

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss textiles [English edition]  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss office for the development of trade  
**Band:** - (1951)  
**Heft:** [1]: 25th anniversary of Textile suisses

**Artikel:** The hosiery and knitwear industry  
**Autor:** Staehelin, W.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798759>

### **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](#)

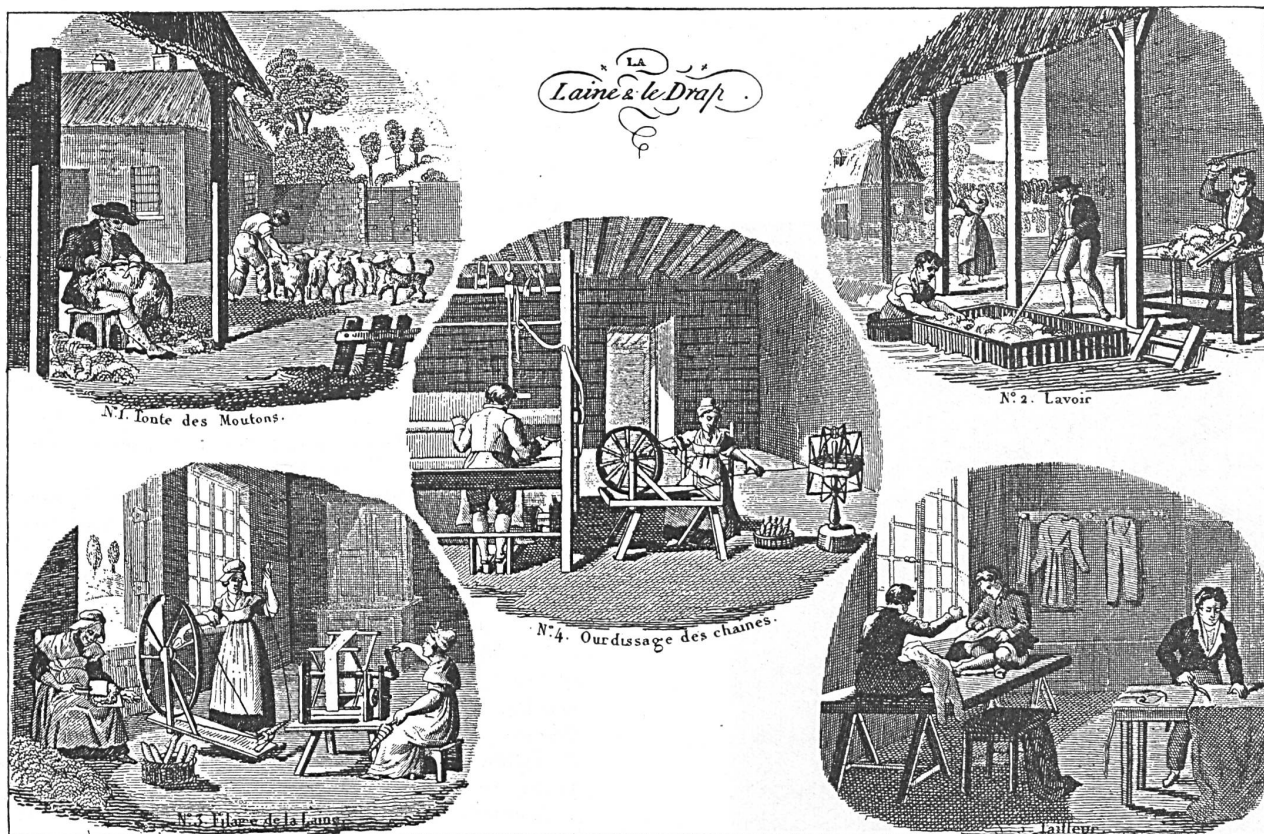
### **Terms of use**

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:** 14.02.2026

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

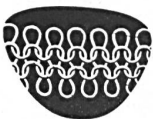
# THE TEXTILE INDUSTRIES IN SWITZERLAND



cotton which had lately been introduced into Switzerland and was driving the wool trade from the towns. Only the finishing of fabrics imported from abroad could survive. But the blockade of the continent from 1806 to 1812 reversed the whole situation. The shortage of English woollen fabrics brought about a renewed interest in sheep breeding and soon a great number of small enterprises sprang up — spinning, weaving and cloth mills, and stocking and cap factories.

Many of them ceased their activities at the end of the blockade, others were able to continue until the coming of the railways and, finally, some survived all crises and have to-day become important concerns fully able to hold their own on world markets.

At the present moment Switzerland possesses a very highly developed wool textile industry capable of satisfying the needs of a very exacting clientele. Most of the raw materials it requires have to be imported, but it works mainly for the home market. The prejudice suggesting that foreign wool fabrics, whatever their quality, are better than Swiss products, is fast losing ground. Furthermore, the Swiss wool textile industry, as has already been pointed out (see *Swiss Textiles* No. 2/1950), manufactures a great variety of products. Its manufacturing programme includes all woollen products, hand-knitting wools, woollen and worsted fabrics for men and women's clothing, cloth for uniforms, carpets, upholstery and even felt for hats and all industrial and technical purposes.



## THE HOSIERY AND KNITWEAR INDUSTRY

by Dr. W. STÄHELIN, Secretary of the Association of the Swiss Knitwear and Hosiery Manufacturers, Zurich

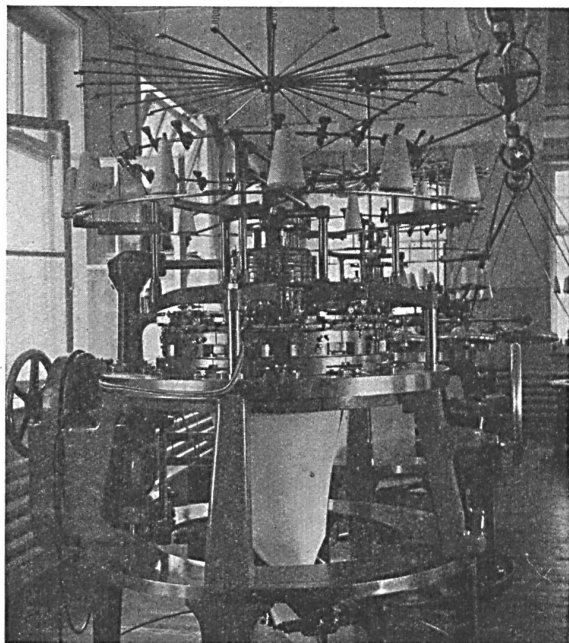
Weaving and knitting are the two main methods of producing woven or knitted fabrics from threads. While in weaving the material is made by the interlacing of the weft and warp threads, in knitting it is formed by interlocking loops or stitches. Naturally with the passing of time machines have been developed which carry out the interlocking of stitches according to different patterns and produce various types of material, but these technical details are out of place

here. The industry itself is called the « hosiery and knitwear industry ».

The manufacture of knitted fabrics by machine goes back much farther than is generally thought. The first knitting machine was built by the Englishman William Lee as early as 1589. But the real rise of knitting on a professional level dates back to the 19th century. Whereas formerly practically nothing else was manufactured by machine but stockings,

knitted fabrics were subsequently introduced in all the different branches of the clothing industry.

The articles knitted nowadays include underwear for men and women, dresses for women, cardigans, pullovers, gloves, swimsuits, baby clothes, etc.



Cotton's knitting machine for knitting stockings, named after the inventor, possesses as many as 32 different appliances called needle-beds. On this machine fashioning is automatic which makes it possible to manufacture fully fashioned stockings.

Industrial knitwear was introduced into Switzerland in the middle of the last century, first of all in the Eastern part of the country, then in the canton of Aargau. This industry developed rapidly and spread to include all fields. After the first World War the manufacture of stockings developed still further because many embroidery manufacturers at that time were turning to this industry which is less affected by crises. It is not surprising therefore that stocking manufacture to-day is mainly carried out in the town of St. Gall and its surroundings, while the other

knitwear firms have developed more or less evenly all over Switzerland during the course of the last few years.

Very few knitwear factories are content to limit themselves exclusively to knitting for most of them also go in for the manufacture of clothing and underwear. By its structure therefore the knitwear industry is not only connected with textile production in the narrow sense of the word, but it also belongs to the clothing industry. Not only does it manufacture the basic material but also the finished article. This state of affairs calls for much flexibility on the part of the hosiery and knitwear industry and necessitates the carrying out of a great many different operations. Questions of fashion, which are within the province of the clothing manufacturer, are thus just as important to the hosiery and knitwear manufacturer as the industrial problems raised by the use of knitting machines.

Generally speaking, Swiss firms are usually medium in size. Factories with more than 200 employees are the exception rather than the rule. At the moment there are some 160 concerns in Switzerland coming under factory law, and these employ some 13,000 workers. They are mainly occupied to-day in satisfying the needs of the home market, but are nevertheless very interested in export. The highest level of exports reached was in 1920 and totalled 60.5 million Swiss francs. Total exports to-day amount to about 30 million Swiss francs a year but manufacturers are trying to increase this figure.

A comparatively young industry, by its very nature, is more easily affected by foreign competition. During the economic crisis of 1930, imports of foreign hosiery and knitwear products at times assumed alarming proportions. There was a similar experience recently when American nylon stockings flooded the Swiss market. Thanks however to measures taken by the authorities, it was possible to prevent Switzerland's hosiery industry from being deprived of its means of livelihood.

Generally speaking however, the Swiss hosiery and knitwear industry has already outgrown its growing pains and is now a sturdy and important section of Switzerland's economy. The demand for jersey and knitwear products is continually increasing. At the same time, this industry is making great progress in the manufacture of materials and their processing so that the prospects for the future of Switzerland's hosiery and knitwear industry may be considered as favourable.



## THE CLOTHING AND UNDERWEAR INDUSTRY

by Dr. C. STAEHELIN, Secretary of the Swiss Association of Clothing and Underwear Manufacturers, Zurich

The clothing and underwear industry to-day is one of the most important of the clothing and textile groups in Switzerland. The last industrial census (1939) showed for these branches a number of 34,198 firms employing 172,366 people, 63,560 of these being employed in the manufacture of clothing and underwear; the many men and women working in the home are not included in these figures.

The size of these firms varies considerably. Some are small employing only a few workers while others are

real factories employing as many as 500 workers or more. They are not confined to any particular region but are spread all over the country.

Wages are regulated by compulsory collective labour contracts, concluded with the respective trade unions and based on the minimum wages compatible with living conditions to-day.

As opposed to what was formerly the case, women working at home receive, for the same work, the same wages as those who are employed in the factories. It