

SERVICE OF INTELLECTUAL AID TO PRISONERS OF WAR

SYNOPSIS (ROPEX 2008)

During WWII, in accordance with Article 39 of the Geneva Convention of 1929, the International Education Bureau (Bureau International D'Éducation) created the Service of Intellectual Aid to Prisoners of War that provided books and other educational materials to prisoners of war and internees. The IEB Service also conducted "universities" at some camps. By the end of the war, over a half million books had been distributed.



Two sets of labels and a souvenir sheet, printed by Courvoisier S.A. under the authority of the Swiss Post, Telephone and Telegraph (PTT), were sold to collectors and others to raise funds for the Service and were used on personal and philatelic mail, as well as official IEB mail to promote the Service. Individual labels were priced at 20 centimes and whole sheets of 12 labels cost 2 francs. The souvenir sheet of all 4 Fr. Girard labels sold for 2 francs.



Labels were also used on correspondence between the IEB and prisoners/internees. According to the Geneva Convention, such mail was sent free of postage, but the PTT directed the IEB to use the labels to visually identify it. Mail outbound from the IEB offices bore the labels in the upper left corner of the envelope. On all outbound mail, to prisoners/internees and otherwise, the labels would be "canceled" with a special undated rubber stamp by the IEB. Two different stamps were used.

Conversely, mail posted from POW camps, Internee Camps, and other official sources to the Geneva office carried the labels in the upper right corner of the envelope. Labels and pre-addressed envelopes were provided to the camps. Camp postal cancels sometimes tie the labels to the cover or appear to its left.

Even though the labels had no franking power, the fact that they were produced under the authority of the Swiss PTT, were printed by the leading printer of Swiss stamps employing security paper used for regular Swiss issues, and that their use was regulated by the PTT, these labels are considered forerunners of the service stamps issued for the IEB in later years.

Purpose & Scope: This single-frame Cinderella/Charity Label exhibit includes all eight labels and the souvenir sheet issued for the IEB. The exhibit emphasizes the use of the labels as prescribed by the Swiss PTT for the IEB– POW correspondence. Covers included in the exhibit were chosen to show each label used on mail to/from the IEB and to illustrate various postal aspects (e.g. censorship, destinations, rates, etc.) Covers illustrating the use of the labels on other official mail and by the general public are included to complete the story.

Organization: The exhibit is divided into two sections, showing the labels by issue; the Pestalozzi labels are shown first followed by the Girard labels. Within each section mint labels are shown first followed by presentation items. Covers illustrating how the labels were used are then shown. Each of the labels are presented in Zumstein catalog order on covers to and from camps/internees/POWs and on other mail illustrating postal marks, censorship and origin cachets.

Challenge: The labels were issued in small quantities. The greatest number issued were 107,400 labels (8,950 panes) for the wine-red Pestalozzi label (first series), while the Fr. Girard labels (second series) were issued in quantities of just 32,640 (2,720 panes) each. The vast majority of the first two Pestalozzi

labels (wine-red and brown) were sold to collectors and other supporters. Examples of these two labels on covers to/from POWs/Internees are scarce. Additionally, most agency mail bearing the labels that survive today were sent to donors or potential donors, either thanking them for donations and/or seeking funds or books (and even these are not common).

Mail to and from POWs and internees comprise a small fraction of the covers that I have seen, thus far. Although covers *from* POWs and Internees are supposedly easier to find than mail *to* the camps (Apparently, the agency sold incoming mail to raise additional funds.), this exhibitor has found that not to be true.

This exhibit represents what is arguably the largest collection of this material extant, the core of which came from the acquisition of the Jack Mayer collection, amassed over 25 years, in 2001. In the 10 years that I have been collecting this material, I have managed to double that collection. One would be fortunate to find even one cover at the bourse of a WSP show or even in most European shows.

Research: Since 2001 I have been conducting a census of the labels on cover to establish earliest and latest recorded uses. This research is reflected in the exhibit where a number of the earliest recorded uses are shown.

Highlights: This exhibit includes imperforate margin copies of the Pestalozzi labels, full panes of the Pestalozzi and Girard issues (I have full sets of both), and scarce presentation items. A very early use (November 27, 1940), the current EKV, that precedes the listed issue date of December, of the wine-red Pestalozzi label is shown, as is the earliest recorded use (January 21, 1942) of the blue Fr.

Girard label tied to the cover by the first IEB cancel. Along with examples of covers from/to POWs in France and Germany and internees in Switzerland, a cover to a camp for German internees in Surinam is shown. (There were less than 50 internees at the camp.) A scarce use of the souvenir sheet on cover is displayed. Highlighted items are noted in the exhibit by a slightly heavier frame line.

Recent Changes and Acquisitions: A cover from the French Red Cross in Algeria to Pedro Rossello, Director of the Service. A Blue Pestalozzi label is tied to the 1941 cover with the red cachet of the Red Cross.

References:

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- "Some Early Philatelic Activities of the International Education Bureau (1940-1946)", *The Journal of the United Nations Philatelists*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (August 1981) pp. 114-117.
- *Swiss Internment Cancels and Other Markings*, Robert C. Ross, 1974
- *Zumstein Spezialkatalog Schweiz—Band 2*, Max Hertsch, ed., Zumstein & Cie., 2000 pp. 960-961
- *Die Post der Internierten in der Schweiz 1940-1946*, G. Schild

