

The Courvoisier "Paul Usteri" design trial by Helmut Büchel,

translated from Courvoisier Versuchsdruck

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As is well known, the Courvoisier company printed Swiss stamps for decades. A newly discovered experimental design trial is an important evidence of collaboration between Swiss Post and the Courvoisier printing house in the years 1928 to 1930.

The Courvoisier Printing House

In December 1880, Alexandre Courvoisier founded "L'Imprimerie Courvoisier" in La Chaux-de-Fonds. From 1926, the company was run by his sons Henry and Paul Courvoisier. With the idea of printing stamps, it was decided in 1928 to set up a gravure printing department (so-called heliogravure). For this purpose, a gravure printing press was procured. This made it possible to produce stamps in large quantities with photorealistic images of high quality. Subsequently, Courvoisier S.A. printed stamps for countless postal administrations around the world and was considered one of the leading stamp printers.



Courvoisier Printing press in La Chaux-de-Fonds



lettering such as this was seen on Swiss stamps for decades.

The company remained privately owned until 1987. Then the Courvoisier family sold their shares and the Swiss PTT took a 20% stake in the new company Hélio-Courvoisier S.A. Until the end of the 1990s, Hélio-Courvoisier produced around 600 million stamps annually with just over 30 employees. Due to a worldwide decline in orders and increasing price pressure, Hélio-Courvoisier had to file for bankruptcy in 2001 and cease operations.

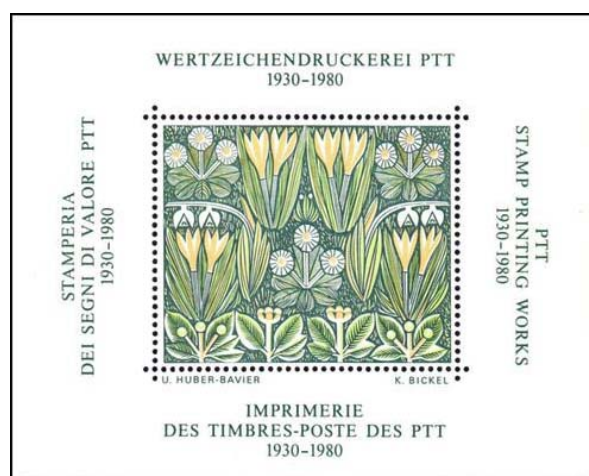
Swiss Post's stamp printing plant

The printing of Swiss stamps was restructured in 1930 and spun off from the Federal Mint in Bern. Until then, the mint printed a large part of Swiss stamps or was at least responsible for the production of printing plates (printing plates, gravure cylinders). A new department «Stamp Printing House PTT» was created. However, the stamps continued to be produced on the premises of the mint. In the following years, mainly monochrome permanent stamps were produced here using letterpress and offset printing processes.

In 1980 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the stamp printing company PTT, a special stamp and a special vignette were issued

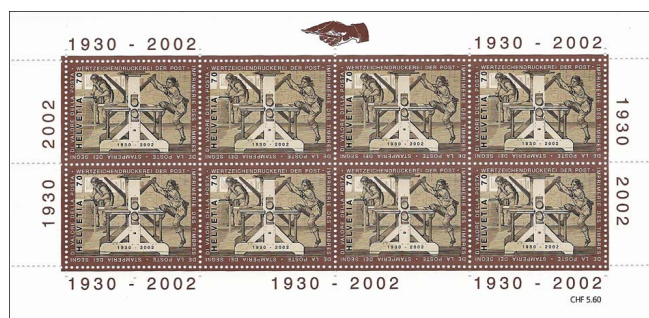


1930-1980 50 years of stamp printing PTT 70 cents



Vignette of an unexecuted design for the edition "High Values 1961"

In 2002, Swiss Post also closed its stamp printing plant because of a lack of future prospects for stamp printing.



Commemorative stamp for the closure of the stamp printing plant in 2002.

The last stamp printed in Swiss Post's stamp printing plant was the A Mail permanent stamp from 1995, which was converted to non-fluorescent paper with luminous fibres in 1999 and reprinted until 2002.



On the last day of printing, 28 June 2002, 1,000 sheets of the A Mail permanent stamp were produced in the stamp printing shop. After that, the operation was discontinued.

The collaboration between PTT and Courvoisier

Between 1928 and 1930, stamp printing tests were carried out on the new gravure press by the Courvoisier printing company on behalf of the Swiss postal authorities. Due to the success of these attempts, Courvoisier delivered the first stamps to Swiss Post in 1931. These were the three landscape stamps of 5, 10 and 20 cents for the Pro Juventute series.



The 1931 Pro Juventute stamps, the first stamps produced by the Courvoisier printing company for the Swiss Post.

Over the next 70 years, Courvoisier regularly printed Pro Juventute, Pro Patria as well as special and advertising stamps in close cooperation with the Swiss Post. Courvoisier also regularly produced stamps for many other postal administrations around the world.

Experimental (trial) prints

Experimental (Trial) prints are an interesting branch of philately. The purpose of experimental prints was to test new processes, machines or materials. In Switzerland, experimental prints were produced by the Swiss Post and the stamp printer, as well as by the Courvoisier printing company and the printing press manufacturer Winkler, Fallert & Cie (WIFAG). The first experimental prints from 1935 are known from the Swiss Post. The Courvoisier company did not produce experimental prints until the 1960s. A catalogue of

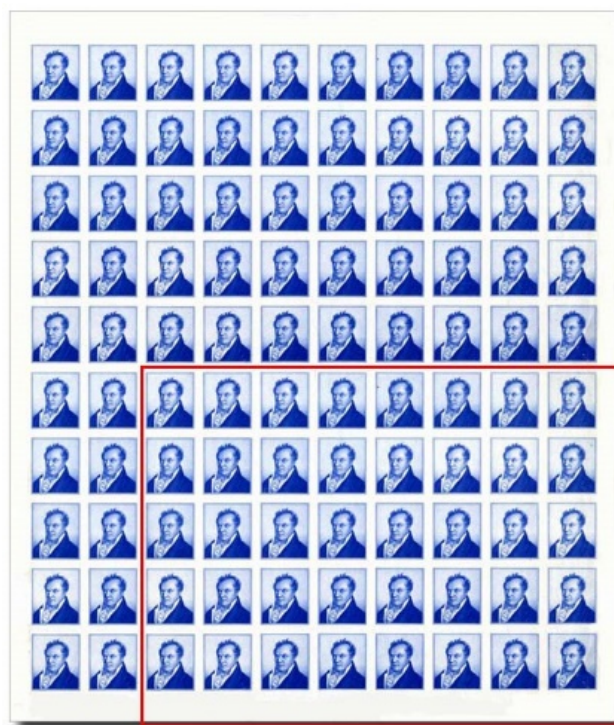
the experimental prints was compiled by Derrick M. Slate and is available on the website of the Helvetia Philatelic Society: <https://swiss-philately.co.uk/swiss-trial-prints/>

Courvoisier design trial «Paul Usteri»

The experimental printing that has now been discovered is evidence of collaboration between the Swiss Post and the Courvoisier printing company in 1928-30. The sheet of 40 stamps has been cut from a larger sheet. There is a handwritten comment on the border « Essai de Timbres en Suisse chez Courvoisier à La Chaux de Fonds en 1930 ». This experimental stamp was printed in a sheet of hundreds and shows a portrait in blue as used in the later 30 cents of the Pro Juventute editions. The sheet is imperforate and ungummed, printed on thin paper. At 17x20mm, the brand image is about the same size as the Pro Juventute editions up to 1927 (cantonal coat of arms).



Part of the Courvoisier test stamp with inscribed edge.



Reconstruction of the 100 mm printed sheet with marking of the 40 mm sheet.

The Subject – Paul Usteri

The subject of this test stamp is the Swiss publicist, politician, physician and botanist Paul Usteri (1768 - 1831). Paul Usteri made a great contribution to the development of freedom of the press in Switzerland. In 1821-31, as director and editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (NZZ), he pursued a liberal opposition course to the conservative government.



C1860 Lithograph Paul Usteri



Experimental stamp is based on the c 1860 Lithograph

What is interesting about this choice of subject is that the Pro Juventute stamps from 1930 to 1935 also depict Swiss personalities. It is therefore quite possible that Paul Usteri and not Alexandre Vinet was originally intended as a subject for the 30 cents value of 1931 which was the 100th anniversary of Usteri's death.



30Rp. Pro Juventute stamps 1930 to 1935 with images of Swiss personalities.

Further reading

- Wikipedia
 - Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz
 - Swiss Trial Prints by Derrick M. Slate 1994/2015
- Images
- SwissPhila
 - Library of the City of La Chaux-de-Fonds

Note added by translator. It is difficult to know whether the Paul Usteri printing was a trial print as defined in Derrick Slates article i.e. produced to test the printing machinery article or whether it was a design trial proposed to the PTT. If this was a trial print to test the machinery it is a very early example of such.

