

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2007)
Heft: [3]

Artikel: Swiss stamps commemorate rail anniversaries
Autor: Farr, Michael
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854747>

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SWISS STAMPS COMMEMORATE RAIL ANNIVERSARIES



Most of us will have sent or received postcards and letters from Switzerland carrying in the top right hand corner a colourful postage stamp, some even commemorating an anniversary or special event concerning a railway or other public transport system.

Swiss stamps were not always pictorial, and the very first railway commemoratives, issued in 1932 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Gotthard Railway were small and carried a portrait of one of three men associated with the setting up of the line.

Engineer Louis Favre lost both his life and his fortune through building the Gotthard Tunnel and is one of the 198 people killed in its construction who are commemorated in a sculptured relief unveiled at Airolo in 1932. Fifty years later the design of the sculpture featured as a gutter pane for the two stamps issued for the Gotthard centenary.

The other two personalities on the 1932 stamps were Alfred Escher and Emil Welti. Escher founded the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt, later a major bank, and held several important offices including President of the Swiss National Council, through which he encouraged the development of the rail network to keep Switzerland on the European map.

Welti fought for the Gotthard line as a Councillor and when he became President of the Swiss Confederation. He led the Post and Railways Department on several occasions.

For the 1982 centenary of the Gotthard line the Swiss Post Office produced an attractive miniature sheet with a violet background. The two stamps, both valued at 40c, and printed in strips of five joined by the interpane gutter of the Airolo sculpture, featured a C 4/5 steam loco of 1906 vintage and an Re 6/6 electric.

Swiss stamps make an ideal and reasonably inexpensive sideline to our interest in the country's transport network - and if you collect mint examples you can always use them on your mail while on holiday should you lose interest later! You can keep in touch with new issues through an excellent - and free - English-language magazine, *Focus on Stamps*, issued quarterly by Swiss Post. To join the mailing list contact Swiss Post, Stamps and Philately, Ostermundigenstrasse 91, CH-3030 Berne, Switzerland. The e-mail address is stamps@swisspost.ch.

The earlier stamps are now only available through dealers and collectors and any members who are interested in learning more are invited to contact the Helvetia Philatelic Society's secretary, Peter Vonwiller on 01 296 621 159.

Editor's Note: Michael Farr has kindly put together this feature with a great deal of help from both the Helvetia Philatelic Society and Swiss Post.



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