

Rural history 2013

The Great Outdoors – 150 years of mountain sports and tourism in the Alps

6.2.1. Löwenplatz in Lucerne – a factory for tourist photographs

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My talk is about the "Lucerne tourism borough", the so called Luzerner "Tourismusmeile". It is – in its entirety – a product of the launch of tourism in Lucerne in the middle of the 19th century. It presented travellers a picturesque image of Switzerland, which is unique in its extent and completeness both in this country and in other alpine regions.

At the outset I want to correct the German-to-English-translation of the title of my paper: It does not just deal with photographs but rather with images, with patterns, with pictures. The "Tourismusmeile" does not just present motives for photos, but provides the tourist with some handsome illustrations and vivid visualizations of what Switzerland represents.

It is thus with pictures that I will illustrate the development of this borough. This will take most of my 20 minutes. I will close with a thesis on the significance of this factory for pictures and would be very interested in your opinion and comments.

Let's begin with a few relevant details from three maps of Lucerne.

Bild 1

This is the situation in 1821, you see the Lucerne of the 18th century, the city of the Ancien Regime,. The Wey-quarter is an orchard, it doesn't yet exist in the modern sense; it is separated from the city by a town-gate, the Weggistor. The Hofbrücke leads to the Hofkirche, it was built in the same style as the still existing famous Kapellbrücke with the water tower.

Bild 2

The Situation of 1848, immediately before the take-off of the tourism-business. Half of the Hofbrücke is replaced by a boulevard, the Schweizerhofquai, with the First-class-hotel Schweizerhof and on the left the Schwanenplatz with the hotel Schwanen, the first hotel with view of the lake and into the mountains. The situation in the Wey-quarter is unchanged.

Bild 3

The situation of 1882; Lucerne tourism starts its second heyday after the crises of the Seventies. Schweizerhofquai is completed. The Wey-quarter is completely redesigned on the basis of a plan, commissioned by the City Council. The Weggisgate has been torn down and replaced by a small square, the Wey-quarter is now directly accessible from the lake along several routes. It is thus connected to where the tourists used to lodge, in brief: it is ready for the role, the City Council intended for it: to become a tourist-quarter.

What were the main attractions of this new quarter?

Bild 4

The oldest attraction is the Lion monument by the famous Danish sculptor Bertel Throvaldsen, inaugurated as early as 1821 and dedicated to the more than 300 Swiss victims of the Tuileries-riots in Paris in August 1792, when the Swiss Guard defended the royal family against the mob of Paris, as it was called in Swiss historiography for a long time. The monument was the beginning of the "Tourismusmeile" and is still something like its soul. In the following years all the big tourist attractions agglomerated around this monument.

Bild 5

In 1855 Ludwig Meyer established his 3D-diorama near to the Weggistor. It started very modestly with only one display, it was the famous view of the Rigi of course with its even more famous sunrise, that could be simulated. It was intended for tourists who, for whatever reason, did not have the ability or the means to climb the Rigi. Meyers Diorama offered them a comparable alternative. After 1870 Meyer installed two other famous views besides this Rigi-diorama: Pilatus and Gornergrat, places known to offer a marvellous view of many 4000-meter-peaks and of the Matterhorn of course.

Bild 6

Here you see the museum of Samuel Stauffer, opened in 1859, where – as the publicity promised – the tourists could see all the alpine animals from the big bear, the eagle and the bearded vulture to the small finch and shrew, all of them as preparations of course. The special attraction at Stauffers Museum was the arrangement of his stuffed animals in groups that showed mainly two situations: prey and family.

Bild 7

As an example of the former you see here two lynx hunting a chamois, very dramatic, the chamois with wide open eyes, completely scared.

Bild 8

Another scene shows a family of Alpine swifts, with the parents feeding their chickens.

Bild 9

In 1873 the so called Glacier Garden opened. Its founder was a young banker, Wilhelm Amrein, who besides his banking business had started a dealing with wines. Therefore he had holes blasted in the rock next to the lion monument in order to build cellars for his stock of wines. As the works proceeded naturally formed holes in the sandstone were discovered which were identified by geologists as giant's kettles or glacial mills and judged as very important witnesses of the glacial period. After this discovery Amrein decided to change business and become a museum-entrepreneur.

This was typical of many of these protagonists of the "Tourismusmeile". They were courageous young men, willing to take risks. Amrein started with the organisation and construction of his new enterprise immediately after the mills had been discovered late in autumn 1872 and half a year later, in may 1873, he opened his Glacier Garden. He had the financial help of his family and a very high credit of a bank, which in the following years would give him many sleepless nights.

The picture represents the state of the garden in 1874 or 1875; in the centre the mills with the erratic blocks, that were found in the holes; in the background you see a mountain cabin, than

a little mountain chapel, that was passed, when the visitor climbed the way up to the look-out on the top. From there he could see the city of Lucerne, the lake, and he had a 180°-view from Pilatus to Rigi.

The house on the left included a restaurant; from the gallery walkway along the street the visitor could overview the terrain with the excavations. On the right you see the pay kiosk. This geological sensation attracted a lot of people, because this broad insight in an up to now unknown period of the world was new. It proved that at least 20 000 years ago Lucerne as well as large parts of Switzerland and the Alps were covered with glaciers.

But all this was not enough to run a profitable business. So Amrein decided to expand into two additional fields: prehistory and cartography, especially alpine cartography.

His brother Caspar Konstantin was an amateur prehistorian who was fascinated by the newly discovered remains of lake dwellings at the shores of Lake Zurich. The discovery of the archaeologist Ferdinand Keller in 1850 this was the signal for excavations all over Switzerland. From Lake Constance to Lake Neuchâtel – at all shores people were digging for remains of the Neolithic Age. Caspar Konstantin for his part was digging at Lake Baldegg in the Canton of Lucerne. And he found riches of remains that he gave to his brother for displaying them in the Glacier Garden: bones, weapons, tools, pottery, carvings.

Bild 10

A bit of the fascination for the lake-dwelling-period is conveyed by this painting. It was created by Albert Anker in 1873 and he too – as does Stauffer with his animal-groups – shows a 19th-century-family scene with a mother and her sleeping child; she looks out to the lake where far out we recognise her husband fishing, bringing home the food. It's a picture of complete peace and serenity with the sleeping child in the arms of its mother, full of confidence.

With the discovering of lake dwellings Swiss people were no longer just rude descendants of alpine farmers, herdsmen and warriors; the smooth light of the Neolithic Age gave them an air of culture and refinement.

Bild 11

Amreins second field was alpine cartography, represented here by the "Relief der Urschweiz" the first model of central Switzerland that is based on survey. It was surveyed, planned and constructed by the Lucerne general Franz Ludwig Pfyffer von Wyher during nearly thirty years and completed in 1786. This model was a tourist attraction of Lucerne already in the 18th century, as it enabled people for the first time to look at all the high Swiss mountains from a position in the sky above.

Bild 12

The Pfyffer-model was the first of a series of models, another one being the model of the Gotthard-railway of Xaver Imfeld. It shows the entire rail track from Lucerne to Bellinzona in Ticino. It was constructed for the World-fair of 1889 in Paris in order to attract tourists onto the newly opened Gotthard-line with its 15 km tunnel completed eight years earlier in 1881. This model stands for the impressive achievements of Swiss engineers.

Bild 13

Another attraction of the Glacier Garden was the mountain cabin of the Swiss Alpine Club with in the background another diorama of Imfeld, the Gornerglacier. The hut was constructed

in 1896; the exhibit of skis testifies to the beginning of winter tourism. Underneath the glacier-diorama there was the model of a glacier mill, where the visitors could study the functioning of this phenomenon: Melt water from the virtual Gornerglacier was falling down on a rock forming a hole, a giant's kettle. This was the first popular scientific model in Switzerland to illustrate a natural phenomenon.

This exhibit too is typical for the "Tourismusmeile": The entrepreneurs were very innovative, always looking for the newest techniques and media to entertain the visitors.

Bild 14

In 1889 the Bourbakipanorama of Edouard Castre opened its doors; it showed the passing of the French Bourbaki-army to Switzerland in Les Verrières in the Canton of Neuchâtel during the German-French-War of 1870/71. For Switzerland it was the biggest wave of refugees ever: 87'000 men and 12'000 horses. After disarmament the refugees were distributed all over the country from Geneva to St. Gallen. To this day this internment was the biggest humanitarian act by the Swiss state.

Bild 15

Here you see a detail of the panorama, the cart of the Red Cross with blessed and exhausted soldiers of the French army.

Bild 16

Another detail shows local people and Swiss soldiers looking after the blessed with their frozen feet.

The Bourbakipanorama strengthened the image of Switzerland as a country of humanitarianism and peace-keeping activities.

Bild 17

This image was further underpinned by another institution: The war and peace Museum of the Polish railway-tycoon Jan Bloch. After the war of 1870/71 he was convinced that wars could no longer be won. He therefore he inspired and financed extended studies on how to avoid war. One result of his engagement was the war and peace museum. He decided for Lucerne because he knew the town from his holidays and was aware of the fact, that many important people were coming to Lucerne every summer. In addition Switzerland was neutral and not involved in the latent conflicts on the continent.

The museum opened in 1902. Ironically it was housed provisionally in the former festival hall of the national fair for the Swiss gun-shooting-contests. In 1910 it moved to its new and definite building at the "Tourismusmeile".

Bilder 18, 19, 20

The exhibit displayed mainly weapons, models of famous battles, from the days of Alexander the Great to the Boer War, dioramas of battlefields and even a model of a battleship. It also included pictures like this painting by the Dutch painter Jan ten Kaate; it is entitled "War against war!" It displays all the representatives of the European peace movement. The museum was criticised for displaying war rather than peace. It was closed in 1920 because of complete lack of interest.

Bild 21, 22

Last but not least I show you the Alpineum which accomodates dioramas of spectacular views in Switzerland. It was founded in 1886 as a museum complementing the lion monument. It informed the visitors of the Tuileries-riots and the catastrophe suffered by the Swiss Guard. Because it was unsuccessful, the Bernese painter Ernst Hodel could buy it and changed it into a museum for alpine sceneries. Hodel was well known for his panorama-paintings and one after the other he painted the panoramas of Rigi, Pilatus, Gornergrat, Mont Blanc and Mer de Glace in Chamonix and displayed them in the Alpineum after Meyers Diorama closed in 1905. Like the Glacier Garden and the Bourbakipanorama the Alpineum still exists.

Bild 23

A few keywords summarize what I have tried to illustrate. The "Tourismusmeile" allowed tourists to gain in a single day a wide variety of impressions about Switzerland. Even better: They could do so unmolested by bad weather or sweaty mountain-climbing or exhausting journeys in a carriage. And to top it off they could buy a souvenir for the dear relatives at home in one of the many souvenir shops or a picture taken in one of the numerous photoateliers, showing him as courageous climbers in the dramatic scenery of the high mountains.

Bild 24

The most famous picture taken at the "Tourismusmeile": Nietzsche, Paul Ré, Lou Andreas-Salomé

To conclude let me propose the following thesis:

The "Tourismusmeile" was not planned as, but worked like a theme park. It had a history completely different from that of related institutions as for instance the Prater-village "Venice in Vienna" of 1895. Unlike the latter the "Tourismusmeile" was not the result of comprehensive and strategic planning but rather of coincidence and chance. It is unique in the history of alpine tourism and existed only in Lucerne. To the tourists the "Tourismusmeile" was in complete agreement with what they had read in their guide books at home before leaving for their tour.

The "Tourismusmeile" summed up and thus shaped the image of Switzerland to a significant degree. Its substance continues having an effect up to our days. I end with a question: Is it possible, that this image, composed for the English, the French, the Germans, the Russians and Americans, had such a great influence, that Swiss people themselves began to identify with this particular image of Switzerland? I would appreciate your opinion about this question and, if you are aware of similar examples, I would be very interested in learning about them.