

Water, cotton and the Henggeler family

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Industry came to Zug by way of its water. The river Lorze, falling steeply from Lake Ägeri through its gorge towards Baar, offered a source of power that the early spinning mills needed. In 1834, the brothers Wolfgang and Alois Henggeler founded the Innere Spinnerei in Unterägeri, the first cotton spinning mill of the canton.¹ The mill in Ägeri began with 58 workers in 1836 and employed 200 by 1843. In the cantonal census of 1850, the canton counted 417 factory workers, of whom 348 worked in Unterägeri.² The upland valley, which for centuries had lived from cattle and dairy, became the first industrial district of the canton.

The Henggeler family built their fortune and their social position on the spinning mills. Wolfgang Henggeler-Schmid built a classicist villa next to the expanded factory in 1846 and another villa in Neuägeri near the spinning mill in 1857.³ The mills of the Ägeri valley were consolidated in 1886 as the Spinnereien Ägeri.⁴ In good years, the company earned annual profits of more than 200,000 francs, as in 1882, 1887, 1889, 1890 and 1893.⁵

The Henggeler mills were the first large enterprises in a canton whose economy had rested on agriculture, small crafts and foreign service. They introduced wage labour on a significant scale, a factory discipline unknown to the peasant economy, and a new class of industrial entrepreneurs whose wealth came from manufacturing. They also introduced a pattern that would recur: the entrepreneurs came from within the canton, but the technology, the raw materials and the markets came from outside. Cotton came from overseas and the machines from England, while the yarn was sold to weavers across Switzerland and beyond. The industrial economy of Zug was, from the start, an open economy.

1 Notes

1. Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": in 1834 Wolfgang and Alois Henggeler founded the Innere Spinnerei in Unterägeri. ↩
2. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm. Frauenarbeit in den Zuger Fabriken von 1840 bis 1950": Spinnerei Ägeri with 58 workers in 1836 and 200 by 1843; cantonal census of 1850 recording 417 factory workers, 348 of them in Unterägeri. ↩
3. Zug in der Welt, "Villen der Wirtschaftskapitäne": villa built by Wolfgang Henggeler-Schmid next to the expanded factory in 1846; further villa in Neuägeri near the spinning mill in 1857. ↩
4. Zug in der Welt, "Zugs zweite Industrialisierung 1880–1913": Spinnereien Ägeri consolidated in 1886 from earlier mills. ↩
5. Zug in der Welt, "Zugs zweite Industrialisierung 1880–1913": Spinnereien Ägeri with annual profits exceeding 200,000 francs in 1882, 1887, 1889–1890 and 1893. ↩

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