

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 38 (1974)  
**Heft:** [2]  
  
**Artikel:** 125 years of railways in Switzerland  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942055>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 18.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## 125 Years of Railways in Switzerland

For three years already, the railway line from Strasbourg to Basle has been operating into Switzerland when the first Swiss railway started up between Baden and Zurich on August 9th, 1847. It was called "Spanischbrotlibahn" after the fresh rolls which it carried rapidly from the then fashionable spa to the town on the Limmat.

The abolition by the Federal constitution in 1448 of tolls and road duties inside Switzerland greatly stimulated the operating of new railway lines. By 1860, the rail network spread over the whole of the Swiss Midlands, and already it was possible to travel by train from Geneva to Romanshorn and Chur. In 1871, the first European rack and pinion railway became operational on the slopes of the Rigi and opened up new horizons for tourism. When the Gotthard line was opened in 1882, the Swiss rail network began its international mission. A second penetration of the Alps followed with the Simplon Tunnel in 1906 and its approach line through the Lotschberg in 1913.

In 1902, the Confederation began to buy back the most important railway companies. With this, the Swiss Federal Railways were established. Today Switzerland commands not only 2,193 km of SFR railway lines but a considerable number of private railway companies whose operational circuit is hardly less than that of the SFR.

Switzerland started very early with the electrification of its federal railway system. Very hesitantly, the new traction method was introduced on the trams. In 1888, the Vevey-Montreux-Chillon line was converted to electricity. In 1913, the first important sections were electrified when the Lotschberg line was opened, followed by the Gotthard railway in 1920. Electric rail transport facilitated operations; travelling by rail became more attractive. The railways increased their appeal in the transport business.

The railway is the oldest amongst modern methods of transport. Yet it has not aged and remains unchallenged in several fields such as long distance travelling and bulk freight transport. Thanks to the principle of guidance by rail, railways are made for automation, a marvellous field for the introduction of electronics and cybernetics!

In addition, railroads use little space; to operate them hardly disturbs the environment. Thus new possibilities open up all the time for development, especially of commuter services in large towns and of transport services to and from airports. Already there is talk of new sections of high speed operation (200-300 km/h) between Geneva and Zurich and on the North-South axis through an alpine base tunnel.

On the occasion of the jubilee of the Swiss railways, several demonstrations were organised. Those in 1942 when the SFR celebrated their centenary, stressed first and foremost the historic past of the railways, whereas the events organised for the 125th anniversary dealt with future problems.

### SWISS TRANSPORT MUSEUM

#### History

Transport holds a key position also in Swiss economic life. If Switzerland was able to develop into a country of communications in spite of considerable topographical difficulties, it was because of her central geographical position and her transport tradition. The latter is expressed most conspicuously in the conquest of the Alps by constructing daring Alpine roads and railways. As early as 1883 and following the National Exhibition, the then technical inspector of the Department of

**We don't want to blow our own**  
**horn, BUT —**

**You**

**SEE MORE**

**ENJOY MORE**

**and PAY LESS**

**when your travel arrangements  
are in the experienced hands of  
Dalgety Travel.**



**WE LOOK FORWARD TO BEING OF SERVICE  
TO YOU !**

 **DALGETY TRAVEL**

**HAMILTON AND ALL BRANCHES**



Railways, an engineer called E. Dapples, suggested creating a railway museum.

But his idea could not be realised, and it was not until the National Exhibition of 1914, that it was possible to show the public some of the vehicles from the early beginnings of the railway. In 1915, the then chief machine engineer of the SFR, Alfred Keller, took up the idea again and expounded — by pointing out similar existing museums abroad — that Switzerland should not hesitate any longer to start such a museum, for she was leading in many fields of railway technique. He proposed already at that time to include navigation and postal services.

A year later, the general management of the SFR made a few rooms available on the premises of the goods administration in Zurich. These became the modest home of the Railway Museum opened in 1918. Its contents, including some articles donated by the Postal Museum in Berne, formed the basis of the Swiss Transport Museum in Lucerne.

The first stage of the construction was concluded in 1959. The Verkehrshaus then consisted of a group of six exhibition halls and three connecting halls, one conference room, an entrance hall and a restaurant installed in the former steamboat "Rigi".

Thus, from the idea of a railway museum first mooted over half a century ago, the Swiss Transport Museum has developed. The initiators may be gratified to see that the Verkehrshaus is the most highly frequented museum in Switzerland and holds a leading position amongst European museums of transport.

## **The Collections**

The Swiss transport heritage consists of thousands of individual items and records which, for years, had been housed in many different places. Now that the Transport Museum has taken them over to supplement its collections and for special and travelling exhibitions, they have become available to the public.

They serve educational, technological, scientific and propagandistic evaluation. The Museum's collections include all aspects of transport, including information and tourism. The richly endowed transport archives comprise valuable documentary material such as manuscripts, deeds, books, periodicals, photos and pictures mainly from the past. In order to make them a source of educational knowledge, especially for young people, the collections have been arranged in a lively, lucid and easily comprehensible manner. They also include original vehicles, engines, apparatus, models, graphic illustrations and slide projections.

At the entrance to the connecting hall, immediately adjoining the main admission hall, one finds a steam engine of the Waldenburger line with a track gauge of 75 cm, the smallest railway in Switzerland. A stained window glass panel facing the garden shows the "Spanisch-brotlibahn", and together with an old alarm bell and the first track vehicle, a pit dog, these exhibits form the prelude as it were to the historic exhibition.

Dates, pictures and captions lead to the origins of the Swiss railways. With these pictorial presentations, original articles of the early days of rail transport are intermingled, such as a ticket printing machine, tunnel lamps, old signalling regulations, station cash boxes and uniform items of the first station masters. Graphic illustrations and other information explaining railway legislation and policy.

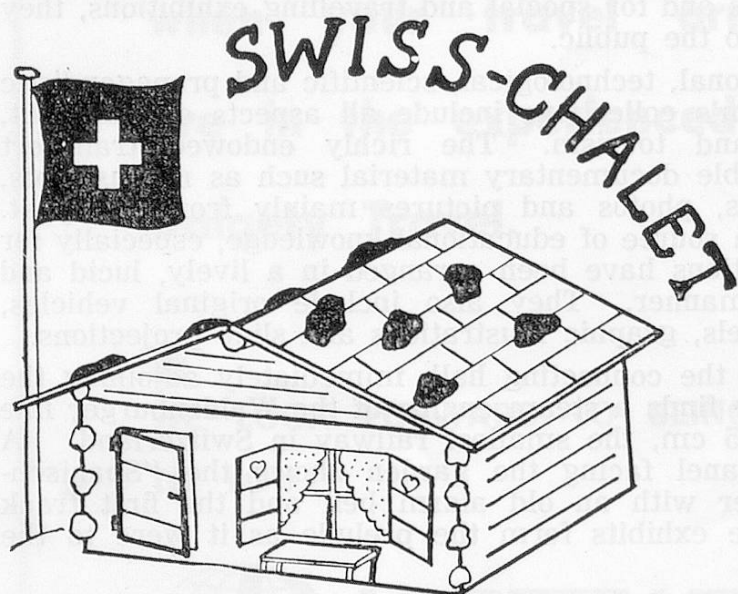
"Global Bonds through PTT" is the introduction of the exhibition of postal and telecommunications of the Swiss PTT administration. It is in two sectors, electric communications and postal services, and it shows various aspects of transmitting news and information. The exhibition

"Telecommunications" is subdivided into various groups: telegraph, telephone, radio, television and post. In concise form, one is reminded of the predecessors of modern telecommunication: a negro drum from the African bush, a megaphone from an Alpine region, one of the first telegraph transmitters of Morse. One will recall that the first telephone connection in Switzerland was installed in 1880. But one also finds details regarding modern PTT installations.

Radio and television are housed in a special gallery. The visitor whose interest is more technological, will be attracted by the first Swiss radio transmitter dating back to 1923 ("Champ-de l'Air") which is exhibited in its original entirety. Sections of broadcasting studios with producer's desks, gramophone and tape recording installations give an idea of the extremely complicated technical equipment in a modern studio. It goes without saying that next to the old radio receivers are the most modern sets with all the latest technical achievements.

The exhibition of electric telecommunications is on the ground floor next to the postal exhibition. The postal service is a loyal and discreet servant and companion throughout one's life. From notices of births and deaths to love letters and bills, the postal service is entrusted with about everything there is of written, printed and pictorial news. Illustrated tables show the history of mail services from the Roman *Cursus publicus* and the *Ordinari* to the first Swiss postal organisation in Berne in 1675.

Passenger transport in postal coaches used to play an important part: a magnificent eight-seated coupe landau and a four-seater postal sleigh are on show to remind the visitor.



**HOMEMADE cakes**  
**our speciality**

PROPRIETORS: MR & MRS BERT FLUHLER

**OPEN**  
**7 DAYS**

**Restaurant**  
and  
**Coffee-Bar**

**ENGLISH and**  
**CONTINENTAL**  
**MEALS**

**HAMILTON**  
270 Victoria Street  
(Opposite  
Commercial Hotel)

**Phone 82-305**