

«Switzerland Elsewhere»

13.04. – 29.09.2019

Tour of the exhibition

INTRODUCTION

No country is exempt from migration movements. For centuries, Switzerland was a country of emigration; this only changed after 1888 when immigration to Switzerland increased markedly. Up to the French Revolution, mercenarism was the most common reason for emigrating. But Swiss master builders, craftsmen, merchants, confectioners, artists, students, scholars, and other highly qualified specialists, too, had been out and about in Europe since the early Modern Era. However, migration only became a mass phenomenon in the 19th century with emigration to the New World. At the same time, the colonial economy offered opportunities to missionaries, merchants, and scholars in Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

In 1916, in the middle of the First World War, the New Helvetic Society founded the Organization of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The «foreign Swiss», as expatriates commonly came to be known, were considered a national resource. The OSA's task was to help Swiss expatriates maintain connections with their home country and among themselves; one way to do this was to build and operate Swiss schools abroad. Since 1966, support of the Swiss abroad, or the “fifth Switzerland” as they are often referred to in reference to the country's language areas, has been anchored in the Swiss constitution.

GOLD DIGGERS, PLANTERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

With the dawning of the colonial era, Swiss businessmen set off for Asia, among them many watch, textile and silk merchants. Others saw their chance in tobacco growing and, from 1865 on, travelled to Deli in Sumatra, at the time a Dutch colony, where, just a year before, the Dutchman Jacob Nienhuys had purchased land from the local sultan at a good price and begun cultivating tobacco. The planters Carl Fürchtegott Grob and Karl Krüsi, too, made a fortune in Sumatra through tobacco, before returning home to Switzerland in 1879 and 1893, respectively.

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TO RUSSIA AND BACK

In the 17th century, Russia was a destination mainly for officers and administrators. Later, scientists, physicians, architects, theologians, and confectioners followed. Tsarist Russia attracted above all qualified upper and middle-class migrants. After 1850, cheesemakers, educators, governesses, merchants, and industrialists were predominant. Train travel encouraged the emigration of the lower classes. Until 1917, more than 20,000 Swiss settled in the Russian empire. With the Revolution (nationalization of enterprises), many of them lost their entire fortune and returned home.

DEPARTURE TO THE ORIENT

Following the economic opening of the Ottoman empire in the 19th century, Swiss businesses and merchants gained a foothold in banking, textiles, and the chemical industry – above all in Istanbul, Izmir, Beirut, Aleppo, and Baghdad. Swiss employees found work in the railway sector, the Ottoman Bank, and the Ottoman Debt Office. In the wake of the Armenian massacres of 1895, and driven by their religious-humanitarian conscience, European helpers began operating orphanages, schools, hospitals, and factories in central and eastern Anatolia under the guidance of American missionaries.

MISSIONARIES AND HUMANITARIAN AMBASSADORS

Basel missionaries had been in Ghana since 1828 – later also in India, China, Cameroon, and Indonesia. Apart from spreading the word of God, they were active in teaching, translated and documented indigenous languages, produced topographic maps, encouraged craftwork, and advanced agriculture and trade (cacao). They played a significant role in abolishing slavery after 1862. Upon instruction by the Basel Mission, they documented much of their work in photographs. Women missionaries working as teachers or nurses, for instance, were distinctly less represented.

EINSIEDELN IN KENTUCKY

Between 1850 and 1900, more than 2,000 people from Einsiedeln settled abroad, most of them in the United States. The project «Einsiedeln elsewhere» traces the roots of Einsiedeln people who found a new home in the city of Louisville, Kentucky. Based on historical sources and interviews with descendants of original emigrants – many of them now resident there in the third to seventh generation – the project creates a bridge between the Kaelins, Schoenbaechlers, Birchlers, Ehrlers, Bisigs, Oechslins, and Zehnders of Louisville and their namesakes in Einsiedeln.

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BRIDGE BUILDERS AND SETTLERS

Owing to crop failures and recurrent poverty, entire families and family groups left their destitute Swiss homelands for South and above all North America during the first and second major waves of emigration in 1816-1817 and 1851-1855, respectively. Many had no other choice and were often almost forced to leave by the local authorities. The third wave of emigration, from 1880 to 1884, affected many farmers (alongside craftsmen and tradespeople). In their new world, they were often able to purchase cheap farmland and went on to found Swiss colonies such as New Glarus in Wisconsin.

OFFICE OF EMIGRATION

For many years, the federal authorities did not bother about emigration too much. But when, in the 1880s, mass migration to overseas destinations and European countries set in, the federal government decided it was time to act. They passed a law on the protection of emigrants and established a Federal Office of Emigration in 1888. Its task was to keep an eye on migration agencies that referred emigrants to economic colonization projects. In a file for the years 1910 to 1953, emigrants' names, dates of birth, home communities, and ports of departure and arrival are meticulously listed.

BROADCASTING SWISSNESS

As from 1935, the Swiss Shortwave Service was responsible for representing Switzerland on the radio. Commissioned by the federal government, its task was to help forge closer bonds between Swiss people abroad and to promote the country across the world. In 1978 it changed its name to Swiss Radio International but continued to broadcast information and entertainment across the globe until 2004. Today, the multimedia info portal «Swissinfo.org» provides worldwide access to news and information about Switzerland. The series #WeAreSwissAbroad portrays Swiss citizens living abroad.

SWISS ASSOCIATIONS

The arrival of European settlers triggered the growth of Swiss associations in the United States as from 1850. The organizations helped new arrivals to gain a foothold. Apart from providing welfare and organizing social get togethers, shooting, gymnastics, and singing were later added to agenda.

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CHABAG COLONY

The colony of Chabag near Odessa was founded by Baselland and Vaudois winegrowers. Here they planted vines and produced wine. In 1839, Chabag counted forty-three families. They spoke mainly Russian, later Romanian. In the Second World War they fled westwards from the advancing Red Army.

COLONY NOVA FRIBURGO

Over 2,000 emigrants from ten cantons departed for Brazil in 1819. Their destination was the colony of Nova Friburgo in the province of Rio, which had been founded a year earlier. Almost 400 of them died on the journey. Unsuitable land and long rains made the start difficult for the exhausted settlers.

EINSIEDELN ELSEWHERE

In 2015, the journalist Susann Bosshard-Kälin launched the project «Einsiedeln elsewhere» in collaboration with the Chicago-based historian Leo Schelbert and the Swiss historian Heinz Nauer along with the photographer Paolo de Caro and the camerawoman Martina di Lorenzo.

MOGHEGNO – MONTEREY

In her photo project «Moghegno – Monterey», the photographer Flavia Leuenberger Ceppi goes in search of traces of Ticino settlers who emigrated between 1850 and 1930. Since 2013 her travels have taken her to the US (Oregon and Montana, California, Pennsylvania, Florida) and Australia.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZED THE EMIGRATION

In the early 1930s, during the Great Depression, the federal government subsidized the emigration of destitute people. Federal Councillor Obrecht, in particular, was committed to ensuring that unemployed citizens who were willing to start a new life as settlers in Brazil received support.

Portraits:

JOHANN JAKOB LOCHER 1829-1870

The comb maker Johann Jakob Locher travelled to Australia from Appenzell in 1854. A year later his was digging for gold in the Fiery Creek Mines, northwest of Melbourne. In his report «Off to Australia!» to his brother, he describes scenes, places, and people he met in Victoria during the goldrush.

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KARL KRÜSI 1855-1925

Karl Krüsi from Appenzell emigrated to Sumatra in 1874 to work on his cousin's tobacco plantation. Not long after, he was able to purchase land cheaply from the Sultan of Deli and established his own plantation. Nineteen years later he sold his property and returned to Switzerland a rich man.

CÉSAR RITZ 1850-1918

César Ritz, who hailed from a small Valais village, travelled to the World Exhibition in Paris at the age of seventeen. He found employment as a waiter before later rising to become a hotel director. His Ritz Hotel at Place Vendôme in Paris set a new benchmark in the luxury hotel business.

ELVIRA WOLF-STOHLER 1920-2018

Elvira Wolf-Stohler was born in Chabag in 1920. The colony of Shabag on the Russian Black Sea coast, originally founded by Swiss settlers, was assigned to Romania in 1918. Wolf, like around 90,000 other settlers, fled from the advancing Red Army in 1944 and returned to Switzerland, her ancestral home.

OLYMPE RITTENER 1862-1950

In 1883, Olympe Rittener from Payerne accepted a posting to Krasnoyarsk (Siberia) as a French teacher. She described her adventurous journey by train, riverboat, and carriage in a travelogue. Seven years later, she returned to Payerne and worked as a private teacher henceforth.

IVAN BIANCHI 1811-1893

The Ticino photo pioneer Ivan Bianchi (originally Giovanni Bianchi) systematically documented the architectural monuments of St Petersburg in pictures. He was the first to photograph the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, the city's landmark built by the famous Ticino architect Domenico Trezzini.

JAKOB MÜLLER 1857-1922

After training with the Nordostbahn, Jakob Müller (from Rain in the Lucerne area) applied at the Orient Express and travelled to Constantinople in 1877. Like his friend Edouard Huguenin from Le Locle, he made a career as director of the Orient Express and received high Turkish awards for his service.

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JOHANN LUDWIG BURCKHARDT 1784-1817

Between 1809 and 1817, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt from Basel travelled to the Middle East under the name Sheikh Ibrahim for a British exploration society. He discovered the ancient city of Petra in Jordan and left behind unique descriptions of the regions and peoples he encountered.

JOSEPHINE FALLSCHEER-ZÜRCHER 1866-1932

Josephine Fallscheer-Zürcher attained her medical degree in Zurich. In 1897 she founded the hospital in Urfa on behalf of the Armenian Relief Society as one of the first women doctors in the Ottoman Empire. For lack of a permit, she had to give up her work and transferred to the American Mission in Aleppo.

FRITZ RAMSEYER 1840-1914

Fritz Ramseyer from Neuchatel visited the Mission School in Basel, after which he worked as a missionary in the Gold Coast (Ghana) from 1864-1908. His account of his imprisonment in the Asante kingdom and his photographs were published in numerous illustrated volumes, books, and magazines across Europe.

BEAT RICHNER AKA BEATOCELLO 1947-2018

In 1992, Doctor Beat Richner rebuilt the children's hospital Kantha Bopha which had been destroyed in the civil war. By 2017 he had added four more hospitals, offering free medical care to children. Richner collected most of his funds through solo performances as a cellist and cabaret artist.

LOUISE PROBST 1884-1971

Louise Probst, daughter of a Basel grammar school teacher, trained as a nurse in Berlin-Schöneberg. In 1913, she took part in a mission in the First Balkan War as a member of the Swiss Red Cross delegation, and published a detailed report about her experiences.

OTHMAR H. AMMANN 1879-1965

After completing his degree in Civil Engineering at the Zurich Polytechnic, Ammann emigrated to the USA. As chief engineer of the Port of New York Authority he built the bridge across the Hudson in 1925 along with other major bridges. Ammann's constructions shaped New York's developing cityscape significantly.

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DAMIAN FELCHLIN *1987

After studying economics in Lucerne, Damian Felchlin from Schwyz travelled to New Jersey for an internship. For the last three years he has been the trade representative of a company promoting the import of Swiss products to the USA. First in New York and now in San Francisco.

THOMAS DAVATZ 1815-1888

Together with Grisons compatriots and families from eastern Switzerland, the teacher Thomas Davatz emigrated to Santos in Brazil with his family in 1855. His report to the Grisons government revealed the untenable conditions in the colonies of Ibicaba and Angelica. In 1857, he fled back to Switzerland with his family.