
A Philatelic Tour of The Government District and the Corniche

by Gary Little

The cobblestoned Place Clairefontaine is the gateway to the government district. In this district you will discover many old heritage buildings that are now occupied by ministries of the Luxembourg federal government. Place Clairefontaine is located near Place Guillaume II at the southern end of Rue du Fossé.



Grand Duchess Charlotte statue (1996 stamp).

abdication of her sister Grand Duchess Marie- Adélaïde. Later the same year, on November 6, she married Prince Félix of Bourbon-Parma. Charlotte and Félix had six children: the previous Grand Duke Jean (1921), Elisabeth (1922), Marie-Adélaïde (1924), Marie-Gabrielle (1925), Charles (1927), and Alix (1929).

1 The centerpiece of Place Clairefontaine is a larger-than-life bronze statue of Grand Duchess Charlotte, the beloved sovereign of Luxembourg for 45 years from 1919 to 1964. The statue, financed by public subscription, was unveiled on April 29, 1990, almost five years after Charlotte's death at age 89 in 1985.

The statue is the work of French sculptor Jean Cardot. It is 2.75 m high and weighs 850 kg.

Grand Duchess Charlotte was born at Berg Castle on January 21, 1896, the second of six daughters of Grand Duke Guillaume IV and Grand Duchess Marie-Anne. She ascended the throne on January 15, 1919 following the



Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former refuge of the St. Maximin Abbey of Trier (1994 stamp).

2 As you stand in front of the Grand Duchess Charlotte statue you will notice on the right a large building with a distinctive three-level mansard roof and a symmetric facade with rows of closely spaced windows along the upper two stories. The interior of the building features beautiful late baroque styling with artistic wood paneling, stucco decorations, and elegant ceilings.

This is the present Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was built in 1751 by Abbott Henri Scheffer, Luxembourg engineer Nicolas Steinmetz, and Tyrolian contractor Louis Hendel.

The building initially served as the refuge of the St. Maximin Abbey of Trier and was one

of the grandest in town in the late 18th century. The French confiscated it when the revolutionary army took control of Luxembourg in 1795. Later, in 1839, the building became the residence of the Prussian military governor and when the Prussians left the fortress in 1867 the Luxembourg government occupied it. It has served as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1945.

3 The next building around the Place Clairefontaine, adjacent to the Cathedral, is *Hôtel de Bourgogne* (Burgundy House); it can be accessed from the courtyard of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This building has served as the Office of the President of the Government and the Ministry of State since 1975.

Burgundy House is one of the oldest buildings in Luxembourg. It was built around 1443 when Philippe the Good of Burgundy first gained control of Luxembourg following the collapse of the original Luxembourg dynasty that had been founded by Sigefroi in 963. It is known for its distinctive pink brick tower staircase whose ornate entrance door features columns and a gothic arch.

One of the notable early residents of Burgundy House was Claude du Fays de Neuchâtel, the deputy governor under Charles the Bold (son of Philippe the Good) and governor under Marie of Burgundy (daughter of Charles the Bold).

4 Directly across from Burgundy House is another very old building, one that has been used since 1974 by the General Finance Inspection, a division of the Ministry of Finance.

The main entrance to the building is actually on the side opposite the one facing Burgundy House. It is accessible from the narrow Rue de la Congrégation.

In 1676 this building was the refuge of the Münster Abbey and was later acquired by the famous Metternich family of Austria. From 1810 to 1973 it served as a convent for the sisters of the order of St. Sophie.



Burgundy House, the office of the President of the government (1993 stamp).



General Finance Inspection, former refuge of the Münster Abbey (1994 stamp).



Ministry of Finance, former refuge of the St. Esprit Convent (1994 stamp).

5 The next government building around Place Clairefontaine, at 3 Rue de la Congrégation directly across from the front entrance to the General Finance Inspection, is the headquarters of the Ministry of Finance. It is the former refuge of the St. Esprit Convent.

This building, made up of three high wings, was built in 1740 and is known for its elegant symmetry and its tall, stone-arched window frames.

A plaque on the outside of the building identifies it as the former city home of Emmanuel Servais (1811-1890), a Luxembourg statesman who served the Grand Duchy in various important political roles, including President of the Government, President of the State Council, President of the Chamber of Deputies, and Mayor of the City of Luxembourg.



Ministry of Agriculture, the Simons House (1993 stamp).

6 The last government building of note around Place Clairefontaine houses the Ministry of Agriculture, Viticulture, and Rural Development. It is situated right on the Place itself at 1 rue de la Congrégation.

This building is called *Maison Simons* (Simons House) and is named for Prime Minister Charles-Mathias Simons (1802-1874) who lived here from 1846. Simons was the Luxembourg Prime Minister from 1853-1860.

Simons House was built in 1580 but it was enlarged in 1721 in baroque style. It was acquired by the government in 1935.

This ends the tour of the buildings of the government district. The next stop is the St. Esprit Plateau. You can reach it by following the short street to the left of Simons House then turning right along Rue du St. Esprit.

Rue du St. Esprit leads to a large plaza on the St. Esprit Plateau, originally the site of the St. Esprit Monastery founded in 1234.

The modern plaza was laid out when the area was redeveloped in 1988 according to the plans of architects Cocchia, Klein, and Muller.



Dove Fountain on the St. Esprit Plateau (1990 stamp).

7 Part of the redevelopment included the placing of the attractive Dove Fountain at the end of the plaza closest to Rue du St. Esprit.

There is also a small building on the plaza that houses elevators which provide quick access to the Grund 50 meters below and to an underground parking lot.

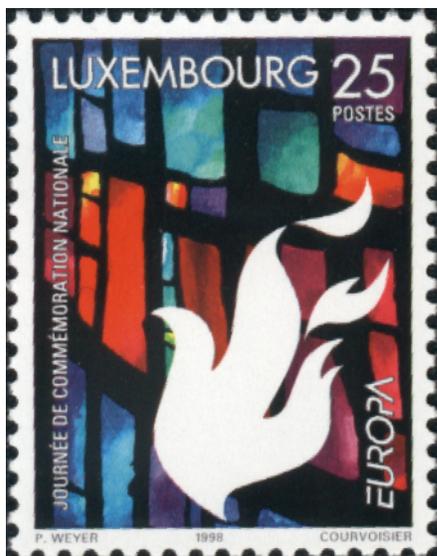
8 On the far side of the plaza is the Vauban Building, built by military architect Vauban as a barracks during the French occupation of the late 17th century. (A nearby second barracks building has long since been destroyed.) The Vauban



Property Registration Administration (1996 stamp).



National Solidarity Monument (1972 stamp).



National Solidarity Monument eternal flame (1998 stamp).

Building now houses the Ministry of Public Forces (which is responsible for the army, police, and gendarmerie), the Ministry of Youth, and the Property Registration Administration.

The Property Registration Administration was founded in 1795 and was charged with the collection of property transaction taxes and the administration of government property. Since 1970 it has been responsible for the collection of value-added taxes (VAT).

9 Past the Ministry of Defense building, on a grassy hill called *Kanounenhivél* (Cannon Hill) is the moving National Solidarity Monument, a memorial to the courageous efforts of all Luxembourgers who sought to regain the freedom of the country during World War II and the grim Nazi occupation. Although many Luxembourgers were involved in several secret underground movements that sprung up, some openly defied Nazi oppression and the imposition of conscription of Luxembourg citizens into the German army. The penalties for disobedience were severe — immediate execution for some and deportation to a prison or concentration camp for others.

The overall design of the National Solidarity Monument is by architect René Mailliet.

The primary element of the design is a group of three semi-circular concrete walls that symbolize the hated prisons and camps where so many Luxembourgers suffered and many died. The walls wrap round a stained glass chapel designed by sculptor-glazier François Gillen. The National Solidarity Monument was unveiled on October 10, 1971.

10 Behind the National Solidarity Monument is a footpath to the site of the now dismantled St. Esprit Citadel, another project of military architect Vauban that was built after the successful French siege of 1684. This site, now a park, offers magnificent views of the confluence of the



*St. Esprit Citadel
(1963 stamp).*

Pétrusse and Alzette rivers far below.

The view to the right is of the Viaduc bridge (also called the Passerelle), which was built in stone from 1859-1861 to connect the old town to the central train station district. The Viaduc, designed by French engineers Achille Grenier and Aug. Le Tellier, features 24 arches and is over 300 m long.

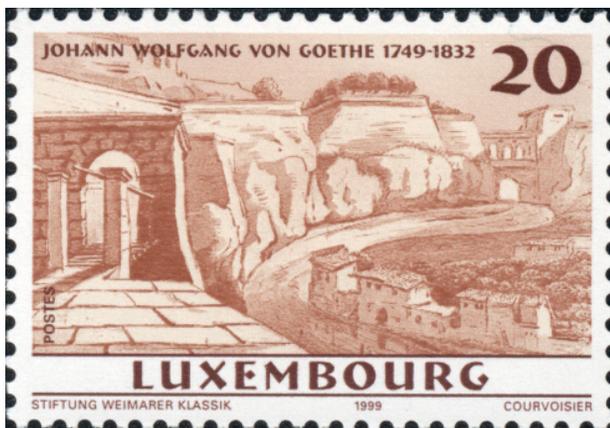
11 The next stop is the National Archives building. To reach it, return to the plaza on the St. Esprit Plateau and take the hairpin path that starts behind the Dove Fountain and descends to the edge of the cliff rising above the Alzette River.



National Archives (1980 stamp).

The very long, sturdy building you first come to was a former military hospital built by the Prussians in 1857-1860.

As a military installation, the building was to have been destroyed in accordance with the terms of the 1867 Treaty of London, which called for the dismantling of the fortress. The building was, however, saved from this fate by a conversion to non-military use even though it later served as barracks for the small Luxembourg volunteer army from 1881-1940. After World War II guards for the Grand Ducal Palace used the building.



Chemin de la Corniche (1999 stamp).

In 1968, the National Archives, the public archives administration, moved to the building. Its extensive archives include historic documents, administrative records, and the central registry of the notaries public.

Chemin de la Corniche, a footpath along the top of the wall of the old Luxembourg fortress, begins at the National Archives and goes all the way to the Bock rock. Magnificent views of the Grund and the Alzette valley far below can be seen all along its path.



*"Luxembourg 1936-1937"
by Joseph Kutter (1969 stamp).*

12 A few meters past the State Archives along the Corniche is the *Bredevee Gate* (also called the Grund Gate). This distinctive crenellated gate provides access along Rue Large from the Fish Market to the Grund.

The *Bredevee Gate* was the primary route to the southern part of town before the Viaduc bridge was built across the Pétrusse in the mid-19th century. Despite its medieval look, the gate was actually built in the 17th century.

Don't miss the classic view from Chemin de la Corniche a few dozen meters before crossing the Gate. From this location you can see the Gate with a row of houses behind it leading up to the St. Michel Church towering above everything in the background.

This view is the subject of one of Luxembourg painter Joseph Kutter's most famous works — *Luxembourg 1936-1937*.



Cassal House (1993 stamp).

13 The last stop on the tour is located along Chemin de la Corniche just before it reaches the Bock. It is *Maison de Cassal* (Cassal House), an old manor house with a distinctive tower.

The northern portion features a balcony that was built around 1570; the central portion with the tower was built about 50 years later. The southern portion, with the keystone window frames, was built in the 18th century.

Cassal House is named for P.M. Cassal, Secretary of the Provincial Council under Philippe II of Spain (ruler of Luxembourg from 1555-1598). It is a fine example of a typical 16th century upper class residence.

Cassal House was purchased by the Luxembourg government in 1920 and now houses offices of the Ministry of Culture and the Grand Ducal Institute.