

Notes and news

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Notes and News

Ciba — Monthey 1904-1954

The Ciba chemical products and dyestuffs works, at Basle, last year celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their Monthey factory and published an interesting illustrated booklet to commemorate the event. The possibility of harnessing the hydraulic power supplied by a river and the existence of a subterranean pipe-line $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles long bringing salt water from the salt beds at Bex caused a firm in Basle — which subsequently became Ciba Co. Ltd. — to decide to take over a factory at Monthey in the Rhône valley, in spite of the distance, in order to start up the production of synthetic indigo. Fifty years later, we can see that the pioneers of 1904 were the promoters of a period of industrial progress at Monthey. Although the indigo factory experienced many ups and downs, periods of prosperity and periods of depression which several times led the promoters to consider the liquidation of the factory, it still exists today and is running well.

Naturally, the premises have been expanded; the factory today

covers an area of 1,539,000 square feet and provides employment for some 900 men and women, among them 25 chemists and 5 engineers. The manufacturing programme is not limited to indigo and the intermediary products of electrolysis such as caustic soda, chloride of lime and hydrogen, which are also put on the market, but has rapidly expanded to include a large number of chemical substances necessary to the Basle dyestuffs industries, as well as plastic materials. More than 50 % of the total power consumed by the factory is used by the electro-chemical department. The current is supplied by two power stations at the water's edge, one of which forms an integral part of the factory whilst the other is run by a subsidiary company and supplies the current for the town of Monthey and several neighbouring districts. Finally, it should be added that the Ciba factory at Monthey has developed its welfare organisations to a degree far exceeding the minimum requirements laid down by Swiss law.

Feldmühle Co. Ltd., Rorschach

Origin and development of a Swiss concern for the manufacture of artificial and synthetic fibres

According to old deeds and records, the « Feldmühle » (« The mill in the fields ») already existed as long ago as the 15th century and was used for grinding corn. In 1884 the premises were taken over by a firm of embroidery manufacturers which, in time, became the largest of its kind in Eastern Switzerland and played an important economic role in the development of the town of Rorschach and its surroundings. In 1920, heavily hit by the slump in embroidery, the firm had to shut down; this was a hard blow for its employees and workers as well as for the town of Rorschach. But the vitality of the firm remained unimpaired, for the management shortly afterwards took the courageous decision to use the huge existing premises for the manufacture of « artificial silk » as it was then called (or in other words viscose rayon). This change-over to a new industry, entirely different from that of embroidery, involved great expenditure on new plant and called for considerable investments.

The daily output amounted to 5,500 to 6,600 lb. of rayon, and provided employment for some 1,000 workers. After the first financial success, the Feldmühle met with great difficulties during the depression of the early 30's, for the major part of its output had to be exported at prices that were too low. Even on the home market, tariff protection was insufficient to enable the firm to compete successfully against the dumping tactics employed by certain of its foreign competitors owing to their considerably lower wages and the depreciation of their currencies. Fortunately it was possible to overcome these obstacles. In spite of all difficulties, the Feldmühle rationalised and developed its plant. In 1933 it was able to add to its existing departments a section for the production of transparent sheets of viscose, known on the market under the trade name of « Cellux ».

During the second world war, the Feldmühle also took up the manufacture of staple fibre in order to compensate for the shortage

of textiles, but this branch of manufacture was abandoned after the war.

This firm has also for many years made artificial straw for the millinery braid industry, for passementerie, hosiery and knitwear, weaving and other purposes, as well as « Spungo » viscose sponges for industrial and household use. In order to keep pace with modern technical developments, its manufacturing programme has been enlarged to include canvas for tyres as well as synthetic yarns of polyamide 6.

Today the potential daily output of the Feldmühle is 22,000 lb. of rayon, canvas for tyres and artificial straw and 8,800 lb. of Cellux. At the moment the output of synthetic yarns is in the neighbourhood of 1,100 lb., but it is planned to step this up shortly to the maximum of 4,400 lb. These quantities represent a by no means negligible factor in the home supplies available to the Swiss textile industry. Today approximately 1,500 persons are employed by the firm, which also has a hundred or so home workers on its books; a great number of people and independent firms collaborate moreover in the costly task of maintaining and expanding the firm.

Most of the work required for the Swiss production of artificial and synthetic fibres is carried out in Switzerland itself. Apart from cellulose, caprolactam and coal, which come from abroad, all the raw materials and auxiliary products are of Swiss origin. Furthermore, during the summer the factory is run on electrical power, so that it can dispense with coal during part of the time at least.

By always keeping up with the requirements of the day, by continually expanding its manufacturing programme and making use of the latest advances in technique, the firm of Feldmühle has become an important factor in the economic life of North-Eastern Switzerland.

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A textile industry jubilee

The embroidery firm of *Jules Michel & Co.* in Zurich recently celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of its foundation. This firm, which is the only one of its kind in Zurich, was founded by Jules Michel in 1895. Manufacture was also originally carried out in Zurich but in 1914 was transferred to eastern Switzerland, thus bringing it nearer to the centre of the embroidery industry.

The major part of this firm's output is exported, mainly to South America. It manufactures high-quality embroidery, created not for Haute Couture but rather to meet the needs of the clothing industry. Its products include guipures, allover and above all embroidery on net, the firm's speciality, which looks like lace and is very popular abroad as well as in Switzerland for the making of blouses and fine lingerie.



Since the death of its founder in 1924, the firm has been run by his son, Mr Harry Michel, to whom we are happy to be able to present here our best wishes for the future prosperity of this firm.

The 150th anniversary of J. G. Nef & Co. Ltd., Herisau

The small Appenzell town of Herisau was in a festive mood on June 16th last. The biggest concern of the district, J. G. Nef & Co. Ltd., whose trade name *Nelo* is known throughout the world, was celebrating the 150th anniversary of its foundation. To mark the start of this memorable day, members of the local authorities and the press were entertained in the gaily decorated premises of the head office. Mr. H. Wintsch, the manager, spoke about the firm's manufacturing programme, which includes all the textile specialities of Eastern Switzerland: plain, fancy and printed novelty fabrics for dresses, skirts, blouses and lingerie, light and heavy fabrics for furniture and curtains in plain or fancy weaves, printed or embroidered, as well as the famous small printed handkerchiefs. He went on to describe the organisation of the firm and the factories attached to it. 80 % of the total output is exported, thanks to the services of a network of 120 agencies extending all over the world. While being shown round the immense premises, which were decorated with magnificent baskets of flowers sent by friends of the firm with their messages of congratulation, the guests were able to see for themselves some of the many stages in the production of textiles.

Then came the commemorative ceremony itself, in the large hall of the Herisau Casino, attended by the public authorities, members of the industrial associations and economic organisations, friends and business connections of the firm and members of the press. All the personnel, office staff and workers, some of whom can boast almost

fifty years of loyal service in the firm, also attended the ceremony. In her speech of welcome, the president of the board of directors, Madame Anita Nef — whose elegant dress bore witness to the successful collaboration between the textile industry of Eastern Switzerland and Parisian haute couture — stressed the close ties existing between the Nef family and the firm of the same name. In spite of its conversion into a joint-stock company, it has kept its character of a family concern and has maintained its ideal which is to work together in a spirit of enthusiastic collaboration to manufacture textile products in keeping with the latest fashion trends and capable of giving satisfaction to clients on all markets. The speeches made by directors, A. Stiefelmeier, vice-president of the board of directors, A. Kuhne and H. Gut made it quite clear that the responsibility for maintaining the good name and tradition of the firm of Nef is in good hands.

On the occasion of its 150th anniversary, this concern has published a commemorative booklet, written by Dr. Peter Buhrer of St. Gall, which tells the history of the firm in relation to the world events of the period. It has also celebrated its anniversary by introducing a new speciality, fabrics bearing the trade mark « Disciplined », which, although made of pure cotton, have the feel of silk thanks to a special finish, and are assured of a success throughout the world which will doubtless be as great as that of other products bearing the trade name *Nelo*.

O. H.



Weaving mills of the firm J. G. Nef & Co. Ltd. in Bauma.

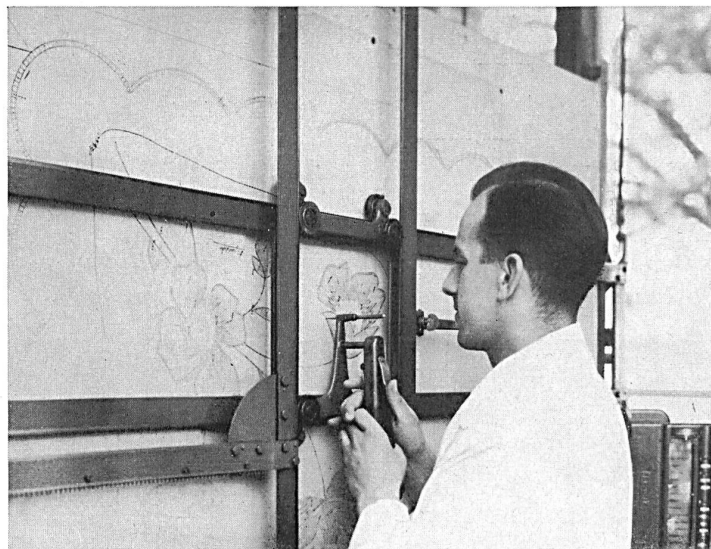
Jacob Rohner Co. Ltd.
celebrates its eightieth anniversary

Brodeur, à la machine à perforer les cartes.

Embroidery worker at work on the card cutting machine.

Obrero bordador en la máquina de picar dibujos en los cartones para los telares de bordar automáticos.

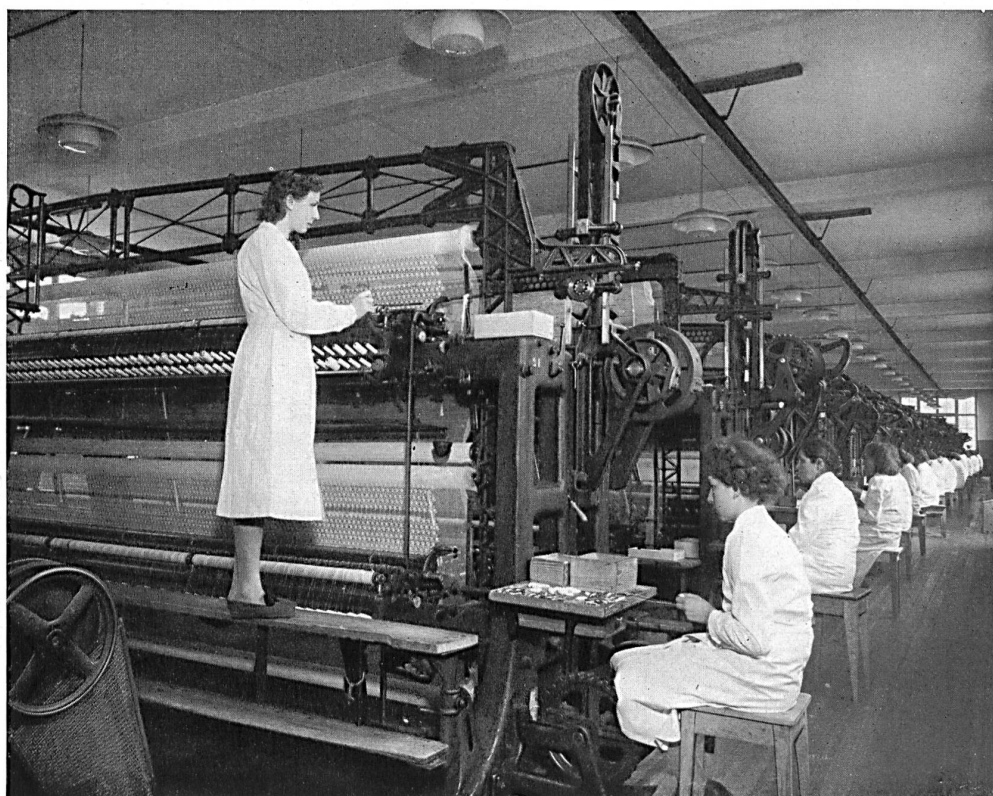
Sticker an der Punchmaschine.



The firm of Jacob Rohner Co. Ltd., at Rebstein, was founded in 1875, and will therefore be celebrating its eightieth anniversary this year. During the eight decades of its existence, it has become the biggest manufacturer and exporter of embroideries in the country. The head office at Rebstein is where the collections are created, and all transactions connected with purchases and exports are handled, whereas the actual manufacture is carried out in the factories at Rebstein, Lüchingen and Widnau. The manufacturing programme covers a wide range extending from the latest novelties to specialities for the women of Africa and the East; it includes embroidered organdies, chemical embroideries, lace, insertions, embroidered allover in cotton and nylon, lace handkerchiefs, etc.

During the last few years, the firm has considerably modernised its technical equipment, its production services and its commercial organisation. During the depression of the 30's it started to manufacture hosiery in order to provide alternative employment for its workers, and at the end of the last war it took over a furnishing fabrics and carpet factory.

The firm of Jacob Rohner today employs some 800 workers, not counting the great number of women who do piece work in the home. «Textiles Suisses» sends its congratulations and best wishes with the hope that in twenty years' time it will have the pleasure of calling attention in these columns to the centenary of this firm.



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