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Times Past - The 'Landi'

Boyd Misstear looks at the 1939 Swiss National Exhibition

While a number of local and cantonal traditional fairs had previously taken place across Switzerland, it wasn't until 1883 that the first official National Exhibition was organized and took place in Zürich. The exhibition included art and industry as had been seen before in the cantonal fairs, but now included topics on the supply of gas, water and electricity, urban planning, protection of nature and heritage. In 1896 the next national exhibition in Genève focused on demonstrating the cultural autonomy of the country by preserving the authenticity of the Swiss Village - "Dörfli" - with a view to safeguarding heritage. "Everything that defines the national character and the specifically Swiss, shall be brought together in a vivid, colourful piece of art", claimed the official guide. The third such exhibition was held in Bern in 1914 and coincided with the breakout of the First World War and while the Swiss were discussing armed political neutrality, adopting "Dörfli" as the name, would personify political neutrality.

Once again as the storm clouds of war were gathering across Europe in 1939, the Swiss found themselves surrounded by larger and better-armed adversaries, so they consciously decided to proceed with another planned national morale-boosting exhibition. Armin Meili, the Director declared: "*It is one of the principal tasks of this national manifestation to convince the Swiss people of its moral value and its abilities*". War broke out with the invasion of Poland by Germany on 1st September, followed by Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 3rd September. The National Exhibition went ahead and was held for the second time in Zürich between May and October. It opened on 6th May to great pomp and ceremony. A parade was held in downtown Zürich, headed by the Federal Cabinet. The official flag-raising took place at the Bürkliplatz on the banks of the Zürichsee. In German, the National Exhibition is called a "Landesausstellung", which has been shortened to the affectionate dialectic form "Landi". This is the name by which most of the Swiss people refer to this event. The "Landi" was to consolidate national unity by cultivating optimism and disseminating the values of spiritual national defence, symbolized for the Swiss by Swiss sculptor Hans Brandenberger's (1912-2003) monumental statue of a peasant-worker donning a military jacket, depicting military readiness and the change from peaceful to embattled citizens. The statue was moved to the Bundesbriefarchiv (Federal Archives) courtyard, Schwyz, in 1941 to mark the 650-year anniversary of the Swiss Confederacy.

Most facets of Swiss life were exhibited at this the fourth "Landesausstellung" including rail transportation, which was to be seen in and adjacent to the Transport Hall located near to Zürich Wollishofen station. Photographs of some of the railway exhibits feature in some of the period photographs that the Model Railway Club has given the SRS access to, and that will feature in future editions of *Swiss Express*. Readers interested in seeing a number of general period photographs of the Exhibition, illustrations of special stamps; images of a PostAuto serving as a Post Office at the venue, and learning more about related philately recounting commemorative special air transportation events of the time, might like to read the illustrated 4-part article '*Landi '39, Unifying the Swiss with War Looming*' by Richard T. Hall published by the American Helvetia Philatelic Society. It commenced in Volume XXXVI, Number 5, September 2010 of their journal, with links continuing to the o ther parts of the article. (See **http://tinyurl.com/ jogfway**)

TOP: The Transport Hall at the SNE 1939.
RIGHT: Hans Brandenberger's spiritual national defence statue.
Photos: Black and white image courtesy of the Model Railway Club