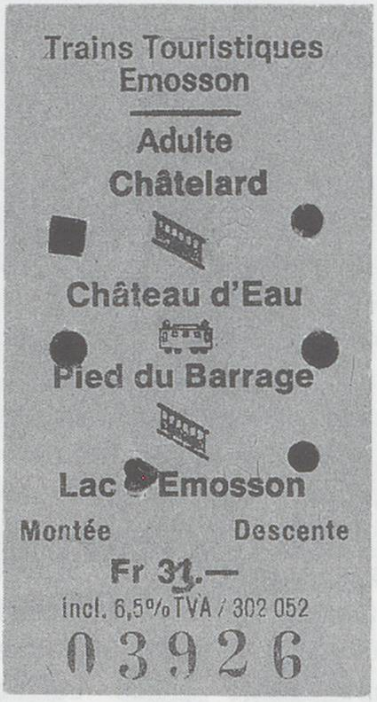

SBB says farewell to Edmondsons

by Michael Farr

Kaiserstuhl, on the Brunig line, saw the end of an era on 5th November 1997 when it became the last SBB station to sell the traditional card tickets invented in the UK by Edmondson 160 years ago.

I had anticipated that I might collect a good selection of traditional tickets on our first trip to Switzerland in 1990 because with the information about our Swiss Travel Service Scenic Tour came a specially-printed red, white and green *Spezialbillet* for the journey **Zurich Flughafen - Luzern** - Brunig - Interlaken Ost - **Grindelwald** - Lotschberg - **Zermatt** - Andermatt - Filisur **o** Landquart - **Davos** - Zurich - **Zurich Flughafen.** I had manged to arrange that whilst at Grindelwald we could visit the SBB ticket printing office at Bern. Clearly they had few visitors but despite my very basic command of German the ice was broken when I mentioned the magic word *Edmondson* and showed them a copy of my little book about the man. Immediately one of the printers rushed off to set in type the word *Edonson* - yes, since time immemorial the Continentals have spelt his name wrong!

At this time the computerised IGB/ESG system, providing enquiry, reservation and ticketing on all state and private transport concerns had been installed at all major stations and the quantity of tickets being printed at Bern had reduced dramatically from the 150,000 a day produced by a staff of 16 in the sixties. In May 1992 it was announced that the office would close, although they have continued to produce a limited service for a few stations, agents and private railways still using the older system - which they have continued to do until now.

On our visit they had been using three machines, one of which was designed to print the larger cards used for special events, and for our STS rail tour. They also had a conventional letterpress machine to overprint ten journey cards, annual abonnements and Fly-Rail Luggage labels.

Edmondson listed the Swiss Northern in his publicity in June 1847 as one of the railways to whom he had sold his system, although for very many years Swiss transport tickets have been printed on machines built by Georg Gœbel in Darmstadt or the similar *Beweg* model by Speedomatic of Lengau.

Most UK railways bought the British made Waterlow ticket printing machine, although Gœbel did sell their machines to some printers in this country, including Alfred Williamson of Ashton-under-Lyne. When they were taken over by Henry Booth of Hull (who now print most APTIS tickets for the British railways) they refurbished one of the machines. Last year they decided to stop using it and I was asked to find a good home; it is now at Swanage ready to print tickets for that and other private lines in the UK.

My search for Swiss Edmondson tickets has continued on subsequent holidays - with diminishing success. I have been fortunate to visit the last railway printing office, the RhB at Chur, and the only remaining commercial printer at Worb.

More and more private transport operators are changing to some form computerised system but even last April I received a specially-printed Edmondson card for the Press photoship for SGV's Paddle Steamer Parade on Lake Luzern and found three outposts of the LSE which still offered traditional ticketing. I understand that since then both the MOB and CGN have converted their smaller stations and I shall have to plan my 1998 itinerary most carefully if I am to travel with Edmondson cards for another holiday.

On the first visit the SBB staff had made us very welcome and I left clutching pieces of type to print the double-arrow symbol and *und zuruck* used for returns, both of which I have used to produce replica tickets, including some for Mike Poleglaze's *Via Mala* model. I asked whether, when they finally closed the print works, I could have one of the type frames (or chases in printing terms) used to hold the type in place whilst being printed. Some months later a heavy package arrived from Brighton c/o a member of British Rail International staff who had been asked to smuggle it into the country after an International rail conference in Bern.

They had carefully set the type and printed off a first class return from **Zurich Fughafen** to **Bern Barengraben** via Zurich-Olten-Bern. I searched the timetables in vain for a station with the later name, only to discover in the dictionary that it had been specially set up to commemorate our visit to Bern when our SBB host very kindly took us back to the station on a sightseeing tour, via the bear pits!

Above: Ce6/8^{II} 14253 headed the "1930's special" northwards through Airolo. 31/8/97.
Photo: John Jesson