

Swiss Trade Fairs

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SWISS TRADE FAIRS.

The trade fairs which are now such a familiar feature of Swiss life owe their initiation to the difficulties experienced during the economic struggle for existence which accompanied the First World War. Just as, time and time again, rival claims to the honour of being the originator of this or that noble institution have been, with due decorum, advanced; just as the seven ancient cities disputed their rival claims to the cradle of Homer, so have at least two Swiss cities, Basle and Lausanne, laid claim to being the first to found trade fairs. The fact is that in 1916, at Lausanne, a "Comptoir vaudois" was held for the first time as a purely cantonal event, but that, on the other hand, Basle organised in 1917 the first "Swiss Sample Fair." Subsequently both cities wished to be the seat of a Swiss Industries Fair, and the question of the two cities taking turns in organizing one was considered, but on June 18th, 1919, a wise compromise was reached with the help of the Federal Government; the Swiss Industries Fair at Basle was to be the general industrial fair, whilst the Comptoir at Lausanne was to be the fair for agriculture and the food industry. Thus the cantonal fair on the Lake of Geneva blossomed into a national one which made its first appearance in 1920 as the "Comptoir Suisse." Division in this way, according to industry, provided the first objective differentiation of the two Fairs, and subsequent developments have shown that this solution enabled the two institutions to be placed on a fruitful footing which also made full allowance for regional differences.

Lausanne is the capital of a canton approximately 80,000 of whose inhabitants are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, but in addition to this it is the centre for a much larger agricultural hinterland which comprises, apart from the Canton of Vaud, that of Valais and considerable portions of the Cantons of Fribourg, Neuchâtel and even Berne.

Basle, on the other hand, is itself the seat of large export industries and at the same time the most important trans-shipment centre for Swiss foreign trade, so that it was just as much predestined to be the seat of the Industries Fair as was Lausanne for the Comptoir devoted to agriculture and the closely related food industry.

Later on, the regional principle again gained in influence when Lugano resumed its ancient tradition of fairs, in the altered form first of an Autumn Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition and later, as from the year 1937, a "Fiera svizzera" (Swiss Fair). Then the "Olma" was founded in St. Gall, once more on a predominantly regional basis and specifi-

cally as an agricultural fair, and in 1946 it was raised, by Federal recognition, at a third autumn institution side by side with those of Lausanne and Lugano, to the status of a fourth Swiss fair. This development was all the easier of realization inasmuch as the Comptoir Suisse at Lausanne has extended further and further beyond the field of agriculture which was originally laid down for it and has been able to accommodate the representatives of the most varied industries in its ever expanding halls. It is true that, at the "OLMA" in St. Gall also, tendencies are evident towards an increasingly loose interpretation of the agricultural theme, so that the serious question of "dispersal of effort" may have to be raised. The purpose of the fairs is not, after all, to bring trade to particular towns and regions. They are intended to bring producers and customers together in the most concentrated manner and in the shortest space of time possible. If the display of industrial production were to be spread over four fairs, it would no longer be possible for the visitor to gain the comprehensive survey he needs, and the fairs would lose their truly representative and national character.

The Swiss Industries Fair at Basle and the Comptoir Suisse at Lausanne have already survived the first quarter-century of their history, a quarter-century characterised by vigorous growth. The Jubilee Comptoir was opened in September, 1944, on grounds covering an area of over 17 acres, with over 2,000 exhibitors, and the Swiss Industries Fair is preparing for its 31st appearance on the occasion of the Spring Fair at Basle. Just as the First World War gave rise to the idea of creating Trade Fairs as weapons in the struggle for economic existence, in the same way the Second World War has given decisive impetus to the idea. Anyone who was able to observe the tremendous numbers of exhibitors and visitors who flocked to the exhibition halls during the war years was able to realise the psychological importance of the Fairs. They become manifestations of the will to live of a people whose material no less than its intellectual existence was threatened. Sometimes they seemed to partake of the character of an extension of the National Exhibition of 1939, from whose elevated roadway the Swiss people were able, on the eve of war, to obtain such a comprehensive view of their outstanding accomplishments and proudest possessions. As year succeeded year it became clearer that these Fairs could not fail to be of increasing importance as a means of re-establishing Switzerland's world-wide connections after the war. As early as 1945, but even more completely in 1946, the influx of foreign buyers showed to what extent the still intact Swiss produc-

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tion machine was attracting the attention of the world, and to what extent the products of this machine were being sought after. The influx of foreign visitors becomes greater and greater, and the great Industries Fair at Basle expands continually.

At the present day approximately twenty million Swiss francs are invested in the buildings of the Swiss Industries Fair at Basle. Year after year, the grounds on which the Fair is held take on the appearance of a building site on which ever more and more massive exhibition halls and, to provide additional accommodation, temporary buildings, are erected, yet in spite of all this activity applications for exhibition space for exceeding the available room have to be turned down.

Although, up to the present, the Fairs have been purely national demonstrations at which the exhibits, which took the form of samples or specimens not for sale in quantity, had to be of proved Swiss origin, the question has been raised in Basle of holding an international Trades Fair. There are two ways in which this could be done; firstly by the internationalization of the existing Swiss Industries Fair, i.e., the admission of goods of foreign origin, and foreign pavilions, and, secondly, the holding of two separate fairs, one national and the other international, at different times. In 1947 there will be opened for the first time at Basle, during the Swiss Industries Fair an international fair confined to a particular trade being thus associated with the national Fair devoted to industry in general. Whether or not this represents the first step towards the creation of an international fair of general character will depend on estimates as to whether the internationalized Fair is likely to provide a more extensive and therefore more interesting market for Swiss products.

Geneva has for years possessed a special type of international trade fair in the form of its Motor Salon, which was re-opened on a lavish scale in March, 1947, after an interruption brought about by the war.

Switzerland, thanks to its intensive international connections, should be so much the more a suitable site for an International Fair of general character in that other international fair centres have, with their spheres of economic influence, lost their importance for a long time to come.

S.N.T.O.

CONTINENTAL TOUR OF A SWISS ARTISTE.

Madame Sophie Wyss, the well-known Swiss Soprano, has just returned to London from a very successful concert tour in France and Switzerland.

She was sent by the British Council, together with Antony Hopkins, to bring British Music to these two countries.

Audiences in France were very appreciative and the artistes received hearty ovations. They were delighted to hear works by Alan Rawsthorne and Antony Hopkins.

In Switzerland they gave four concerts and two broadcasts in one week, there too audiences were enthusiastic, and the Press notices were excellent. We heartily congratulate Sophie Wyss on her successful tour.

SWISS CLUB DUNFERMLINE.

Social Evening held on Friday, 7th March, 1947.

Once more members and friends of our Club gathered in one of the works canteens in Dunfermline for their Annual Social. The main attraction was again a Play which our Dramatic Circle has rehearsed during the winter months.

Our President, in his own humorous way, heartily welcomed the large company and expressed the hope that everyone would spend an enjoyable evening in a truly Swiss atmosphere. Mr. Gurtner extended a special greeting to the compatriots from the Swiss Club, Balloch, whom we were all happy to see amongst us. Our honorary member from Balloch, Mr. Hofstetter, Consular Agent, was, unfortunately, prevented from attending but his greetings and best wishes were conveyed to us by our Balloch friends.

The Play which followed soon after, was a real Comedy in Swiss Dialect and, judging by the laughter and merriment during the performance, was obviously greatly enjoyed by everyone. Its title was "Alles Wegeme Hemperchnöpfli" and truly it was most amusing and amazing to witness the confusion and upheaval a missing stud can cause to a, no doubt, otherwise smoothly running household. As usual in the end everything turned out for the best and even the stud turned up at last, discovered by "Dr. Häberli" in "Heiri Denzler's" stud-hole where it had been all the while poor father Denzler and his family searched the house for this most important implement in a gentleman's attire.

All the artists acted their parts extremely well and were fully recompensed for their efforts by a tremendous applause at the end of their performance. Let us hope this was an encouragement to them for future productions.

After the Play the audience indulged for some time in singing a number of the better known Swiss Folk Songs and during the remainder of the evening various attractions with prizes for the lucky ones kept the company in good spirit. In the intervals we were splendidly entertained by Mrs. Meier and Mrs. Bosshardt at the piano. In spite of ration difficulties a tasty supper was served during the evening — thanks to Mr. Schönenberger's skill in making a perfect "Härdöpfelsalat" and the Vienna sausages coming off points just at the right time.

Only at a late hour the happy company began to disperse and all appeared to have fully enjoyed our this season's Social.

F.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, April 25th, 1947.

We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind donations: S. Jeker, J. C. Wetter, J. W. Frick, E. Devegney.

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