

William Rappard and the Swiss diplomacy of hospitality

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The establishment of the League of Nations in Geneva owes much to William Rappard, a Geneva professor, economist and diplomat, who pleaded Geneva's cause before the Paris Peace Conference and President Wilson, then became one of the organisation's senior officials before founding the Graduate Institute of International Studies.¹ His career illustrates how individual Genevans shaped their city's vocation through personal approaches to the powers, drawing on Switzerland's networks and on Geneva's reputation.

The Swiss diplomacy of hospitality has since become professionalised. The Confederation, the canton and the city have developed legal, financial and practical instruments to attract and retain organisations, as the next chapter describes. Yet the original model — an influential Genevan, personal relationships and a reputation to be put forward — remains recognisable in the way the financial centre cultivates its networks and its image.

The headquarters of the World Trade Organization, housed on the lakeshore in a building constructed for the International Labour Office, today bears the name Centre William Rappard.² The name of a Genevan who had argued for the League of Nations thus designates the place where the rules of world trade are negotiated, a symbolic link between the two ages of International Geneva.

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (en), "William Rappard": born on 22 April 1883 in New York to Swiss parents, died on 29 April 1958; member of the Swiss delegation to the peace conference, "highly influential in persuading him [Wilson] to choose Geneva as headquarters of the League of

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Nations”; director of the Mandates Section (1920-1925), member of the Permanent Mandates Commission throughout its eighteen years of existence; co-founder with Paul Mantoux of the Graduate Institute of International Studies (1927); rector of the University of Geneva (1926).

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2. Wikipedia (en), “Centre William Rappard”: built from 1923 to 1926 for the International Labour Office, inaugurated on 6 June 1926; occupied by the GATT from 1977 and by the WTO since 1995; named after William Rappard in 1977. ↩

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