

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1925)
Heft: 197

Artikel: The Beginning of Madame Tussauds's [to be continued]
Autor: Lätt, A.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687053>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 30.03.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The BEGINNING of MADAME TUSSAUD'S

By Dr. A. LATT.

The destruction of Madame Tussaud's famous collection of waxworks is a fitting time for remembering that the founder was of Swiss origin, and that her "Cabinet de Circ" was a curiosity of Bern before it was transported to Paris and ultimately to London. "*The Romance of Madame Tussaud's*" is the title of a book which the present head of the family, Mr. John Theodore Tussaud, the old lady's great-grandson, published in 1920 (Odham's, Ltd.). The book is well written and well illustrated, and is likely to be a much better monument of the museum we have known than any future imitation or restoration can hope to become.

Madame Tussaud was born at Bern on December 7th, 1760, as the only child of *Joseph and Marie Grossholtz*. Her mother, née *Kurtz*, was the daughter of a Bernese clergyman. Grossholtz was her second husband. Of the first we only know that his name was *Walter* and that he left his widow with seven sons and no money. All these boys were grown up when the widow Walter became Mrs. Grossholtz in 1750. We are told that she still looked pretty on the wedding day, and that many members of the aristocracy were present at the ceremony. The husband was a professional soldier, like so many of his contemporaries. During the Seven Years' War he was aide-de-camp of General Wurms. He must have looked a fit ancestor of a museum of oddities, "covered with wounds, his forehead laid bare to the bone, his lower jaw shot away, but replaced by a silver plate."—When his daughter was born, her mother had for the second time become a widow. Her brother, *Johann Christoph Kurtz*, who latinised his name to *Curtius*, at once took his sister and his little niece under his special protection. The writer of the "*Basler National-Zeitung*" mentions two brothers of *Curtius* and three brothers of Madame Tussauds as soldiers of the Swiss Guards at the court of France. We do not know what authority he quotes from, but "*The Romance of Madame Tussaud's*" knows nothing of any of them. The brothers might have been of the *Walter* family, i.e., half-brothers of *Marie's*.

Uncle *Curtius* was a medical practitioner at Bern. In the pursuit of his anatomical studies he took to modelling in wax the limbs and organs of the human body, and probably as a hobby he executed his first miniature portraits in wax. He seems to have done much better in his new art than in his old profession. Persons of rank sat to have their likenesses taken in wax, so that the little studio soon became a private museum and a curiosity of Bern, which foreign visitors could not pass by. The Prince de Conti, a cousin of King Louis XV. of France, happened to pass through Bern some time in 1762. He made the acquaintance of *Curtius*, and was so pleased with the doctor-artist's skill that he invited him to come to Paris, where he would procure him "as many commissions as he might feel disposed to execute."

The Prince de Conti's offer had not been lightly made as a mere compliment, for when *Curtius*, a few months later, left Bern for Paris, his protector assigned him a handsome suite of apartments at the Hôtel d'Aligre, Rue St. Honoré. Clients were numerous and paid well. In 1766 *Curtius* went in person to Bern to fetch his sister (and niece), who took charge of his household. Some time about 1776 *Curtius*, who, so far, had confined his art to the making of miniature portraits, began to strike out a new line, for which he had served his apprenticeship as a doctor at Bern. He took to the modelling of *life-size portraits of well-known persons*, King Louis XVI, the Duke of Orleans, Voltaire, and Benjamin Franklin, the last two from life. An exhibition of these busts was arranged at the Palais Royal in 1780. One day the king's sister, *Madame Elizabeth de France*, entered the studio and had a look round. She soon fell to talking with the artist's pretty young collaborator, our Madame Tussaud, then a girl of twenty. As a consequence of this chance meeting, *Marie Grossholtz* was offered a post in the suite of the princess, who seems herself to have practised the art of wax modelling. Thus Madame Tussaud went to live at Versailles for the next nine years, whilst her uncle again took larger premises on the Boulevard du Temple. He now added to his "Cabinet de Circ" a new attraction, "*La Caverne des Grands Voleurs*," which, of course, is the beginning of the "Chamber of Horrors."

Soon after the outbreak of the French Revolution, when Versailles was no longer a place of safety for royalties and their servants, *Curtius* called his niece back to Paris. He was mistaken, however, in his hope that the modesty of his character in the middle of a crowded city would be a protection against the perils of the period. Fate had destined him and his niece to play a prominent part even in the very first days of the "Reign of Terror." On Sunday, July 2nd, 1789, a mutiny broke out in Paris, when the news was spread that the king had dismissed the very popular minister of finance, *Necker* (a Genevese, as you know), and that the new Assemblée Constituante

was to be dissolved by force. Troops, mostly foreigners (many Swiss!), were kept in readiness on the outskirts of Paris to defend monarchist rule if need should arise. Meetings were held in the clubs and public places to discuss the situation and to protest against the military measures. Then it was that *Camille Desmoulins* (a Genevese again!) sprang on a table outside the Café Foy near the Palais Royal, and, brandishing a drawn sword and a pistol, shouted his famous "Aux armes, Citoyens!"—a call which was immediately taken up by hundreds.

Someone suggested that the models of *Necker* and the Duke of Orleans, the people's idols, should be obtained from *Curtius'* museum near by, to be carried in front of the demonstration. "You will break them," objected the surprised *Curtius*, when his door was forced open and the busts were simply carried off. He was, however, wise enough to offer no resistance to the rabble, who soon moved away in the direction of the Place Vendôme. Even *Carlyle* considers this little incident as the real beginning of the Revolution, which on the 14th led to the taking of the Bastille. He relates it as follows in Chapter IV of his "*French Revolution*":—

"To arms! Sunday, July 12th, 1789—France, so long shaken and wind-parched, is probably at the right inflammable point. As for poor *Curtius*, who, one grieves to think, might be but imperfectly paid, he cannot make two words about his images. The wax-bust of *Necker*, the wax-bust of Orleans, helpers of France: these, covered with crape, as in funeral procession, or after the manner of suppliants appealing to Heaven, to Earth, and Tartarus itself, a mixed multitude bears off. For a sign! As indeed he, man, with his singular imaginative faculties, can do little or nothing without signs: thus Turks look to their Prophet's Banner; also Osier Mannikins have been burnt, and *Necker's* portrait has erewhile figured, aloft on its perch (a reference to former demonstrations).

In this manner march they, a mixed, continually increasing multitude: armed with axes, staves, and miscellanea; grim, many-sounding through the streets. Be all theatres shut, let all dancing on planked floor, or on the natural greensward, cease! Instead of a Christian Sabbath, and feast of guinguette tabernacles, it shall be a Sorcerer's Sabbath; and Paris, gone rabid, dance—with the Fiend for piper!

However, *Besenal* (a Soleurois, commander of the Swiss guards), with horse and foot, is in the Place Louis Quince. Mortals, promenading homewards, in the fall of the day, saunter by, from *Chaillot* or *Passy*, from flirtation and a little thin wine, with sadder step than usual. Will the Bust-Procession pass the way? Behold it! Behold also Prince Lambesc dash forth on it, with his Royal-Allemands! Shots fall, and sabre-strokes; busts are hewed asunder; and, alas, also head of men. A sabred procession has nothing for it but to explode, along what streets, alleys, Tuileries Avenues it finds; and disappear. One unarmed man lies hewed down: a Garde-Française, by his uniform; bear him (or bear even the report of him) dead and gory to his Barracks; where he has comrades still alive! . . ."

Thus the founder of Madame Tussaud's saw the beginning of the French Revolution, and thus fell two of his most famous busts as the first victims of the "Reign of Terror."

(To be concluded.)

FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

In presenting their report for the year 1924, the directors of the Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company state that the ever-increasing perfection and regularity in the quality of their products, the special care taken in their manufacture and appearance, the closer collaboration between the different departments, and the friendly relations with customers, have resulted in a steady development in the volume of sales as compared with last year, and this in spite of the increasing activity of competitors.

Progress has been particularly satisfactory in the overseas markets, and the company have every confidence that trade will develop still further as normal conditions return.

They have been able to make satisfactory use of the producing capacity of their factories in England, and although the economic position here is still very difficult, Great Britain still offers the best outlet for the company's products. Strenuous efforts are being made to interest more directly new classes of consumers in these products, and while allowing customers the benefit of a reduction in prices, corresponding to the decrease in the cost of certain raw materials, the company have been able to maintain their position without making too heavy sacrifices.

As a result of fierce competition in the United States, the New York subsidiary again shows an appreciable loss on the year's working. The directors express the hope that 1925 will show no further loss, but conditions in the United States seem to be very difficult for the company. The Australian company in Sydney, on the other hand, was able to pay a dividend of 3½% on its ordinary shares, after payment of the preference dividend, and as a result of the good agricultural season in Australia it has been possible to increase the supplies shipped from this source to the company's export markets in the Far East.

After briefly reviewing the company's other subsidiaries, the directors report that, owing to the fluctuations of the exchanges and to a more intensive nationalist policy, they have decided to

form a Belgian company. This will soon commence operations and will have at its disposal a small factory for the manufacture of the company's Infants' Food. They have also taken an interest in the S.A. Belge des Chocolats P.C.K. in Antwerp, and the Belgian Société Nestlé will act as sole agents for the products of this company's factory.

STOCK EXCHANGE PRICES.

BONDS.		Mar. 31	Apr. 6	
Swiss Confederation 3% 1903	...	75.12%	74.50%	
Swiss Confederation 5% 1923	...	99.12%	98.95%	
Federal Railways A—K 3½%	...	79.12%	78.90%	
Canton Basle-Stadt 5½% 1921	...	101.25%	101.62%	
Canton Fribourg 3% 1892...	...	70.00%	71.50%	
SHARES.		Nom.	Mar. 31	Apr. 6
		Frs.	Frs.	Frs.
Swiss Bank Corporation	...	500	638	639
Crédit Suisse	...	500	692	690
Union de Banques Suisses	...	500	538	540
Fabrique Chimique ci-dev. Sandoz	...	1000	3180	3262
Société pour l'Industrie Chimique	...	1000	1907	1930
C. F. Bally S.A.	...	1000	1212	1200
Fabrique de Machines Oerlikon	...	500	680	670
Entreprises Sulzer	...	1000	758	742
S.A. Brown Boveri (new)	...	350	334	335
Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Cond. Mk. Co.	...	200	222	214
Choc. Suisses Peter-Cailler-Kohler	...	100	177	176
Comp. de Navig'n sur le Lac Léman	...	500	545	550

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

Following a decision taken at the beginning of the season, the Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Mercantile Society took place last Saturday, the 4th inst., at the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras.

A distinguished gathering, headed by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, and the old friend of the Society, Mr. Henri Martin, took their seats at about 7.30 p.m., after a reception of the guests a few minutes prior.

It would be too cruel to those members and friends who did not attend to enlarge upon the delights which the elaborate menu, as well as the treasures of the wine cellar, bestowed upon the assembly, not merely because it was not only "un peu de tout," but because no gourmet would have had just cause of complaint.

The Swiss Minister, having given the toasts to the King and Switzerland, the President, Mr. A. C. Stahelin, rose to address the assembly, posing as a novice, and thought to implore the pity of the listeners for the task he was burdened with, at the same time not forgetting to praise everybody except himself. The President said:—

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—In the name of the Swiss Mercantile Society I have the pleasure of extending to you a most hearty welcome, coupled with the wish that this evening may prove very enjoyable.

We are particularly pleased to have in the Chair the official representative of our homeland, Monsieur Paravicini, who has been good enough to come here in spite of pressure of official duties. We very much regret the absence of Mme. Paravicini, who is in Switzerland for reasons of health, and I feel sure that I am speaking for all of you in expressing the wish that Mme. Paravicini may soon be restored to her normal good health.

We are also pleased to see amongst us the representatives of the various Swiss Societies in London; their presence is a further proof of the cordial relations existing between these societies.

We have furthermore here to-night a good many of our Trustees of the Education Department, Contributing Members and Guarantors. It is largely due to the unflinching support of these friends that we can carry on our educational activities, and our sincere thanks are due to them.

Now, before I tell you in a few words about the activities of our society in the past year, I wish to say that these achievements were obtained under the presidency of my friend, Mr. Cornu. It is only on account of the change of our financial year to the calendar year that Mr. Cornu is not in my place to-night. I do not know whether I should feel sorry for him, or whether he should not feel sorry for me; for this is the sort of job on which you start with shaky legs and finish up with knock-knees.

The activities of the Swiss Mercantile Society consist of the Employment Department and the Education Department. The Employment Department is, as most of you know, in charge of our Honorary Member, Mr. J. Pfändler. Mr. Pfändler is probably personally known to most of us, for he stands as much for the Swiss Mercantile Society as the Swiss Mercantile Society stands for Mr. Pfändler. Owing to the general condition of commerce in this country, with the consequent restrictions on immigration, which we can quite understand, this Department naturally suffers most. Mr. Pfändler has been able to effect 625 engagements in the past year, a sure sign of his untiring work. The pleasant feature of this Department is that Mr. Pfändler does not show the strain. In fact, I think I may well apply to him the words of a well-known poster: "He gets Younger every day."