



Swiss Flexible-Head 'Razor' Cancelers



This exhibit illustrates the development of flexible-head cancelers invented by Swiss engineer, Frédéric de Coppet (1851–1930).

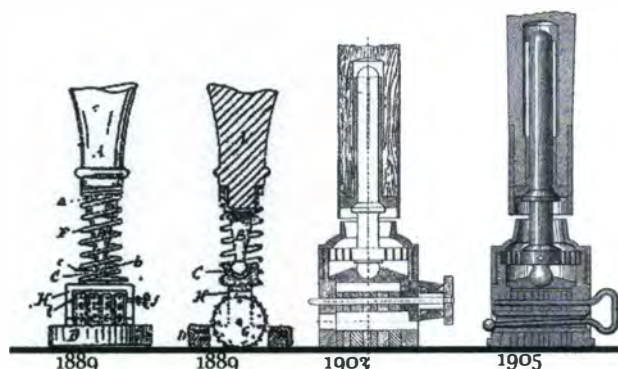
Güller & Sons made the first rotating date-wheel cancelers for the Swiss Post, Telephone, and Telegraph (PTT) in 1866. Twenty-three years later in 1889 de Coppet patented his first flexible-head mechanism combining both technologies. His patent described the forerunner of the most significant hand canceler design in the history of the Swiss PTT.

De Coppet demonstrated a working model later that year, but it was deemed unsatisfactory by administrators. Nine years later the PTT agreed to conduct extensive field tests. Eleven participating District Post Offices (DPO) received their first experimental [razor] cancelers in October 1898. The tests were successful and concluded in April 1903 when the PTT signed a contract adopting de Coppet's canceler design. As manufacturer, Güller & Sons eventually made over 10,000 devices for the PTT based on de Coppet's invention.



A 1903 canceler, restored by Michael Rutherford using parts provided by Peter Güller.

Left front: spring on center shaft, date wheel assembly, collar to join date wheels and spring shaft; Upper: pin and set nut for locking date wheels, hollow handle into which spring shaft is inserted. (photo by exhibitor)



1889 – external spring; de Coppet's first patent application.
1903 – internal spring; pin for fixing location of date wheels.
1905 – internal spring / modified retaining spring clip.



Güller & Cie manufactured all de Coppet type cancelers after 1903 at this factory. Production continued until 1964.

1889	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903
<p>February 1889 De Coppet patents flexible-head hand canceler</p> <p>October 1889 Bern and Lausanne PO tests</p> <p>1897 Ste. Croix canceler</p>	<p>Official Test starts 10 October 6 cancelers issued.</p> <p>24 October 5 additional issued.</p> <p>16 November Breakages require all cancelers be recalled.</p>	<p>19 April Cancelers returned to all DPO's for onsite testing.</p> <p>Intermittent use. Breakage common.</p> <p>30 November All recalled, further modifications.</p>	<p>11 April Cancelers returned to DPO's for additional testing.</p> <p>7 September New cancelers sent to 5 offices to test redesigned internal spring mechanism.</p> <p>Repairs made throughout the year.</p>	<p>Razor cancelers continue to have problems, though less frequently.</p>	<p>June 27 Type 2 internal spring cancelers issued to all DPO's.</p> <p>27 October PTT receives final prototype cancelers from de Coppet.</p>	<p>12 April Contract between de Coppet and PTT.</p> <p>June Pre-production samples sent from Güller to PTT.</p> <p>November Mass production begins by Güller.</p>

Items of special interest are outlined in red. Explanatory notes accompany the item descriptions.

1889

De Coppet's First Post Office Demonstration in Lausanne



Lausanne Exp. Let.
2 October 1889
Earliest known use.



Lausanne Exp. Let.
3 October 1889

Seven known use dates of this device: 2 - 6 October; and 7, 16 December 1889.



Lausanne Exp. Let.
6 October 1889 to Genève.
Domestic postal card.

One of three known examples on cover.

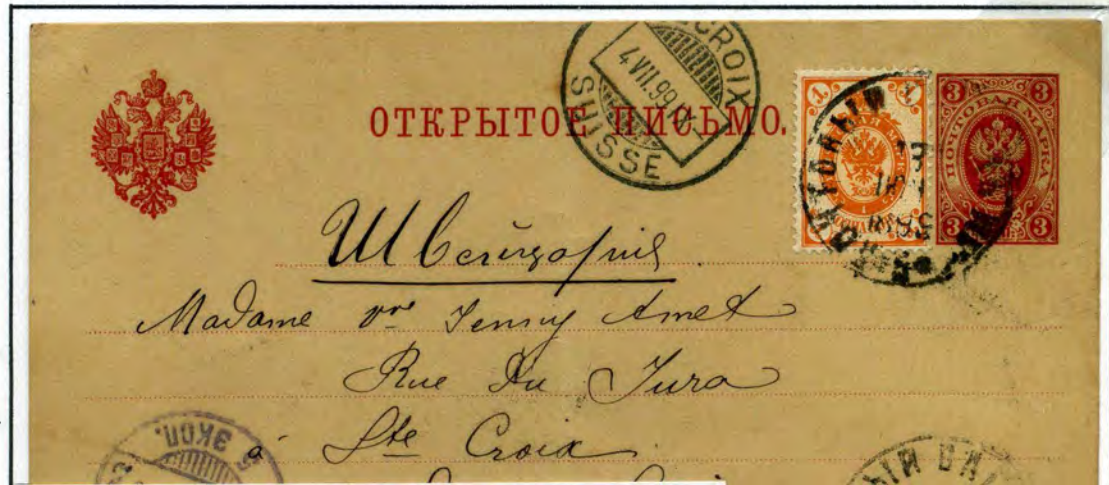
There were three different de Coppet devices used in 1889. A unique example of Lausanne Fac.Let. dated 22 XII 89 exists. There are also two examples known from Bern Brf. Ex., dated 21 IX 89 and 7 XI 89. It is assumed these devices were the same mechanical design as the one above demonstrated by de Coppet in Lausanne.

1897
Ste. Croix

Delivered June 1897. It is assumed there were mechanical differences between this device and those made in 1889.



Ste. Croix [0.04] 29 July 1897
One of three pre-1899 examples.



Ste Croix [0.04] 4 July 1899
?, via St Petersburg, Russia.
International postal card.



Ste Croix [0.04]
17 June 1899
from Bätterkinden.
Domestic letter,
underpaid 4 centimes.

Ste Croix [0.04]
20 September 1901
misdirected
from Marseilles, France,
to Ste Croix.
Correct address is
Danish West Indies.
International post card.



1898

10 October – Razor cancelers issued, official post office trials begin



5 cancelers issued.
Basel
Bern
Genève
Lausanne
Neuchâtel

2 cancelers broke
Basel - 20 October
Genève - 5 November

24 October
5 cancelers issued.
Aarau
Bellinzona
Luzern
St. Gallen
Zürich

16 November
All cancelers back to
deCoppet for repairs.



Bern [4.01] 11 October 1898 to Nurnberg, Bavaria.
International postal card.

Second day of use.



Lausanne [7.01] 17 November 1898 to Plainfield, NJ, USA.
International letter.

Last known use in 1898

This cover shows the Lausanne PO used its canceler the day after Bern issued a full recall. De Coppet lived in Lausanne, therefore, it was not necessary for the Lausanne PO to send the canceler to Bern only to have it returned to Lausanne for de Coppet.

De Coppet took five months to modify the cancelers before returning them to Bern for further testing.

1899

19 April – Cancelers returned to post offices. Testing resumes.

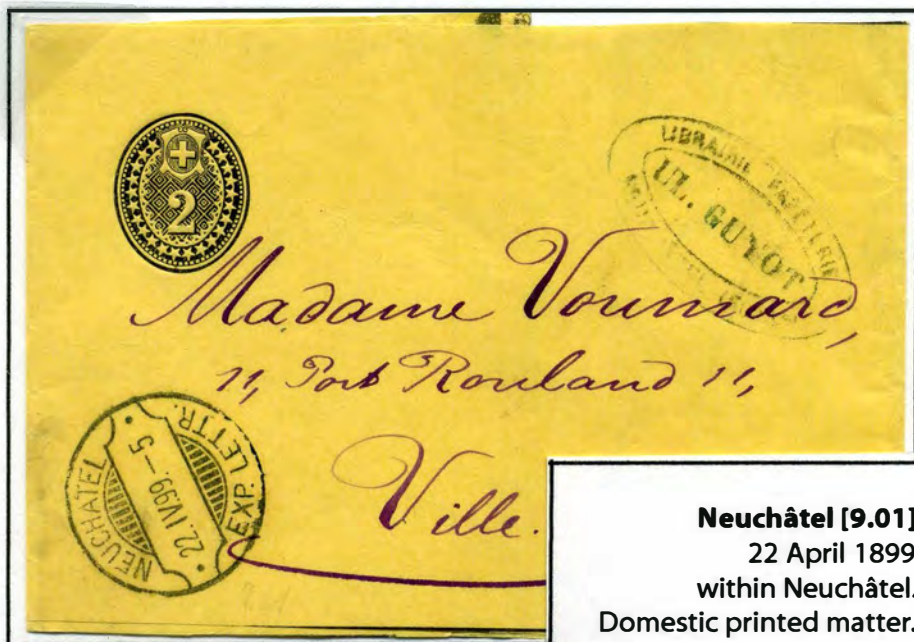
Chur and Zürich Fahrpost received razor cancelers for the first time, total of 12 now being tested.

Breakage occurs, intermittent use. Genève, Bern, Basel, Aarau, and Zürich all returned their cancelers before mid-June. These were repaired and returned to them.

Luzern broke 27 June, Neuchâtel broke 28 June, neither were returned in 1899.

Five others broke between August and October and were not returned in 1899.

The remaining six were recalled on November 30.



Neuchâtel [9.01]

22 April 1899

within Neuchâtel.

Domestic printed matter.



Zürich Fahrpost [11.06]

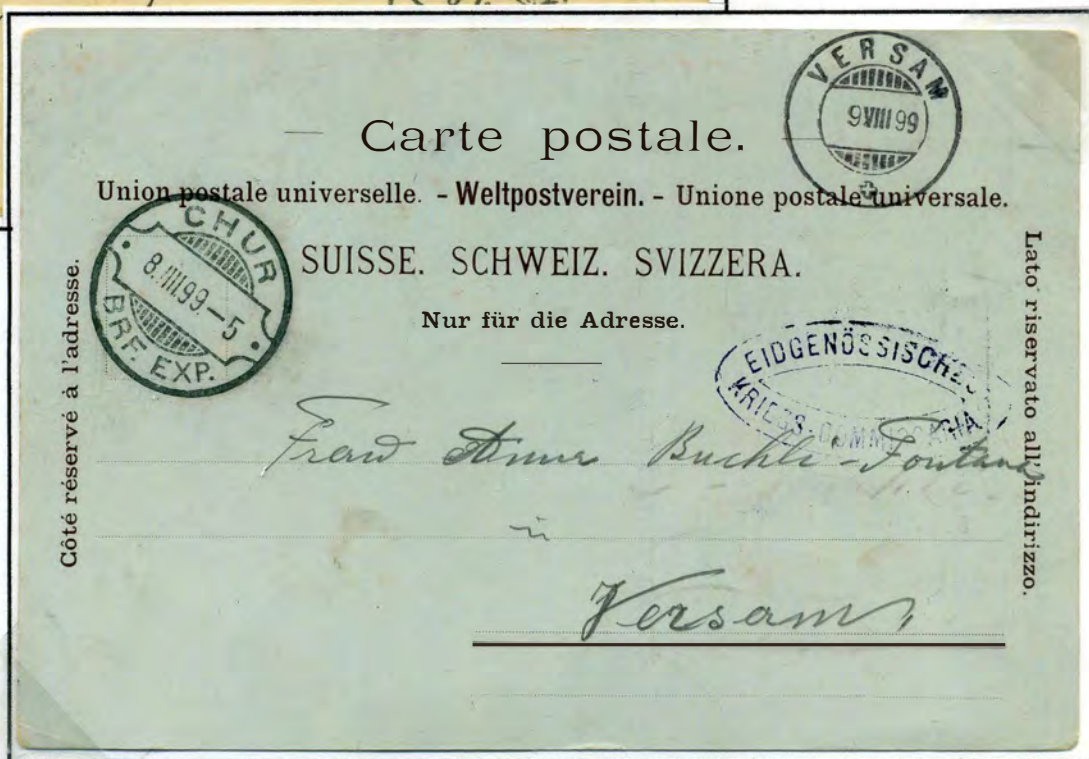
13 May 1899 to Meilen.

Domestic postcard

5 centimes, nachnahme

<10fr = 10 centimes.

Total = 15 centimes.



Chur [5.01]

8 August 1899 to Versam.

Free domestic postcard.

Swiss Military

Commissioner of Chur.

1900

11 April - Repaired cancelers reissued to post offices.

11 April

Type 1 cancelers modified with new spring. PO's told to use until April 1901.

21 April

PTT orders new internal spring cancelers for:
Basel Brief Exp.
Bern Brief Exp.
Geneve Rue Du Stand
Lausanne Consig. Lett.
Zürich

10 September

These new 8 bar cancelers were delivered to four post offices, Zürich had 12 bars.

Both the original and new mechanisms were now being used simultaneously.



Bern (4.01) to Aarau (1.01) 25 April 1900. Domestic postal card.
Two different razor cancels on the same item is uncommon.



Lausanne [7.01]

2 July 1900
to Godesberg, Germany.
Uprated domestic postal card.

2 July, 1900:

First Day of issue for the
5, 10, 25 centimes stamps,
and two postal cards.

(Valid until 31 December 1900)

Bellinzona [3.01]

2 June 1900 to **Chur [5.01]**

Free military post card.

(Two different razor cancels.)



1900

10 September

New cancelers were issued to Basel, Bern, and Zürich; additionally, Lausanne Consig. Lett. and the Geneve Rue Du Stand Branch Office received new razor cancelers for the first time.

The 26mm diameter design included the newest internal spring mechanism and had eight bars above and below the date bridge making them visually different from Type I devices, which continued to be used by all participating offices.



Bern [4.02] 10 September 1900 to Bern.
Domestic postal card.

Type 2 - First day of use



Geneve Rue Du Stand [6.04] 22 October 1900 to Les Ponts.
Domestic post card.

1901

Type 1 and Type 2 cancelers used all year

April - Post Offices send first reports to Bern.

7 October

PTT orders a set of 11 next generation cancelers for a final test period.

Razor cancels continued to have problems during 1901, though less frequently.

Sender should have changed "Carte Postale" to "Imprimé" to obtain lower printed matter rate for this New Year's greeting card.



Lausanne [7.01] 1 January 1901 to Basel. Underpaid domestic greeting card.

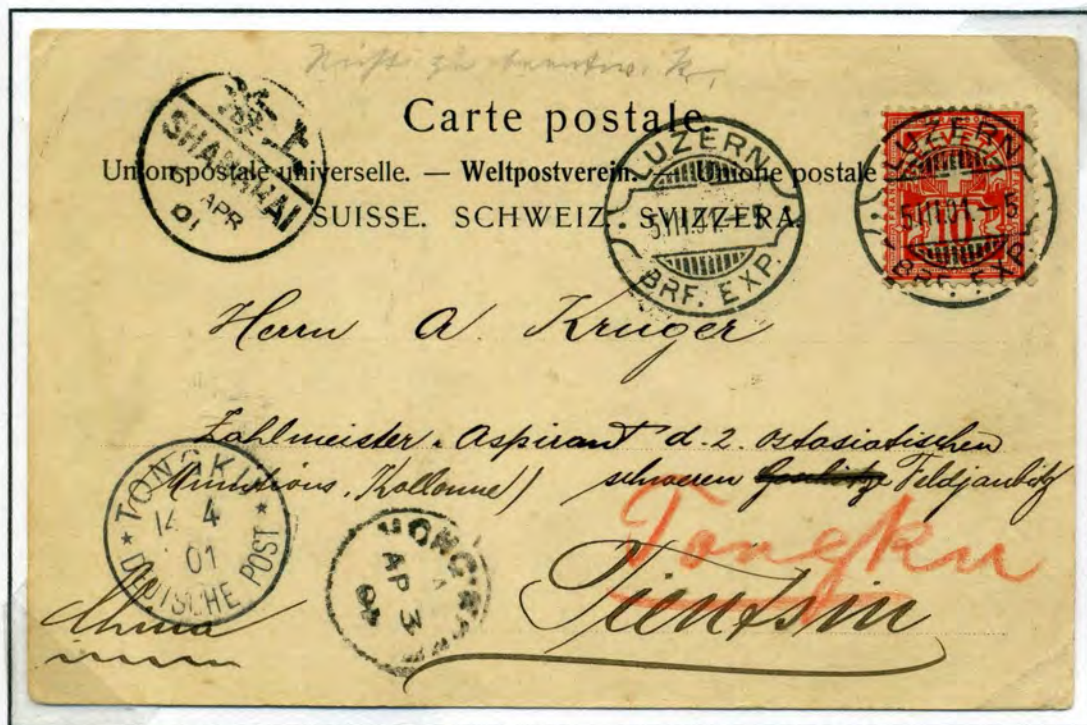


Basel [2.02] 23 February 1901 to Zürich. Domestic postal card.

Though Basel is one of the largest post offices and this device was used for over five years, [Oct 1900 - Feb 1906] examples of this canceler are very difficult to find.

This specific device was the model for the next generation of cancelers issued in July 1902.

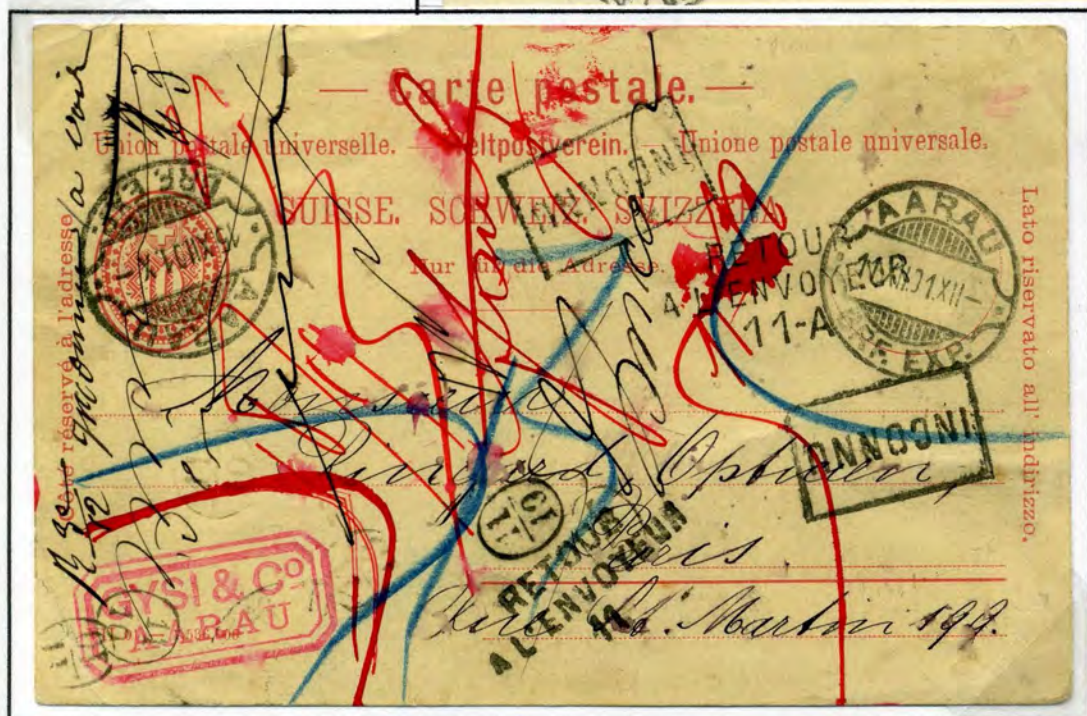
1901



Luzern [8.01] 5 March 1901
to Tientsin, China;
transit Hong Kong 3 April;
transit Shanghai 6 April;
forwarded Tientsin 12 April;
received Tongku 14 April.
International postcard.



Geneve [6.01]
21 November 1901
to Bern.
Domestic postcard.



Aarau [1.01]
11 December 1901
to Paris, France.
International postal card.

Paris - "INCONNU", RETOUR
A L'ENVOYEUR/11-A;
RETOUR A L'ENVOYEUR/11;
11/10.

Undelivered and returned to
Aarau [1.01],
15 December 1901.

1902

1 July.
Type 2 internal spring
cancelers distributed to all
11 DPOs.
New report due in 1903.

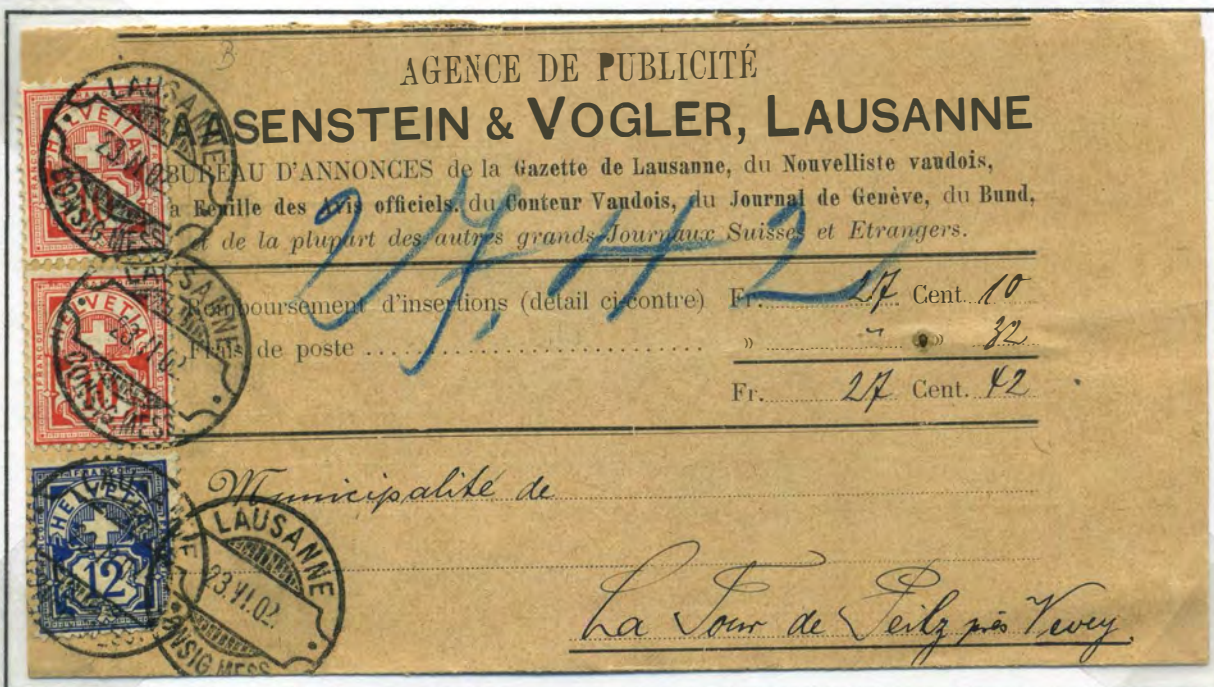
27 October
PO receives four final
prototype cancelers from
de Coppet.



Lausanne [7.01a] 6 January 1902
to Stockholm, Sweden.
International letter.



Bern [4.03] 29 July 1902 to Bern, forwarded to Interlaken.
Local domestic letter 5 centimes, forwarded outside
10km zone = 5 centimes tax.



Lausanne
Consig. Mess. [7.04]
23 June 1902
to Tour-de-Peilz
received 23 June.

Printed matter invoice.
2 centimes postage +
3 x 10 centimes per
10fr = 32 centimes.

1902

July 1 – First use of new internal spring cancelers

Ordered the previous October, eleven redesigned cancelers were finally delivered to the DPO's on 27 June; a few were used, Tuesday, 1 July.

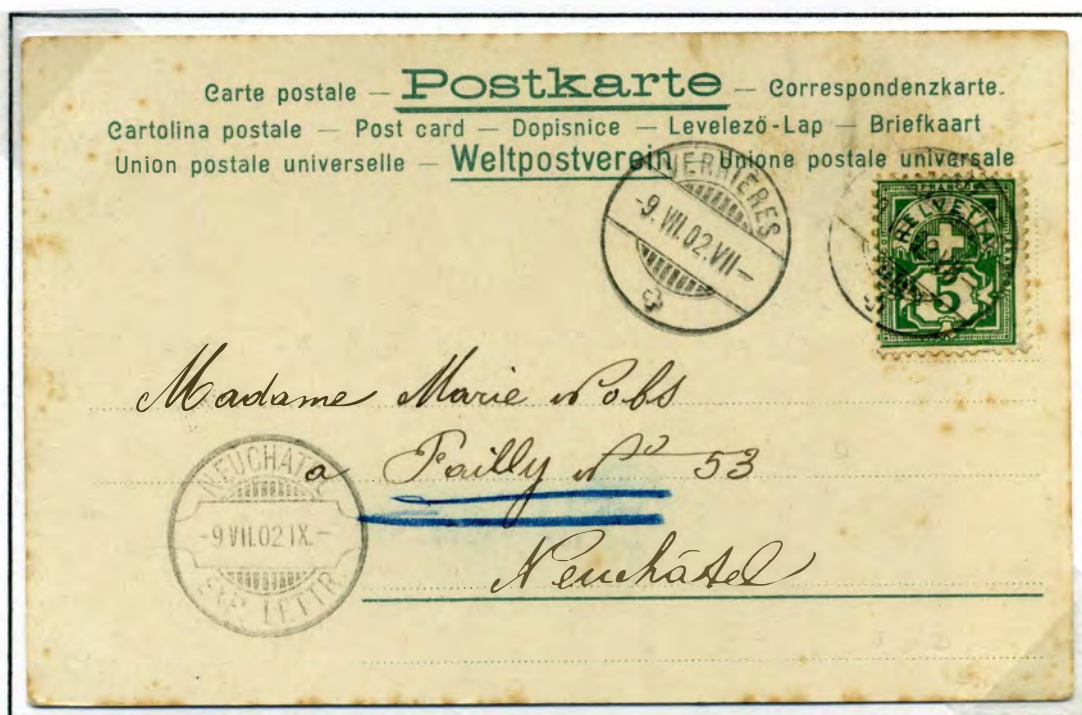
Seven are recognized by having 8/8 bars above and below the date bridge. Basel, Lausanne, and Neuchâtel 10/10; Zürich 10/12.

The first series of cancelers continued to be used.



Aarau [1.02] 2 July 1902 from Leipzig, Germany.
International postcard.

Earliest use of Aarau Type 2



Neuchâtel [9.02] 9 July 1902 from Verrieres.
Domestic postcard.

Second earliest use as a receiver.

1902

Bellinzona [3.02] 29
July 1902 to
Fehraltorf.
Domestic postal card.



Used only 4 1/2 months: 1 July - 15 November 1902.

Lausanne [7.02]
12 October 1902
from Frankfurt, Germany;
domestic forwarding to
Montreux.
International letter.



Canceler in use for over 10 years. Fewer than 5 receiver/ forwarding examples.
This the earliest known.

1902 de Coppet Final Prototypes

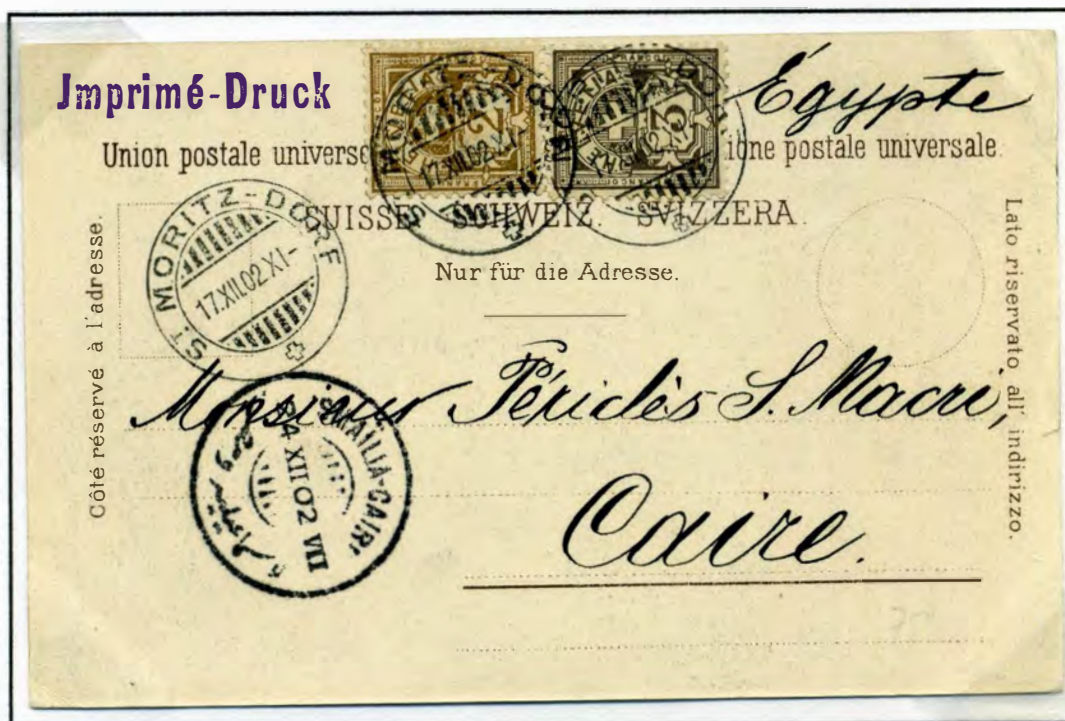
Four prototypes were ordered to finalize the mechanical design acceptable to the PTT.
These were ordered 28 August and after the PTT selected appearance, they were delivered 27 October 1902.

First uses: St. Moritz-Dorf (4 Nov); Chaux-de-Fonds (9 Nov); Grenchen (3 Dec) ; Basel 2 Fil.B.B. (21 Dec)

Chaux-de-Fonds
9 November 1902 - 4pm,
to Bern and received
10 November - 10am.
Considered short paid,
3 centimes definitive added
10 November - 5pm in place
of postage due and
delivered.
Domestic post card.



Earliest known use of Chaux-de Fonds prototype.



St. Moritz-Dorf 17 December 1902 to Cairo, Egypt. International printed matter.

1903

April 12 – contract signed
Flexible-head canceler adopted as new PTT standard



The day this wrapper was posted, 11 April 1903, Frédéric de Coppet received a contract from the Swiss PTT to provide cancelers for all First Class Post Offices.

He signed and returned the contract the 12 April.

Geneve [6.02] 11 April 1903 to Havana, Cuba.
International printed matter.

After the contract was signed De Coppet was unable to hand-make the large number of cancelers required. Güller & Sons was subcontracted to manufacture all flexible-head devices after the November 1902 feasibility tests proved the mechanisms could be mass produced.

The PTT was unhappy with the visual appearance of the November 1902 cancelers and ordered a new group from Güller for delivery in July 1903. The alternate designs eventually led to the first production "fleuron" devices with distribution starting in late November.

The experimental tests were now over, but these razor cancelers stayed in service for many years. Many disappeared prior to WWI, but some were modified and survived into the 1930's. Most were used for special situations not suited for the high speed machines introduced in 1912 by the PTT. They are, therefore, found used as express receivers, on official documents, special event items, printed matter wrappers, machine skips, philatelic situations, etc., all best suited for hand processing.

1903

June/July

Pre-production samples

Strikes of seventeen prototypes in this style are found on Page 1 of the 1903 Güller proof book, which was specifically started to record the shipment of de Coppet style cancelers.



Bendlikon-Kilchberg
10 October 1904 to Thun.
Domestic printed matter.



Wangen an der Aare
10 August 1904
from Berlin, Germany.
International registered
nachnahme card.



Cham 13 September 1904
from St. John's, Newfoundland;
to Marseilles, France,
forwarded to Cham.
International post card.

1903 Production Fleuron Cancelers

This is the first fleuron pattern found in Güller's proof book of de Coppet cancelers. In use nine days at the Frauenfeld exhibition, 18-27 September.

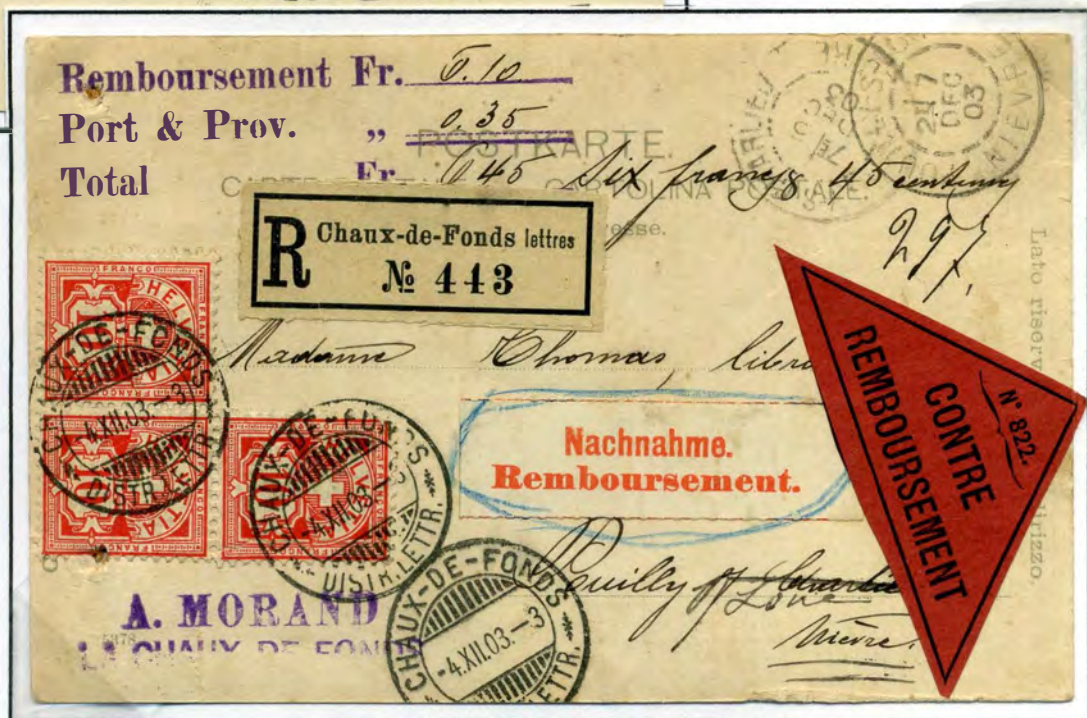
**Frauenfeld
Ausstellungsplatz**
22 September 1903
to Romanshorn.
Domestic postcard.



Zürich
3 December 1903
from Aohnai, Greece.
International postcard.

Chaux-de-Fonds
4 December 1903
to Pouilly-sur-Charlieu, Loire;
forwarded to Pouilly-sur-Loire,
Nièvre, France.
International registered
nachname postcard.

Shipments from Güller's work-shop began in mid-November. More than 10,000 cancelers were eventually delivered to first class post offices through-out Switzerland until 1964.



By 31 December 1904, after 15 months of production, Güller had produced only 176 of the new de Coppet cancelers.