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What are Pro Patria stamps?

This year's Pro Patria stamps portray valuable cultural monuments behind whose walls human dignity, social justice, humanity and culture are upheld. All the buildings depicted serve a social function. The proceeds from the sale of the stamps will go towards their financial support.

Urs Hobi

Every year at the start of summer, Swiss Post issues its Pro Patria stamps. This year they are dedicated to four important historic buildings in Switzerland: the Rotach houses in Zurich (CHF 0.85 postage value/CHF 0.40 surcharge), Monte Carasso Abbey in the Ticino (CHF 0.85/0.40), St. Katharinen Abbey in Diessenhofen (CHF 1.00/0.50) and the Palais Wilson in Geneva (CHF 1.00/0.50). At the same time they represent a postal birthday present for the Society for the History of Art in Switzerland, which is celebrating its 125th birthday this year. Through its publications, the Society makes architecture and art accessible in a variety of ways. One of the highlights of the anniversary year is the eagerly awaited re-issue of the first two volumes of guides to art in Switzerland.

Each issue of these stamps, which incidentally are valid for an indefinite period, always prompts the question of what "Pro Patria" stands for. The translation from the Latin ("For the fatherland") suggests that that it is something to do with Switzerland. And indeed, the Pro Patria Foundation is a prominent part of our National Day, 1 August. Pro Patria is a traditional institution whose origins date back to the Swiss National Day Committee founded in 1909. Incidentally, Swiss National Day has only been celebrated since the late 19th century. In 1891 the 600th anniversary of the Confederation – based on the alliance between the original cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden – was celebrated. Since then, 1 August has been declared a National Day, and a Swiss National Day Com-

mittee has been responsible for organising the festivities. The Pro Patria Foundation, established in 1909 as an offshoot of this committee, introduced the 1 August badge to promote Swiss National Day. Illustrated postal cards were also circulated to draw attention to this special day. 1938 saw the introduction of Swiss National Day stamps, which have borne the "Pro Patria" emblem since 1952. The annual proceeds from sales of the badge and surcharges on Pro Patria stamps are in the region of CHF 3 million. The money from such appeals is primarily used for cultural conservation projects as well as social projects. Pro Patria receives no government subsidies and is a non-profit-making agency run by private individuals in Switzerland. Hundreds of Swiss volunteers are out and about selling the stamps and badge ahead of 1 August.

The Foundation Board reviews the main beneficiaries of the appeal every year. For several years the pictures on Pro Patria stamps have been directly related to the institutions supported. This was not always the case. Initially, the stamps featured historic sites or national monuments. The motivation behind the modern stamps was triggered in 1938 by a painting of the Tell chapel by Bernese artist Hans Thöni. The background colour of the stamp (CHF 0.10 postage value/surcharge CHF 0.10) was violet. One year before the outbreak of war, the Foundation decided to dedicate its appeal to Swiss nationals living abroad, to draw attention to the existence of the Fifth Switzerland and its related organisations.



The new Pro Patria stamps: Rotach Houses, ZH; Monte Carasso Abbey, TI; St. Katharinen Abbey, TG; Palais Wilson, GE (l. to r.).