

The Red Cross Mail in Geneva during the 1st Convention 1864 -1906



Background

Geneva is the cradle of the Red Cross founded in 1863. The upcoming of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 gave rise to new kinds of mail with franking privileges. Being situated close to the French border and not far from German-occupied territories, Geneva played a key role as a postal hub for mail forwarding. The International Committee of Red Cross coordinated actions in many areas.

Purpose and Scope of the Exhibit

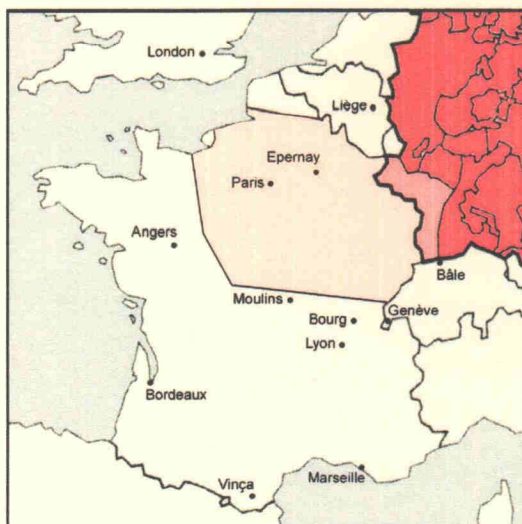
The purpose of this exhibit is mainly to show how the new International Committee of the Red Cross agreed with postal administration on how to facilitate mail and parcels forwarding from the Franco- Prussian War until the Geneva Convention Revision in 1906. The exhibit displays official and military mail handled by the International Committee, the Relief Central Agency or any related person through the postal way of Geneva.

Sources and references

Beside personal research mentioned below, information and statistic data come from studies and articles from R. Pittier†, M.-M. Thomas† & P. Monot†, in particular *Les précurseurs de la thématique Croix-Rouge 1864-1900*; G. Schild, *Die Internierung von ausländischen Militäreinheiten in der Schweiz 1859; 1871; 1916-19*. S. Walske RDP, *Les Postes aux Armées de la Guerre franco-allemande de 1870-71*

Personal research and publications

Information gathered through personal research is part of publications in progress about the postal history of Geneva, in particular "*Manuel des oblitérations genevoises 1839-1907*" (ca. 1500 postmarks or cancellations described on 300 pages). Different specialised lectures on the Red Cross and the Franco-Prussian War through the International Committee in Geneva.



Contents

1. International Committee
2. Wounded Soldiers in France
3. French Internees in Switzerland
4. Prisoners of War in Germany
5. Post-War Official Mail

Outstanding pieces

The exhibit shows most rarest frankings of this period. Labels and seals giving franking privileges are recorded in very few numbers (mentioned in the rarity statements). Due to scarcity and rarity, such a collection of the Red Cross in Geneva is not possible to duplicate. Most outstanding pieces come from famous Swiss and European collections which were awarded worldwide recognition (Pittier†, Liniger†, Leemann†, Monot†, etc.).

Rarity statements

These are based on surveys compiled by P. Monot and the exhibitor during the last 15 years, based on auction catalogues (mainly Roumet), lists compilations and other miscellaneous sources.

Abbreviations

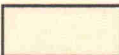
AW	Swiss Manual of Cancellations 1843-1907	F. Andres, H. Emmenegger,
Zst.	Zumstein Spezial Katalog	Max Hertsch
Cat. Monot	Catalogue Pierre Monot	French Philatelic Club Red Cross

Colour conventions

Story line in grey;
Rarity statements in red;
 All other descriptions in black.

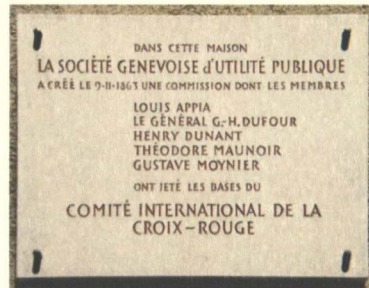
Chronological Steps

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 17 Feb. 1863 | <i>Founding of the Red Cross</i> |
| 22 August 1864 | <i>First Geneva Convention</i> |
| 19 July 1870 | <i>Declaration of War from France to Prussia</i> |
| 7 August 1870 | <i>Postal franking for Prisoners of War</i> |
| 25 Feb. 1871 | <i>Mail freedom between occupied and free territories</i> |
| 28 June 1871 | <i>Last military postal privileges for ambulances only</i> |
| 8 April 1872 | <i>Abolition of all military postal privileges</i> |
| June 1906 | <i>First Revision of the Geneva Convention</i> |

 *Maximum expansion of German occupation in 1871*

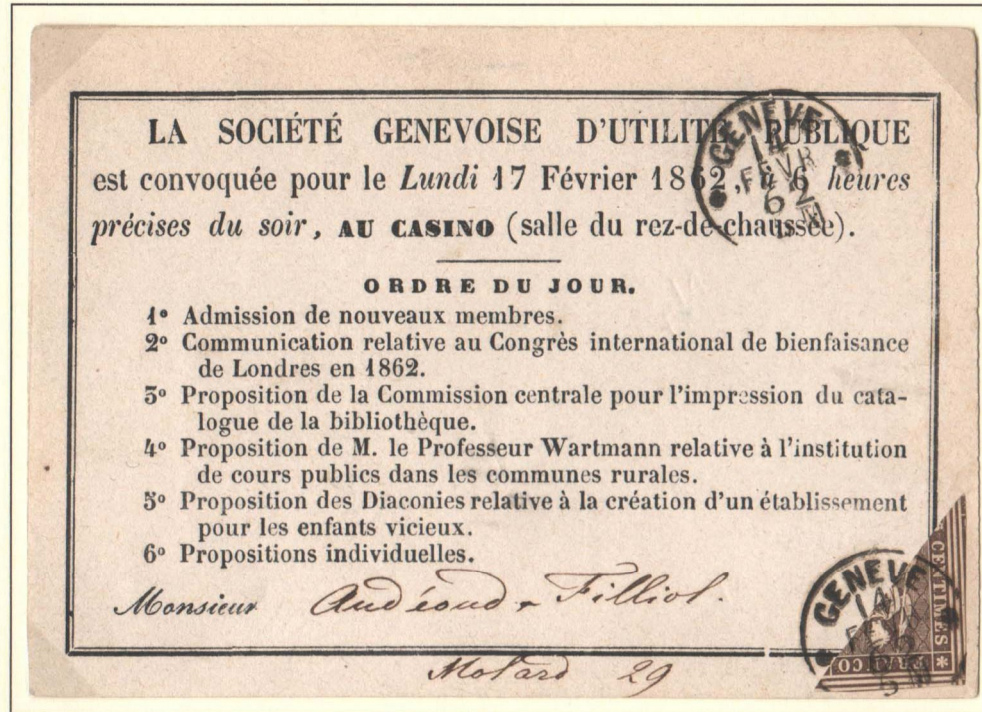
1 International Committee

Geneva is the cradle of the Red Cross founded in 1863. Being situated near the French border and not far from German-occupied territories, the city played a key role in mail forwarding. The **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** coordinated actions in many areas.



14 Feb. 1862 - Notification from the *Genevan Charitable Public Society*, founder of the Red Cross in 1863.

Bisects of 5c stamps were allowed for local mass frankings beyond the first 20 examples (1861-1862)



Earliest letter from the ICRC recorded so far

Only 2 examples of the ICRC handstamp recorded so far



26 April 1864 - From the International Committee to a military doctor in Pamplona (Spain). Postage due 8 Reales as franking privilege was not yet acknowledged at that time. Spanish entry datestamp LA JUNQUERA of 28 April.

Following the memorandums of 28 July and 5 August 1870, the Swiss Postal Administration granted postal privilege to "International societies existing in Switzerland according to the Geneva Convention of 1864"

1st Oval frank stamp (Zst. IX)

14.09.1870 - 21.08.1883

16 covers recorded

Sole example recorded to Belgium



26 Dec. 1870 - From the International Committee to the *Delegate of the French Relief Society for Wounded Soldiers* in Brussels. Frank stamp not acknowledged for an international sending. Handwritten postage due 5 decimes (vertical line).

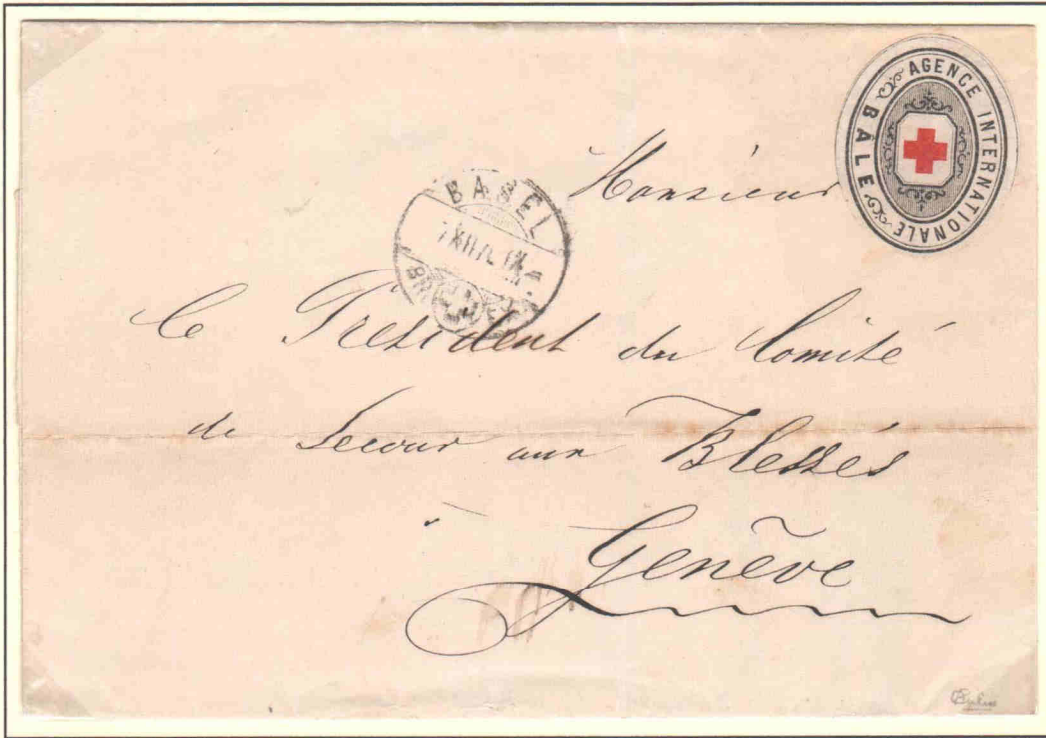


3 examples recorded to France

13 Feb. 1871 - From the International Committee to the *diplomatic representation of Netherlands* in Bordeaux, provisional government seat. French postage due handstamp 5 decimes.

1 International Committee

The International Committee receives mail from Red Cross districts of Switzerland which look after prisoners in Germany and France. Four districts issued frank stamps: Lausanne, Vevey, Basle and the International Committee in Geneva itself.



7 Dec. 1870 - From the Basle Red Cross district (International Agency which handled most parcels for prisoners) to **Gustave Moynier**, President of the International Committee. **First Basle oval frank stamp.**

Oval frank stamp (Zst. VI)
09.1870 - 1871

Ca. 20 covers recorded

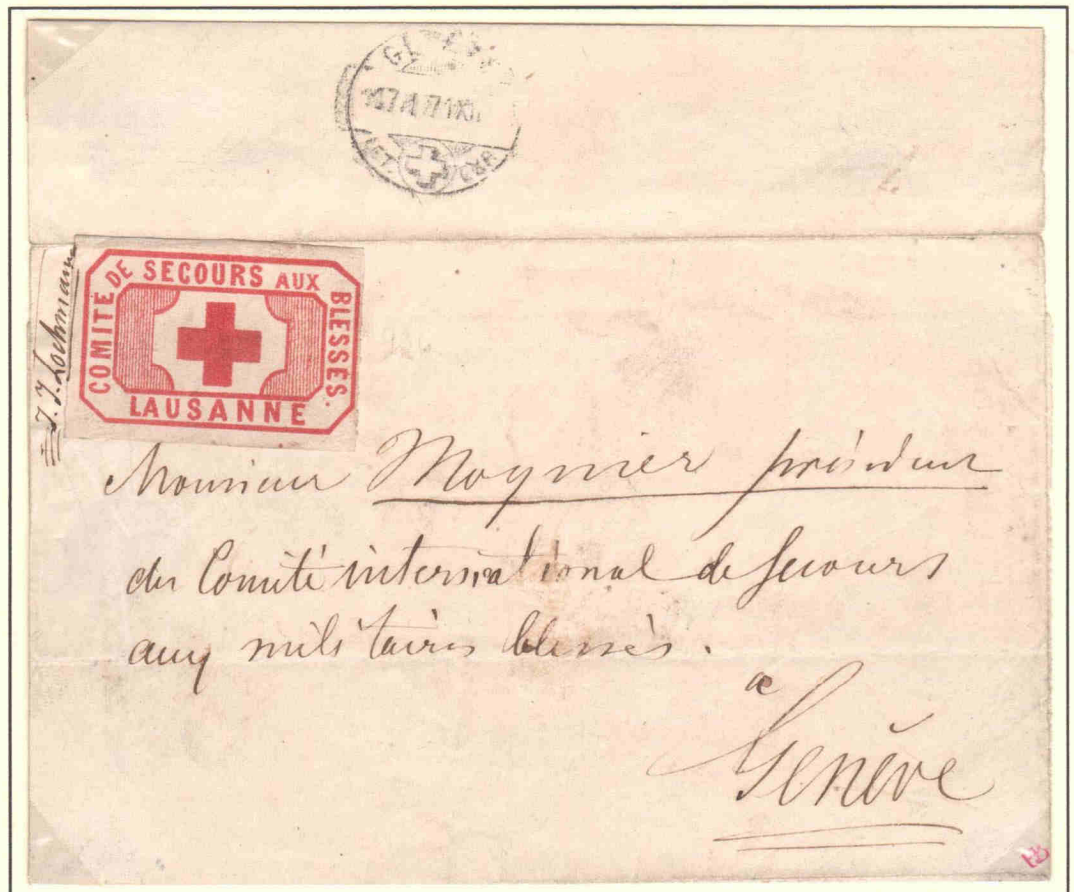
(e)



17 Jan. 1871 - From the Lausanne Red Cross district to the same addressee. Frank stamp bearing the signature of **Jean-Jacques Lochmann**, well-known philanthropist in Lausanne.

Rectangular frank stamp
(Zst. IV)
1870 - 1871

Ca. 10 covers recorded



2 Wounded Soldiers in France

Except for ambulances, military postal privileges are abolished from 28 June 1871



25 March 1871 - Red Cross letter from Geneva to Loriol, France, with regular **franking privilege** granted by both red stamps:

SOCIÉTÉ DE SECOURS AUX BLESSÉS MILITAIRES / * EST *
(Monot Nr. 108)

SOCIÉTÉ INTERN^{LE} DE SECOURS / AUX BLESSÉS MILITAIRES / Délégue. Région. EST
(Monot Nr. 109)

Scarce Relief Agency covers sent from Switzerland

30 August 1871 - Letter from the same society to Vinça, France. French postage due stamp of 5 decimes as **franking privilege is no longer acknowledged** since 28 June. French entry postmark SUISSE / LYON.



Seals of Relief Agencies for Wounded Soldiers and military origin give franking privilege abroad only if mail is addressed to Red Cross, Military or official recipients.

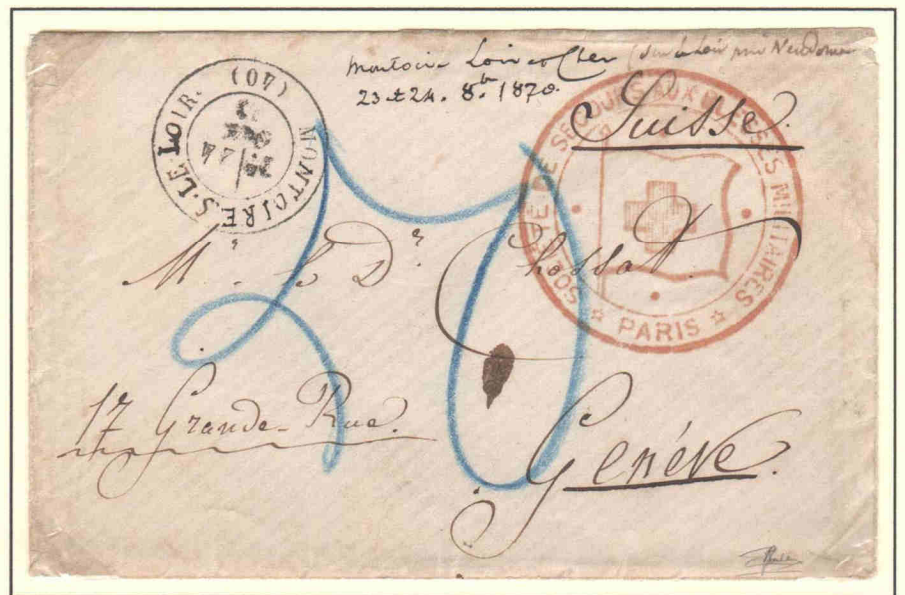


27 April 1871 - From the **AMBULANCE DU TEMPLE / ST-QUENTIN**, Northern France to Geneva. Letter dated 21 April firstly forwarded to LONDON, then mailed at normal rate (3x SG 43/44) on 24 April. On the reverse, postmark GENEVE of 27 April.

Ex Walske



24 Oct. 1870 - Red Cross letter from Montoire-sur-le-Loir to Geneva. Franking mark **SOCIÉTÉ DE SECOURS AUX BLESSÉS MILITAIRES * PARIS *** with 4 dots (not registered in the Monot catalogue, mentioned in the specialised YT 1975). Handwritten postage due 50c at the regular Franco-Swiss rate valid from 1865 to GPU. Postmark MONTOIRE S. LE LOIR [accentuated by hand].



3 French Internees in Switzerland

Gratis Labels are used from 03.02 to 27.03.1871. They are privately issued for the French internees, therefore not supposed to be tied with postmarks. Exist in two distinct shades.



6 Feb. 1871 - To Nantes, France, bearing the mention *Armée de l'Est*. This mention should have been sufficient to benefit from franking privilege.



20 Feb. 1871 - To Angers, bearing the mention *Provenance Militaire Ambulance*. On the reverse, railway postmark TOULOUSE A BORDEAUX dated 22, ANGERS dated 23.

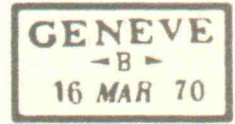
One of the rare labels tied by a postmark

3 French Internees in Switzerland

Ambulances are set up from Feb. 1871 after the entry of the Bourbaki Army. Handwritten mention on the front is usually sufficient to get military franking privilege.



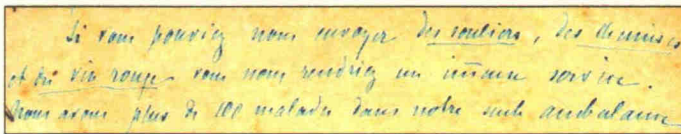
21 Feb. 1871 - Parcel label for a laundry bag, transited by the International Relief Committee in Basle, to Grenoble, France. The handstamp grants franking privilege. Handwritten mention *Valeur 10 Fr.* and boxed parcel postmark GENEVE / B.



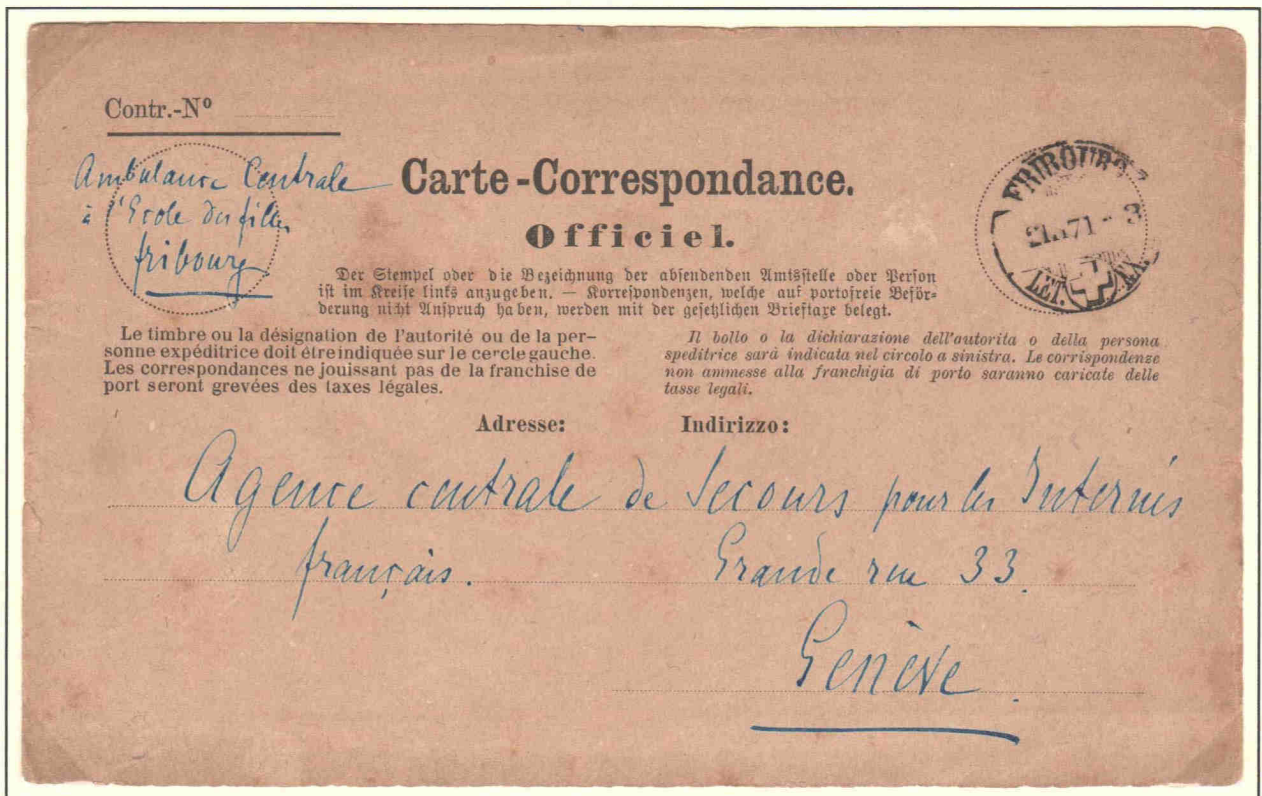
AW 95 (see p. 73)
3 examples reported



INTERNATIONAL RELIEF COMMITTEE / BASEL
(Cat. Monot Nr. 126)



21 Feb. 1871 - Official postal franking card (Form Nr. 4337) from the Central Ambulance, Fribourg, to the International Relief Agency for Internees, Geneva. On the reverse, text signed by the Director requesting clothing for more than 100 wounded soldiers.



Exceptional military use of an official postal card

(e)

Franking privilege is granted only in the military frame

14 Feb. 1871 - **Domestic postal card** sent by a "prisoner on his word" (*Prisonnier sur parole*) to Paris, thus ineligible to use the GRATIS label. The French officer added the full postage for letter rate 30c (Zst. 41), taking no credit to the imprinted value of 5c under the adhesive. Stamp manually cancelled because not compliant with postal provisions. After Paris delivery, charged due 2 Groschen for remailing to St-Benin d'Azy (Prussian occupation rate).

Unique example of military mail sent on a postal card abroad before UPU

Ex Stone



27 Feb. 1871 - Parcel card to a sergeant-major, Engineering company, 1st Legion Rhone. Parcel post (MESSAGERIE) stamps of the main post office (A), red circle seal of the **Relief Central Agency** to get franking privilege, confirmed by the PP (postage paid). Handwritten blue marks for parcel post register.

GENEVE
-A-
27 FEB 71



(Cat. Monot Nr. 128)
2 examples recorded



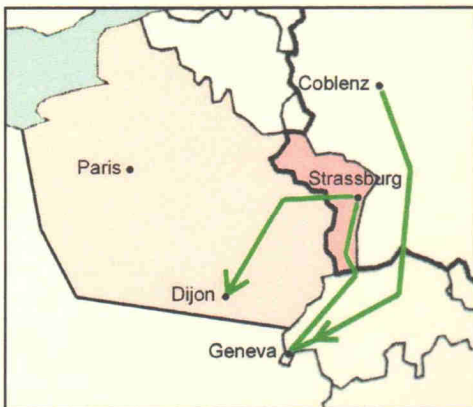
4 Prisoners of War in Germany

French POW's mail usually goes through Geneva and Basel...

12 Dec. 1870 - From Beaune, France, to the International Committee in Geneva, forwarded to the prefect of the Department Côte-d'Or, **State prisoner** at the Ehrenbreitstein fortress, Coblenz, Rhineland **Prussia**.



Handstamp **CHARGÉ**, **PD** and handwritten **X** (Red Cross) probably to get partial franking privilege. Whether the letter was actually charged seems doubtful because not closed. Franking of 30c (3 x YT 28) complies with a standard postage to Switzerland. On the reverse, handwritten mention from the Prussian post *Kann abgegeben werden* (may be delivered) and private mark **EHRENBREITSTEIN**.



14 Dec. 1870 - From Coblenz, Germany, to Dijon. Letter from a French officer, firstly forwarded to Geneva, then mailed on 16 Dec. (Zst. 41) and carried by Prussian post via STRASSBURG, annexed Alsace, on 18 Dec. Arrival postmark DIJON dated 16 Janv. 71

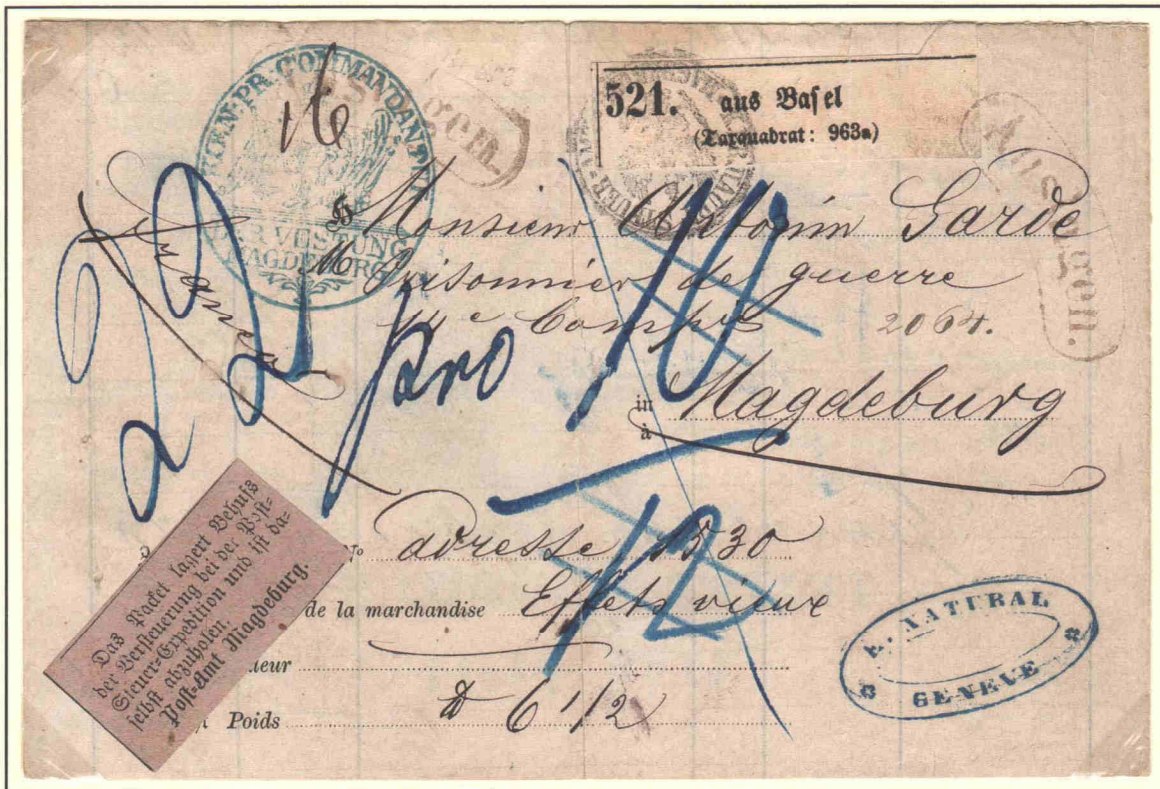


... with or without private forwarding

3 Jan. 1871 - From Cherchell, Algeria, to Düsseldorf, Germany, stipulated *Voie de Genève (Suisse)* (via Geneva, Switzerland). Postage 50c (YT 43 & 46). Basically the letters to French PoW in Germany were granted franking privilege on the French part. Thus postage should cover the Swiss and German parts. Whether the addressee had to pay postage due (blue handwritten mention) is not clear. So far many other examples remain still not explained as well.



To General Brincourt, Prisoner of War, staying in private home as most senior officers



2 Dec. 1870 - Parcel post bill (Swiss postal form Nr 54) for the shipment of used clothes (*effets vieux*) from Geneva to a POW in Magdeburg, Germany. Privately forwarded up to Basle before being left to the Post of German Baden state. Postmarks AUSLAGEN (Postage due) and handwritten 22 (Gulden / Kreuzer). On the back datestamps LEIPZIG 4 Dec. and AUSG. (*Delivery*) 5 Dec.

Most military mail relates to POW's beside regular German troops



4 Nov. 1870 - From Düsseldorf to Sennecey, France, stipulated *via Geneva*. Sent by a POW to his family through the Prussian military post which struck the service mark ETAPPEN COMMANDANTUR DÜSSELDORF. Franking 2½ Groschen (Mi 15 & 17) valid during the war instead of the normal rate at 4½ Gr.

PORTO FREI
LT. VERF. v. 7.8.70
=
Franking Privilege according to provision of 7/8/70



16 Jan. 1871 - From Bonn, Prussia, to Geneva. Blue stamp from the Prussian Regiment of Hussars. Postage paid 2 Groschen (postal stationery Mi U31A) despite the blue boxed mention of military franking privilege.

5 Post-War Official Mail

Although the International Committee in Geneva plays a key role in terms of communication and public relations, printed matter items are extremely rare

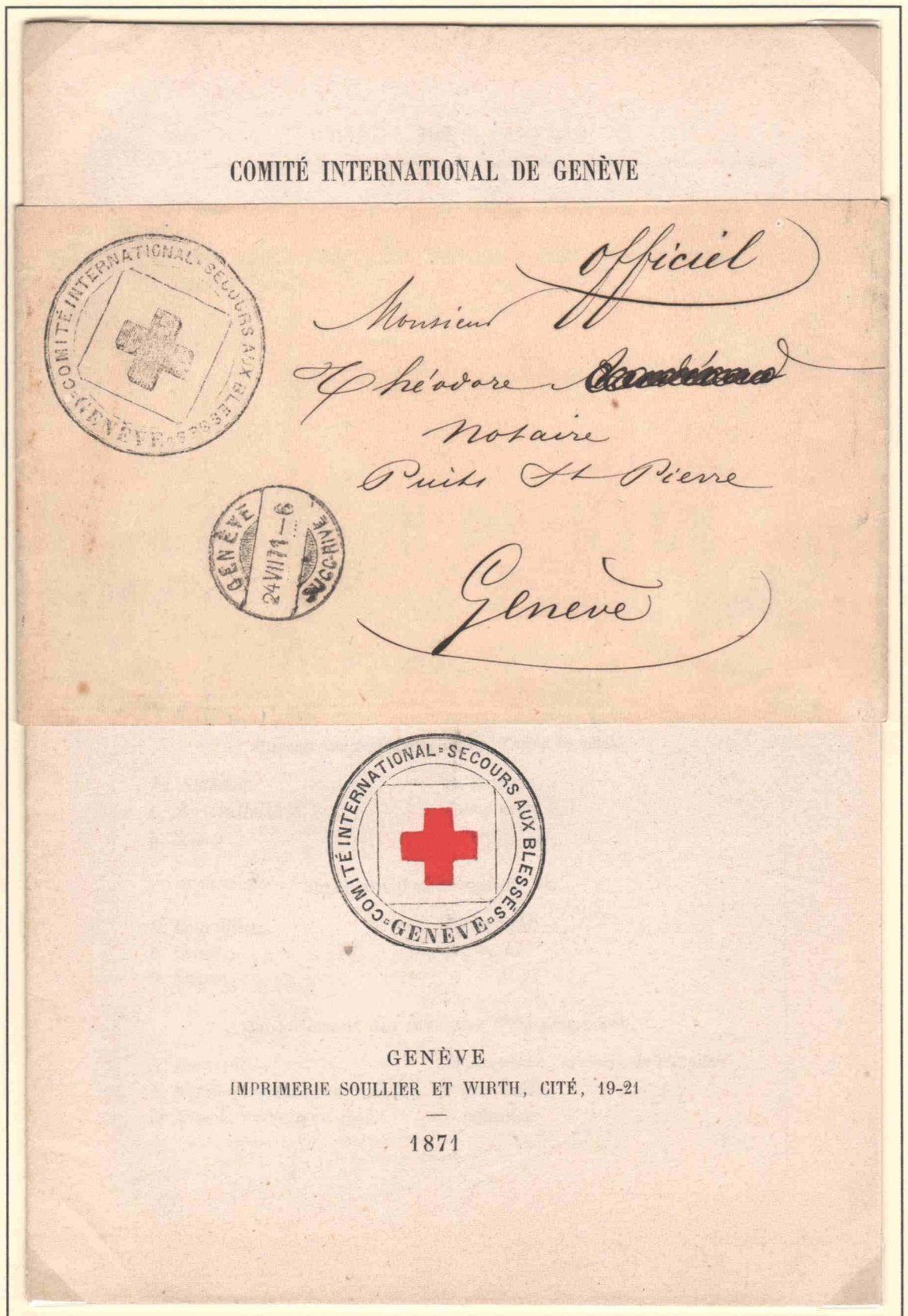
COMITÉ
INTERNATIONAL
SECOURS
AUX BLESSÉS /
GENÈVE

(Cat. Monot
Nr. 132 C)

**One of the
2 examples
ever recorded**



*The Genevan logo
COMITÉ INTER-
NATIONAL -
SECOURS AUX
BLESSÉS was also
printed on front co-
ver of such official
Red Cross reports.*



24 July 1871 - Wrapper tied with the seal of the International Committee granting postal franchise. Postmark of the nearest post office in Geneva RIVE

5 Post-War Official Mail

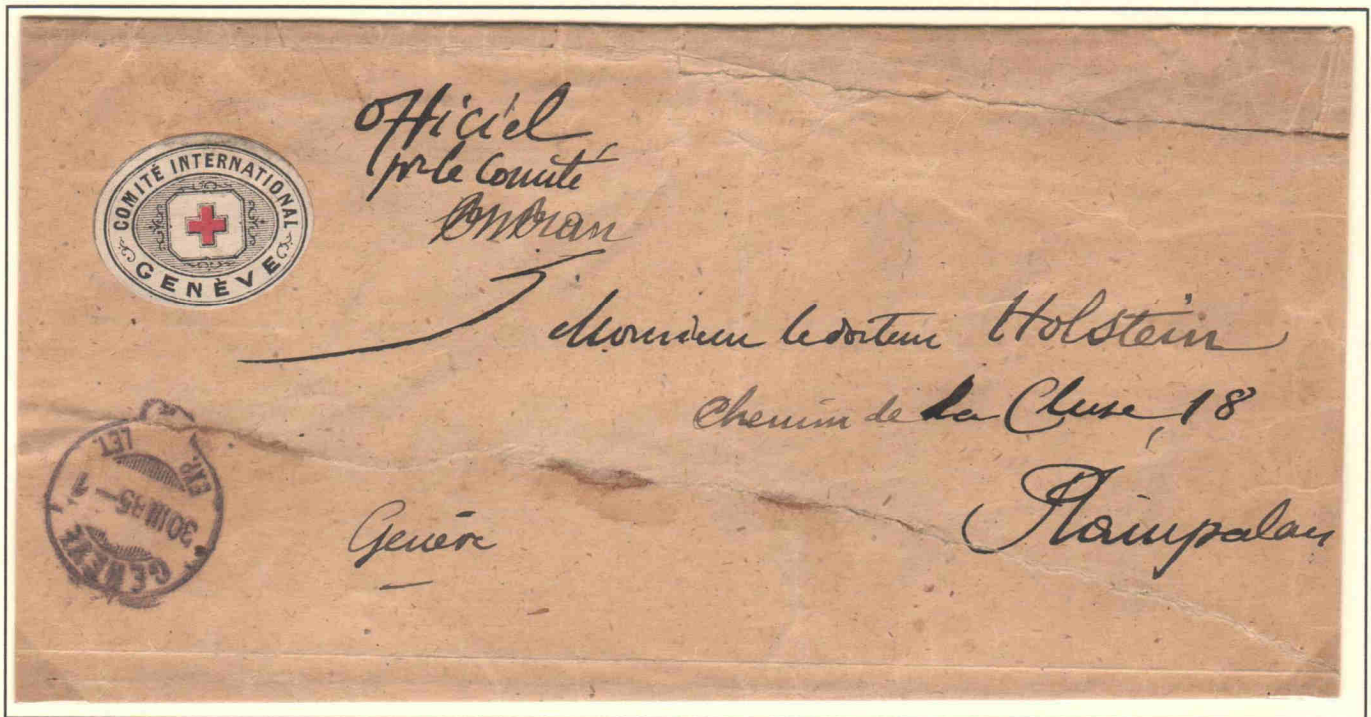
After the Franco-Prussian war, the International Committee continued to use successive frank stamps

10 Nov. 1877 - Letter from the International Committee to Bern, bearing the oval frank stamp (Zst. IX) and the handwritten mention "Officiel" as required. At the back, postmark BERN from the same day.

7 examples of the first oval frank stamp recorded after the war

Ex Grand

(e)

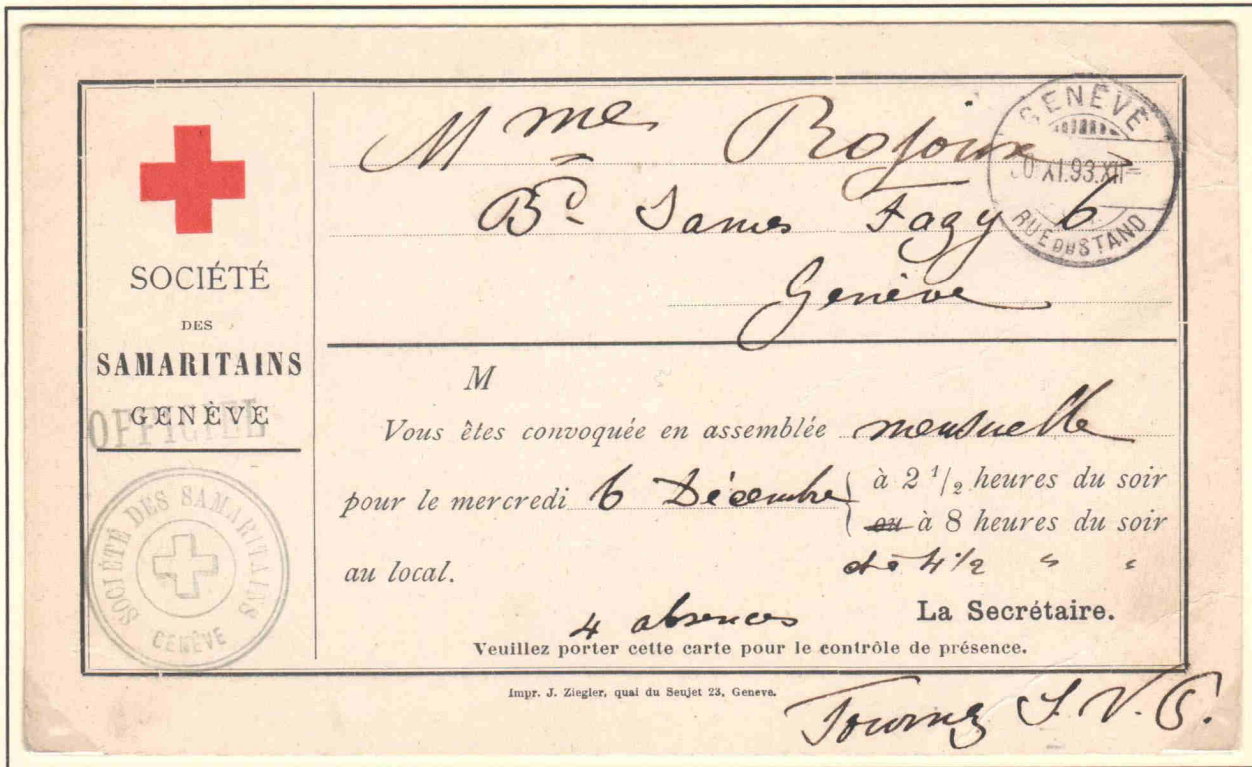


30 March 1885 - Wrapper within the city (Plainpalais). Handwritten mention "Officiel / pr le Comité". **2nd oval frank stamp** with regular letters E of GENEVE (Zst. X). **8 examples recorded** (01.1882 - 01.1886)

(e)

5 Post-War Official Mail

A last oval frank stamp was issued in 1885. Then a simple red cross could be used by benefit societies.



30 Nov. 1893 - Notification from the Samaritan Society to a member. Overleaf the reason: support the cause of **indigent wounded persons**. Handstamp of the society and OFFICIEL for franking privilege.

3rd Oval Frank Stamp
(Zst. XI)
06.07.1885 - 1922

During 37 years, 55 covers are recorded of which only 20 were used for service purposes (vs. convenience)

Ex Löwer



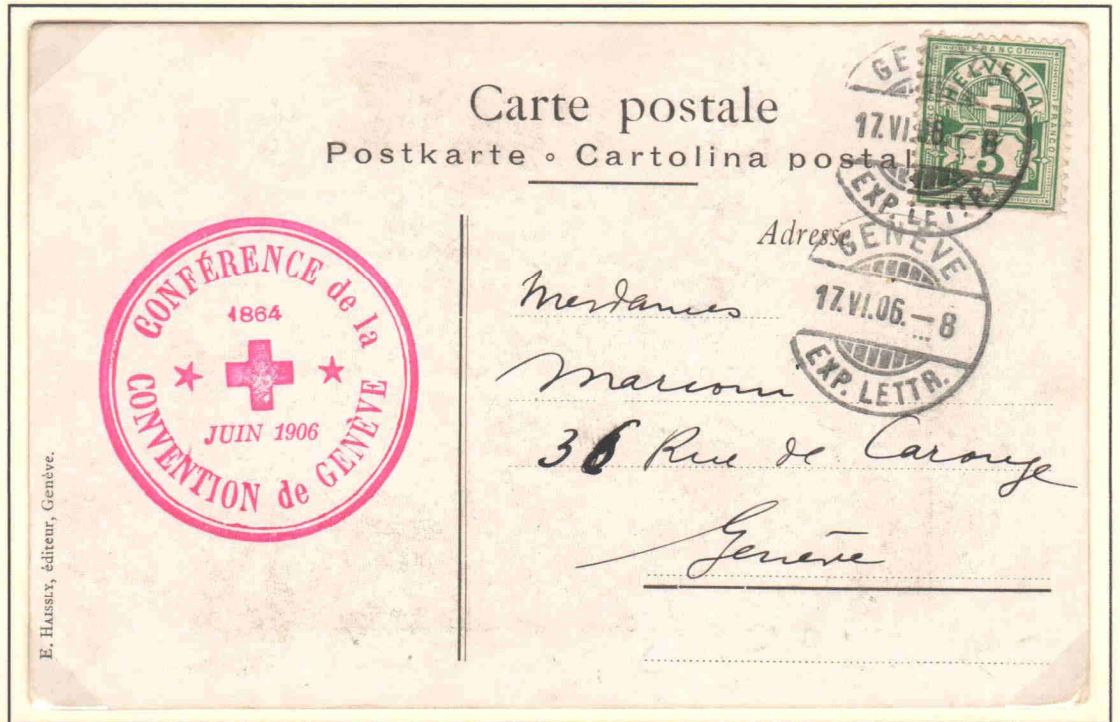
26 Oct. 1898 - Wrapper to Bern, used to send activity reports of the International Committee.

The Conference for the Revision of the Geneva Convention (11 June to 6 July 1906)
opens a new era for the ICRC which will shape its role during WW I

17 June 1906 - Postcard sent within the city, bearing the official seal of the International Conference for the revision of the Geneva Convention.

5 examples recorded

(17 to 25 June)



25 June 1906 - Official cover issued by the Canton of Geneva on behalf of the ICRC. Regulatory State seals REPUBLICA GENEVOENSIS and AFFAIRE OFFICIELLE to grant franking privilege during the Conference.

7 examples recorded

(10 June to 4 July)