

# The evolution of woodcarving in the Bernese Oberland

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**APPENZELL A RH.**

The late Ferdinand Fisch has left an amount of 25,000 frs. to the Swiss Y.M.C.A.

**VALAIS.**

The Banque de Monthey, of Monthey, has been granted a one year's moratorium as from January 5th, 1937. A commissioner has been appointed to supervise the bank's transactions while the moratorium is in force.

**ST. GALLEN.**

A disaster occurred on Sunday last at the "Faulfirst" in the Alvier district, when an avalanche fell on a party of four skiers, two of which were killed, the names of the dead are: Christian Zogg, father of two children and Hansruedi Hösli, an apprentice from Buchs.

**THE EVOLUTION OF WOODCARVING IN THE BERNESE OBERLAND.**

A year of famine, back in 1816, is held responsible for the birth of wood-carving in the Bernese Oberland. At that time Christian Fischer, a clever turner in the little village of Brienz, finding himself no longer able to buy the box-wood and horn necessary for fashioning the pipes for which he had already acquired a certain amount of fame, began experimenting with maple and other species of native wood. He made egg cups, napkin rings, goblets, plates and bread baskets and decorated them with simple carvings, the result being so pleasing to the eye that foreign visitors were eager to buy these articles. This initial success inspired Christian Fischer to further and more complicated efforts and he also gave free instruction to the peasants of Brienz who were so much in need of a side income.

The enthusiasm of the pupils was as great as the master's and with simple sharp knives they managed to sculpture articles which were typical of their environment. Their reproductions of animals and flowers were based on their own careful studies of Nature.

Other Bernese Oberland communities, such as Meiringen, Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, also began to give attention to wood-carving as a home industry, and through the income from his wood sculptures, many a poor mountain peasant was able to banish want from his home.

Presently Christian Fischer's remarkable pioneer work in this field was brought to the attention of the authorities and both the Federal and cantonal governments, as well as the village of Brienz and some neighbouring localities, voted yearly subventions for the maintenance of a Wood-carving School. The purpose of this institution, which was founded in 1860 and which is flourishing to-day, is to enable students to acquire a thorough practical and scientific training in the wood sculpture profession.

One of the primary conditions for admission is good eyesight. New pupils are moreover on probation for eight weeks to test their aptitude for drawing, which is a decisive factor. The apprenticeship for home and ornamental carvers is respectively two and three years, and for animal and figure sculptors it is four years. At the end of these terms the students have to pass a state examination.

Tuition is free for Swiss citizens, as well as all the tools and working materials. Sculptures produced in the school are the property of the institution, but any articles which are not kept for the school collection, or otherwise claimed by the school, may be bought by the pupils for a small refund for materials.

An interesting feature of the Woodcarving School at Brienz, which since 1928 is a special department of the Cantonal Industrial Museum in the city of Berne, is the small Zoological Park belonging to it. There students are able to make practical animal studies.

The products of the more advanced pupils are on sale in a special showroom and exhibitions are also arranged occasionally to acquaint the public with the general activity of the institution.

A visit at Brienz is an experience which is as charming as it is enlightening. For who would not love at first sight a village of cozy brown chalets, with flowers blooming on every windowsill and balcony; a village which is mirrored in the mountain-enclosed lake to which it has given its name, and whose back-ground culminates in the Brienz Rothorn, one of the finest points of view in all Switzerland, accessible, of course, by a mountain railway!

Things assume an exciting aspect as soon as one arrives at Brienz, for Switzerland's wood-carving capital flaunts the most attractive road signs to be found anywhere. Most appropriately they are carved in wood, and their designs vary cleverly according to their location. Thus the road sign pointing the way to the Chamois Park is surmounted by replicas of two of these nimble animals; the road signs to the landing place for steamers bears a quaintly garbed traveller, receiving road directions from a little boy; a portly tourist, preceded by an equally corpulent little dog, surmounts the sign directing to the Rothorn,

and a sprightlier little man, equipped with all the liker's paraphernalia, is headed for Axalp. Ultra smart is a feminine figure with a beautiful hound, looking in the direction of Fluhberg Pavilion.

Woodcarving at Brienz has experienced a glorious evolution. More and more the artisan is vanishing, and the artist comes to the fore. One of the foremost masters in wood-sculpture nowadays is Hans Huggler, who recognized long ago that it was more important to catch the spirit and expression of a model than to reproduce it. In a series of bold strokes and slashes, a simple arrangement of planes and angles, he brought a block of wood to instant and vigorous life that it could never acquire through the careful modelling of the old school. Then he began his character sketches that are now familiar to every tourist who visits Switzerland. With the keenest understanding the affection he carved these little men and women, and painted them roughly in the dull, beautiful colours of the home-dyed stuffs the peasants wear. In these illyptian woodcarved figures many people of Brienz and environs recognized themselves and their neighbours with conscious pride, for while their fellow townsman recreated them, he did it with a touch so whimsical and so kindly that he never gave offense.

But the "little people" are only a part of Hans Huggler's artistic creations. He, too, has caught and preserved with his magic chisel the animal and wild life of his world, but in a striking way all his own.

Then there is Karl Binder, also a native of Brienz, who in 1908, at the age of twenty-three, was urged by Rodin, Bartholomé and Desbois to exhibit in the Salon National des Beaux Arts in Paris. A sculpture "Ivresses" earned him the title of "associé," and only one year later another creation, "The Bagpiper," elevated him to the rank of "Sociétaire" in the Beaux Arts Society, a distinction equalling a gold medal. Several of Karl Binder's wood sculptures have been acquired by the city of Paris, and in other lands his works are equally admired.

Another gifted Brienz artist is Emil Thomann, whose noble sculptures of ecclesiastical subjects have received most favourable comments.

In addition to the displays of the before mentioned works of art in wood, the little village is literally alive with wooden bears in every size and conceivable attitude. Bears inviting you to entrust your hat or umbrella to them, or both; bears eager to do duty as a seat; bears holding smokers' accessories, etc. Chamois, deer, eagles, cows and goats are introduced in ever so many clever combinations, while chalets of different sizes are ready to serve in numerous ways. Bread-baskets, book racks, paper knives, ink wells, salad sets, bowls, clocks and pictures lend further variety to the displays, so that a visit in Switzerland's woodcarving capital is not only instructive, but a rare visual delight.

**M. MOTTA AND SWISS CLUB LIVERPOOL.**

The Committee of the Swiss Club Liverpool sent, on the 16th of December, the following letter to Monsieur Motta, then Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation:

Liverpool, December 16th, 1936.

Herrn Bundesrat G. Motta,

Vize-Präsident des Bundesrates,

Bern.

Herr Vize-Präsident,

Das vereinigte Komitee des Schweizer Klubs Liverpool in seiner heutigen Sitzung erinnert sich daran, dass Sie während 25 Jahren unserem lieben Vaterlande ganz ausgezeichnete Dienste geleistet haben und wir erlauben uns den Wunsch auszudrücken, dass Sie dies noch manche Jahre tun können.

Genehmigen Sie, hochgeschätzter Herr Bundesrat, die Versicherung unserer Dankbarkeit und ergebener Hochachtung.

Sig. Ls. C. Comte, E. Montag, E. Tüscher, Th. Leyvraz, L. J. Favre, G. Ray, Chs. Clottu, H. Ott, A. Baer.

In reply the Swiss Club Liverpool has received the following letter:

Der Bundespräsident  
der Schweizerischen  
Eidgenossenschaft.

Bern, den 6. Januar 1937.

An das Komitee  
des Schweizerklubs Liverpool,  
Liverpool.

Geehrte Herren,

Ihr Brief vom 16. Dezember mit den Glückwünschen des Schweizerklubs Liverpool zu meinem Amtsjubiläum hat mich sehr gefreut, und ich danke Ihnen herzlich dafür.

Empfangen Sie bitte, mit meinen wenn auch etwas verspäteten, so doch aufrichtigen Wünschen für ein gutes Neues Jahr, meine besten Grüsse.

Sig. MOTTA.

**A FEW PECULIARITIES OF THE SWISS****RAILWAY SYSTEM.**

The expenditure incurred for the establishment of the Swiss Federal railways, not including therefore the secondary lines which are privately owned, came to a round sum of 2,787 million francs, of which 717 were employed for purposes of electrification. This sum corresponds to frs. 936.— per meter and represents a very high figure compared with foreign railways. The main reason is obviously the configuration of the ground. There is scarcely a line to be found throughout the country for which only simple infra-structure was required such as is the case in flat countries. High embankments and deep excavations, innumerable bridges and long tunnels, damming in of mountain torrents and protection against land-slides and avalanches are some of the characteristics of Swiss railways. The total length of tunnels is 165.1 km. i.e., 5.74 per 100 km. of rail. This proportion is only of 1.49% for Austrian railways, 0.42% for German railways and 0.04% for the Hungarian State railways. Another factor which has contributed in raising the cost incurred for the construction of Swiss railways, is that, with exception of the inhabited regions of the high Alps, the agglomerations are very close to one another so that there must be a great many stations. Apart from the Austrian railways, of all other European railways, the Swiss lines have the smallest distance between stations. In Switzerland there are 27 stations per 100 km. of rail, in Germany there are 22, the Hungarian and Swedish railways have 17. And lastly, another factor which should not be overlooked is the density of the road network which leads to a great number of road and rail crossings. Switzerland's road network comprises thus over 6,700 crossings, of which 4,100 level crossings, 2,000 underground passages and 600 overhead crossings.

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