

The Spinnerei an der Lorze

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The largest industrial enterprise of the nineteenth-century canton was the cotton spinning mill on the Lorze at Baar. It was founded in 1854, with Wolfgang Henggeler among its founders, and built between 1853 and 1858 on the eastern edge of the village, along the new road to Sihlbrugg.¹ For a time, it was the largest cotton spinning mill in Switzerland.² In 1876, it was reorganised as a company limited by shares.³

The records of the mill allow a glimpse into the technology and the finances of a large enterprise of the period. The company bought four self-acting mules from the English manufacturer Platt for 23,393.50 francs in 1876 and two ring-spinning machines for 13,172.60 francs in 1879, before installing electric lighting at a cost of 82,000 francs in 1887.⁴ Electric light in a spinning mill in 1887 was an early adoption of a technology that was then barely a decade old in commercial use. The investment in lighting allowed longer shifts and safer work in the dust-laden halls and made Baar one of the first places in the canton to see electric light.

The workforce of the mill tells the social history of industrialisation. In 1879, the mill employed 495 workers, of whom 285, or 57.6 per cent, were women, with girls between 14 and 19 years of age making up a quarter of the workforce. Only 25 workers came from Baar and 24 from other places in the canton, whereas 228 came from other Swiss cantons and 6 from abroad.⁵ The mill thus drew most of its labour from outside the canton, much of it from Protestant regions. The consequences for the confessional structure of Baar, described in Chapter I, were immediate: the number of Protestants rose from 12 in 1850 to 209 in 1860. In 1867 the first Reformed church of the canton was built in Baar.⁶ By 1902, Italians made up nearly one third of the workforce of the mill.⁷ The spinning mill brought to Baar, within a single generation, the confessional and national diversity that the canton had resisted for three centuries.

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The mill transformed Baar from a farming village into an industrial municipality and gave rise to related industries in wood processing, food production, metalworking and power generation.⁸ Its owners built themselves residences that expressed their new status. The Villa Burgweid, completed in 1881 by the architect Dagobert Keiser senior for Heinrich Henggeler-Eiholzer, was described as the most beautiful villa of a factory owner in the canton.⁹

From the late 1920s, the mill entered a prolonged crisis of sales, which led to substantial job losses. It ceased operations in 1993.¹⁰ Its decline coincided with the rise of the new economy of the canton. Like many former industrial sites in Zug, the site of the mill later found new uses. The history of the Spinnerei an der Lorze spans the whole arc of the industrial age in Zug: its rise with the first industrialisation, its peak in the late nineteenth century, its long decline in the twentieth century and its closure at the moment when the canton's economy had shifted decisively towards services and headquarters.

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (German), "Spinnerei an der Lorze", accessed September 2026: founded in 1854 with Wolfgang Henggeler among the co-founders; located on the eastern edge of Baar along the new road to Sihlbrugg; Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": construction of the canton's largest spinning facility from 1853 to 1858. ↩
2. Wikipedia (German), "Spinnerei an der Lorze": at its peak temporarily the largest cotton spinning mill in Switzerland. ↩
3. Zug in der Welt, "Zugs zweite Industrialisierung 1880–1913": Spinnerei Baar reorganised as a company limited by shares (AG) in 1876. ↩
4. Zug in der Welt, "Zugs zweite Industrialisierung 1880–1913": purchase in 1876 of four Platt selfactors for 23,393.50 francs; acquisition in 1879 of two ring-spinning machines for 13,172.60 francs; installation of electric lighting in 1887 for 82,000 francs. ↩
5. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": Spinnerei an der Lorze in 1879 with 495 workers, of whom 285 women (57.6 per cent) and 210 men; one quarter girls aged 14 to 19; origin: 25 from Baar, 24 from other places in the canton, 228 from other Swiss cantons, 6 from abroad. ↩

6. Wikipedia (German), "Spinnerei an der Lorze": growth of the Protestant population of Baar from 12 in 1850 to 209 in 1860 and construction of the canton's first Reformed church in 1867. ↩
7. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": Italians comprised nearly one third of the workforce of the Spinnerei an der Lorze in 1902. ↩
8. Wikipedia (German), "Spinnerei an der Lorze": the mill spawned related industries in wood processing, food production, metalwork and power generation and converted Baar into an industrial municipality. ↩
9. Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": Villa Burgweid completed in 1881 by the architect Dagobert Keiser sen. for Heinrich Henggeler-Eiholzer, described as the most beautiful factory owner's villa in the canton. ↩
10. Wikipedia (German), "Spinnerei an der Lorze": prolonged sales crisis from the late 1920s with substantial job losses; operations ceased in 1993. ↩

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