



Stamps of Distinction

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Wednesday, March 5, 2008

Terminology - Semi-Postal Stamps

Semi-postal stamps, also called *charity stamps*, are stamps that have a surcharge added to the regular postal fee. The extra money generated by the stamp goes to a specific charity or cause, predetermined by the postal administration.



For example, if the cost to mail a one-ounce letter is 39 cents, a semi-postal stamp might be

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issued for a cost 49 of cents, where the 10 cent difference is given to the charity. The customer at the postal counter pays 49 cents, but the stamp is only good for 39 cents worth of

postage.

The first semi-postal stamp was issued by New South Wales in 1897 with the charitable surcharge going to fight tuberculosis. It was issued in honor of the diamond jubilee (60 years on the throne) for Queen Victoria. It was inscribed *Consumptives Home* which identified the stamp as contributing to a facility for those with consumption (tuberculosis). To further cement its standing as a charitable issue, it is also inscribed "but the greatest of these is charity", a direct quote of 1st Corinthians 13:13 (King James Version).

Just prior to World War I, semi-postal stamps began to be issued by European countries, and have remained quite prevalent in Europe to this day. Some of the charitable causes have been for tuberculosis treatment, the Red Cross, and assistance for war veterans and orphans.

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To help identify a given stamp as a semi-postal, the stamp usually illustrates the postal value and the charitable value separated by a plus sign (+). For example, a stamp with a denomination of *17 + 10* means that 17 cents is the postal value and 10 cents is the charitable value. Not every semi-postal stamp uses the plus sign, and some don't even identify either the postal value or the charitable value, but most do.

Many countries have issued semi-postal stamps annually since the early days of the 20th century. Switzerland is well known for its *pro juventate* semi-postal issues that began in 1912 and have been issued continually. The issues help to benefit children and adolescents in Switzerland.

Other countries rarely, if ever, issue semi-postal stamps. The United States was a relative late-comer to semi-postal stamps; its first semi-postal issue was issued in 1998 (the non-denominated *Breast Cancer Research* issue) and has been in continual



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production since that time. Only 2 other semi-postal stamps have been issued by the United States since that time.

Semi-postal stamps are just one of the many types of stamps that are called *back of the book* stamps, because they are usually listed in the back section of the country sections of stamp catalogs. Some collectors choose not to collect back of the book issues, as many times all of these specialty issues are too numerous and costly.

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In the U.S.-published *Scott* catalogue, all semi-postal stamps are prefixed with the capital letter "B". If you

are trying to identify a stamp and can't find it in your album, check the stamp again and see if you see a plus sign (+). If so, it's probably a "B" stamp. If you can't find it and you see an airplane in the picture, it's probably a "C" stamp! And if all the characters are in an alphabet you do not speak, talk to your local expert or buy a useful book such as *Linn's Stamp Identifier* that helps you find those "weird" stamps that we all have.

<http://www.mcgees.org/stamp-offers/>

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