One hundred years of Swiss Railways (SBB)
As seen through stamps

ZNr. 191   ZNr. 192   ZNr. 193

ZNr. 668/669

A glance at the history of Swiss Railways as reflected in the pages of a stamp album reveals the mingling of many themes. The miniature format of stamps requires designers to concentrate the content in a way that generalizes the subject. Swiss stamp motifs with an SBB link can be grouped in a variety of ways. And that's exactly what collectors do, classifying these little works of art in categories such as people, landscapes, bridges, tunnels and rolling stock, to name but a few.

All Swiss stamps issued over the past one hundred years have probably been used to prepay letters or parcels that were transported to their destination by Swiss Railways. Seen from that angle, all of them were suitable and relevant for SBB use.

However, the issues dedicated specifically to Swiss Railways, its history and achievements are easier to survey. This article focuses on a few examples which, while representative, do not claim to be exhaustive.

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Background photos:
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People
The series of railway stamps of direct relevance to the SBB starts with faces, in the form of three portrait stamps featuring leading public figures which were issued to mark the 50th anniversary of the Gotthard Railway in 1932.

The self-taught engineer and building contractor Louis Favre (1826–1879) **(ZNr. 191)** not only lost his life through building the Gotthard Tunnel but also his fortune. Later, the management of the Gotthard Line voluntarily settled a life-long pension of CHF 10 000.– a year on Favre's impoverished daughter, Mrs. Henriette Hava-Favre, who lived in Paris. After the nationalization of the Gotthard Line in 1909, the SBB continued to meet

ZNr. 196

ZNr. 198

ZNr. 200

ZNr. 298

ZNr. 302

ZNr. 816

this commitment for another three years, until Mrs. Hava's death in 1912.

The monument to Favre and the other 198 people who lost their lives building the tunnel between Göschenen and Airolo was sculpted by the Ticino artist Vincenzo Vela (1820–1891) in the form of an impressive relief. Though completed in 1883, it was not erected and unveiled until 50 years later, in 1932, in Airolo. Another fifty years on, Vela's sculpture featured on the interpane gutter with no prepayment value **(ZNr. 668/669)** of the miniature sheet issued by Swiss Post to mark the centenary of the Gotthard Line.

The first CEO of this railway was Alfred Escher (1819–1882) **(ZNr. 192)**, founder of

the "Schweizerische Kreditanstalt" (later a major Swiss bank), President of the Government of Zurich and Chairman of Swiss North-Eastern Railways. As President of the Swiss National Council, Escher ensured that the young federal State took due account of the railways as a new means of transport, claiming that otherwise, Switzerland ran the risk of being bypassed and condemned to hermit-like isolation in the future. During the discussion of the subsequent Railways Act, he successfully introduced the minority motion designed to privatize railway construction and operation and leave the granting of licences in cantonal hands. In July 1852, Escher's policy postponed the setting up of Swiss Railways by about 50 years.

While a Councillor of State, Emil Welti (1825–1899) **(ZNr. 193)** fought for the Gotthard Line. Later, in his capacity as a Federal Councillor and while President of the Swiss Confederation, he was to head the Post and Railways Department on several occasions. Welti was a vigorous supporter of nationalizing the main private railways. The 1872 Railways Act transferred the authority to grant licences from the Cantons to the Confederation, creating the foundation for the repurchase of the major private railways, a move voted by a considerable majority of the Swiss electorate on 20 February 1898.

ZNr. 325

ZNr. 329

ZNr. 385

ZNr. 668

ZNr. 669

ZNr. 746

Railway landscapes

From 1934, the 10-centime stamp **(ZNr. 196)** featured Chillon Castle, with the Dents-du-Midi in the background, promoting the SBB's Lausanne–Villeneuve line to stamp status. It was built in 1861 by the Ouest-Suisse company, supplemented with a second track in 1891, incorporated into Swiss Railways in 1903 and used by the Simplon Express from and to Milan from 1906. The construction of the Mont d'Or line in 1915 brought Lausanne and Paris that bit closer, and in 1984, a TGV service to Lausanne was introduced via Dijon–Vallorbe, further strengthening the city's railway status. In winter, the "TGV des Neiges" (TGV of the Snows) operates as far as Brig, via Chillon, open-

ing up the runs of Canton Valais to Parisian ski fans.

The 20-centime stamp **(ZNr. 198)** shows a section of the South Ramp of the Gotthard Line with the magnificent infrastructure in the Biaschina Gorge, above Giornico. Here, the railway conquers a height difference of some 80 metres by means of two helical tunnels, Travi (1547 metres) and Pianotondo (1508 metres), and the Pianotondo Viaduct (111 metres long, nine arches) with its 300-metre radius at the very top.

Bridges

The third stamp dating from 1934 – a 30-centime stamp **(ZNr. 200)** – depicts the arched stone bridge over the Rhine Falls which was built during the low-water winter of 1855/56 by the Rheinfall Railway. For technical (foundation) reasons, its ten arches vary in size. It was commissioned in 1857 by the Swiss North-Eastern Railway, which was subsequently nationalized in 1902.

Other SBB bridges featured on stamps in 1949. In fact, the 5-centime stamp **(ZNr. 298)** shows four of them – at Sittertobel, near St Gallen-Bruggen – in one fell swoop. The Krätzer Bridge looms at the top, above the 191 metre-long SBB viaduct with its six arches spanning up to

ZNr. 786

ZNr. 34

ZNr. 35

ZNr. 36

ZNr. 37

30 metres each, framed by the older and lower-lying Gmünder Tobel road bridge and the viaduct of the Lake Constance–Toggenburg Railway with its 100-metre-high lattice girders, the highest railway bridge in Switzerland.

The 25-centime stamp **(ZNr. 302)** depicts the ponte-diga between Melide and Bissone which crosses Lake Lugano or Verbano. The appearance of the 814-metre bridge-cum-dam built in 1847 has altered considerably over the years. Originally, it was the work of Cantonal Engineer Pasquale Lucchini (1798–1892), one of the first supporters and protagonists of the idea of the Gotthard Railway. His grandson, Cesare Lucchini (1885–1965), joined the Gotthard Company in

1908 and went on to pursue a great career, culminating in the Presidency of the SBB's General Directorate between 1949 and 1951.

Swiss Post opted for another SBB bridge as a stamp motif in 1991. For 80 centimes **(ZNr. 816)**, collectors could have the image of the curved, 236-metre lattice bridge over the River Aare, between Koblenz and Felsenau, Canton Aargau. Since the end of May 1994, the bridge with its five sections, each 47.83 metres long, is used more for goods traffic.

Tunnels

A 10-centime stamp **(ZNr. 325)** was issued in 1956 to mark the 50th anniversary of completion of the SBB's Simplon Tunnel, which remained the longest railway tunnel in the world until 1982, and shows its two portals.

A train pulled by an Ae 6/6 locomotive sporting the Swiss cross (1952–1966, 4300 kW or 5830 HP, top speed of 125 km/h) is shown leaving Tunnel II (originally intended for ventilation and not opened for rail traffic until 1921), while the mouth of Tunnel I (on the left), completed in 1906, highlights that this was the first time a twin-tunnel system had been used.

ZNr. 277

ZNr. 278

ZNr. 279

ZNr. 280

Approximately 9.1 km of the 19.8 km of tunnel are in Switzerland. The border between the Swiss and Italian Railways is 11 km further on in Iselle, on Italian territory.

The Biaschina Gorge and the Ae 6/6 locomotive starred on yet another stamp, issued by the Swiss PTT in 1957 in tribute to the 75th anniversary of the Gotthard Line **(ZNr. 329)**. A train is shown leaving the Travi helical tunnel. This spot near Giornico was also chosen for its symbolic importance, because it is here that travellers heading south have their first real "taste" of Italy: besides chestnuts and grapes, Giornico is home to the first fig trees ...

Railway vehicles (rolling stock)
Five years later, on 19 March 1962, another stamp **(ZNr. 385)** was dedicated to Swiss Railways, in the shape of the TEE electric train which could be used for all current systems throughout Europe. The first four fully-electric trains had five carriages, but 1966 saw the addition of a further carriage, and in 1967, the existing fleet was supplemented by a fifth train on the same lines (2310 kW or 3143 HP, maximum speed of 160 km/h; seating for 128–168 passengers). The map of Europe which forms the background to the stamp highlights Switzerland's national pride in its railways.

The Gotthard Line hit the philatelic headlines yet again, in the form of two

40-centime stamps **(ZNr. 668/669)** issued to mark its centenary. The first stamp shows the C 4/5 steam locomotive built in 1906 as a traction engine for mountainous terrain (993 kW or 1350 HP, max. speed 65 km/h), and the second the heavy-duty Re 6/6 electric locomotive in operation between 1972 and 1980 (7802 kW or 10611 HP, max. speed 140 km/h). Both images were presented as a miniature sheet with a violet background in strips of five, joined by the interpane gutter shown on page 24.

Two expansions of its network inspired further Swiss Railways stamps with vehicle motifs. In 1987, a 90-centime stamp **(ZNr. 746)** with the title "Liaison CFF Genève Aéroport" (Geneva Airport Rail

ZNr. 909

ZNr. 910

ZNr. 911

ZNr. 912

Link) was issued to celebrate the linking of the airport to Western Switzerland. It features a Boeing 747 taking off and an incoming InterCity train just below it, pulled by an Re 4/4 IV locomotive with a standard IV passenger van. These locomotives (4960 kW or 6750 HP, max. speed 160 km/h) were in fact precursors of Rail 2000, but never went into series production.

In 1990, the commissioning of Zurich's regional high-speed network ("S-Bahn") inspired a stamp with the double-decker coach which was its characteristic feature **(ZNr. 786)**. The design shows two views of this train: on top, an inbound locomotive with a driver's cab and the first coach, while below, the control unit with the

other cab is departing with another of the S-Bahn's four-section sets, each 100 metres long. This presentation translates the high traffic volumes processed into visual terms. At Zurich's busy S-Bahnhof under Museumstrasse or at Zurich Stadelhofen, another train is often arriving just as one is leaving.

Set of four stamps
The fourth set of four railway stamps was issued by the Swiss PTT to mark the centenary of railways in Switzerland. In the past, this tribute was reserved for Swiss railways in general – in 1947, to mark one hundred years of Swiss railways, and in 1997 on the occasion of their 150th birthday. The 1947 commemorative federal (Pro Patria) stamps **(ZNr. 34–37)** show a

group of track-layers at work, as well as the stations at Rorschach, Lüen-Castiel and Flüelen. As with the latest Swiss Railways stamps, the focus even then was on rolling stock. In 1947, the vehicles featured **(ZNr. 277–280)** were the "Spanisch-Brötli-Bahn", the biggest and newest SBB Gotthard C 5/6 steam locomotive and the Landi locomotive, hailed as the world's most powerful locomotive, plus a goods and a passenger train crossing a four-track bridge inspired by Berne's Lorraine viaduct. And in 1997, the stamps **(ZNr. 909–912)** supplemented railway vehicles with the fashions of the day, ranging from Biedermeier to the Charleston era, through the Depression years and up to modern times.

Item from the collection of
Heinz Bürki, Ittigen

Swiss railway philately: 101 years old

Collectors have constantly come up with new ideas for special activities and initiatives. Even one year before Swiss Railways started independent operations, certain private individuals "set in train" a first-day letter, when the Zurich–Berne night train on New Year's Eve 1900 passed through Aarau at the stroke of midnight and then travelled on in the New Year, under the aegis of the Confederation. On board the railway post van, there was also a bag of special covers preprinted with the words "First Swiss Railways Train" and franked with the Universal Postal Union's Jubilee stamp, cancelled in Aarau on 31.XII.1900 and valid until midnight on that same day. The same covers, cancelled en route with the "AMBULANT 1.I.01" stamp by railway post guard, Rudolf Käser (1850–1906) from Aarau, have also survived.

Since then, stamp collectors, and in particular philatelists who are members of the "Railway Philatelists Association"*, have frequently initiated and managed special covers, maximum cards and date-stamps, special cancellations and advertising slogans as well as participating regularly in special stamp exhibitions and marts.

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