

Swiss Federal Coins – Respectable and Trustworthy

Switzerland stands aloof from the European Union. But Switzerland too once introduced its own single currency – the first federal constitution of 1848 put an end to Switzerland's previously fragmented coinage. The minting of coins in the individual cantons was abolished, and the coinage became the exclusive responsibility of the central government of the Swiss Confederation. And what the Confederation minted was the Swiss franc – French things were very much in fashion, and the decimal structure of the new currency made it convenient to work with. It's tough too, though, the Swiss franc, like a real mountaineer, strong enough to stand up to the euro any day.

Swiss Confederation, 5 Francs 1850, Paris



Denomination:	5 Franken
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Paris
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	24.97
Diameter (mm):	37.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

During the first half of the 19th century, every Swiss canton minted its own coins. The resulting confusion is hard to imagine today – good, valuable money mixed with worthless coins. Only when the sovereign single states joined into the Swiss Confederation in 1848, a legal basis for a complete reformation of the Swiss currency was at hand.

Antoine Bovy from Geneva designed the first series of Swiss coins that showed the image of a sitting Helvetia. This type was minted until 1874, when it was exchanged by the standing Helvetia.

Swiss Confederation, 2 Francs 1850, Paris



Denomination:	2 Franken
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Paris
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	9.97
Diameter (mm):	27.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Two years after the introduction of the Swiss federal constitution (1848) the first Swiss coins were issued. Opinions over the system of the new Swiss currency were divided: The eastern parts of Switzerland wanted a currency modeled after the Southern German gulden, while the western part opted for the French decimal system. Finally, upon the recommendation of the financial expert Jakob Speiser from Basle, Switzerland adopted a currency based on the French franc. In 1850, the first Swiss francs were minted.

Swiss Confederation, 1 Franc 1850, Paris



Denomination:	1 Franken
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Paris
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	4.98
Diameter (mm):	23.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

One of the most important inventions of the federal state was the new national symbol, the Helvetia. She was yet unfamiliar in Switzerland, although national personifications were characteristic for the time. Helvetia had sisters in many other countries – Germania in Germany, Britannia in Great Britain, Marianne in France or the American Miss Liberty. In 1850, Helvetia was depicted sitting on the coins, but since 1874 she had to stand. And that is how she is depicted on Swiss coins still today.

Swiss Confederation, 1/2 Franc 1850, Paris



Denomination:	1/2 Franken
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Paris
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	2.5
Diameter (mm):	18.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

In 1848, the Presidential Election Council united the 22 former sovereign cantons in a Federal State. Just like the postal service, the customs or the fabrication of gunpowder, coinage became a federal matter. However, Switzerland did not yet have an efficient mint. Therefore the first Swiss coins were struck in Paris (mint mark A) and Strasbourg (mint mark BB).

In 1853, the Swiss government took over the former mint of the city of Berne. It was renamed as "Federal Mint." In 1998, the Federal Mint was reorganized and redefined as "Swissmint."

Swiss Confederation, 20 Rappen 1850, Strasbourg



Denomination:	20 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Strasbourg
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	3.25
Diameter (mm):	22.0
Material:	Billon
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Switzerland was the first country to issue coins from special alloys. Until 1881, 20 rappen-coins were made from an alloy of copper, zinc, nickel and silver. Then the composition was changed – as from 1881, the Swiss 20 rappen-coins were made entirely from nickel.

The new nickel coins were more difficult to counterfeit than the former coins from softer alloys. The high melting point of nickel, and the strong minting machines that were needed to stamp nickel coins, complicated the forgers' lives. However, since nickel was a strategic metal, coinage had to switch to the more economical copper-nickel in 1938. This alloy remained the metallic base for the 20 rappen-coins up to this day.

Swiss Confederation, 10 Rappen 1850, Strasbourg



Denomination:	10 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Strasbourg
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	2.5
Diameter (mm):	19.0
Material:	Billon
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The first 10 rappen-coins bore a Swiss shield with oak leaves, and on the reverse the indication of value. In 1879, however, the small coins got a new motif: The head of Helvetia wearing a diadem with the inscription LIBERTAS was used for the first time on the pieces of 10 and 5 rappen; the coins of 20 rappen bear the liberty head since 1881. This coin image has been used without any changes ever since. The engraver Karl Schwenzer from Württemberg cut the dies for these coins, yet did not sign them.

Swiss Confederation, 5 Rappen 1850, Strasbourg



Denomination:	5 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Strasbourg
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	1.67
Diameter (mm):	12.0
Material:	Billon
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The coins at 20, 10 and 5 rappen were made from billon. The German Karl F. Voigt cut the dies for these denominations. The motif was a simple Swiss shield garlanded with Alpine roses on the obverse and the value on the reverse.

Swiss Confederation, 2 Rappen 1850, Paris



Denomination:	2 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Paris
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	2.5
Diameter (mm):	20.0
Material:	Bronze
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Since January 1st, 2007, the little copper coins of 1 rappen are no longer part of the Swiss currency. Coins worth 2 rappens were withdrawn from circulation on 1978 already. Also the 5-rappen-coins have lost their meaning in daily trade in Switzerland. Moreover, the production of a 5-rappen-coin cost 6 rappens – clearly a losing deal.

Swiss Confederation, 1 Rappen 1850, Paris



Denomination:	1 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Paris
Year of Issue:	1850
Weight (g):	1.48
Diameter (mm):	16.0
Material:	Bronze
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Of this denomination, the 1 rappen-coin of 1850, 5,000,000 pieces were minted. 1 rappen had still some purchasing power at that time; a worker earned between 30 and 60 francs a month, and a pound of cow meat (not beef, which was more expensive) cost 35 rappen.