

2.20 Switzerland

Libraries in Switzerland¹

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Looking Back in Time

A timeline of Swiss librarianship might include instances such as the evidence of a separate library room in the plan of the Abbey of St. Gall (820), Conrad Gesner's project of a universal bibliography, the 'Bibliotheca Universalis' (1545–1555), Johann Heinrich Hottinger's 'Bibliothecarius quadripartitus' (1664), an instruction to librarians, Philipp Albert Stapfer's project for a national library system (1800), the foundation of the national library association (1897) or the invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners Lee at CERN (ca. 1990).

For a long time, as was the case elsewhere, libraries on Swiss territory were the business of the Church and some wealthy private collectors. Early examples are the library of the Abbey of St. Gall (the monastery was founded in 612), today a UNESCO World Heritage Site, or the Middle High German lyrics collected in the thirteenth century by the Zurich patrician family Manesse, the source for the famous 'Codex Manesse'. In the upheavals of the Reformation, which split Swiss territory into Protestant and Catholic regions, many collections were destroyed or lost, but the Reformation and the invention of print certainly made books more available. School and town libraries, open to the clergy and to educated citizens, were founded in the reformed cities such as Zurich (around 1525), Berne (1528), Lausanne (1537) or Geneva (1559), and the seventeenth century saw a series of libraries founded by citizens. Collections were fed by gifts, often by renowned members of the community. Starting in 1536, the university library of Basel received free copies of the Basel print production on an agreement basis.

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, the Age of Enlightenment bridged the religious denominations by making education a responsibility of the state. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reading societies and commercial lending libraries responded to the rising need for

¹ This chapter focuses on the development from 1980 to the present, with a glimpse into the future. For a more general presentation see: Jauslin, Jean Frédéric & Kellerhals, Andreas (2010). Switzerland: Libraries, Archives and Museums. In: Bates, Marcia J. & Maack, Mary Niles (eds.). *Encyclopedia of library and information sciences*. 3rd ed. Boca Raton FL, CRC Press: 5086–5095.