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AUCKLAND SOCIAL CLUB

A MEETING is convened for the purpose of forming a committee of the Auckland Social Club. Will all those interested please attend at Mr.& Mrs.Peyer's home, 48 Moa Rd.,Pt.Chevalier, about 2.30 p.m. on SUNDAY, JUNE 11th.

R E M I N I S C E N C E S

By E.Merz,Auckland.

Whenever you meet strangers and you introduce yourself as Swiss, more often than not you are told at once: "Oh,Swiss, well I own a watch from your country for so-and-so many years,and I can rely on it like .... well just like a Swiss watch." - Tradition ? Yes, but to attain this there must first be some deep and lasting cause to establish it. Far and wide,in every corner of the globe, the fame of our watches spreads its great name. It is something everyone needs in daily life,and it is well that our country enjoys universal and unassailable repute in this trade. If I say "unassailable", let me tell you of a case in point that happened only last year. As you know,America,-in recent years England as well - established a small nucleus of watchmaking in their own countries. Evidently,these manufacturers prospered during the war years, but soon after the conclusion of hostilities, the Swiss watch reappeared with renewed insistence and popularity. Presently the U.S.A. watchmakers thought to contest the mounting importation of our watches, and the case was finally forced to appear before the House of Representatives in Washington. A special committee was appointed to investigate the matter,with the result that the House was recommended to drop any restrictions and let the Swiss product enter unopposed as in the past. The Commission found firstly that much larger employment was assured through the importation of the component parts (the bulk of watches are imported to the States "unassembled"), and secondly, the workmanship and reliability of our watch far exceeds the American make. During all these "hostilities" Switzerland remained calm and confident, with the knowledge that their 300 year old industrial experiences could hardly ever be successfully assailed.

One of the "highlights" of my recent visit to Switzerland,was to see the vast exhibition at the Mustermesse in Basel and the somewhat smaller but very artistic "Exposition des Montres" at Geneva. I have watched visitors gaze in admiration at the manifold exhibits,and to tell you the truth I was one of them myself. Some of the creations are simply amazing and testify the genius of our watchmakers. At exhibitions like these it is principally the artistic decorative watch-cases, or the novel shape, that attract one's attention, but it is the mechanical perfection and the constant improvement in every detail of the watch that has established the century old reputation of the Swiss watch.

Now let us turn back the "pages of history" and see what happened over the last 300 years.

When one considers the lonely landscape of the Jura valleys which became the cradle of the Swiss watchmaking industry, long after the craft had already flourished in Geneva, then it is possible to understand better how the young blacksmith DANIEL JEANRICHARD must have marvelled to behold the golden watch that a certain English traveller one day drew out of his pocket, handing it to the youth for some small repair. With eager curiousity he must have studied the mechanism and perhaps holding the ticking watch to his ear like a child. And he must have envied the master who created this masterpiece with life, and suddenly thought, "Why not I?" The intelligent young craftsman quickly grasped the working of the then simple mechanism: he succeeded in making the tools necessary for the production of watch parts, and finally manufactured a watch. And so the blacksmith became a watchmaker. Today, he is considered as the founder of the Neuchatel industry because, through him the craft was implanted in this region, and La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Locle and Fleurier soon became important centres of watch production.

Although Geneva manufactured watches 50 years before Daniel Jeanrichard, the blacksmith, commenced his new trade, this handicraft was now destined to become a flourishing industry and to spread the fame of Switzerland throughout the world. During the 16th Century the Watchmakers Guilds grew in size both in Geneva and the Canton of Neuchatel. The name "Geneva" especially evoked the idea of the "good Swiss watch" and many famous masters created pieces during the next century, that still adorn today some great museums in many countries. Several of these artists have come down in the watchmaking industry like great Generals and it is certainly worth while to know something of their achievements.

Jost Burgi from Lichtensteig, St.Gall, in the 16th century had such exceptional skill that he was summoned, at a very early age, by Emperor Rudolph of Prague to upkeep the clocks and the making of instruments in his laboratory. However, Burgi was not content with applying his knowledge of clockmaking; he wished also to understand the use of optical instruments, and by sheer tenacity, he learned the science of astronomy. There he worked with the great inventor Kepler and between the two the system of logarithm was born. The career of this Swiss clockmaker, who became first an astronomer and then a mathematician, surely testifies to the fact that the making of clocks can help to develop the intellectual powers of man.

Ferdinand Berthoud, around 1750, solved the problem of fixing the longitude and diminishing the danger of shipwreck, for which an extremely accurate timepiece was necessary, one that would not be affected by the pitching and rolling of ships at sea. Ferdinand Berthoud of Neuchatel, then established in Paris, began making clocks for the Navy, and finally was awarded a prize by the Royal Academy of Science. This distinction won him the appointment as sole supplier of marine clocks to the French Navy.

At the same time Louis Perrelet of Le Locle invented the so-called "perpetual" type of self-winding watch, which is wound by the impulse given by the jerking movement of the wearer. This system vanished from the market until the 20th century, when it reappeared under the name of "automatic" or self-winding watch.

Like his countryman Berthoud, the man who was called the "King of Watchmakers", Abram-Louis Breguet of Neuchatel, made his career in Paris. Endowed with a remarkably inventive mind and astonishing skill, he created watches which are today eagerly sought after by collectors and museums. He contrived very intricate and accurate watches, improved the "perpetual" watch and invented the mechanism termed "whirl", which increased the accuracy of chronometers. Whirl movements are still found today among the chronometers that obtain awards in contests. Besides he created entirely new astronomical instruments.

Navigation on the high seas raised the problem of determining longitude, but after 1830 another mode of locomotion,the railway, gave a new impulse to the desire for perfect timekeepers. Until then exact time was required only by navigators and a few men of science. The coming of the railway obliged even the man in the street to keep an eye on the right time and a good watch became an indispensable commodity for travellers. Watches became more and more popular as the need for precise timing grew.

And in order to meet an increasingly heavy demand for watches, production had to expand. The number of watchmaking firms expanded rapidly,and,for example,in the Canton of Neuchatel the output rose from 130,000 watches in 1818 to 500,000 in 1870. Today this appears an insignificant figure,as the 1948 expert reached the amazing total of 50 Million pieces. As the demand increased, so the watchmakers soon dreamed of producing large quantities,with interchangable parts. This could only be achieved through the invention of tools and machines for the manufacture of various parts. The triumph of machinery was not easy,for many specialists feared it as a rival which might deprive them of their livelihood; others thought that machines would debase their noble craft. The progress of mechanical methods of watch manufacturing may be attributed greatly to the fine training schools created,which year by year produce excellent teams of watch technicians.

A few years ago a quite unique institution was established in Neuchatel, the Swiss Laboratory for Horological Research. This institute is magnificently equipped with the most delicate and sensitive instruments and it is a veritable Information Bureau for watch manufacturers.

Finally, here are a few explanations of the latest and best known types of watches made in our homeland: The Water-Repellent Watch, the case of which protects the movement not only against water, but also - what is more important still - against dust. The Self-Winding Watch,fitted with a very small weight which oscillates freely on the slightest movement of the arm. This oscillatory movement,based on gravitational laws, is transmitted to the mainspring which is thus almost constantly in action. The Timer-watch,indicating split seconds from 1/5th up to 1/1000th of a second. Used all over the world in sporting events. The Calendar-Watch,showing the day and the date,even the moon and its phases. Such watches of course require extremely minute and delicate parts, some as small as 0.0025 millimeter,which one can hardly visualize; or can you for instance imagine the size of an individual screw of which 50,000 can be placed comfortably in a thimble?

Today, 2,500 firms which represent the Swiss watchmaking industry,possess the most efficient technical equipment in the world, and as mentioned at the beginning of my short article,its position is unassailable.

SWISSAIR TRAFFIC IN 1949.

Swissair traffic statistics from and to England which have just been published show that compared to previous years results in 1949 are remarkably improved. A most satisfactory increase has been registered in passenger,freight andpostal traffic and an extension of the flight programme of the Swiss Air Transport Company has therefore proved to be a necessity.

The travelling public recognises more and more the enormous advantages offered by the aeroplane; the number of those who give preference to this most modern means of transport grows from year to year.

Swissair has therefore not hesitated to modernise its aircraft park by adding four Convair Liners. This "Flying Pullman" attains a cruising speed of 300 miles per hour.