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Preface

Appearing in 1979, «Drei Schmidheiny» (Three Schmidheiny's) was the thirty-second book in a series on Swiss pioneers of business and industry published by the «Verein für wirtschaftshistorische Studien» (Association for Historical Research in Economics). Author of numerous historical studies on the Rhine Valley area, the teacher Jakob Boesch from Berneck in the canton of St. Gallen wrote the portrait of the founding father of the Schmidheiny industrial dynasty, Jacob I, a simple weaver who very early in life had set himself one main aim: «I want to be a manufacturer». His sons Ernst I and Jacob II continued his extraordinary and diverse life's work, expanding it and undertaking business ventures beyond Switzerland's borders. Hans Rudolf Schmid (Thalwil), editor of the first edition of the book, and Benedikt Fehr (Zurich), who worked closely with Jakob Schmidheiny II over many years, wrote the biographies of the two sons.

The book (now out of print) was a great success, and there was a definite demand for a revised version of the three profiles incorporating relevant new material. The only one of the three authors still alive, Benedikt Fehr, who wrote the third biography, kindly consented to this undertaking.

The new chronicle of the Schmidheiny industrial dynasty from Heerbrugg was also to continue where its forerunner left off and include a description of the lives and work of the third and fourth generations – Ernst II, Max and Peter Schmidheiny and

their sons Thomas, Stephan, Alexander and Jacob III. Going largely separate ways, they all significantly expanded their particular spheres of operation and helped to shape the fortunes of Swiss industry from the mid-twenties to the present day – a time when industrial evolution is in a constant state of flux thanks above all to the unfailing Schmidheiny dynamism.

The present author received generous assistance from all quarters. In numerous discussions, the protagonists of the Schmidheiny story and their friends, relatives, staff and colleagues imparted their private and professional recollections and experiences as well as their business and political views. For this I should like to express my utmost gratitude – without their help these portraits would not have been complete. This book was finished in the summer of 1994, and any subsequent events have not been considered.

Hans O. Staub