

**Zeitschrift:** Schaffhauser Beiträge zur Geschichte  
**Herausgeber:** Historischer Verein des Kantons Schaffhausen  
**Band:** 86 (2012)  
**Heft:** [2]: Schaffhausen seven walks through history : old town & Rhine falls

**Artikel:** A brief history of the city of Schaffhausen  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-841554>

### **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:** 30.04.2026

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



## **Origins and location**

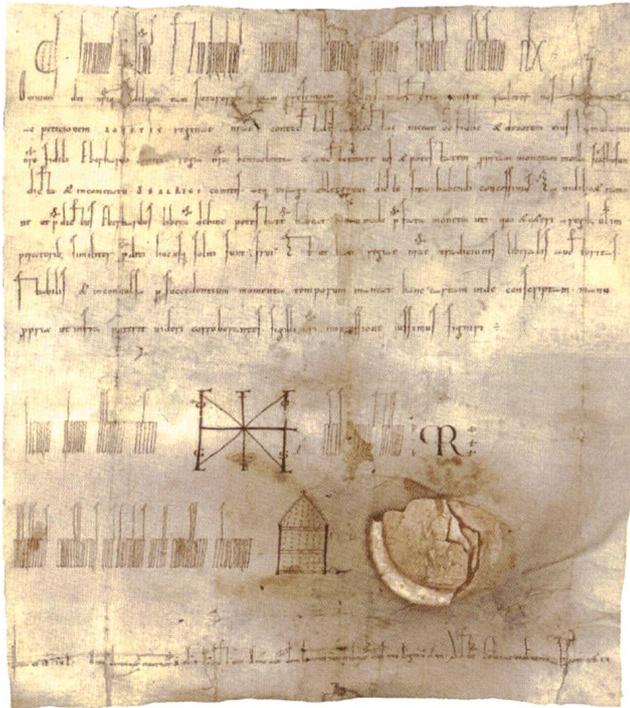
Schaffhausen owes its existence to its favourable location. As long as goods were shipped down the Rhine, cargo – mainly salt from the eastern Alps and cereal from southern Germany – had to be unloaded just before the Rhine Falls, and carried overland to be reloaded onto ships below the obstacle. Thus the city developed around the spot where the roads from the ferry across the Rhine, the Klettgau and the Hegau all met, i.e. what is now the Fronwagplatz. Transport and trade laid the foundation for the emergence of a diverse economy.

## **From market town to free city**

Schaffhausen entered history on 10 July 1045, when King Henry III – soon to become Holy Roman Emperor – granted Count Eberhard von Nellenburg the right to mint coins in the „villa Scafhusun“. By this time the city probably already had its defensive walls and enjoyed the right to hold a market. The founding of the Allerheiligen (All Saints) monastery in 1049 by Eberhard von Nellenburg also had a decisive impact on the development of the city. Along with Hirsau and St Blasien, Allerheiligen was one of the leading monasteries promoting the Cluniac reform movement in the German empire. In 1218 the emperor assumed the prerogatives of

## A brief history of the city of Schaffhausen

imperial bailiff himself, which made Schaffhausen a free city within the empire – in other words, directly subordinate to the emperor.



10 July 1045:  
King Henry III  
grants Count  
Eberhard von  
Nellenburg the  
right to mint  
coins in the "villa  
Scafhusun"

### **Under Austrian rule**

The relationship between Schaffhausen and the Habsburgs is of particular importance: the Habsburgs were acquiring more and more influence, strengthened still further because the ruling family in the Hegau, to the east, was linked to them. Finally in 1330 King Louis the Bavarian mortgaged Schaffhausen to the House of Habsburg-Austria. Under their rule so many military and financial demands were made on the citizens that for many years the town laboured under great social and economic difficulties. By the end of the 14th century Schaffhausen was deep in debt, many of the leading families had



moved away and others had died out as a result of the devastating wars against the Swiss Confederates. It was not until the 15th century that the citizens managed to win back some of their rights. The year 1411 was a milestone in the development of the city: a constitution was introduced placing power in the hands of the guilds, which was to leave its mark on the political structure of Schaffhausen for centuries.

### **Schaffhausen joins the Swiss Confederation**

In 1415 Schaffhausen unexpectedly regained its status of free city within the empire, in the wake of a dispute between the then King Sigismund and his rival Duke Frederick of Austria. Constantly dogged by Austria's attempts to reconquer it, the city concluded a number of treaties, allying for the first time with the Swiss confederates in 1454. Having proved itself a reliable partner in the Burgundian and Swabian wars, Schaffhausen was accepted into the "Eternal Alliance" of the Swiss confederation in 1501 as the 12th member.



## **Reformation and territorial expansion**

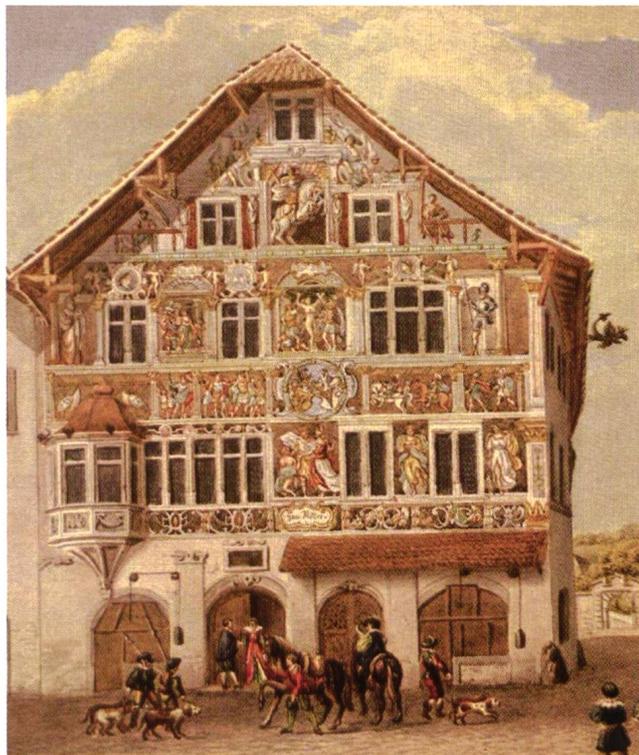
What is today the canton of Schaffhausen has its origin from the city. Bit by bit the rural areas around the town of Schaffhausen were conquered and added to the city-state. The secularisation of the Allerheiligen monastery in 1524 brought Merishausen, Neuhausen and Hemmental into the possession of the city. In 1529 the up-and-coming city-state joined the Reformation. By the middle of the 16th century, the borders that were to last until the end of the Ancien Régime were more or less complete. Schaffhausen further upgraded its fortifications, including the Munot. The rural areas were divided into ten administrative districts under the rule of the city council. Finally, the city gained control over the Reiat district in 1723 and added it to its territory.

## **Growing self-confidence**

By the time Schaffhausen joined the Swiss Confederation, what is now the old city already had the shape it has today. Wealthy citizens took in hand the task of beautifying it. Houses were decorated with oriels and frescoes, and painted panes were put in the windows. Statues were placed on the fountains. But the Reformation led to huge changes: countless Romanesque and Gothic works of art were destroyed by iconoclasts. The Church no longer gave commissions to artists. Only glass painting flourished in Schaffhausen, reaching its peak with Daniel Lindtmayer (1552–1607) and Tobias

## A brief history of the city of Schaffhausen

Stimmer (1539–1584). Stimmer, the most important painter of his time, was responsible for the frescoes on the "Zum Ritter" house in the Vordergasse.



Numerous town houses belonging to wealthy burghers were redesigned between the 16th and 18th centuries, initially in Renaissance style, later in Baroque. The many oriels were embellished with the family coats of arms of their owners. The interiors of most of these houses were decorated with ornate stucco ceilings.

### **House names**

The many house names, inscribed on oriels and lintels, are a typical feature of Schaffhausen's old city. The visitor finds an abundance of very diverse appellations: some are purely descriptive, while others are based on family names, job designations or features of the building in question. There is a range of variations to do with animals, plants and the cosmos. The list is completed with references to the Bible, abstract moral concepts and, quite often, simply flights of fancy. For a long time these names were the only way of identifying a building. They only started to lose their importance in 1809 when all buildings had to be registered for the sake of fire insurance, and became redundant in 1887 with the introduction of house numbers by street.

### **End of the Ancien Régime**

In 1798, the old system of rule by the city establishment collapsed. Schaffhausen had to endure foreign armies sometimes clashing on its territory. The so-called Regeneration constitution of 1831 put an end to the privileges of the leading city families. The city was separated from the rest of the former city-state, becoming the commune of Schaffhausen with its own administrative apparatus. The communes in the rural areas became autonomous under a new cantonal government. This transformation found a symbolic physical expression too: the boundaries



of the city were destroyed, with the walls and many of the towers and gates razed to the ground. For the new municipality the first half of the 19th century was overshadowed by economic distress and depression. The collapse of the salt trade, the abolition of shipping privileges on the Rhine and Baden's entry into the German customs union – which cemented economic ties between German states – hastened the decline, and this, along with the rise in population that occurred at the same time, led to mass emigration to North and South America.

### **Pioneers of industry create an economic boom**

Energetic pioneers like Heinrich Moser and Friedrich Peyer Im Hof, who respectively harnessed the power of the Rhine and connected Schaffhausen to the rail network, opened up new prospects and created a thriving industry on the ruins of the old guild system. In less than five decades Schaffhausen became one of Switzerland's leading industrial centres. The Schweizerische Industriegesellschaft (SIG), manufacturing railway wagons, weapons and packing machines, the former Johann Conrad Fischer iron and steel works, subsequently Georg Fischer +GF+, Alusuisse, the IWC watch company, and the medical supplies company, Internationale Verbandstofffabrik IVF, all achieved an international reputation. From the point of view of town planning, it must be regarded as a stroke of luck that this development only really started after major industrial firms stopped depending

#### **Tip**

A permanent exhibition in the Museum zu Allerheiligen shows the diversity and importance of industry for Schaffhausen, and how its inhabitants lived in the 19th and 20th centuries.

## A brief history of the city of Schaffhausen

---

directly on the flow of the river for their energy and could be relocated to the outskirts. The rapid increase in population meant that towards the end of the 19th century the outer suburbs, originally planned as housing for workers, started to grow.

### **Schaffhausen in the Second World War**

As a border canton, Schaffhausen experienced the war in a very particular way: on the one hand, it was threatened by Hitler's Germany, while on the other, it was torn internally between rival parties.



On 1 April 1944 the city was accidentally bombed by American planes, which killed 40 people. Many houses, as well as works of art in the Museum zu Allerheiligen, were destroyed.



## The post-war boom

It was the post-war period with its economic upturn, rising incomes and partnership agreements between management and employees that ironed out social inequalities and brought general prosperity. The incorporation of Buchthalen (1947), Herblingen (1964) and Hemmental (2009), as well as the rapid rise in population, greatly increased the number of people living in the city. The population was now about 35,000. The upsurge in individual transport and the start of the building boom in the 1970s permanently changed the appearance of the city. Fortunately, the old city was largely spared, thanks to intelligent conservation measures.

