

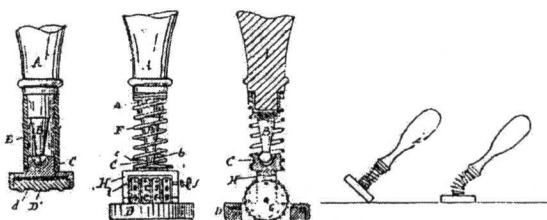
DeCoppet Razor Cancels of Switzerland - Synopsis

Purpose of Exhibit:

This exhibit illustrates the success of flexible-head, rotating date-wheel cancelers invented by Frédéric deCoppet (b.1851-?) of Lausanne, Switzerland.

Güller & Cie made the first date-wheel cancelers for Switzerland in 1866. DeCoppet first patented his flexible-head canceler in 1889, thus combining both technologies.

Innovation and early collaboration between deCoppet and Güller led to the most significant change in canceler design in the history of the Swiss PTT.



Left - conventional Güller fixed head Swiss canceler.
Right center - two views of deCoppet's first external spring mechanism with rotating date wheel.

DeCoppet demonstrated his invention to the Swiss PTT in 1889, but it took another nine years before administrators agreed to conduct extensive tests of his patented flexible-head canceler. The District Post Offices received their first test cancelers in October 1898. The test period continued through 1903 with many stops and restarts. In April 1903 the PTT signed a contract with deCoppet to use his patented canceler. Manufacture was subcontracted to Güller, and new cancelers were distributed to first class post offices throughout Switzerland. The test cancelers continued to be used after 1903, each eventually disappearing from service; last known use 1939.

The Swiss PTT relied on deCoppet's patents until 1964, at which time it required cancel designs to include postal codes. Guller & Cie, a small company, was unable to manufacture 10,000 new cancelers. The German company that won the contract replaced deCoppet's intricate sixty-two year old design with a single rubber block!

Structure:

The exhibit follows a time-line showing the development and modifications of the many cancelers tested. Each of the twelve offices used its cancelers differently according to its own priority.

Güller & Cie made the first Swiss date-wheel devices in 1866. The company proof books from the 1880's are filled with postal cancelers of other countries, and it is believed the company had a samples book for foreign postal administrations to choose from. Included in the proof books are markings of Swiss post offices and select private businesses, including the Schweizerhof Hotel in 1888.

The most important cancelers in this exhibit are those from the first Swiss PTT demonstrations conducted at the Lausanne PO in late 1889. There are only three known examples on cover; one is shown here.

DeCoppet also made a canceler for one day use at the opening of the Ste. Croix-Yverdon Railway, 1893. As private order this device was not authorized by the PTT. It is very difficult to find uses prior to 1899, but after 1900 they can be found until 1925.

In May 1898 the Post Office asked deCoppet to prepare cancelers for eleven District Post Offices, except Chur for some unknown reason. They were delivered and first used on 10 October 1898. After only five weeks all were returned on 16 November to deCoppet for repairs and modifications. Apparently no test protocol existed, only a directive for clerks to use the cancelers and for administrators to report their results to Headquarters.

The following April, 1899, the cancelers were sent back to the post offices for testing, but mechanical problems continued. Another recall occurred in November 1899. This set came back for testing in April 1900 and continued in use during 1901 while deCoppet worked to solve the breakage problems. By early 1902 most weak points had been identified and strengthened.

In June 1902 a complete set of newly designed cancelers were sent out to all participating offices and the test started for the third time. By early 1903 the reports were compiled and found favorable; the PTT offered deCoppet a contract.

After the contract signing, Güller started manufacturing the new "Fleuron" cancelers. Razor cancelers continued to be used in daily operations at the test offices, some more than others. Eventually each one broke, or was removed from service after having proved deCoppet's new canceler technology to the Swiss PTT.

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Structure (cont.)

All forty-seven varieties of razor cancels are shown in this exhibit on outgoing items, and many are seen on incoming or forwarded mail. Some uses are unique, others are common. (See table on page 4.)

Individual items in this exhibit demonstrate the many postal uses of the cancelers, and the many destinations to which Swiss postal items were sent 100 years ago. Early examples show the routine handling of cards and letters; later examples show that cancelers came to be applied in more varied situations such as for special tasks, or occasions. This indicates they were no longer in normal everyday use.

Within the razor cancel time-line are examples of deCoppet's exhibition cancels (1900-1901), examples from the Güller manufacturing test (1902), and the resultant post-contract Fleuron design (1903). There are also a few samples from the first canceling machines imported to Switzerland (1911-14). These led to a significant reduction in use of hand cancelers at large District Post Offices in Switzerland.

Characteristics of deCoppet Cancels

The mechanical characteristics of these flexible-head cancelers made post marks more legible, especially when used on uneven or curved surfaces. The post offices now wanted cancelations to indicate the nearest hour. Number wheels made it easy for clerks to change the date and time without fussing with date slugs.



Zurich Type 1; Oct 98- Oct 99
Bellinzona Type 2; July 02 - Nov 02

The distinct visual pattern of the cancels was designed to allow easy identification of the deCoppet test devices. Some have dots at the ends of the date bridge, others do not. It is unknown why this difference exists. Some cancelers were withdrawn from service and later reintroduced with minor engraving changes, but the date wheel characteristics and cancel diameters (24 to 27.5 mm) remained. Therefore, it is

possible to link specific early cancelers with later versions.

Most examples of deCoppet cancels are found on outgoing mail. The purpose of the post office test was not only to assess ease of handling and efficiency, but also to determine whether the cancels were more legible during transit to their destinations. This policy accounts for the scarcity of incoming mail with razor cancel markings. It made little sense to use razor cancels as receivers if those pieces of mail were delivered almost immediately to the addressees.

Factors Effecting Scarcity

The DeCoppet connection to pre-1889 items is speculative based on comparisons of his known cancel patterns and measurements, and the known cancels and mechanisms manufactured by Güller. It stands to reason that since deCoppet was "improving" an existing standard canceler, mechanisms such as the date wheel assembly must have been available to him. This would allow him to focus his efforts on the design of the flexible head assembly.

The Swiss Patent Office opened in late 1888, and one of the first patents, #251, was issued to deCoppet on 21 February 1889. Prior to this date he could have received parts and assistance from Güller, with or without permission, but based on their later business relationship, I assume they collaborated at this early date.

Even though the October 1889 demonstrations resulted in three known examples on cover, there is only one known early example of the Ste. Croix/Suisse canceler made by deCoppet in 1893. It seems this device was put away, as it was a private trial not ordered by the PTT. Later in 1897 it appears to have been used again, but not until mid-1899 is it seen with any regularity, then mostly as a receiving mark.

The first Post Office trial, which began in 1898, shows razor cancelers being used for only a six week period between 10 October and 16 November, half of them for only a three week period. Canceler availability to participating DPO's was sporadic during 1899 as the devices broke often and were away for repairs. It is difficult to find uses from either of these two years.

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Factors Effecting Scarcity (cont.)

Aarau appears to have used its canceler almost daily from 1900 onwards, and examples are common. I have concluded that one clerk sat at his desk and canceled all mail passing through the office, both incoming and out-going. This pattern continued until the device was withdrawn from service on 31 December 1907; the cessation date likely being an administrative decision.

Bellinzona clerks disliked their deCoppet canceler and wrote letters of complaint. They never thought the devices should go into service and wanted to stop testing, so it should not be surprising that Bellinzona examples are difficult to find. Basel cancels are also scarce and considering the huge volume of mail processed daily at this large post office, more examples should be available for study, but are not.

My data shows that early uses, 1898 - 1900, from Geneve, Luzern, and St. Gallen are also difficult to find, even though they are rated as common in the chart. It seems once the Type 2 (1902) cancelers proved successful, these post offices decided to use the earlier cancelers more frequently.

After the contract signing in 1903, razor canceler use decreased for these reasons:

- ◊ the test was over;
- ◊ the new Fleuron cancelers were distributed to all first class post offices and the PTT wanted consistency of appearance;
- ◊ after 1905 incoming mail was no longer routinely date stamped;
- ◊ after 1911 canceling machines were introduced to District Post Offices. This contributed to the disappearance of hand cancels on routine, standard-sized items.

The remaining razor cancelers were modified after 1917 to meet a 1914 decree requiring the Swiss Cross be above the date bridge, and the district number below. Before some of these modifications were completed another change required a 24 hour time wheel be inserted into the canceler to meet the European railway time standard.

The last use for each razor device likely happened when a clerk, without recognizing its history or significance adjusted the date wheel, struck a postal item, and the canceler broke for the final time. Uses after 1923-24 are very difficult to find. The last known razor cancel is dated from 1939, forty-one years after deCoppet's first official test in 1898.

Items of special interest include:

- ◊ EKU Basel elzevir cancel (16 hachures) by Güller - 1867
- ◊ Schweizerhof Hotel to Nova Scotia, 1889
- ◊ Lausanne 2 October 1889, EKU.
- ◊ Lausanne 6 October 1889 card, one of three known on cover.
- ◊ Bern, 11 October 1898. Second day .
- ◊ Lausanne FDC of UPU, 2 July 1900.
- ◊ Bern Type 2, 10 September 1900, EKU.
- ◊ Basel Type 2, 1901.
- ◊ Aarau Type 2, 2 July 1902, EKU.
- ◊ Bellinzona Type 2, 29 July 1902.
- ◊ Lausanne Type 2, 12 October 1902, < 5 known receiver/forwarding.
- ◊ Kristiania, Norway, 6 November 1906, Norwegian deCoppet cancel.
- ◊ Chaux-de-Fonds 9 November 1902, EKU
- ◊ Basel B.B., 21 December 1902, EKU.
- ◊ Lausanne Type 1a, 7 January 1903, one of three known forwarding uses.
- ◊ Zurich Type4, 3 February 1903, EKU
- ◊ Geneve, 5 September 1907, fewer than five known forwarding uses.
- ◊ Zurich Type 5, 8 April 1908, EKU.
- ◊ Zurich Fahrpost, 15 May 1909, fewer than 5 known receivers.
- ◊ Bellinzona 12 May 1911, LKU.
- ◊ Lausanne 14 September 1911, fewer than 5 known forwarding uses.
- ◊ Geneve Rue Du Stand Type 6.05, 23 May 1912, LKU.
- ◊ Bern 1 Michelius machine, 18 April 1914, used only 5 days .
- ◊ Bern Type 4, 17 December 1914, LKU.
- ◊ Chur, Type 3, 3 February 1917, third day of use.
- ◊ Geneve 2 December 1918, fewer than 5 known receivers.
- ◊ Luzern 3 December 1918, 8.03, LKU .
- ◊ Luzern Type 5, 1 July 1919, EKU (forwarding).
- ◊ Neuchatel Type 2, 1 April 1919, LKU.
- ◊ Geneve Rue Du Stand 29 September 1923, fewer than 5 receivers known.
- ◊ Basel Type 4, 24 September 1925, fewer than 10 examples known.
- ◊ Chur Type 4, 6 February 1935, LKU.

EKU = Earliest known use

LKU = Last known use

Items of special interest are marked with a blue dot; explanatory notes accompany the item descriptions.

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Rarity Table

The relative rarity of razor canceled items has been determined by collectors in Switzerland. Data collection is an ongoing process, and usage dates change as new finds are reported. (1 = common, 13 = unique, - = not known; bold = example in this exhibit, italic= not represented.)

	Type	Out	Rec/Forward
Aarau	[1 .01]	1	1
	.02]	2	3
	.03]	1	1
Basel	[2 .01]	5	<i>12</i>
	.02]	9	-
	.03]	5	<i>11</i>
	.04]	11	-
Bellinzona	[3 .01]	5	7
	.02]	10	<i>12</i>
	.03]	4	8
Bern	[4 .01]	2	<i>12</i>
	.02]	3	<i>12</i>
	.03]	1	8
	.04]	8	11
	.05]	4	<i>10</i>
Chur	[5 .01]	1	1
	.02]	4	7
	.03]	1	9
	.04]	6	7
Geneve	[6 .01]	2	<i>12</i>
	.02]	2	11
	.03]	9	-
Rue Du Stand	.04]	1	7
	.05]	1	8
	.06]	7	11
Lausanne	[7 .01]	1	<i>13</i>
	.01a]	1	11
	.02]	1	11
Cons. Lett.	.03]	7	-
Cons. Mess.	.04]	6	<i>12</i>
Luzern	[8 .01]	1	5
	.02]	5	-
	.03]	1	9
	.04]	1	5
	.05]	1	6
Neuchatel	[9 .01]	1	3
	.02]	7	7
	.03]	5	6
St Gallen	[10 .01]	1	2
	.02]	2	5
	.03]	1	3
Zürich	[11 .01]	3	3
	.02]	1	1
	.03]	3	5
	.04]	3	5
	.05]	7	7
Zürich Fahr.Auf.	.06]	2	11

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