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2013 STEAMBOAT JUBILEES

Mario Gavazzi




'PS Hohentwiel' in the harbour of Romanshorn.

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

In 1913 the European shipbuilding industry delivered some splendid lake ships, which are an interesting and important part of the history of navigation in Switzerland and adjacent countries. In the early spring of 1913 Escher Wyss & Cie. in Zürich finished the construction of 'ps Hohentwiel' for the Bodensee fleet of the "Königlich-Württembergische Staatseisenbahn" whose headquarters were in Friedrichshafen. Some weeks later the shipping company of Lake Luzern ("Dampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft des Vierwaldstättersees") put in service the 'ps Gallia', another Escher Wyss construction. Fortunately both steamers are still working and in good condition giving a good example of the quality of ship production 100 years ago. On Lago Maggiore, that straddles the Swiss/Italian border, there is the 'ms Torino' that was originally built in 1913 as a steamer. Unfortunately the original ship was almost destroyed in World War II but the hull survived and was subsequently rebuilt as a motor ship, keeping the same name. Its owners are now pleased to be celebrating the centennial of the launching of the original vessel.

Another Bodensee steamer that could have participated in the steamboat jubilees of 2013 could have been the 'ps. Schaffhausen', built for the "Untersee & Rhein" company for service between Schaffhausen Kreuzlingen. Unfortunately this vessel, built by Sulzer at Winterthur in 1913 but re-engined in 1955 with a new oil-fired boiler, was scrapped in May 1967 just after the beginning of a campaign to save it. This was the first attempt in Switzerland to save an active historic ship, and it was led by people living alongside the stretch of the Rhein that it served. The attempt failed, but had this action taken place a few years later when the importance

of preserving the shipping heritage of the country was more paramount, there would have been another ship with its centenary this year. But the preservation movement, that has subsequently resulted in many older ships being saved to keep sailing on our lakes started with the 'ps Schaffhausen'. This process continues with the current rebuilding of the 'ps Neuchâtel', built in 1912, a project that we have previously reported on in *Swiss Express*. The legacy of the attempt to preserve the 'ps Schaffhausen' lives on just over the border in Italy with the rehabilitation on Lago Como of the historic paddle steamer the 'ps Patria' of a similar age to her Swiss cousins. Help to restore this ship to regular service (probably next year) has come from Swiss steamboat enthusiasts and after a hiatus of 23-years her first trial runs took place last May 8th. Useful websites for more information on Swiss steam are; www.hohentwiel.com, www.lakelucerne.ch, www.dampfschiff.ch, www.prodampfer.ch, www.trivapor.ch whilst information on the 'ps Patria' can be found on facebook 'piroscafo patria'. 

After more than 23 years again in service: 'ps Patria' on Lake Como – a wonderful salvation!

Photo: Jacopo Memeo

