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# AMERBACH'S CABINET

The Public Collection of Fine Arts in Basle is the oldest Museum in Switzerland, and it is the first in Europe to have been inaugurated with public funds rather than by a wealthy amateur of nobility or royalty even.

Actually, it goes back to its founder, the lawyer Basilius Amerbach (who died in 1591), after whom it was named *Amerbach's Cabinet* (which is still an important part of the collection). In 1661, an art dealer from Amsterdam tried to purchase the collection from Amerbach's heirs, but the Town Council, under the leadership of Mayor Rudolf Wettstein, the same who won the Independence of the Swiss Confederation in the Peace Treaty at Muenster in 1648, prevented this by acquiring the collection for the University to which it still belongs.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, Basle was a town of merchants and printers with a strong humanistic trend. It was the printer Johannes Amerbach who bequeathed to his son Bonifacius a group of woodcuts by Duerer, Urs Graf and others. Bonifacius, a lawyer, numbered among his friends the painter Hans Holbein the Younger, the printer Johannes Froben and the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam who also made him his sole heir. Thus he came into possession of the famous painting "Roundel of Erasmus" and the drawing of "Thomas More and his Family", both by Holbein.

These were the beginnings of the collection and Basilius, son of Bonifacius, continued to enlarge it, mainly by works of art dating from the early decades of the sixteenth century as was natural for a man of his time. He also collected books, manuscripts, coins and objects of natural history and ethnology: he belonged to the Late-Renaissance period and Basilius Amerbach lived up to the ideal of an "universal museum". — Thus grew the nucleus of the Collection of Fine Arts:

*"The urban humanists, the brothers Holbein,  
the rural Squire Niklaus Manuel from Berne,  
the landsquenet Urs Graf,  
the anabaptists such as Hans Leu the Younger,  
the firm believer in the old creed Matthias Grunewald,*

giving a fairly complete picture of art in western parts of Europe of that time.

After having been housed, since 1662, in the old meeting place of Basle's nobility, near the Cathedral, the Town Council, in 1843-49, had a museum erected in the Augustinergasse,

in the neo-classic style which today contains the collections of natural history and ethnology.

And of course, the Collection of Fine Arts grew. In 1823, the so-called Faesch Museum, founded by another lawyer, Remigius Faesch, in the seventeenth century was incorporated with the Public Art Collection. This collection comprised mainly artists of the fifteenth century, amongst others Konrad Witz, who had worked in Basle in the first half of that century. This was a first completion of the old collection of the sixteenth century. Throughout the period of Romanticism, the works of art of the fifteenth century were collected with great zeal. The Basle collection was of course mainly interested in Swiss, Upper-Rhinish and South-German painters of that period, and if there is a small number of Italian paintings, this is due to Remigius Faesch.

Then, in about 1870, the Public Art Collection received a bequest of German Romanticists from Basle Painter Emilie Linder. Thus began the interest in art of the nineteenth century, concentrating almost exclusively on German and Swiss artists.

Till about 1930, the additions were mainly orientated towards the past, among others Arnold Boecklin, the most significant Basle painter of the nineteenth century, and Ferdinand Hodler, in a way the forerunner of modern art in Switzerland. And always contemporary Basle painters.

But slowly, a new interest grew, namely that in French art: Ingres, Corot, Delacroix, Courbet, Maillol, Gauguin, van Gogh, Rouault.

In 1936, the new building was ready to receive the whole Collection of Fine Arts in its continuity, and this was to remain the purpose in all new additions. Today, the first floor gives an idea about the Old Masters, whilst the second floor is reserved for practically all that has happened in art in the last eighty years.

French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, etc., are shown with samples of internationally recognised high standing. There is a room of Cubism, which has no parallel in any other museum of the world. The German and Norwegian expressionists as well as the Belgian artists are represented here.

And all that is always accompanied by Swiss and in particular Basle contemporaries, giving them their place in European art today.

(*Basle T.O.*)

# TOURIST NEWS

## SWITZERLAND'S LARGEST

### CHIMES

The largest set of bells in Switzerland was installed approximately two years ago at Libingen near Butschwil, 44 miles east of Zurich. It is one of the attractions of the then newly erected Albert Schweitzer Memorial Tower and consists of 40 bells, the weights of which vary between 25 lbs. and 3½ tons. The chimes are operated either automatically or by hand and may be heard every day at 8 a.m. They also play a five-minute programme of various tunes on the hour from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. On weekends and for larger groups, the owner of this unique carillon — Mr. W. Meierhans — will whenever possible, play chime compositions. During the Summer Concerts by guest bell-ringers from the U.S.A., Holland, Belgium and France will be held. The profit made on the modest entrance fee goes to Dr. Schweitzer's hospital in Lambarene.

## SKI-ING AND MUSIC HOLIDAYS

The pleasure derived from first class musical performances can be combined with the thrills of Summer ski-ing on snow and waterski-ing at Montreux; all on the same day. The heights of the snow fields in the Diablerets glacier area at 10,000 feet are easily accessible by aerial cableway. Here ski-ing is practised throughout the year. On returning to Montreux one has the opportunity of a refreshing swim in the lake and a couple of runs on water-skis before dinner and the attendance of excellent musical performances afterwards. Concerts will be given during the period 29th August to 5th October.

## FREE PHONE SERVICE FOR TOURISTS

In order to help tourists find hotel accommodation at whatever hour they arrive at Montreux, the town's Information Office has now installed a free and automatic telephone by which tourists can be put in touch with hotels in the area when the office is closed. This is the first installation of its kind in Switzerland.

## SUMMER SKI COURSES

The Swiss Ski School at Sils in the Engadine will organise special Summer Ski Courses with standard and short skis during the period 30th June to middle of October. A six-day course including ski hire and season ticket for the Corvatsch cableway will cost Fr.210.— (£21). Full details from the Official Tourist Office, 7500 St. Moritz.