

An American in Cham: the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company

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The first enterprise in Zug with a genuinely global market was founded by foreigners. In 1866, the American brothers Charles and George Ham Page, from Dixon in Illinois, founded the Anglo- Swiss Condensed Milk Company in Cham, together with a Swiss partner and three other associates.¹ Charles Page had come to Switzerland as a commercial vice consul of the United States. The brothers had gained experience with condensed milk during the American Civil War, when it was supplied to the armies. They saw that the dairy farms of central Switzerland could provide the raw material for a European production.² The company started with a share capital of 100,000 francs and sold its condensed milk under the brand "Milchmädchen", the milkmaid.³ Its factory in Cham was the first condensed milk factory in Europe.⁴ The company grew quickly. It employed 20 people in 1867 and more than 400 at its peak in 1885 and 1886. In the 1880s and 1890s, it processed the milk of some 8,000 cows every day.⁵ From the 1870s, it pursued an aggressive strategy of expansion through acquisitions and new factories, in the United Kingdom, in the German Empire and, from 1882, in the United States. Around 1889, it built in Dixon, Illinois, what was then the largest condensed milk factory in the world.⁶

The company's principal competitor was a Swiss enterprise in Vevey. In 1867, the pharmacist Henri Nestlé developed an infant food based on milk. The two companies, each moving into the other's product lines, then competed intensely for decades.⁷ George Page died in 1899.⁸ In 1902, Anglo-Swiss sold its American operations to Borden. On 1 August 1905, the two rivals merged to form the Nestlé and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company, the enterprise that became Nestlé, the largest food company in the world.⁹

The Page brothers left their mark on Cham. In 1876 and 1877, two houses in the American colonial style were built for George Page and his brother David. George Page married Adelheid Schwerzmann, a woman from Zug, in 1875. After his death, she bought the castle of St. Andreas in Cham in 1903.¹⁰ The story of the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company anticipates the later history of Zug in a remarkable way. Foreign entrepreneurs, with foreign capital and experience gained abroad, chose a location in the canton because it offered them something they needed: in this case, the milk of central Swiss dairy farms, water power, labour and a stable legal order. They built an enterprise that served a global market from a small Swiss town. The company expanded internationally through subsidiaries and acquisitions and eventually merged with its main competitor to form one of the largest multinational enterprises in the world. The merged company had its seat in both Cham and Vevey, as Nestlé S.A. still does today.¹¹ Zug thus hosted the headquarters of a global group long before the tax policies of the twentieth century made it a headquarters location by design. The factory in Cham itself continued to operate until 1933.¹²

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (English), "Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company", accessed September 2026: founded in 1866 in Cham by the American brothers George Ham Page and Charles Page from Dixon, Illinois; Finanzmuseum (Swiss Finance Museum), "Nestlé and the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company", finanzmuseum.ch: founded in 1866 in Cham by Charles and George Page, alongside a Swiss partner and three other associates. ↩
2. Wikipedia (English), "Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": Charles Page served as a commercial vice consul; the brothers gained experience with condensed milk during the American Civil War. ↩
3. Wikipedia (English), "Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": initial share capital of 100,000 Swiss francs; brand "Milchmädchen" (Milkmaid). ↩
4. Finanzmuseum, "Nestlé and the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": the first condensed milk factory in Europe. ↩
5. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company in Cham with 20 employees in 1867 and more than 400 in the peak years 1885–1886; processing of milk from 8,000 cows daily in the 1880s and 1890s. ↩
6. Wikipedia (English), "Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": expansion from the 1870s through acquisitions and new facilities in the

United Kingdom, the German Empire and, from 1882, the United States; around 1889 construction in Dixon, Illinois, of the then largest condensed milk factory in the world. ↩

7. Finanzmuseum, "Nestlé and the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": Henri Nestlé created infant milk formula in Vevey in 1867; years of intense competition. ↩
8. Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": death of George Ham Page in 1899. ↩
9. Wikipedia (English), "Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": sale of the American operations to Borden in 1902; merger with Henri Nestlé's business in 1905 forming the Nestlé and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company; Finanzmuseum, "Nestlé and the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company": merger on 1 August 1905 forming Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss; Nestlé the largest food company in the world by 1971. ↩
10. Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": marriage of George Page and Adelheid Schwerzmann in 1875; two American-style colonial houses built in 1876–1877 for George Page and his brother David; purchase of Schloss St. Andreas in Cham by Adelheid Page in 1903. ↩
11. HLS, "Nestlé" (Albert Pfiffner), hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/041776/: the merger of 1905 created the Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Co. with its seat in Cham and Vevey. Nestlé S.A., Articles of Association, Art. 1, nestle.com: "The registered offices of Nestlé are in Cham and Vevey, Switzerland." Chamapedia, "Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company", chamapedia.ch: the general meeting was held in Cham until 1948 while the headquarters were in Vevey. ↩
12. Chamapedia, "Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company", chamapedia.ch: the last condensed milk was produced at the Cham works at the end of October 1933; from 1948 the general meeting took place in Zug, with only the share register office remaining in Cham. Local wiki; no primary source was located. ↩

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