

# Teaching the textile crafts in Switzerland

Autor(en): **R.Ch.**

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# Teaching the Textile Crafts in Switzerland

About one hundred years ago, there existed in Zurich a School for Weavers of which little or nothing is known. Later, a Silk Weaving School was established, but it proved to be short-lived. Nevertheless, the value of an institution of this kind was undeniable and, as the textile trades and skills grew and developed in Eastern Switzerland, the need was strongly felt for a centre where skilled operatives and, especially, managerial staff could be trained for work which was becoming increasingly complex. Three different schools were established some seventy years ago: one, for the craft of silk weaving, in Zurich, a centre of the industry, another in St. Gall for embroiderers, and the third at Wattwil in the Toggenbourg district for the training of cotton weavers. All three of these industrial training schools met with such success that their future was assured. They have survived, grown and kept abreast of progress by modernized curriculums and equipment.

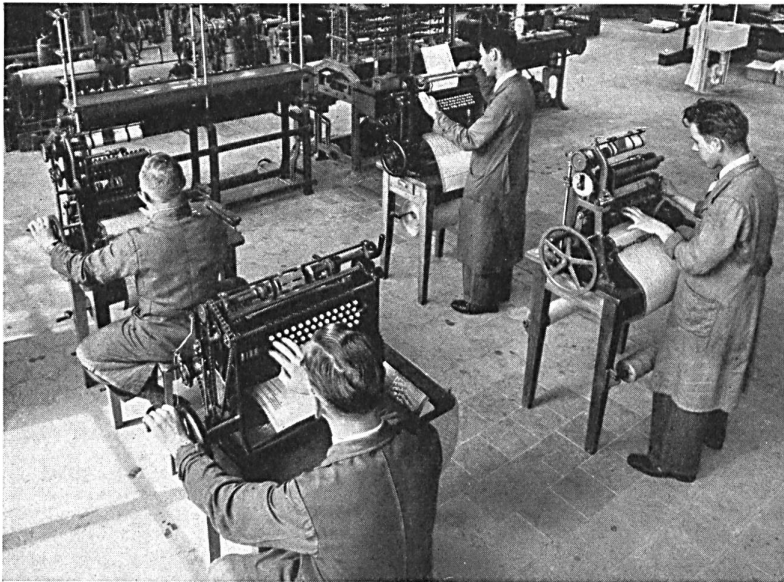
The Zurich School was opened in 1881, fifteen years after its foundation had been decided, for many obstacles had to be met before it could be opened. At first, only the art of silk weaving was taught; then, in 1946, the school was re-

organized and enlarged, endowed with a new machine room and the name of "Professional Training School for the Textile Crafts." Practical and theoretical teaching is given here, the course lasting two or four semesters. Foremen, commercial staff (salesmen and buyers), designers and managers are trained, especially in the technique of the silk and rayon trades. The curriculum is very judicious and adapted to each particular job. It is of great advantage to the students that such different skills should be taught in the same school. A designer, for example, must be able to distinguish between the different handles and textures of the fabrics he intends to use, to know what can be done with different types of looms and to calculate cost prices; a textile buyer must not only be fully acquainted with all the different qualities of fabrics, but also be capable of drawing a weaving pattern or a design if necessary.

Generally speaking, teaching in the weaving schools bears largely on the following subjects: technical and artistic design, composition, history of art and styles, weaves, preparation of weaving patterns, warping and weaving (practical), mechanics of textile machinery, technology of raw materials, price calculation, execution, finishing, colour chemistry, dyes, printing, economic geography, industrial hygiene and legislation, industrial and commercial organization. The curriculums at Zurich and Wattwil are almost identical, the first bears chiefly on silk and rayon weaving, however, and the second on cotton, wool and linen, excluding silk. Practical teaching in the machine room begins with

*The professional Textile Training School in Zurich. Both the School Board and the classrooms are housed in this lovely French-style building, once the home of a wealthy XVIIIth century industrialist.*



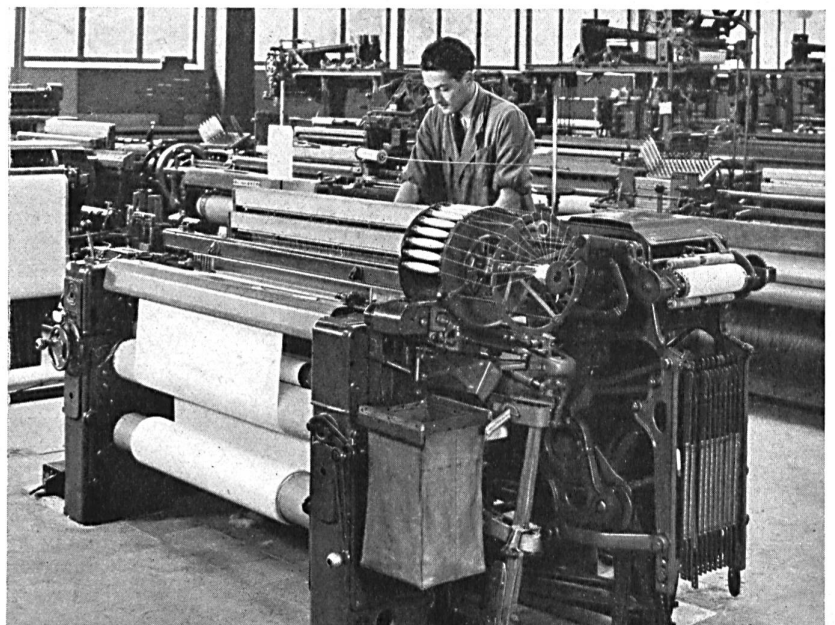


*The Zurich Training School. The machine room: preparing patterns for looms with dobby.*

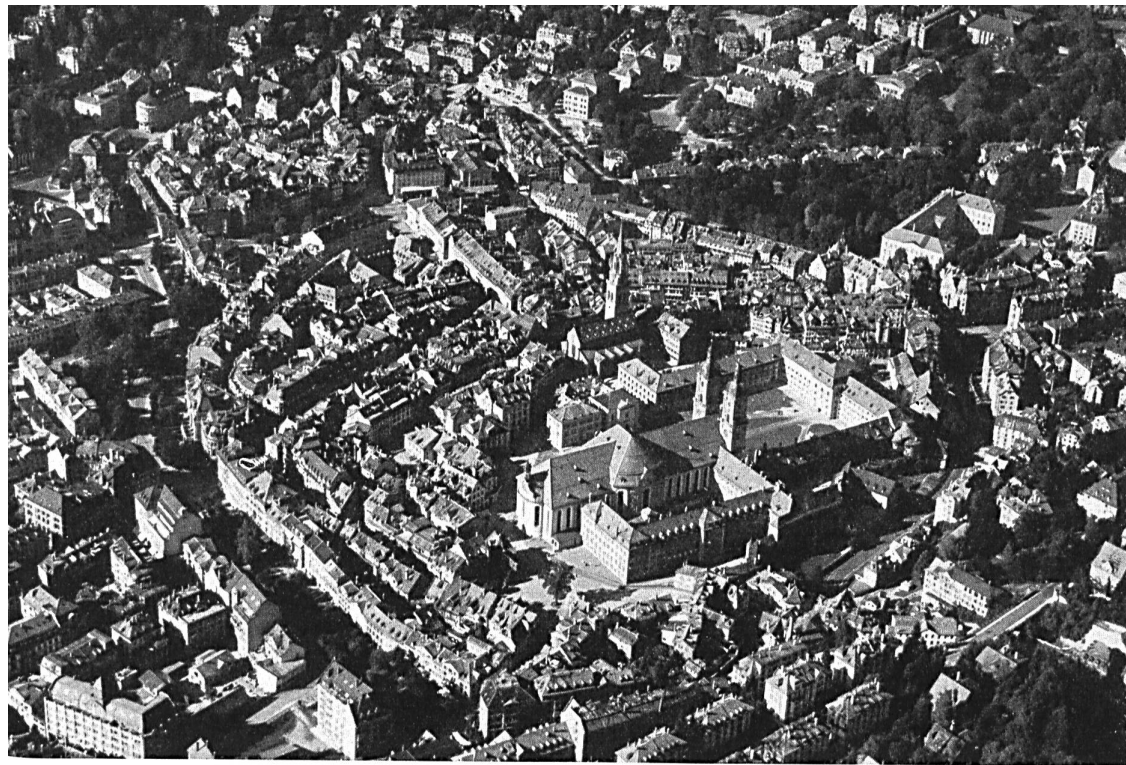
warping and the students have at their disposal a complete range of Jacquard and power looms. These machines are lent by Swiss manufacturers and students can thus become familiar with all types of machinery, even the most modern. Large collections of fabrics of all periods are used to illustrate lectures given by teachers who have all had great practical experience in the trade, some of whom are still active in a business or industrial career. The Zurich and Wattwil Schools (the latter was also founded in 1881) both owe their foundation to private enterprise, that is to say, to trade organizations, and are subsidized by grants from some Cantons. The schools are in constant contact with manufacturers to whom they supply qualified workers; from this close connection the schools themselves derive the vitality

which only practical application can give.

The St.Gall Professional Training School was founded in 1886, together with the Arts and Crafts Museum of that town. Its purpose is to supply the embroidery trades with skilled labour: designers, women operatives for machine-embroidery shops, embroiderers, designers for printed fabrics, the graphic arts and fashion modelling. All these groups naturally work in close cooperation. Apart from purely technical instruction, general courses on textiles and artistic subjects are given. In 1932, a Fashion Section was added to the St.Gall School. This Section is extremely selective as regards both admission and training. Its purpose is to train cutters, designers and forewomen. Each stage of instruction is followed by two years practice; this means that only young girls or women showing real aptitude and great perseverance can hope to scale all the degrees of apprenticeship and to attain at last the enviable position of fashion designers. The value of the diplomas awarded by



*A modern loom with dobby and bobbin-changer, at the Zurich School.*



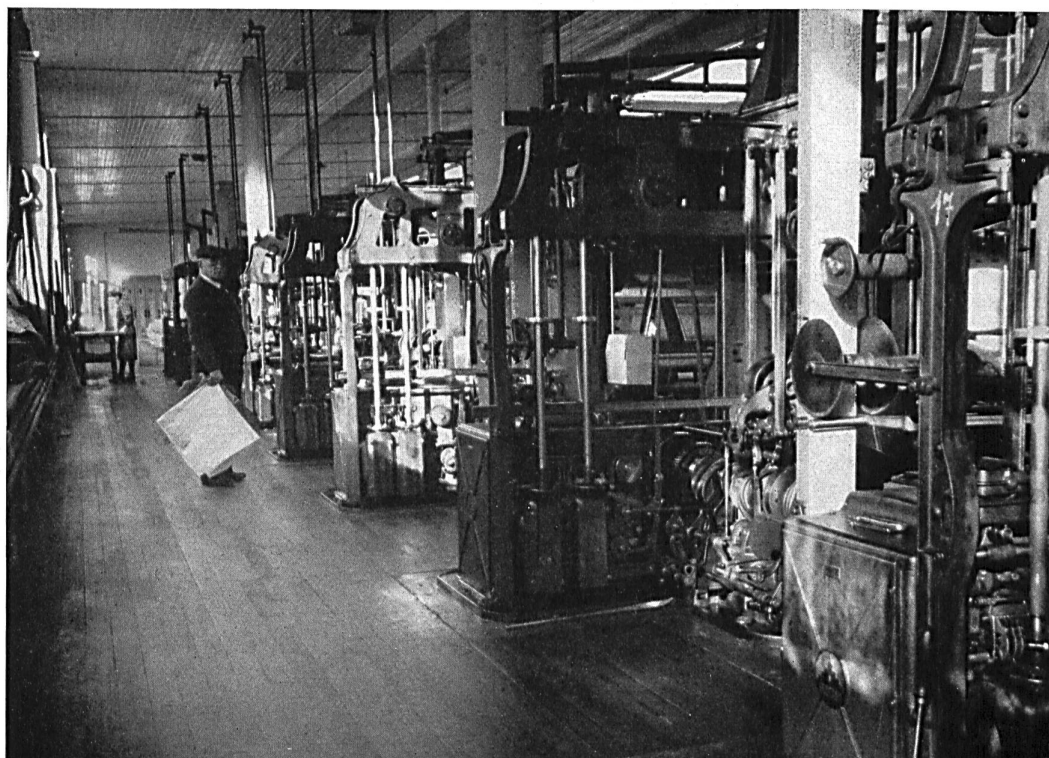
*The town of St.Gall, an important training centre for the textile trades. The old quarters of the town are built round the ancient Monastery.*

the St.Gall School is such, that successful students are assured of finding excellent posts in the embroidery industry or the apparel trades; they can also look forward to success in an independent career. It is hardly necessary to say that the St.Gall School is equipped with different types of embroidery machines, ranging from the "Lorraine" to automatic shuttle embroidery looms and hand-embroidery machines.

To complete our survey, mention must be made of the hand-embroidery craft practised in the Canton of Appenzell and the Embroidery Courses organized in the half-Canton of Outer Rhodes (see "Eastern Switzerland" in the present number).

It is not difficult to appreciate all the benefit that the Swiss textile skills and trades derive from these very efficient training centres; they represent a source from which are drawn the highly qualified and specialized workers required to maintain the industry's superior standard of quality.

*R. Ch.*



*The embroidery machine room at the St.Gall professional training school.*