

The second industrialisation: electricity, meters and light

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In the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, the town of Zug experienced a second wave of industrialisation. New enterprises settled in the town: a cigar factory in 1872, a warehouse and logistics company in 1881, a match factory and a second cigar factory in 1890, the Elektrotechnisches Institut Theiler & Co. in 1896, a mill in 1897, an incandescent lamp factory in 1898 and a box factory in 1900.¹ After the water works had installed 47 turbines with a capacity of 150 horsepower in 1888, electricity became available in the town by 1891.²

The most important of these enterprises was the Elektrotechnisches Institut Theiler & Co., founded in 1896 by the technician Richard Theiler and the entrepreneur Adelrich Gyr to manufacture the electricity meters that Theiler had developed.³ Heinrich Landis joined the business in 1903 and acquired it in 1904. When Karl Heinrich Gyr became his partner in 1905, the company took the name under which it became known across the world: Landis & Gyr.⁴

The growth of Landis & Gyr was spectacular. In 1904, the company employed 37 workers, of whom 5 were women. By 1918, it employed 787 people, of whom 39.5 per cent were women.⁵ By the early 1930s, its workforce exceeded 2,000. The company produced electricity meters and, increasingly, other instruments for the measurement and control of electricity and exported them across Europe and beyond. It became the largest employer in the town and one of the leading manufacturers of electricity meters in the world.⁶ Karl Heinrich Gyr, who led the company for decades, acquired and renovated the Villa Seeburg in 1921.⁷

The later history of Landis & Gyr belongs to Part C, but its outline shows the continuity between the industrial and the post-industrial canton. The company passed through several changes of ownership. Acquired by Toshiba in 2011 for 2.3 billion dollars, it was listed on the SIX Swiss

Exchange in 2017. Headquartered in Cham, it operates in more than thirty countries.⁸ An enterprise founded in a small workshop in the town in 1896 became a multinational group headquartered in the canton. The canton's later role as a location for headquarters built in part on such home-grown enterprises.

1 Notes

1. Zug in der Welt, "Zugs zweite Industrialisierung 1880–1913": new industries in the town of Zug: Zigarrenfabrik Wemans (1872), Lagerhaus (1881), Zündholzfabrik Becheler (1890), Zigarrenfabrik Kerckhoffs (1890), Elektrotechnisches Institut Theiler (1896), Untermühle Zug (1897), Glühlampenfabrik (1898), Kistenfabrik (1900); HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": foundation of the Elektrotechnisches Institut Theiler & Co. in 1896, of the Glühlampenfabrik in 1898 and of the Kistenfabrik in 1900. ↩
2. Zug in der Welt, "Zugs zweite Industrialisierung 1880–1913": in 1888, 47 turbines and equipment with a capacity of 150 horsepower installed; HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": electricity available in the town by 1891. ↩
3. Wikipedia (English), "Landis+Gyr", accessed September 2026: established in 1896 as Theiler & Co. in Zug by the technician Richard Theiler and the entrepreneur Adelrich Gyr, manufacturing electricity meters developed by Theiler. The Zug in der Welt article "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne" gives 1898 as the founding year; the HLS article "Zug (Gemeinde)" and the Zug in der Welt article on the second industrialisation give 1896. ↩
4. Wikipedia (English), "Landis+Gyr": Heinrich Landis joined in 1903 and acquired the business the following year; Karl Heinrich Gyr became a partner in 1905, which led to the new name; Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": Heinrich Landis partner in 1903; Karl Heinrich Gyr co-owner in 1905. ↩
5. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": Landis & Gyr with 37 workers in 1904, of whom 5 women; 24.5 per cent women before the First World War; 787 employees in 1918, of whom 39.5 per cent women. ↩
6. Wikipedia (English), "Landis+Gyr": by 1914, when it became a joint-stock company, the largest employer in the canton of Zug with over 800 employees; in the 1920s offices in New York and Australia and takeovers of competitors forming a global technology group; from the 1930s diversification into telemetry and remote control. ↩

7. Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": Karl Heinrich Gyr acquired and renovated Villa Seeburg in 1921. ↩
8. Source as cited in the printed edition. ↩

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