

Refused Mail of Switzerland

Purpose of Exhibit

This exhibit traces Swiss Refusé markings before and after international agreements regarding undelivered mail were adopted by the Universal Postal Union in 1891.

Organization of Exhibit

The evolution of marking refused mail in Switzerland can be divided into these periods:

Frame 1: 1850's - 1886

Hand stamp on refused letters.

Hand written *refusé*, or German equivalent.
Items signed by addressee confirming refusal.

Frame 2: 1865 - 1891

Pre-UPU international mail, German proposal.
Swiss adopt bilingual green labels for international and domestic returned mail.

UPU standardizes rules regarding international returned mail.

Frame 3: 1891 - 1909

Swiss bilingual green *refusé* labels uses on domestic and international mail.

Frame 4: 1909 - 1918

Right of Refusal and introduction of trilingual labels.
Refusal of *nachnahme* and postage due items, domestic and international.


Frame 5: 1918 - 1927

Introduction of black trilingual labels
Black label size changed and perforated.

Private label contractors replaced by state printing office.

Frame 6: 1927 - 1985

Retour hand stamps
Mid- 20th century changes, rouletted labels.

Items with blue dot are of special interest. 

Types of Items Most Frequently Refused

Nachnahme (COD) - Most common was the demand for cash on delivery. In Switzerland many businesses mailed bills to customers and the carrier collected the amounts due, which were sometimes substantial. An accounting system tracked the collection of this money. If the addressee refused to pay the amount due, the sender was notified with the return of the 'refused' correspondence.

Postage Due - Many pieces were commercial cards and letters from companies advertising services and products. Why would a business pay to receive advertising (junk mail) in which they had no interest?

The forwarding of foreign mail to Switzerland often created postage due items. After the addressee refused to pay the tax and penalties, these items were marked and returned to the country of origin.

Registered and Official Letters - Refused items in this category were often the result of the addressee being party to a legal dispute or not being available to receive the registered letter. Money was also collected by registered mail.

Subscriptions, Advertising, and Memberships - Within this category one sees requests for publication subscriptions, or payments due for printed advertising within a publication. Also, organizations collected dues in this manner. These items are most often wrappers or post cards.

Publications for Review - In 1884 publishers were allowed to send publication samples to people for review. The review period was four days, at which point the publication could be returned post free to the sender. There were special labels created for this specific service. Very few exist today.

International - Incoming examples of foreign mail refused in Switzerland are shown with return labels applied in compliance to the 1891 UPU regulations. A few examples show Swiss outgoing international mail refused in the receiving country and returned to Switzerland. These items demonstrate how other countries interpreted the UPU guidelines.