

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1974)
Heft: 1690

Artikel: Short history of Zurich
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687617>

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: 16.02.2026

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

take place in June 1975, will be held in Interlaken, the major city of the Bernese Oberland. Fans can profit from an 8-day all-inclusive stay in Interlaken.

Reservations can be made through every Swissair office abroad or through the O.K. World Championships in Archery, P.O. Box, CH-3800 Interlaken.

high-rise buildings near important squares, such as Buerkli and Bellevueplatz, and in the Old Town. The streets of the latter are reserved for pedestrians. Churches have been cleaned and old towers renovated for posterity. But the restraint on large buildings was not imposed on the outer areas, some of which, such as the 11th District, have some beautiful estates. Hirzenbach, for example, has become a well-known example of modern town planning.

SHORT HISTORY OF ZURICH

(Adapted from the "Echo" of last March)

The rapid growth of Zurich during the past hundred years has left definite traces on its urban planning. Towards the second half of the 19th century, the people of Zurich, proud of their economic achievements, felt the need to radically redesign the layout of their town. Work started in 1860 and many parts of Old Zurich were sacrificed to the requirements of progress. This search for grandeur found expression in an ambitious urban programme providing for vast avenues cutting through the inner town. Only some of these plans, such as

the Uraniastrasse and the Zaehringerstrasse, have materialised.

It was not until the middle of the present century that concern for the safeguard of the Old Town was firmly established. Those areas which the leaders of the town were once so eager to destroy were now classed as historical sites. A commission for the maintenance of monuments was created in 1955. 1958 saw the creation of an office for the protection of old monuments, and the people were called five years later to vote on a new law preserving the monument of the old town. This concern has since been translated in real terms by a ban on

A cultural centre

No one can deny Zurich's intense cultural life. The City has become a natural forum of intellectual exchange and confrontation. The Press is an obvious example, since the three most important papers of the country are published in Zurich. Although the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* is only in third rank in circulation, it enjoys a solid reputation at home and abroad for its scrupulous and complete information on matters of foreign policy. Zurich's University and an Institute of Technology count over 15,000 professors and students. This and an open university, a private school-club, a catholic institute for adult education, are among the foundations of its diversified cultural life. Zurich has for a long time been the scene of more conferences than anywhere else in Switzerland. The town council spends 15 million francs a year on its opera, on the Schauspielhaus and the fine arts museum. It has many other private theatres offering a kaleidoscope of artistic expression. Zurich's Chamber Orchestra, with its unquestioned international renown, is an example of the energy of this private artistic initiative.

An economic centre

Zurich owes its economic fortune in the 19th century to Alfred Escher, who contributed to the building of the town's railway links, to the foundation of the Swiss Credit Bank and the first large insurance companies. He also strived to establish lasting economic ties between Zurich and abroad. That period saw the growth of the Escher-Wyss company, the foundation of the machinery factory in Oerlikon. True to its international tradition, Zurich is now enlarging its airport and strives to preserve its economic drive by appropriate measures to sustain the economic mechanisms. In the banking sector, the three main undertakings are the Swiss Credit Bank, the Union Bank of Switzerland and the Swiss Bank Corporation. In industry, some of the main employers are the Oerlikon Machine Factory (part of Brown Boveri), Oerlikon-Buehrle, Albiswerk (Electronics), Standard Telephone and Radio, Amag (electric engines), Maag (gear wheels), Robert Aebi (building equipment) and Precisa, not to mention Swissair. IBM, Dow Chemicals and Philips count among the main foreign firms established in Zurich.

DICKENS IN SWITZERLAND

Switzerland has attracted as many writers, poets, artists and historians from Britain than from any other country. From Gibbons to Byron and Whimper, the list of British creators, who found a special appeal in the wild sceneries of the Alps or the quiet organisation of the inhabitants, is a long one. Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was among English writers who left Switzerland with the strongest impressions. His fascination for the country is described in a recent brochure by the Swiss National Tourist Office.

Dickens set foot in Switzerland for the first time in November, 1844. Coming from Milan, he had climbed the Simplon by coach and sledge and reached Fribourg in three days. He journeyed on to Basle on his way back to England. The following year saw him enter Switzerland again from the south, taking the Gothard stage coach in summer. This second encounter with Switzerland inspired one of the most beautiful pages of "David Copperfield". Dickens left London in May 1846 for Lausanne, where he rented a villa with his family. There he began to write another novel, "Dombey and Son", in which he distilled the grandiose atmosphere surrounding him. The setting of the novel was quite some distance away from the grime and misery of Victorian London. At Lausanne, Dickens also wrote on the "Battle of Life" a tale on war which he dedicated to his "English friends in Switzerland".

He met several leading personalities of the time during his stay in the city and took an interest in the treatment of the sick, blind and incapacitated people and

of prisoners. From a trip to Great St. Bernard he came back with the impressions used ten years later in the detailed descriptions of "Little Dorit".

In October 1846, Dickens visited Geneva. A revolutionary ferment had taken over the town. Dickens was in admiration for this revolution because it has been launched by "free, noble, generous and moderate minds sustained by their splendid popular education."

Dickens returned to London in November 1846. It was seven years before his next and last trip to Switzerland. Accompanied by his friend, W. Collins, Dickens entered Switzerland at Basle; in October 1853 he moved on to Berne and Lausanne where he saw many of his old friends before leaving the country that same month. It is interesting to note that the specific Swiss sceneries and characters are depicted in his novel "No Thoroughfare", which was ultimately set on the stage. Dickens also published the English version of Henri Dunant's "Memories of Solferino".

The impressions which Dickens derived from these three visits to Switzerland never left him and it was in a prefabricated Swiss chalet in London, a gift from a friend, that he collapsed after a day's work on June 8th, 1870 and died the following day.

For Dickens, Switzerland not only represented, with its majestic sceneries, a break from the urban universe and an opening to the beauties of nature, but a country with traditions of freedom and heroic devotion.

(Pro Helvetia)

A village or a great town?

It took 150 years to transform Zurich from the small medieval town which it once was, into what it is today. Outlying communes were absorbed in 1893 and 1934. Today it is felt that Zurich will not encroach on any new commune but continue to extend its economic influence so as to be at the heart of a "region". This region is politically diversified owing to its differing small and larger communes organised in a rather loose organisation for the "regional planning of Zurich and its surroundings". But all these communes are intent on preserving their independence from Zurich.

Is Zurich a large city? Not in the general understanding of the term. In fact, it is quite small compared to some of the capitals of European countries. But in relation to its size it has all the attributes of a large city. But the "Zurcher" doesn't like to consider himself as the resident of a large city. A puritan mind has dwelt in him since the days of Zwingli. Work and security, these are his demands on his destiny while he bewares of vast programmes. But the "Zurcher" still remains open to the outside world, knowing that a small country like Switzerland can't in the long run survive without preserving close relations with the rest of the world.

Message from the President of the Confederation to the Swiss Abroad, 1 August, 1974

Dear compatriots abroad,

Each year on August the first we Swiss think of the founding of our state, the Confederation. I am particularly happy, dear fellow citizens, that today I may talk to you. I send you my warmest greetings and convey to you the best wishes of the Federal Government and your fellow-countrymen and women here in Switzerland.

With our attention being held by present-day problems, we scarcely find time to look back into the past and celebrate with solemn respect the anniversary of the birth of our nation. I say this, knowing that we cannot wisely shape the future without a respectful appreciation of what has been achieved up until now. But lately there have been so many changes and upheavals that we must summon all our strength together if we are to overcome the difficulties of the present and of the future. Following a long period in which stability, economic growth, industrial peace and full employment seemed firmly assured, much is now being put in question. Great efforts will be necessary if this development is to yield positive results.

We are confronted in a very direct way with the question of economic growth, the limitations of prosperity and the harsh realities of voluntary

restrictions. The shortage of energy, raw materials and certain types of food-stuffs has made us aware of our precarious state of dependence. It forces us to reconsider our situation and to accept this as a challenge. Above all, the oil crisis has proved in an emphatic way how difficult it is to steer a structure as complex as the modern world economy on a changing course. The efforts towards a reform of the monetary system, the liberalization of world trade, the intelligent adjustment of international investment activity, and the development of the Third World – all these have without doubt suffered a setback. Storm clouds are gathering and are threatening the liberal world economic order, accomplished during the last 30 years in intricate and painstaking detail. What this means for a country like Switzerland, which is so strongly inter-connected with the world, can perhaps be even more readily understood by you who live abroad.

Closely connected with this situation is the inflation – which we partly import and partly create ourselves. Inflation may be to the benefit of some, but it is also to the disadvantage of others; it undermines stability, creates a climate of speculation, and inevitably leads to increased social tension.

Despite all efforts, attempts to break out of the vicious circle of the increasing cost of living have until now been unsuccessful. Yet we must not give up our efforts, for it would be disastrous

to relax in the fight against this unfortunate trend and the spreading of an inflation-mentality. It would mean living at the expense of our economic future, and that sooner or later we would have to foot the bill – in both the social and political fields. Up until now the strength of our economic system was measured by the growth of our prosperity. And in the wise management of our prosperity we shall in future have to prove the enduring qualities of our political system. We shall have to give up many creature-comforts if the price is too high or if they create unacceptable dependencies for us. These are evolutions which go far beyond pure economics. They raise as much the question of solidarity within our national community as they demand a cutback of a hectic development which has gone beyond the natural limits of the human mind and spirit.

Although the future thus holds all kinds of difficulties for us, we do not want to face it with too much pessimism. There are many people who have recognised this precarious situation and are prepared to work together to overcome it. And there is no reason why we should not continue to have faith in our peoples proven strength and determination to master its own destiny. From this strength and determination springs our Federal Constitution, which this year is one hundred years old. Its outward appearance may have grown somewhat outdated – which is why we are at present in the process of overhauling it from top to bottom.

But the very inadequacies and contradictions of our basic national laws reflect the active determination of our people always to adapt our institutions to the needs of the day – the aim being to strengthen the position of our small neutral country abroad and to enrich the life of our community through tolerance, solidarity and the legal provisions of our constitution.

I know the mere word of the constitution and of the existence of democratic institutions are not enough. What is needed is also a human involvement that enables us to break out of the narrow circle of our own personal interests and to understand the fundamental truths of our Swiss existence with clarity and alacrity.

From my contacts with many of you, fellow citizens abroad, I gather that this is the sort of attitude you expect of us. Let us hope that this expectation can be fulfilled, and that in this way we can truly express our gratitude to those Swiss abroad who with great loyalty share with us our problems and efforts aimed at preserving the well-being of our common homeland.

To you and yours I wish health and prosperity, success and satisfaction in your work, and happiness and peace of mind in your family.

*Ernst Brugger
President of the Swiss Confederation*



**For a High Standard of
Quality and Durability—
'GUARD'
OVERALLS**

available in Drill, Nylon, Terylene, etc.
INDUSTRIAL GLOVES, APRONS, HEADWEAR
I invite your enquiries—W. W. Linsmeier, F.I.A.C. (Swiss)
Managing Director

AIRGUARD LIMITED
60 LILLIE ROAD LONDON S.W.6
TELEPHONE 01 385 3344