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The Swiss National Transport Museum

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quarter of a century in the service of transport

ON July 1st 1959, the Swiss National Transport Museum was opened in Lucerne.

Its aims have been to collect historical evidence of Swiss transport by road, water and air, to make it available to the public and to conserve it for posterity.

In addition, the museum stimulates people's interest in all methods of public transport, one of the most important service sectors of Swiss economic life.

The idea of such a museum is almost as old as that of having a postal museum in Berne, opened in 1907, and of the modest railway museum in Zurich, which was inaugurated in 1918.

It was really the National Exhibition in 1939 which gave the idea an impetus, and a study commission was set up in 1942, the "Society for a Transport Museum in Switzerland" under the chairmanship of the initiator, Dr Raphael Cottier, at that time regional manager of the SBB in Zurich.

The project to have such a museum in Zurich could not be realised, and in 1950, the society moved to Lucerne.

When the SBB – 50 years old – donated a million francs in 1952 and the PTT two halls erected for the Hospes Exhibition in Berne, construction could begin in earnest.

The Swiss private railways and the road traffic users gave considerable financial support, and finally, on July 1 1959, the museum could be opened by Federal Councillor Giuseppe Lepori, head of the then Federal Post and Railway Department.

At that time, the museum contained halls for rail and road traffic, postal and telecommunication, as well as the archives and a conference hall.

The other means of transport – aviation, navigation, cableways and tourism – were housed in the two halls given by the PTT.

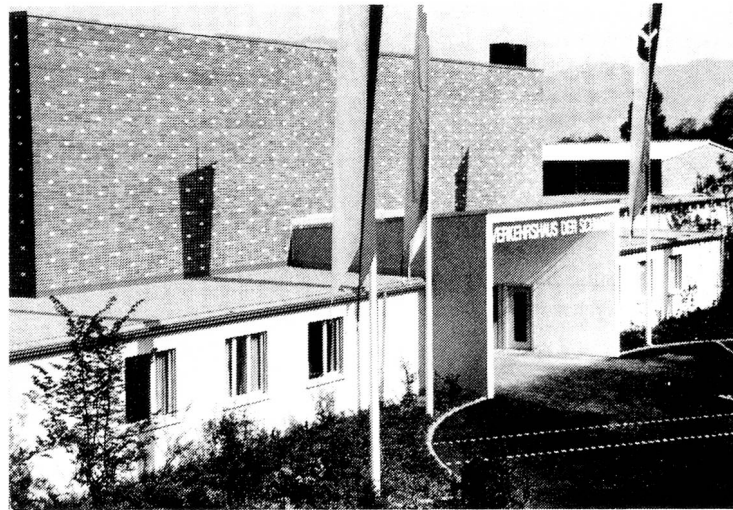
Ten years later, the first planetarium in Switzerland could be inaugurated, and in 1972 the hall for aviation and space exploration were added, including the cosmorama. More and more halls were added, and the existing exhibits complemented.

The Lucerne Commune gave additional land in 1976, and the Hans-Erni House was opened in 1979. A further hall for rail traffic was completed in 1982, when the Gotthard railway celebrated its centenary.

And now, for the Silver Jubilee, the hall devoted to navigation, cable railways and tourism was opened on July 2.

The collections of the Transport Museum are housed in 12 buildings and comprise several thousand objects from all sectors of communication.

May we just mention 60 locomotives and coaches – among them the strongest electric



The museum's main entrance

engine in the world – over 40 motor cars, 50 cycles and carriages, 35 aircraft, a steamship, several boats and cablecar cabins, two original spacecraft, a space suit worn on the Moon, Moon rock and telecommunication apparatus.

Hundreds of models of every description, demonstration machines and video shows form a representative and attractive collection.

The Planetarium has 300 seats, and over 300 pictures, drawings and sculptures by the famous Swiss artist Hans Erni are contained in the hall bearing his name. He has a very special relationship with technology in general and communication in particular.

In the auditorium, a mural – 40m long – bears the name "Panta rhei – everything flows" and shows personalities from Thales to Einstein who left their mark on occidental culture.

The Transport Museum is the most frequented museum in Switzerland – right from the beginning it attracted the crowds and now has up to 700,000 visitors a year, over 10 per cent of the total population. Twelve million have been to see the "Verkehrshaus der Schweiz" in 25 years.

The society of that name has 20,000 members, and thanks to the success and substan-

tial support by communication organisations, the museum is self-supporting. The latest extension could be realised without federal subsidy.

A new hall devoted to tourism will be opened in November, and the sector cable railways will become operational in May next year. At the same time, the "Swissorama" will be opened, a film projection on a circular screen. This has been financed by a generous gift from the Migros-Genossenschaft-Bund.

The show "Impression of Switzerland" will last 20 minutes, and the visitor will get an excellent cross-section of Swiss landscape, culture and economic life.

The Swiss National Transport Museum in Lucerne represents an invaluable bridge between past and present, and as Dr h.c. Alfred Waldis, president of the society, says in an article in "Switzerland" (SNTÖ), it should remind the public that means of communications of every kind are products of our culture, for they were created for communication between people, for the exchange of economic and cultural values.

They should also show the limitation which faces technology by the demand for humane environment, a task which has become more and more important and necessary today.

Mariann Meier