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# The village photographers

Weddings, confirmations, funerals, village parties, company photos, children's photos, family photos, photos of accidents – spanning Rudolf, Robert, Ruth and Peter Zbinden, Photo Zbinden from the Bernese municipality of Schwarzenburg is a century-old professional photography dynasty that has seen and done it all. Comprising half a million images, the family's body of work is a chronological record of how rapidly rural life in Switzerland has evolved. The Zbindens are those archetypical village photographers whose collection resembles a long-term anthropological study. Within their rural microcosm, the Zbindens have documented key changes with regard to the working world, daily family life, family ideals, and society as a whole.

No one can compare 1936 with 1976 – or 1976 with 2016 for that matter. But the Zbindens have been an enduring presence in Schwarzenburg – the 'go-to' documenters of a changing world. This journey has not been without its dramas. For example, when Robert Zbinden (alias 'Fotoröbù') captured on celluloid the blaze that consumed the Schwarzenburg short-wave radio transmitter in 1936, he was documenting a piece of history. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Swiss in the 'Fifth Switzerland' were suddenly bereft of a radio signal from their home country. Even the familiar call sign fell silent.

Regardless of whether or not Schwarzenburg is on your radar, the recently published book showcasing a century of Zbinden photographs is a remarkable and quite fascinating historical record of a specific locality in Switzerland. MARC LETTAU

Photo Zbinden – Drei Generationen Fotografie in Schwarzenburg 1916–2016 (Photo Zbinden – Three generations of photography in Schwarzenburg 1916–2016). Stämpfli Verlag, Berne, 2019. ISBN 978-3-7272-6038-4, CHF 34.00

