

A Brief History of Thalwil

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Part of a Tetrtych of the view from Thalwil by local artist Hui Ling Mavroidis.

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Preface

I moved to Thalwil with my wife and one of our daughters from the United States in 2013. It was the first time for any of us living outside of our birth country. There were the expected adjustments for a new culture, but we quickly felt at home. We are now Swiss citizens and Thalwil is and always will be our official *Heimatort*, even if we are unfortunate enough to leave.

Switzerland has a reputation for being unfriendly to expats. Maybe because we considered ourselves to be immigrants, not expats, or maybe Thalwil is special, we have not found the reputation to be deserved. And I cannot say enough about how helpful and friendly the staff of the Gemeindehaus (city hall) have been.

But for those of us who did not know much German when we arrived but wanted to learn more about our chosen town, there was little accessible information. I am fascinated by history but there was almost nothing in English outside of bits on Wikipedia. So I bought the two available books^{1 2} on the history of Thalwil and tried to read them using Google Translate. But translation was not enough because the books were obviously written for people with a basic understanding of Swiss history for context. Both because I really wanted to and to fulfill the requirements for Swiss citizenship, I did acquire the context needed.

Even though Thalwil is now providing more services for English speakers, I hope what follows is helpful to others who want to better understand Thalwil but do not have the language skills and/or historical background to consume other sources. I have included references, but any errors are mine.

October 2025

Dedicated to Lisa, my wife and soulmate, and to Thalwil, my Heimatort.

Introduction

When you look around Thalwil and Gattikon today, you see buildings, parks, a forest, ponds, streams, streets, railroads and docks. Do you wonder why they are where they are or how old they are? Do you wonder what it would have been like to live here 100 years ago, 500 years ago, 2,500 years ago? What would the area have looked like? What would you have been doing if you lived here?

To briefly answer this last question: Before the early 1800's you would have probably have been a peasant working on a small farm, with any slopes covered in wine grape vines. Then until the mid-1900's you would have probably been a textile industry worker for one of the largest such companies in the world. And more recently, you are likely living here but commuting to work elsewhere, taking advantage of the excellent transportation connections that are the legacy of the industrial era. This is how it happened...

¹ Thalwil - Ein Dorfbild von Heini Gut, 1986

² Chronik der Gemeinde Thalwil by Hans Jakob Zwicky, 1995

Geographical Influences

Thalwil's geography greatly influenced its history, so what follows is not just a list of readily-available unrelated dry facts, as will hopefully be explained.

Today's political municipality (Gemeinde) of Thalwil is situated around the northern three-quarter mark of the western shore of Lake Zürich (Zürisee), eastward to the Sihl river. The Sihl flows north from Sihlsee near Einsiedeln in Canton Schwyz and joins the Limmat river near the main train station in Zürich. The Limmat flows from Lake Zürich into the Aare and to the Rhine.



Sihl River in Gattikon near the three-way border with Oberrieden and Horgen



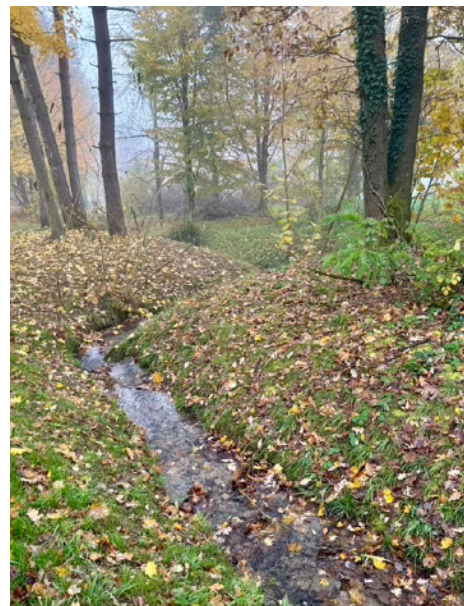
Between the eastern and western borders is the Zimmerberg Ridge, separating the municipality both politically and geographically. On the western slope of the ridge down to the Sihl is the village of Gattikon, which is a community with its own postal code, but is within the municipality of Thalwil. On the eastern slope down to the lakeshore is today's town of Thalwil.



Lake Zürich is a glacial lake carved out by the last ice age ending about 10,000 years ago. The Rhein glacier extended from the alps to approximately today's Rhein river and included Lake Constance (Bodensee). The lake surface elevation and Thalwil's lowest elevation is 406 meters. The highest point in Thalwil is 486 meters on the Zimmerberg ridge. The lake, river and ridge all run roughly north/south.

There were also many streams flowing down the slopes to the lake or the Sihl. These streams still flow but most are no longer visible because they have been redirected and covered. Even when not visible, there are reminders of the streams in the street names, such as Vogelbachweg.

The streams provided irrigation and drinking water, and some such as Dorfbach/Mühlebach and Scheidbach/Sagenbachli were power sources for mills. Scheidbach was also the border with Oberrieden just as Marbach was the border with Rüschtikon. Part of Scheidbach is not covered.



Right: Bönibach was partially revitalized in 2022. The stream was also variously known as Bürgerbach, Dickenbach and Armenbach.

The area was densely wooded at the time the area was being settled. This made it difficult to travel and transport goods by land. North/South transportation by boat on the lake was generally faster and safer and the lake provided fish, so early settlements are along the lakeshore.

Because Lake Zürich is a glacial lake, the land slopes steeply toward the lake and there is little flat land along the lakeshore. So there were only small settlements along the lakeshore with farms well above. In Thalwil there is less flat lakeshore land than Horgen and Wädenswil, for example. Most lakeside communities were naturally divided in two parts, the lower village (Unterdorf or Niederdorf in German) near the lake and the upper village (Oberdorf) above. Thalwil is no exception. Unlike towns that were larger or strategic, Thalwil's Oberdorf was never fortified.

Where the slopes are too steep to easily plow, it is better to grow fruit, especially grapes for wine. However, wine produced from grapes grown on east-facing slopes is generally inferior to that from west-facing slopes. So while there once were extensive vineyards on both sides of the lake, today there are very few on the western lakeside in contrast to the eastern side. Thalwil street and place names such as "In Reben" (in vineyards) and "Trotte" (wine press) echo memories of the earlier time.

Today, about 24% of the land in Thalwil is still forested and 18% is farmland. The remaining forest is mostly along the Zimmerberg ridge. The farms are in southern Thalwil and in Gattikon, below the forest.

Fun fact: The western side of the lake is known locally as the Silver Coast, and the eastern side as the Gold Coast. The western side is also derogatorily known as the Sniffle Coast (Pfnüselküste) due to less afternoon sun. Not long ago, Gold Coast residents were generally richer and the property was more expensive. This is no longer true, at least for property prices.

Prehistory

The earliest settlements around Lake Zürich have been dated as far back as 7000 years ago, just a few thousand years after the last Ice Age. These early settlements were Neolithic (New Stone Age). Various neolithic cultures are identified through the styles of pottery, tools and houses they left behind. The most notable of these Neolithic cultures is the Horgen culture, found throughout this part of Europe but named after the site of initial finds in Horgen at Scheller on the lakeshore. In fact, Ötzi (The Iceman) carried a copper axe and stone tools of the Horgen culture.

The prehistoric settlements were pile dwellings, houses built on pilings in the lake. Some of pilings are still visible, protected from decay by the deep water. While no such settlements have been found directly off the Thalwil lakeshore, they have been found as close as Oberrieden-Riet. Some of these settlements were occupied as recently as 2500 years ago.



Around 2500 years ago, Gauls moved into much of today's Switzerland. One of those Celtic-speaking groups were the Heluētī (Helvetii in Latin). The Helvetii occupied the area of today's canton of Bern through Winterthur, including the area around Lake Zürich. They buried their dead in mounds such as those in Rüslikon at Feldimooos-Weissberg³. The Latin name for the Swiss Confederacy is *Republica Helvetiorum* (Helvetic Republic) and Switzerland's Neo-Latin name is *Confœderatio Helvetica* (Helvetic Confederation), abbreviated **CH**. Helvetia is the allegorical national personification. She appears on coins, stamps and statues.



One interesting way to visualize how the area developed is to use the Zürich in 4D app from the City of Zürich. Although it only includes the area within today's city limits, it includes interactive views from the late neolithic circa 3000 BCE, Roman times circa 200, Middle Ages circa 1500, and later. In the view of 3000 BCE, note the pile dwellings on the lake shore just to the west of the Limmat where Sechseläutenplatz is today. The remains of this neolithic settlement were discovered during construction of the opera house parking garage in 2010⁴. The finds are on exhibit in the parking garage.

Zürich city's Archeological Window web page has a collection of more sites you can visit. The page is like a decentralized city museum for sites from the neolithic to the late middle ages. Some sites are accessible any time. For access to some other sites, one must borrow a key from the Zürich Stadthaus in exchange for depositing your passport.

The Landesmuseum (Swiss National Museum) across from the Zürich Hauptbahnhof (main train station) also contains exhibits from all time periods. And of course, there is the Thalwil Ortsmuseum in Pfistergut at the Trotte bus stop. The latter focuses on the artwork of Johann Jacob Aschmann (1747-1809) and on farm life and the industrialization of Thalwil.

³ Thalwil - Ein Dorfbild von Heini Gut, 1986, page 24

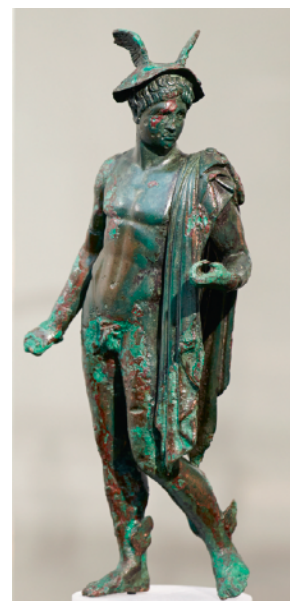
⁴ Steinzeit im Parkhaus: Moderne Archäologie und das unsichtbare Welterbe der Pfahlbauten

Emperors, Kings, Dukes and Counts

Roman Occupation

The Helvetii were conquered by Julius Cæsar in 58 BCE and their area later included in the Roman province of Germania Superior. About 15 BCE at the Celtic settlement of Turīcon, the Roman town of Turicum (Zürich) was founded as a customs station and tax collecting point for goods moving between Roman Italy and northerly areas along the Rhein river. The Romans abandoned Turicum around 405.

The Romans definitely cultivated wine grapes on the east side of Lake Zürich, but perhaps not the less sunny west side. However, there is circumstantial evidence of Roman occupation in Thalwil. About 1860 a 22cm high bronze statuette of Mercury from the first century was discovered in Thalwil while laying a gas pipeline. The details of the find were not recorded and no other evidence of a villa have been found. “Der Merkur von Thalwil” (*right*) is on display in the Swiss National Museum in Zürich.



For those interested in the Roman occupation, there are numerous wonderful sites throughout Switzerland, including an entire town (Augusta Raurica near Basel), the capital of the Roman province and a major Helvetic town (Aventicum near Avenches in Vaud), and a fortress of the Roman Legion (Vindonissa - Windisch in Aargau). The remains of a Roman bathhouse are visible anytime in Thermengasse in Zürich, near St. Peter's. Near Pfäffikon ZH are the remains of the Roman fort of Irgenhausen Castrum. Archaeologists estimate that there were around 120 Roman estates in the Canton of Zurich alone.

Early Middle Ages

Romans in the region were displaced by the Alemanni, a confederation of Germanic tribes. The dialect they spoke was Alemannic, the dialect family that includes Swiss German. The Kingdom of Alemannia later became part of the Carolingian Empire of Charlemagne. In 915 the kingdom became the Duchy of Swabia within the Holy Roman Empire. Schwäbisch is also an Alemannic dialect still commonly spoken in southeastern Germany.

It is during this time that the first records of Thalwil and its parts have been found, indicating the area had settlements worth recording. The oldest mention is from 915 and is actually that of Ludretikon, now a part of Thalwil. Ludretikon seems to derive originally from “Ludo’s farm”. Thalwil itself is first mentioned in 1030 as *Talwile villam* (Thalwil village), derived from *Tellewilare* (Tello’s farm). Gattikon (which was part of Ludretikon) was first mentioned in 1134 and derives from “Gatting’s farm”.

Yet More Place Name Origins

Place names ending in Alemannic -ikon and -wil are very common in the area. The endings “-ikon”, “-iken” and “-ingen” mean “the place of the people of ...”. The ending “-wil” is Alemannic dialect for German “-weil” from Weiler, meaning settlement or farmstead, and is derived from Latin “villa”. A “-wil” is smaller than a *Dorf* (village). “-hof” means farm.

The “gau” ending of Thurgau and Aargau means “area” or “region”. However, “au” as a name, prefix or suffix means wetland, marsh, river island, or cultivated bank of a river or stream. So Aubrigstrasse in Thalwil is “marsh bridge street”. Moos means swamp or moor, so Feldmoosstrasse was named after the swampy field that remained after the Feldweiher pond was filled in.

Other common place names derive from clearing forests for agriculture and settlements. *Rüti* means a cleared area, so the famous *Rütli* just means a small cleared area. There is a *Rüti* in Thalwil near Etlizberg. *Schwand* (as in Schwandelstrasse) means an area cleared using the Schwenden method of killing trees by stripping bark. *Loo* is another word for *Wald*, meaning woods or forest. Tischenloo (Mathis' woods) is an ancient lakeside settlement on the border between Thalwil and Oberrieden.

Büel and *Rain* both mean hillside slope, giving Thalwil's Öggisbüel (barren slope), Isisbüel (slope of the biting north wind), Rainstrasse, Kirchrain, and Bönirain (the forested slope above Böni). *Böni* means "stage", so is the high flat area below the slope. *Egg* is Swiss-German for *Ecke*, meaning "corner" or "edge", but also "ridge" as in Tällegg near Im Ebnet. *Ebnet* means a farm or area that is "even" or "level", notable because so much of the land is not.

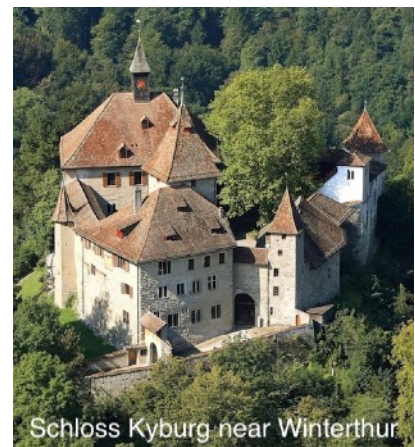
A great source for the origin of place names is <https://ortsnamen.ch/de/> (in German). For example, for "Mettli" the translation says: "The secondary place name, in its earliest attestations, shows the noun *Mettle(n)* (Swiss German), ... meaning a small, cultivated piece of land, usually shaded, damp, and not very fertile, surrounded by forest on two or three sides ... Since the 18th century, the place name has been recorded in the diminutive form *Mettli*."

The Holy Roman Empire

This part is mostly just background for the more relevant history that follows.

In 853, Charlemagne's grandson King Lothar (Louis the German) founded Fraumünster Abbey in Zürich for his daughter. In 952, Holy Roman Emperor Otto I personally granted ownership of Ludreitikon to Fraumünster Abbey while visiting Zürich, referred to then as a "village". In 1045, Holy Roman Emperor Henry III granted the right to hold markets, collect tolls, and mint coins to the abbey, effectively making the abbess the ruler of Zürich. At this time Zürich is just the town. Lands outside of the town including Thalwil are not under the city's control, although the abbey itself did own other land.

In 1098, the Duchy of Swabia became the Duchy of Zähringen, controlling much of the area from Zürich to Lake Constance and including the Fraumünster and Grossmünster, and thus Zürich. Within the duchy between Zürich and Winterthur was County of Kyburg. In 1218 the Zähringen family died out. The duchy was divided and the city of Zürich was granted the status of Imperial Free City (*Reichsunmittelbarkeit*) by Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV. The Counts of Kyburg greatly expanded their area thereafter, but the Kyburgs themselves died out in 1264 and their lands were claimed by Rudolph of Hapsburg, the first Holy Roman Emperor from the Hapsburg family.



High Middle Ages - Hapsburgs

The Hapsburgs⁵ were a noble family from today's Canton Aargau. Their power grew until at one point the Hapsburg family ruled much of Europe and all of Spanish America. Their power ended with the end of Austria-Hungary Empire in 1918 at the end of World War 1. Although the family came from Aargau, they were never Swiss. In fact, much of the Swiss Confederation's history is framed as a struggle for independence from the Hapsburgs.

However, the Hapsburgs do relate directly to Thalwil's history. By 1030, the Hapsburg family owned Thalwil and Muri Abbey founded by the Hapsburgs eventually owned twelve farms in Thalwil. Wettingen Abbey near Baden also owned three Thalwil farms. St. Martin's church (now the Swiss Reformed church) at Platte was founded by Wettingen Abbey in 1159. This is the oldest church on the east side of Lake Zürich.



Late Middle Ages

Once Zürich became a free city with full market rights, its power grew greatly. The Fraumünster Abbey had the power, but employed citizens to control trade. The trade groups became guilds and the guilds became powerful. In 1336, Rudolf Brun led guilds to neutralize the power of the aristocracy, and the guilds started to exert control over the surrounding area.

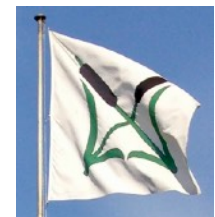
Zürich purchased the rights to nearby settlements starting with Wädenswil in 1342, Zollikon in 1358, and Thalwil in 1386. Theoretically, such rights were pawned by aristocrats in need of money, which they always seemed to be. The Thalwil *Vogtei* (shire/bailiwick) had been pawned to Zürich from 1304 and 1309 as well as a second time for two years around 1370. The Horgen *Vogtei* was conquered by Zürich in 1339, but returned to its owners in 1399, then reacquired in 1406. In 1436, the Horgen *Vogtei* was given *Obervogtei* status over the Thalwil *Vogtei* and Adliswil. Much later, the Horgen *Obervogtei* became today's Horgen *Bezirk* (district).

In 1440 and again in 1443, Thalwil was overrun and plundered during the First Zürich War by the forces of the Old Swiss Confederacy. The second time, St. Martin's church was burned. Zürich had been expelled from the confederacy while competing with the other members for the lands of the Count of Toggenburg whose line had died out. Zürich had allied itself with the Hapsburgs. Zürich was readmitted in 1450 after dissolving its alliance. The Hapsburgs gained the disputed lands.

In 1483, Muri Abbey created the Bannegg-Waldung, the oldest forest corporation in Canton Zürich. The 12 Muri farms in Thalwil owned the corporation. Today, the corporation is owned by 16 members and the Thalwil Gemeinde. Over 500 years later, the corporation still works the forest along the Zimmerberg Ridge, including the popular forest area above Böni.

Thalwil Coat of Arms

In addition to a name, every town in Switzerland has a Coat of Arms (Wappen) that appears on flags, signs, and documents. The Swiss national, canton and local flags are all square. The Thalwil Coat of Arms is two crossed cattail reeds. It is essentially unchanged from the first known depiction in 1490. The one on the left is from 1530.



⁵ [History of the Germans podcast season 11](#) starting with episode 203

Zwingli to 1798

Swiss Reformation

Ulrich Zwingli started the Swiss Reformation in Zürich in 1519. The monasteries were closed, including Fraumünster Abbey in 1524. The reformation extended to all of Zürich's holdings, including Thalwil. So Thalwil became Protestant. Despite this, Muri Abbey continued to own land and rights in Thalwil until the abbey was dissolved in 1835.

The reformation did have one major effect on Thalwil. Einsiedeln Abbey in the canton of Schwyz was an important stop on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain or to Rome; and Einsiedeln became a pilgrimage site in its own right. The pilgrimage trail (Pilgerweg) led down the east side of Lake Zürich past Thalwil. Those not wealthy enough to afford travel by boat along the lake, followed the trail through Ludretikon and Thalwil, from the north mostly along today's Alte Landstrasse, Pilgerweg, Florastrasse, Kirchbodenstrasse and then back to Alte Landstrasse in the south. Pilgrims no longer passed through the Zürich area after the reformation. This caused hardship for the residents of Thalwil and neighboring communities since they could no longer make money from the pilgrims, for example by selling food and wine to them.



Zwingli tried to extend the reformation to the entire Old Swiss Confederation. The Catholic cantons, backed by the Hapsburgs, resisted. The result was the two Kappel Wars, taking place not far southwest of Thalwil at Kappel am Albis. The end of the first "war" was negotiated before fighting started while the opposing soldiers peacefully ate and drank together.

Left: *Kappeler Milchsuppe*, the shared meal

The second Kappel war resulted in a victory for the Catholic cantons and the death of Zwingli and 11 men from Thalwil. Thalwil was again overrun and plundered in 1531 until the forces of Zürich returned. One of the signers of the peace treaty was Klaus Landholt of Thalwil. The Old Swiss Confederation remained religiously divided.

The Thirty Years War

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) did not directly impact Thalwil, but it did greatly impact the Old Swiss Confederation. The war was largely between the Protestant and Catholic powers, with the Catholic powers being largely the Hapsburgs. The war was mostly fought within the Holy Roman Empire and the emperors from 1438 to 1918 were Hapsburgs. Because going to war required unanimous consent of the members (cantons) of the Old Swiss Confederation and the cantons were religiously divided and so could not agree which side to support, Switzerland remained neutral even though it was still nominally part of the Holy Roman Empire at the start of the war.

By remaining neutral, Switzerland escaped the Thirty Years War's great devastation and profited by trading with both sides at inflated prices. The Treaty of Westphalia ended the war, but it also established Switzerland's sovereignty and neutrality.

The end of war profiteering caused economic depression in Switzerland, resulting in unrest and the Swiss Peasant War of 1653. But in the end, the cantonal lords crushed the rebellions and maintained control. Many Swiss peasants migrated to Germany where they were needed to reoccupy farms depopulated by the war and associated diseases.

Economy

In general, those outside of the power centers were kept poor and forced to labor to enrich the lords and abbeys. In Zürich's case, the lords were the guild leaders. During the period from 1336 to 1798, the guilds of Zürich exerted increasing control over the economic activities of Zürich's holdings. The residents of Thalwil and other communities were prevented from developing independent economic activities. The guilds licensed specific buildings where specialized crafts such as milling, butchering, baking, tanning, smithing and shoemaking were allowed to take place, and only to meet the immediate needs of a specified area, such as Thalwil.



Near the lake in Ludretikon and Thalwil Unterdorf to Tischenloo the primary activities were fishing, transportation of goods and people, and wine production from the vineyards on the slopes above. In Thalwil Oberdorf, Gattikon, and Langnau the primary activities were farming and woodcutting.

Left: *Tischenloo am Zurichsee* by Johann Jakob Aschmann

By the 1700s, the two abbeys directly owned about eleven percent of Thalwil, collecting both tithes and rents from those properties as well as income from the Bannegg forest corporation. Because the church provided all social services including schooling, tithes were collected from all residents, usually in form of goods since cash was scarce.

Tithes and rents were collected at the Muri *Amtshaus* on the lake at today's ZSG dock and stored in barns there specifically for tithe goods. Wettingen Abbey's tithe storage and *Trotte* (wine press) was the *Zehntenhof* where Zehntenstrasse meets the lakeshore. *Zehnten* literally means "tenth" in German, but in this case it means "tithe" since tithes were generally one tenth of production. These lakeside locations were chosen for easy transport of tithe goods. The location and use of today's ZSG dock has a history going back to 1476.

From the *Amtshaus*, the Thalwil *Ammann* (administrator) controlled all of the Muri fiefdoms in Thalwil, Oberrieden, Langnau and Meilen. The duties included collecting and distributing tithes and rents, as well as ensuring the collected grape harvest was pressed before it rotted. The Muri *Ammann* position was held by a member of the Kölliker family for almost 200 years until 1763.

Education

Before the French invasion of 1798, education was the responsibility of the priest/pastor of St. Martin's church. However, by the early 1600s if not earlier, teaching was delegated to a paid schoolmaster, who often also had to serve as the church's cantor and/or sexton. The schoolmaster had to be able to read and write and had mastered the multiplication tables. But most importantly, the schoolmaster had to be someone whom the priest/paster trusted to instill good morals and discipline in the students. From 1651 to 1790, the schoolmasters were all succeeding generations of the same Frymann family.

The first known classroom was in the *Gesellenhaus*, built in 1577 across from the church. That building replaced one from the early 1500's, but records about the use of the earlier building as a school or of any other school locations were lost in the fire of 1749. The *Gesellenhaus* housed the only school for all of Thalwil and Gattikon until 1770, when a branch Winter School was started in a farmhouse in Ludretikon due to the increasing population. Such branch schools were prohibited at the time, but no one complained so it remained in operation until 1798.

Initially, there was only Winter School, running from St. Martin's Day (11 November) to Candlemas (2 February), later gradually extended to Easter. Children were expected to work on their parents farms the rest of the year. Saturday was a school day for religious instruction. Summer School was added in the early 1600's, two days per week. In 1688, voluntary Night School was added, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings during Winter School and very early on Sunday during Summer School. Night School was the forerunner of today's secondary school. By 1760, Night School was three evenings per week.

In Thalwil, obligatory school costs were covered by tithes. The schoolmaster was paid to teach voluntary Night School by the parents. In some communities, parents paid for all school costs.

From the Reformation until 1798, the foundation of education in the protestant areas was the Bible. Schooling was initially focused on the ability to read the Bible and other printed text, such as prayers and sermons. The other focus was rote memorization of songs, psalms and prayers, as well as the answers to The Question Book (catechism). Examinations were held once per year until the student passed the examination required for Confirmation.

According to the Zürich cantonal rules of 1637, all children from age six to twelve had to attend school. But parents often sent their children to school as young as three or four so they could graduate sooner and be able to work full time. Students were grouped by achievement, not age.

Learning to write and do arithmetic was only for capable students whose parents felt they would be useful skills. Initially such students were mostly boys because many parents felt it they were unnecessary skills for girls. Attitudes changed over time and by 1772, approximately 70% of all graduating students could write. In 1778, compulsory school was extended until age 16. But even so, in 1799 schoolmaster Rudolf Kölliker reported the overall boy/girl ratio as 5:2.

Thalwil Watches (not the clock kind)

The Thalwil municipality was divided into *watches* (hamlets): the Oberwacht, the Unterwacht, Ludretikon (including Gattikon and Aegertli), and Langnau. The watches were responsible for raising alarms for and putting out fires, for civil defense, keeping order in the streets, the schoolmaster's salary and keeping a breeding bull.⁶ The Säckelmeister (treasurer) of each watch was an important position.

Langnau wanted to have its own church parish (Kirchgemeinde) and to separate from Thalwil. Separation was requested in 1708 and finally granted by the lords of Zürich in 1713. Gattikon remained with Ludretikon. In 1855, the watches were dissolved and merged, although Gattikon remained as a separate village within Gemeinde Thalwil. Gattikon has a permanent seat in today's Thalwil town council (Gemeinderat).

Similarly, the Horgen municipality had been divided into four watches. In 1773, the watch of Oberrieden separated and became a separate Gemeinde on the southern border of Thalwil. There have been no further changes to the boundaries of the communities within the district of Horgen.

So today, the Thalwil municipality is bordered by Rüschtikon, Langnau and Oberrieden, with a very short border with Horgen across the Sihl river. Officially, there is also a border through Lake Zürich between Thalwil and Erlenbach on the other lakeside.

⁶ Chronik der Gemeinde Thalwil by Hans Jakob Zwicky, 1995, page 25

Older Landmarks

Churches

The previously mentioned church building at Platte existed from 1159 until 1845, although it had been renovated after it was burned in 1443, and rerenovated and enlarged in 1578, 1611, 1656 and 1748. The replacement church at the same location stood from 1847 until it burned down in 1943. The rebuilt church opened in 1946 with the old walls and a new tower.



Left: 1830



Middle: 1928



Right: 1943

The painting from 1830 by Caspar Staub shows the old cemetery (Friedhof) in the foreground next to the church. The cemetery was expanded 1833 to include the neighboring vineyards where Öggisbüel school and playground are today. The cemetery was moved to its current location in 1897.

From the Reformation until 1864, no Roman Catholic services were held in Thalwil. The need for services came with new factory laborers. Due to the distance to and size of the church of St. Mary of Langnau-Gattikon, the Roman Catholic church of Saints Felix and Regula (the patron saints of Zürich) was built in 1898 (*right*). The tower was added in 1924 with bells from a church in Dietikon.



Muri Amtshaus and Wettingen Zehntenhof

The previously mentioned Muri Amtshaus stood from 1476 until 1899. One of the buildings associated with the Amtshaus became a post office in 1853. The dock associated with the Amtshaus was used by the steamships transporting mail between the lake communities. After the Post Office was moved nearer the train station, the building was named *Alte Post*. The last of the buildings associated with the Amtshaus were demolished in 1949 when the current ZSG dock (Schiffstation) was built.



Left: ZSG dock at the former Amtshaus yard



Right: Zehntenhof at Seestrasse 83

The previously-mentioned *Zehntentrotte* was torn down in 1840 during the construction of Seestrasse. Seestrasse was built along the lake through the Wettingen *Zehntenhof* and the buildings near the Muri Amtshaus. The current house called Zehntenhof was built in 1895.

Inns

At one time, *tavern rights* (Tavernenrechte) to serve food and accommodate guests in Thalwil were granted by Zürich only to the **Adler** (Eagle) at Platte in the Oberdorf across from the church, and to the Ludretikon **Schützenhaus** (shooting house) on the lakeshore.

Schützenhaus

The Ludretikon Schützenhaus was built in 1589. The shooting range was closed in 1833 and in 1836 the inn and hall were renamed to **Hotel zur Krone**. The Krone closed in 1952 and the building was replaced by the Hotel **Alexander am See** in 1958. That building in turn was replaced and reopened as the Hotel **Alex Lake Zürich** in 2019.

Since shooting practice was required for civil defense, a new shooting range, drinking hall, and inn was built in the Oberdorf in 1839/1840, directly across from today's Chilbiplaz. The inn was named **Zum Schützenhaus** and is now a residence. Today, the shooting hall building (*right*) is used for community events such as the annual Büchermarkt.

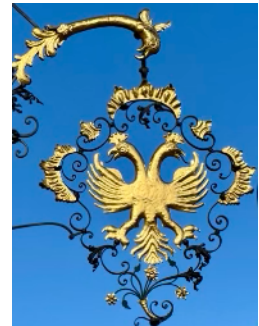


Adler



The Adler is first mentioned in 1632. That building was demolished in 1740 and the new inn (Gasthaus) was in operation by 1741. The dancehall was added on the north side in 1871.

In 1969, a planned demolition was prevented by community vote. The inn and the dancehall were closed in 1970 and renovated in 1973 as apartments. The inn building with the former dancehall still stands today with its golden eagle sign from the mid-1800s.



Gesellenhaus

Nearby the Adler at Platte at today's Dorfstrasse 10 was a building from the early 1500s. It had limited tavern rights, allowing stays of at most one night. The building was replaced in 1577 by the then-new *Gemeindehaus* (town hall), **Gesellenhaus** (society hall), Oberdorf school, and the butcher licensed for Thalwil, Lantau and Oberrieden. That building was in turn replaced in 1736.



The use of the Gesellenhaus as an inn caused a heated dispute with the Adler. In 1749 during the dispute, it happened to burn down, destroying the town archives and other records. In 1751 the building was replaced and the lawsuit over tavern rights was settled by agreement permitting the Gesellenhaus to serve food to limited people on specific occasions and no overnight stays. In 1820 after more years of dispute, the Adler sold the right to serve food to anyone to the Gesellenhaus, while the Adler retained the exclusive lodging rights.



In 1824 the Gesellenhaus building was torn down and replaced by the current building. But after 1857 the building was no longer used as a society hall and butcher due to the growing school requirements, so community events took place at the Adler and the Krone. Use of the building as the Gemeindehaus ended in 1898 when then mayor (Gemeindepräsident) Julius Schwarzenbach built and donated a new Gemeindehaus. It was not until 1924 that the building was no longer used as a school. Today the building houses the municipal planning and construction permit offices.

The loss of the archives and other records in the fire of 1749 is the reason why Thalwil's history prior to that date is known only through records kept elsewhere.

Mills

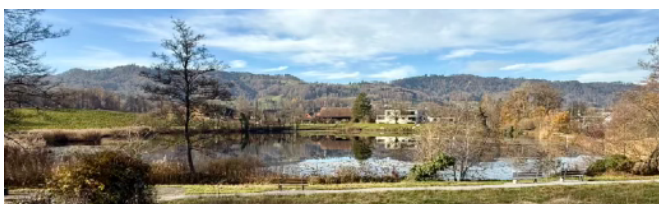
Like tavern rights, grist mill rights (Mühlrechte) were at one time granted to only two operations, one in Gattikon and the other on Isisbüel in the Thalwil Unterdorf. The milling rights included rights to the water needed to power the mills. Historical records exist because the operations were taxed; and like the tavern rights, disputes over milling rights had to be settled by the Zürich court.

Gattikon

There are records of the mill in Gattikon from 1460. It was owned by the Schwarzenbach family until 1780. There was an upper gristmill and a lower sawmill powered by a waterwheel from the Krebsbach stream. Water was stored in and flowed from the small Sternenweiher (star pond) directly above the mill, and it from the larger Gattikerweiher.



In 1780, the Gattikon mills were taken over by Hans Heinrich Schmid-Leemann (1727-1792) from Öggisbüel. Upon the death of his father in 1792, Hans Jakob Schmid-Höhn (1769-1839) took over the mills. In 1800, he created the Waldweiher (forest pond) to increase the mill's water power. In 1815, he added a cotton spinning mill, described below. In 1830, he enlarged the Waldweiher yet again.



Above: Gattikerweiher

The grist and saw mills were converted to a metal goods factory in 1918. The north side burned down in 1928. The Sternenweiher was filled in in 1936. In 1939, the site became an electroplating factory. The former mill buildings at Mühleweg #10 and 12 are now residences.

Unterdorf Mill on Isisbüel

The Unterdorf mill appears in the Zürich tax records in 1357. In 1623, the mill was rebuilt with a sawmill added above the gristmill. The sawmill was rebuilt in 1861 with a new waterwheel. The gristmill ceased operation in 1867, apparently shifting operation to the Gattikon mill perhaps due to marriage between the families of the two mill owners. The sawmill ceased operation in 1955. For over 300 years the Unterdorf mill was owned by members of the Kölliker family.



The Unterdorf mill was powered by the stream called variously Dorfbach and Mühlebach, flowing approximately along the part of Dorfstrasse now called Mühlebachstrasse. There was a small water storage pond in Lingg just above the mill in today's Thalwil Gemeinde campus near the Blummenhof and Villa Sonnegg. The larger Feldweiher near today's Feldmoosstrasse drained into the small pond. In the first half of the 1900's, both were filled in. Mühlebach was covered in 1921.



Unterdorf Mill Granary and Sawmill about 1840

Lithograph by Chapuy/Cuvillier

The Unterdorf sawmill was renovated starting in 1978 and opened in 1988 as the ***Alte Sägemühl*** (Old Sawmill) museum on Mühlebachstrasse. The museum contains a working gristmill from Accla im Val Medel in Graubunden as well as a saw, both powered from a waterwheel rebuilt using parts from the Kittenhöhle in Erlenbach. Since the original water sources are no longer available, the waterwheel is powered by recirculated pumped water. The museum is open annually around the end of May for Swiss Mills Day.



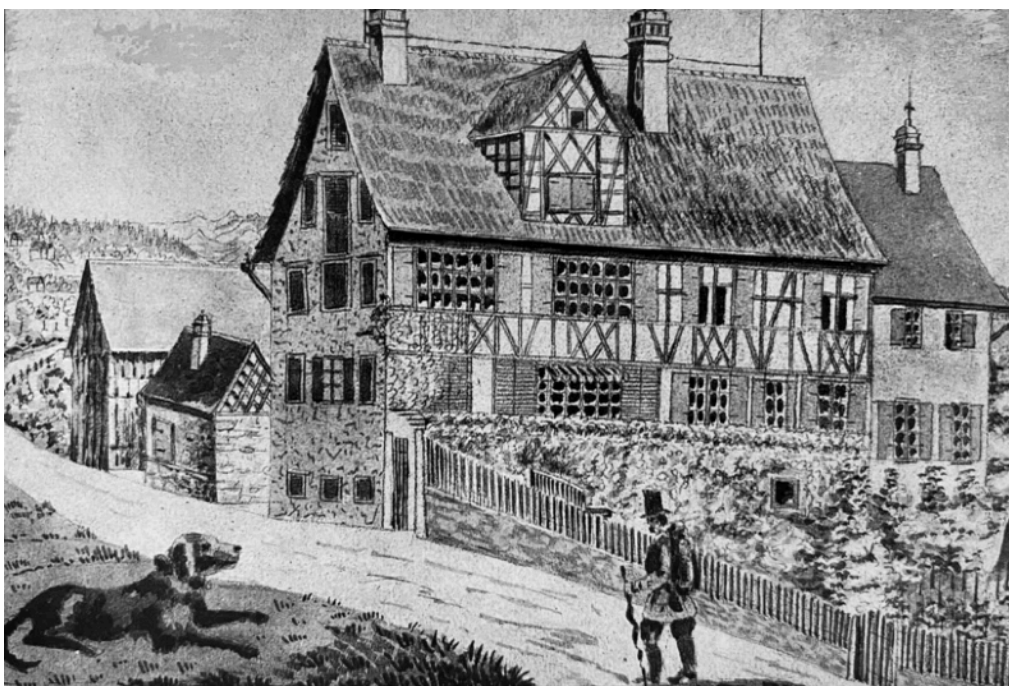
Pfistergut and Trotte

This farm on the north slope of Isisbüel was first noted in a 1634 census. The western and smaller part of the current building was a wine farmhouse that may date from 1638 and almost certainly before 1650. The farm was sold to the Syfrig family in 1657. In 1679, a building was built to house a much larger wine press (Trotte) and drinking room (Stube). The building is known today simply as **Trotte**. In The larger western part of the building was added in 1752, since then referred to as **Haus an der Strass** on Dorfstrasse at the time but now at Alte Landstrasse 100. About the same time, the still-standing barn and a since-demolished washhouse were also added. In 1825, Heinrich Pfister-Syfrig acquired the farm, since then called **Pfistergut**.



Pfistergut barn, Trotte and *Haus an der Strass*

In 1949, Pfistergut was sold to the Thalwil municipality. Trotte was renovated in 1977 for use as cultural and event space. The winepress from 1679 itself remains within and is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the canton. In 1991, *Haus an der Strass* at Alte Landstrasse 100 was renovated as more cultural space, including the Thalwil Ortsmuseum. The old farmhouse is now the police station.



1840 drawing of Pfistergut by Simon Caratsch showing the barn, washhouse and *Haus an der Strass*, all from about 1752, with the attached original farmhouse from about 1640 on the right. The washhouse is now gone. The part of Dorfstrasse now called Alte Landstrasse is in the foreground.

Im Aegertli Farmhouses

The farmhouse at Im Aegertli #1 and 3 was built as a double farmhouse in 1640, making it one of, if not the oldest still-standing building in Thalwil. It may be even older than original Pfistergut farmhouse. It is located just off Sonnenbergstrasse at the Aegertli busstop.

The original parts of the farmhouse at Im Aegertli #10 and 12 may be of similar age. The double house at Im Aegertli #14 and 16 is more recent: from 1760.



Etzliberg

The central part of the row of attached houses at Etzlibergstrasse #10 and 12 was built in 1702 and the others were added later. The eastern part with a wonderful view over Thalwil was opened as a restaurant in 1886. That part was torn down and replaced in 1993 by a new restaurant that opened in 1995. During this time, the oldest parts were renovated and the barn was converted to a residential building.



Even older, is the row house at Etzliberg #15, 17 and 19 from the 1600s. On the side of #19, it says *Hotzehuus 1650*, which would make it one of the oldest still-standing houses in Thalwil.

Trümpplerhaus

On today's Isisbuelstrasse in 1675, a member of the Syfrig family built the eastern two parts of the farmhouse at #3 and 5 with an adjoining winepress at #7. The winepress part was converted to a third part of the house in 1837. The name of the house is from a recent owner of part #3.



Beyond being one of the oldest still-standing houses in Thalwil, there was a very fine wood-paneled *Stube* (gentlemen's parlor and wine drinking room) attached to the house, notable for two things. One of the conspirators in the Stäfa Trade Dispute of 1794-1795 was Gemeindepräsident Hans Jakob Aschmann-Nägeli. He owned the house and one of the meetings is said to have taken place in this *Stube*. Much later in 1895, the then-owner of house part #3 sold the *Stube* to the Landesmuseum (Swiss National Museum), which then sold it to the German Kaiser, who had it installed at Karlsruhe. It was destroyed by bombing during World War 2.

Having a *Stube* seems have been an important part of life in those times. In a *Stube*, neighbors could socialize without needing to go to one of the licensed inns. Most farms with a winepress seem to have had a *Stube* since no license was required to serve wine produced by the farm. In 1801, Thalwil had 54 winepresses and only 137 houses!

Zur Platte

Next to the church and across from the Adler is a two-part farmhouse dating from the 1600's. The part next to the church at Alte Landstrasse #88 dates to before 1681 and was sold to Hans Syfrig-Schärer in 1692. The northern part at #90 was added in the early 1700's. Today's adjoining Platten Park was part of the original farm's fields.



Güggel

The Muri property at today's Mühlebachstrasse 30 was leased to the Schwarzenbach family. In 1741, an old farmhouse was replaced by the still-standing half-timbered house with a rooftop rooster (Güggel).



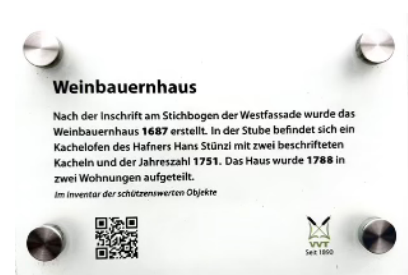
Oberdorf

There are a number of other older buildings in the Oberdorf, such as a farmhouse from 1687, "Zum Neubrunnen" from 1709, houses from 1764, 1773, 1778, and "Höchhus" from 1780. There is also a house at Dorfstrasse #29 from 1706. The Oberdorf and Im Aegertli are zoned to protect their "village character".



More Landmarks

The Verschönerungsverein Thalwil (VVT) has attached plaques to 70 buildings, printed with QR codes and short histories. Each QR code links to a page with more details at vvtalwil.ch. Most are shown on the page Historische Objekte. There is a downloadable map to all 70 on that page under the link for VVT-Plan Thalwiler Objekte. Much of the above information is from these pages, combined with other sources such as the previously noted books.



Another source is the Wikipedia page Liste der Kulturgüter in Thalwil. The page has photos and locations of the protected cultural objects, but no descriptions at the time this writing. Beyond buildings, there are two listed objects: the double-eagle sign on the Adler and an organ in St. Martin's church.

The Helvetic Republic and Aftermath

Much of this section is not specific to Thalwil. It is included to provide context for the huge changes that Thalwil went through as it was industrialized as a direct result of these events.

Unrest

In the 1700's small-scale industries started to develop throughout the Old Swiss Confederation, especially textile manufacturing. Although controlled by the cantonal lords, these operations were often started by families who already had local positions of influence and/or owned or leased properties useful for these industries. These families became more middle-class. Most of the still-standing houses built in Thalwil in the 1700's and 1800's were built by these families.

In the late 1700's, the ideas of liberal democracy appealed greatly to this new middle class who wanted more freedom from the feudal overlords. Locally, this new unrest came to a head in the previously noted Stäfa Trade Dispute of 1794-1795. Thalwilers were involved, including the municipal president. The Zürich guilds harshly crushed the movement, which only added to the discontent.

French Occupation 1798-1802

Similar unrest throughout Switzerland in 1797 was seized upon by Napoleon and the French revolutionary army, which invaded the Old Swiss Confederation in January 1798. The army's desire was control of the alpine passes to Italy and loot to finance the invasion of Egypt. Only secondarily was the revolutionary desire to free the Swiss people from feudalism.

The Old Swiss Confederacy quickly collapsed. The Helvetic Republic was proclaimed in April 1798. The loose confederation of independent cantons was replaced by a unitary "sister-state" of France. But the heavy taxes imposed by the Helvetic Republic and the general resentment of being controlled by a foreign power caused further unrest. French troops were quartered at local expense everywhere to keep control, including in Thalwil.

In 1799, Zürich became a battleground between the French army and the allied Austrian and Russian imperial armies. The First Battle of Zürich ended with the Austrians (Hapsburgs!) occupying the city of Zürich. The Second Battle of Zürich saw the Russian forces defeated and the French reoccupying Zürich. These battles caused great damage and misery in and around Zürich and further increased opposition to the Helvetic Republic. French forces withdrew in 1802.

Well-known artist Johann Jakob Aschmann (1747-1809) of Thalwil had been found to be involved in the Stäfa Trade Dispute and imprisoned. During the French Occupation, he was released and appointed as regent of the Horgen district. But as soon as the French withdrew, he was removed from office. His paintings provide an invaluable record of the area from that time.

Mediation and Restoration Periods

After more unrest and rebellion, Napoleon's Act of Mediation in 1803 abolished the Helvetic Republic and established the Swiss Confederation with new cantons and a constitution. After Napoleon's defeat, the 1815 Congress of Vienna fully reestablished Swiss national independence and added three more cantons. The national borders have only changed trivially since.



Immediately after the Helvetic Republic ended, the aristocracy regained their control over the countryside. There was a short-lived rebellion against this reimposition of control in 1804 by people from Wädenswil and Horgen. At one point, the rebels entered Thalwil.

Left: The battle of Bocken in Hogen by Johann Jakob Aschmann.

Despite the aristocracy regaining control, not everything went back to the way it had been. For example, tithes had been abolished by the French. Part of the tithe income paid for schools and social services for the poor. Until the tithes were replaced by even heavier taxes, the Thalwil school had to be funded through donations.

There was also some liberalization of the economy, which allowed industries to develop. The Zürich aristocrats benefited from the relaxation of restrictions on enterprises by having new sources of revenue to tax.

Regeneration Period: The End of Feudalism

But since none of the fundamental issues that caused the unrest prior to the French invasion had been improved, the discontent outside of Zürich city only grew. In particular, Winterthur had lost much of its centuries-old sovereignty from Zürich.

Spurred by the second French Revolution of 1830, so-called Radical-Liberals from outside the city held a cantonal assembly in Uster to demand a new cantonal constitution. Under pressure, the Grand Council dominated by Zürich aristocrats resigned and new members were elected with two-thirds of the members from outside the city.

The newly drafted cantonal constitution passed the first ever cantonal referendum by 40,500 to 1,700. It went into effect on 10 April 1831. The constitution made the canton a representative democracy with local sovereignty, freedom of religion, press, trade and commerce. It ended feudal dues paid by the countryside to the city of Zürich and it secularized and reorganized the schools.

These changes were not unopposed. In particular, there was opposition to the secularization of schools by those who felt that without control by the church, schools would not instill proper religious and moral values. This opposition led to a coup d'état in 1839. They forced a new election of the Grand Council, requiring candidates to *not* be “scientifically educated”, but *instead* “God-fearing men”. But by 1844, the Radical-Liberals were back in control. The Radical-Liberals were the forerunners of today’s Free Democratic Party (FDP).

The Start of Modern Switzerland

The democratic, liberal and secular changes in canton Zürich, also occurred in eleven other cantons. These cantons moved to expel the Jesuits because the Jesuits and their allies had violently suppressed liberals in Valais. The fear of continued meddling by the Pope in Swiss politics convinced even conservative Protestants to join the liberals supporting expulsion.

In reaction, the conservative catholic cantons formed a separate alliance (Sonderbund). Such alliances between cantons was forbidden by the federal constitution. The federal parliament voted that the alliance be dissolved, but the catholic cantons hoped for support from Austria (Hapsburgs!) and mobilized against the Swiss federal government.

The Sonderbundskrieg civil war was fought in November 1847, the last war fought on Swiss soil. The federal government won at the cost the lives of about 100 soldiers total from both sides, including Johannes Staub from Thalwil. He was buried in the Thalwil cemetery (*right*) with great ceremony. The victorious Radical-Liberals took complete control of the federal government. Until 1891, no members of the federal parliament were elected from other political parties.



Most importantly, the victory resulted in a new Swiss federal constitution in September 1848, transforming the Swiss Confederation into a federal republic. The now two-chamber federal parliament was modeled after the United States Congress. The concept of the United States as a confederation of states was modeled after the Old Swiss Confederation of independent cantons.

Thalwil's Industrial Era

With the end of the power of the Zürich guilds over trade and commerce in 1830, entrepreneurs were able to start business ventures throughout the countryside. Thalwil and other communities joined the Industrial Revolution that was sweeping over much of Europe. Thalwil's economy quickly transformed from an agrarian and cottage-industry economy to one based largely on industrial-scale textile production and other manufacturing. In fact at one point, Thalwil was home to the largest textile company in the entire world. Very simply, Thalwil from the middle of the 1800's to the middle of the 1900's was very different from what it was previously and what it is today.

From the [German Wikipedia page on Thalwil](#): "In the 19th century, the nickname for the inhabitants of Thalwil was *Halbfüidler* (half-assed) – referring to the fact that they, in their haste to get to work, should only sit down at the table with half their buttocks"...

The Zürich Textile Industry

Prior to the 1700's, most European clothing was woolen. Those who could afford it also wore silk. Protestants fleeing to Zürich after the Reformation brought silk weaving skills. As a result, Zürich was one of the few cities north of Italy that became a center for silk textile production.

Spinning wool and raw silk into thread and then weaving thread into cloth on a loom could be and was done in homes. Woolen cloth manufacturing was very much a cottage industry throughout Switzerland. But distribution and selling of any product beyond what was needed by local residents of canton Zürich was under the control of the guilds, as was the importation of raw wool and silk. Cloth destined for finished goods was sent to finishing houses, also controlled by the guilds. In 1678, the city of Zürich had 36 finishing houses for woolen goods. All stages of silk production were limited to the city.



Hand loom in Appenzell circa 1830

In the 1700's cotton clothing became fashionable, so carding, spinning and weaving of imported raw cotton started to replace woolen textile production throughout Switzerland. Zürich canton became a leading center for cotton textile production. At one point even before the Helvetic Republic, there were 219 looms and 30 cotton spinners in Thalwil.

As tight control by the guilds over commerce loosened in the early 1800's and as machines powered by water or steam increased efficiency, the textile industry boomed throughout canton Zürich. By 1827, there were 106 cotton spinning mills with 200,000 spindles (half of all those in Switzerland), of which 27,000 were hand-operated, 3,500 were steam-powered, and 169,000 were water-powered; and by 1830 there were 6,000 looms and 18,000 workers employed in silk manufacturing.



*Zunft zur Waag
Zürich Textile Guild*

With complete freedom of trade and commerce, many entrepreneurs attempted to start businesses if they could raise the capital or had useful assets such as property or water rights. Few of these early entrepreneurs had any experience running a business. Banking and other sources of venture capital were also just developing. With so many start-ups as competition and with quickly changing technology, most of these start-ups failed.

Early Thalwil Textile Enterprises

The first known attempt to start a textile business in Thalwil was by Johannes Aschmann (not the artist) and his wife Verena around 1804. They started a cotton muslin weaving mill in a now-demolished house near the lakeside dock. But this was just after the guilds had regained control. Since the business was unlicensed and mismanaged, it was shut down by the authorities in 1808.

Yet only a few years later in 1812, another more successful cotton weaving mill was started in a house adjacent to the Adler by Hans Conrad Schmid-Horner (1787-1850) and Hans Heinrich Kölliker-Leemann (1761-1837). The later was also the Gemeindepräsident, which may be why it was permitted. The business failed in 1843, probably due to the rise of mechanized cotton mills as there was no power source at Platte.

In 1818, two more cotton weaving mills were founded. One was started in the Oberdorf, by two Hoz brothers. By 1851, the mill employed about 45 cotton weavers and 75 silk weavers. In 1854 the business switched entirely to silk production and the headquarters and finishing house was moved to the former Hoz boarding school called the Institute (*right*) at Alte Landstrasse #57.



In 1885, the Institute building was taken over by the Reinhold Wettstein Silk Weaving Company. In 1887, Reinhold Wettstein (1857-1936) bought and renovated the building called Felsenhof (*left*) at Dorfstrasse #36. He added the adjacent building at Dorfstrasse #34 as a factory and moved his Thalwil operations there in 1892. The Felsenhof factory employed up to 60 workers and continued operations until 1925.

The other weaving business started in 1818 was Kölliker, Wieland & Co. In 1821 they built the building called Am Gstad (*right*) at today's Seestrasse 135 both as a residence and to house silk looms controlled by then-high-tech Jacquard machines, punched-card loom controllers that could produce complex patterns. In 1853 on the south side of Am Gstad at Seestrasse 133, partner Johann Jakob Wieland-Kölliker built Villa Schöneck (*below*). In 1854 the factory was expanded to 80 looms. But after the Wieland family withdrew from the business, it went bankrupt in 1868. Dye factory owner August Weidmann bought Am Gstad in 1871 and converted it to a manor house.





A shorter-lived company that left its mark on Thalwil was the silk manufacturing company founded in 1843 by Gustav Ammann and Conrad Egli. Gustav was the son of Major Johannes Ammann-Hotz, who ran an oil refinery in Tischenloo and a spice trading business. In 1843 Johannes liquidated his other businesses and switched to silk manufacturing from Gustav's house in Isisbüel. Johannes bought the manor house at Alte Landstrasse #95 and in 1852, built a silk factory nearby at Alte Landstrasse #99 (*right*), across from Pfistergut.

Gustav and business partner Heinrich Rüegg acquired land near the lower millpond and built the building called Blumenhof (*below*) at Alte Landstrasse #110a to house Jacquard looms.

The combined operations employed 500 workers and was the largest silk business in Thalwil. Conrad Egli left the business in 1854 and the company was dissolved in 1861. The factory building was converted to apartments in 1864. The Rüegg factory at Blumenhof continued operation until 1877. Blumenhof is now part of the Thalwil Gemeinde campus.



Hochhaus at Asylstrasse 22 on Dorfstrasse was built in 1780 by the Oberwacht Säckelmeister (treasurer) Hans Jakob Syfrig (1741–1807). In 1827, brothers Johannes Kläger-Ammann-Schwarzenbach (1798-1835) and Mathias Kläger-Scheller (1795-1863) bought the Hochhaus building from Hans Syfrig's son's widow as their residence and by 1830 had established a grocery and textile trade there.



In 1837, the remaining Kläger brother Mathias replaced the winepress building by a Jacquard weaving factory at Dorfstrasse #13 and 15, with finishing and sales at Hochhaus. Hochhaus is on the right side of the above photo with the factory building on the left. The factory probably ceased operation about 1867 with the death of the widow of Mathias' son. Attached to the former factory building is a fountain and a more recently added statue of a girl reading a book (*right*).

Schmid Factories in Gattikon

In 1815, the owner of the Gattikon mills Hans Jakob Schmid-Höhn (1769-1839), Säckelmeister Rudolf Pfister, Hans Jakob Kölliker-Hoz and other investors built a cotton factory on Rudolf's land just above the mill, powered by the Schmid mill's water supply. Kölliker, Pfister & Co. was the first true factory in the municipality.

Hans Schmid's sons Hans Jakob Schmid-Schmid (1800-1853) and Hans Heinrich Schmid-Kölliker (1806-1883) joined the company and in 1829 changed its name to Pfister, Schmid & Co., Mechanical Cotton Spinning Mill. In 1841 the brothers were sole owners and divided ownership of the mills. The grist and saw mills went to Hans and the cotton spinning mill to Heinrich. Heinrich expanded the factory, upgraded the machines and installed a heating system needed to control the humidity for fine yarn.



Heinrich Schmid's sons Robert Schmid-Henggeler-Voegeli (1839-1912) and Karl Schmid-Schwarzenbach-Ehret (1840-1905) joined the cotton mill company. In 1859 on the banks of the Sihl river they built one of the largest cotton weaving mills (*left*) as well as the waterworks to power it and a gasworks to light it. The mill had the first sawtooth roof in Switzerland. The mill had about 500 looms and employed about 250 additional workers.

Sihl mill circa 1925

Heinrich Schmid (*right*) was considered to be a socially responsible employer. He built three large boarding houses (*above left*) where some workers could live for relatively low rent, established a workers savings fund, and ensured injured or ill workers were cared for at his expense. Heinrich was Thalwil Gemeindepräsident from 1836 to 1843 and served in the Zürich Kantonsrat from 1850 to 1869. He built the first school house in Gattikon in 1870. He was also one of the main people behind the railroad line.



In 1873 after Heinrich sold his shares to his sons, they split ownership of the textile mills. Robert took over the Sihl weaving mill and waterworks, while Karl took over the upper spinning mill as well as the pond that fed the spinning and grist mills. In 1911, the rights for the Sihl waterworks ended, as were the pond water rights in 1934, indicating that the mills had other power sources. In 1920, Robert Schwarzenbach & Co. acquired the upper mill and ran until 1938. The building was then occupied by the R.R. Wieland Textile Printing Works until the building was demolished in 1973.

In 1976 the Sihl weaving mill was taken over by cotton manufacturer Grossmann & Co. AG. The new company demolished all factory buildings and the boarding houses except part of the original weaving hall (*below left*) and the office building (*below right*). It finally closed in 1987. The original weaving hall was converted to a commercial center. A Lidl store was opened in 2010 on the old mill site just north of the old hall.



Heer & Co Factories at Im Isisbüel

In 1831, two Kölliker brothers founded a calico printing company at today's *Im Isisbüel*. It failed and in 1843 it was taken over by three Schmid brothers and the buildings were converted to a silk spinning, weaving and printing factory. Two of the three brothers left the company in 1870, leaving the remaining brother Hans Jakob Schmid-Staub (1816-1890) in financial trouble. Heinrich Heer from Glarus invested in the company and by 1879 he was sole owner of the company now called Heer & Co. that specialized in silk weaving, dyeing and finishing.



Gebrüder Schmid factory in 1843



Heer & Co factory in 1899

Heinrich's son Henry Heer-Huber (1871-1937) joined the company in 1893 and with dyer Jean Angehrn-Honegger (1867-1940), they expanded the business to the point it was exporting silk and satin goods worldwide. Earlier than most competitors, they pioneered producing rayon textiles. After World War 1, rayon rapidly replaced silk in the market and the company benefited from its early adoption and retained all 400 employees through the transition. Son Hans Angehrn-Bechtler (1898-1973) took over management until the company closed in 1970.

In 1971, the factory was demolished, leaving only the office buildings. The former administration building (*right*) at Kirchbodenweg 16 at the corner of Kirchbodenstrasse and Mühlebachstrasse was renovated as an apartment building. It can be found near the left side of both of the above pictures. Where the factory buildings once stood are now large apartment buildings on today's Im Isisbüel street.



Heer & Co. factory in 1925

Schwarzenbach Silk Company at Im Marbach

In 1832 Johannes Schwarzenbach-Landis (1804-1861) and his son-in-law Jakob Näf-Schwarzenbach (1799-1858) founded a silk weaving mill in Aegertli. The *Näf & Schwarzenbach* company was successful enough to need more space. With the construction of Seestrasse in 1840 providing improved road access, they built two identical large houses and outbuildings in Ludretikon at Seestrasse #185 and 185A (*right*) near the Marbach stream on the border with Rüschrlikon. By 1846, the company had added a finishing house and separate buildings for silk winding and twisting.



In 1852, Johannes and Jakob ended their partnership. In 1861, the Johannes Schwarzenbach-Landis company was taken over by sons Heinrich Robert Schwarzenbach-Zeuner (1839-1904) and Jakob August Schwarzenbach-Kesselring-Syz (1834-1888). By 1869 the Näf company had failed and its buildings were taken over by the Schwarzenbach company. In 1892, the name of the company was changed to Robert Schwarzenbach & Co. after the death of brother August.

Robert Schwarzenbach

With the advent of the railroad on the west lakeshore in 1875, shipping of raw silk, thread, cloth and finished product improved greatly for the company, as well as for the other textile manufacturers. By then the company was exporting worldwide.

For decades, the company relied on hand weaving, largely in cottage industries through Switzerland. The company produced the silk thread, shipped it to the weavers, and brought the cloth back to Thalwil to be finished. At its peak in 1899, the company employed 3,936 hand weavers. Mechanical weaving very quickly replaced hand weaving industry-wide, so starting in 1884 the company invested in mechanical looms at the Ludretikon factory, having already started a mechanical weaving mill in Adliswil in 1860. The company also used other mechanical mills in the area, including the Gattikon weaving mill on the Sihl.

With rising protectionism and tariffs after the economic crisis of 1873, the company established subsidiaries in some export markets, with large factories in Milan and Lyon, other mills in France and Germany, and three mills in the USA. They had sales offices in London, Berlin, New York, Lyon, Como and Milan. By 1904 when Robert Schwarzenbach died, the company had 13,000 workers worldwide. By 1928, just before the start of the Great Depression, Robert Schwarzenbach & Co was the largest company in Switzerland and the largest textile company in the world with 28,000 workers, many in the USA. But by 1935, production had fallen by 90%.



Circa 1925. Krone Hotel is in center foreground.

The Thalwil factory ceased operation in 1981. Those factory buildings were demolished in 1983-1984. The *Im Marbach* residential development was built on the old factory property. The company still exists, but now manages the real estate and other holdings of the Schwarzenbach family.

Weidmann Dye Works

In 1831, cotton manufacturer Martin Hoz (1776-1849) built a fine dye works on the lakeside. A year later, he then built a second factory building nearby. The dye business soon passed to son Josef Hoz, but it failed and at the end of 1839 it was taken over by the founder's eldest son Jakob Hoz (1801-1852), who lived at and manufactured cotton at Felsenhof from 1831 to 1849. Within a year, he first leased the dye works, then in 1843 sold it to Daniel Friedrich Weidmann (1809-1889), who had joined the failing dye works in 1838 after learning the trade in Zürich. After near bankruptcy in 1848 and foreclosure in 1867, the dye works ended up in the hands of Friedrich's son August Weidmann-Züst (1842-1928) and August's friend from childhood Jakob Julius Schwarzenbach-Meier (1844-1908). Julius Schwarzenbach was a younger brother of Robert Schwarzenbach. Julius brought textile and chemical expertise and perhaps most importantly, capital and banking connections.



The *Schwarzenbach & Weidmann Silk Dyeing* company flourished and built ever more buildings along the lakeshore, followed by construction of The Blue Factory across Seestrasse. With the need for more building space, the land was extended into the lake. If there had been any remains of bronze-age pile dwellings there, they would have been covered and probably destroyed. The widely-common “pinking” process used to artificially add weight to silk using tin-based chemicals was performed at the factory and the treated silk was dragged through the lake behind boats to wash it. A study published in 2024 details the tin pollution in the lake sediments. Tin pollution started around 1890, peaked around 1900 and by 1940 further tin pollution had ended due to newer processes that reclaimed the tin.



The silk dyeing baths were also washed into the lake. From the 2024 study: “Indeed, a resident of Thalwil, Adriana Berchtold, reported that she knows from still living persons that their skin would be coloured after a bath in the lake, over a wide zone around the shore of Thalwil. The dye would be so strong that they would know what colour was currently in use. A single shower would not be sufficient to wash out the colour.”

Circa 1925

After Julius Schwarzenbach sold his share of the company to August Weidmann (*right*) in 1895, August renamed the company to *Weidmann Dye Works*. August also co-founded a dyeing company in Zürich, took over another in Horgen, and in 1925 co-founded another in New Jersey USA. By 1910, the Thalwil dye works had over 1,000 workers. He built villa Zehntenhof in 1895 and remodeled villa Am Gstad in stages from 1876 to 1911. August was Gemeindepräsident from 1880 to 1883. Among his other large donations to Thalwil were the Oeggisbüel schoolhouse and Chilbiplatz. August ran the company until his death in 1928.



Julius Scharzenbach (*right*) was already serving as Gemeindepräsident (1892-1904) when he left the company. He built Villa Diana as his family residence in 1873. In 1897, Julius purchased Blumenhof and the nearby land in Lingg, including the mill pond. On that land, he built and donated a new Gemeindehaus. He also built Villa Sonnegg on that land for his brother's widow. The land and these buildings and are all now the Thalwil Gemeinde campus.



Thalwil Gemeinde campus

*left: Blumenhof
center: Gemeindehaus
right: Villa Sonnegg*



The factory continued operation through the Great Depression and World War 2 but ended in 1970. Due to the widening of Seestrasse, the lakeside factory buildings were explosively demolished in 1978 (*right*). In their place is *Seeanlage Farb* park.



Of the lakeside factory, only a section of the factory entrance (*below left*) and the small factory building known as the Blue House (*below center*) remains. Dye waste was said to have been discarded into the lake from the Blue House, which is now an event space. The large blue factory building (*below right*) officially known as *Zentrum Färberei* is still owned by Färberei Weidmann AG.



Gasworks

Since the textile factories used gas lighting, they had their own gasworks plants to convert hard coal into hydrocarbon gases. The first of these to provide gas for street lighting was the *Schmid Brothers* factory in Isisbüel in 1860. It did not have the capacity to supply more than a part of the Unterdorf and Oberdorf, so *Näf & Schwarzenbach* and the owner of the Krone Hotel built a larger gasworks and in 1876 started supplying gas beyond their own needs. Demand increased around 1885 when gas started to be used for household interior lighting, cooking and heating. A byproduct of gas production was tar, which was useful for roads, roofs and wood preservation.

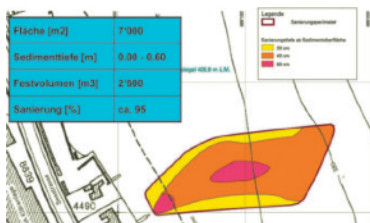
To meet the need for gas, August Weidmann with support from Robert Schwarzenbach raised capital through stock sales for a new much larger gasworks. It started operation in 1898 and by 1899 the Schwarzenbach gasworks closed. The gasworks (below) was built on the land side of Sesstrasse in the industrial area that stretches along the lakeshore through Horgen. From the Bürger area through Tischenloo there was once petrochemical, metal, and other manufacturing.



Circa 1962 Lower left is the gasworks

Right is Badi Bürger 1 and small boat harbor

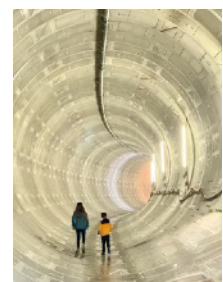
The company Gaswerk Thalwil AG failed in 1915, but had to be taken over and operated by Gemeinde Thalwil because the gas supply had become an essential need, not only for Thalwil, but also Oberrieden, Rüslikon and Langnau. The gas plant ceased operation in 1931 when Zürich extended its supply to the area. In 1963, the old gasworks plant was demolished (right) to make way for the regional sewage treatment plant, which started operating in 1966.



Around 1984, it was discovered that somehow, large amounts of tar from the plant had been deposited on the lake floor via stormwater conduits. As can be seen in the upper photograph, the lakeshore opposite the gasworks and where the sewage treatment plant was constructed is adjacent to the popular swimming area Badi Bürger 1. In 1994, it was decided that the tar pollution posed a danger and had to be cleaned up, which it was from 2001 through 2002.

The immediate area is being altered once again, this time it is due to construction from 2022 to 2026 of the Sihl flood relief tunnel. The tunnel extends from the Sihl at the south side of Gattikon, under the Waldweiher, the forest, and Böni, then exits under Badi Bürger 1 through a jetty that will become part of the revamped swimming area.

Inside the tunnel, August 2025



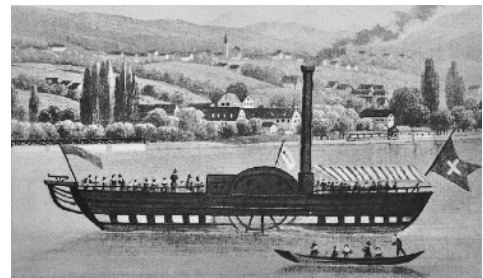
Transportation and Communication

Good transportation for raw materials and finished products is essential for industrial development. And with the associated population growth due to industrial employment, transportation for people, mail and communication also became increasingly important.

Steamboats

Before Seestrasse was built, transportation to and from Thalwil was primarily via sailboat as the old Pilgrim's trail (more or less today's Alte Landstrasse) was not really usable for moving heavy goods. The primary boat dock was at the old Muri Amthaus, with secondary docks at the Wettingen Zehntenhof and the Ludretikon Schützenhaus, and others. There were trips for those who needed to shop in Zürich every Friday morning, later also on Tuesdays.

In 1834, a steamboat was imported from Manchester via the Rhein, dismantled and carried via cart to Zürich, where it was reassembled. It was christened *Minerva* (right) in 1835 and started regular roundtrips between Zürich and Rapperswil with stops including Thalwil. It was the first steamboat on Lake Zürich and the first iron steamboat in continental Europe. In the next few years, two more Lake Zürich companies with their own steamboats were also founded. These three companies had merged by 1843.



In 1864, a steamboat company was founded in Horgen to serve the communities and industries on the west side of the lake. In 1869, this company was merged with the others to become the DSG: *Dampfschiffgesellschaft für den Zürichsee* (Steamboat Company for Lake Zürich). Before the lake was dredged near the landings, passengers had to be ferried between the steamboats and the shore.



Competition from the railroads starting in 1874 caused reduction in steamboat use for transporting goods. The DSG was reorganized and in 1890 it was renamed to the ZDG: *Zürcher Dampfbootgesellschaft*. It ran scheduled routes on the north end of the lake, including Thalwil. In 1900, increasing passenger demand and a merger with *Dampfbootgesellschaft Wädenswil* added boats and routes with stops all along the lake. In 1957, the name was changed

to ZSG: *Zürichsee Schifffahrtsgesellschaft*. Since 1990, the ZSG has been part of the ZVV regional transportation network that includes buses, trams, and suburban passenger trains.



The boat in the two photos above was originally built in 1892 and called the Steamboat *DS Neu-Zürich*. It carried up to 100 passengers. In 1897, it was renamed to *DS Thalweil*. The picture on the left is from a 1911 postcard. In 1936, it was converted from steam to diesel power and renamed to Motorboat *MS Thalwil*. It was operated until 1969. Since 1990 it has resided at the *Verkehrshaus der Schweiz* (Swiss Transportation Museum) in Luzern as a children's play boat (above right).

Railroad

The first railway in Switzerland opened in 1847 between Zürich and Baden. The Swiss Federal Constitution of 1848 gave the federal government the power over railways, but the power was quickly delegated to the cantons. Because of the large investment required to construct a railroad and purchase engines and wagons, development was done by entrepreneurs. In Zürich, development was led by Alfred Escher, operating the Swiss Northeastern Railway. For a while, he and other railroad barons effectively controlled transportation much as the guilds once had.

Because the Zürich cantonal government was controlled by the railroad barons and they had built a railway to the south on the east side of the lake, it was only with great effort by Gattikon mill owner Heinrich Schmid and other industrialists that a concession to build a railway on the west bank was granted in 1871. Money was raised by the communities along the route from Zurich to Ziegelbrücke for construction and operation.

The railway was opened on 20 September 1875 to great joy and fanfare. But two days later, the railway near the new Horgen train station sank into the lake (*right*). It took two months to rebuild that section and the station a bit further away from the lakeshore.



*Thalwil train station 1875
and 50-meter steel footbridge*

With the new train station location, the focus of Thalwil shifted to the streets just below and above the station. Along both Bahnhofstrasse near the station and Gotthardstrasse on the hill above, new buildings for residences and businesses were built. By around 1900, the appearance of Thalwil had changed from a village to more of a town.



*Thalwil train station 1930
Buildings along Gotthardstrasse
can be seen in the background*



In what would become very important for Thalwil's future development, Thalwil became the junction for a new railway line to Zug and beyond in 1897. All railway traffic between Zürich and southern and southeastern Switzerland and the Gotthard pass went through Thalwil. In Thalwil, the new track went through land that was then mostly vineyards. But since it crossed Tischenloostrasse, a bridge (*left*) had to be constructed and the street regraded. That same year, the railroad system was electrified and electric engines began to replace steam engines.

In 1963, the classic SBB Neo-Renaissance Thalwil train station building was replaced by today's utilitarian building. In 1973 the larger freight station was built, this time with a bit more style.

In 2003, the Zimmerberg Basis Tunnel opened. It provides a railway directly from the Zürich main train station to Thalwil in 9 minutes, bypassing all train stations between. It is used by the IR and IC fast trains, whereas the S trains stop at some or all of those stations. The tunnel exists on the north side of the Thalwil station, allowing the trains to take either of the junction lines just south of the station. That is why Thalwil is a stop for some IR trains and why Thalwil has probably the best train connections on both sides of Lake Zürich. This will likely change in 2035 when the tunnel will bypass Thalwil and then split with one exit near Au and the other leading to Baar.

In 1892, the Sihltalbahnhof railway opened between Zürich Selnau and Sihlwald in Horgen, which is just south of Gattikon. The Langnau-Gattikon train station serves both towns. In 1897, the railway was extended southward to Sihlbrugg where it connects to the Thalwil-Zug railway. In 1924, the railway was electrified. The connecting stretch between Zürich Selnau and the main train station opened in 1990.

Post, Telephone and Telegraph

Mail had been transported along the old pilgrim's trail by foot, horse riders, then wagons and coaches from Zürich in the north and Glarus and Schwyz in the south. In 1831, the first post office in Thalwil was opened in the Oberdorf on Alte Landstrasse. But from 1835, mail was increasingly transported from everywhere except the west via regular steamboat service.

So in 1853, the post office moved down to the lakeshore into first one and then another of the old Muri Amtshaus buildings. Telegraph messages were also sent and received there. But once the railway opened and mail was transported by train, the post and telegraph office moved again in 1877 to a new building at Bahnhofstrasse #4. In 1883, the telephone exchange was added.

In 1906 a new Art Nouveau building for the entire Post Telephone and Telegraph (PTT) operation was constructed at Bahnhofstrasse #2. The previous building at #4 has since been replaced by a modernistic extension of the building at #2. Since 1992, the current customer service location of Die Post is in the former firehouse at Gotthardstrasse #37.

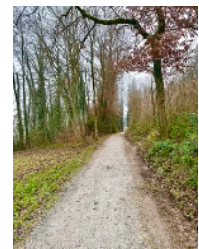
In the foreground of this 1907 photo is the 1906 building at Bahnhofstrasse #2. The previous post office at #4 is behind it.



Roadways

Drawings and even early photographs of Thalwil show that "roads" were just dirt paths wide enough for a cart, and some seem barely more than trails. Even a major road like Dorfstrasse appears in the above drawings of the mill and Pfistergut to be only about wide enough for a cart in each direction. The major need for land transportation was between the lake and the slopes above. And since the slopes are so steep, roads and paths are at an angle to the lakeshore. The only two north/south roads were Säumerstrasse and Landstrasse.

An example of a typical road can still be found in Knonauerstrasse, which was once the main road between Gattikon to the Oberdorf through Böni. Part of Knonauerstrasse (*right*) is one of the paths through the forest and it looks today very much like the roads in the old drawings.



As has been noted so often above, one of the earliest and certainly the most impactful road development was of Seestrasse. Construction of this new road was mandated by the Zürich cantonal government in 1835 over the objections of the communities which did not want a road they felt was unnecessary and which would displace homes and other buildings. Construction had to be performed by the local citizens.

Seestrasse was opened in 1840, but was called Neue Strasse until 1898. The road simply called Landstrasse was renamed to Alte Landstrasse after the construction of Neue Strasse. Seestrasse was still just a dirt road about two carts wide. But it had the desired effect of providing better land transportation between the communities and to Zürich. Even for steamboat transportation, it made it easier to move goods and people to and from the boat docks to other lakeside locations. Improved transportation encouraged the large factories to be located along the lakeshore.

The main connecting road to Seestrasse was and still is Mühlebachstrasse, which was the section of the old Dorfstrasse between the lake where the old Müri Amtshaus once was up to where it meets Alte Landstrasse above the Isisbüel mill. Secondary roads to the lake were Seehaldenstrasse to Ludretikonerstrasse to the lake; and the steep Zehntengasse path from the Oberdorf, which was upgraded to Zehntenstrasse in 1935. The other main connecting road to Seestrasse is Tischenloostrasse, which was built in 1856 to Alte Landstrasse. Tischenloostrasse connects to Seestrasse at Tischenloo at the Thalwil/Oberrieden border.

Bahnhofstrasse was built in 1875 at the same time as the railroad and train station. It runs between Mühlebachstrasse and Ludretikonerstrasse, which connects to Seestrasse. It seems to be the first street with modern width in Thalwil, although it was still dirt.

Opposite the train station are attractive buildings (*right*), including the previously-noted old and new Post Telephone and Telegraph (PTT) buildings in the distance on the right. The building on the left was built just above the Villa Diana in 1896 as the Katarinenhof Hotel. It was renamed to Thalwilerhof in 1949 and a floor was added in 1952. Then in 2002, the building was torn down and replaced by the Hotel Sedartis. The two buildings between the hotel and the PTT are still standing.



Gotthardstrasse was built in 1897. Like Bahnhofstrasse, it runs between Mühlebachstrasse and Ludretikonerstrasse, it was a dirt street of modern width, and it quickly was lined with trees and similar style buildings (*below*). Unlike Bahnhofstrasse, Gotthardstrasse became the town center.



Gotthardstrasse in 1901 near today's COOP



Gotthardstrasse circa 1920

Gotthardstrasse was effectively extended to Tischenloostrasse by the construction of Kirchbodenstrasse in 1923-1925. Kirchbodenstrasse follows the path called Kirchbodengasse, which was the name for the part of the old pilgrim's path below the church. At the same time, Mühlebachstrasse was regraded to pass under the railroad tracks instead of crossing them.

Schools

The first school in Thalwil outside of the church and community school at the Gesellenhaus was a private Sekondarschule (secondary school and apprenticeship) founded by Hartmann Hoz in 1826. It was moved to the building known as The Institute in 1830 and operated until 1853 for up to twenty boys. Due to limited space in the Gesellenhaus, the Sekondarschule classes there were moved to a building in Grünen Klee in 1834, but moved back in 1838. Closure of the Institute in 1853 forced dedication for school use of all space in the Gesellenhaus.

With the growing mill employment in Gattikon and the distance to the Oberdorf, mill owner Heinrich Schmid demanded permission to build a school in Gattikon. This was finally granted and the second Thalwil municipal school was built in 1870 in Gattikon (*right*). By 1908, the population in Gattikon had grown to the point where a second school was built.



Even after the students from Gattikon no longer went to the Gesellenhaus, the population on the Thalwil side of the hill grew to the point where a separate Sekondarschule was needed. The Ölweisli secondary schoolhouse (*left*) was built in 1874 very near the Gesellenhaus schoolhouse. The schoolhouse was named after the land called Ölweise (oil meadow) behind the Adler. The land had been called that because an oil press was operated there from 1635 to 1805. Today, Ölweise and Öggisbüel operate together as a unified primary school.

The Schwandel schoolhouse was built in 1886 at Alte Landstrasse #124 and the Turnhalle (sports gymnasium) was built in 1890 at #122A. The Ludretikon schoolhouse was built in 1902 at Alte Landstrasse #148. Today, Schwandel and Ludretikon operate as a unified primary school.

The Öggisbüel schoolhouse (*right*) was originally built as a Sekondarschule at Zehntenstrasse #18 on the land previously occupied by the cemetery. Its opening in 1911 was delayed for a few months due to closures of it and the Schwandel school for the Diphtheria epidemic. Schools were closed again during the 1918 influenza epidemic, during which the Ludretikon school was used as an emergency hospital.



Hospitals

In the middle ages, hospitals were supported by religious/charitable organizations. But these hospitals were considered to be poorhouses for the sick, injured, orphaned, elderly and drunkards. Almost everyone else would be cared for at home until they healed or died. In the late middle ages, communities established and supported a Krankenasyll (sick asylum), but really only the name changed.

However, large factory owners saw the need for a different kind of hospital. Many workers came from outside of the community so had no extended family to take care of them. Furthermore, it was not unusual for entire families to be working the factories, so there would be no one at home to provide care. Both out of a sense of Christian and civic duty and to help injured or sick workers to be able to return to work, they started to establish hospitals. But whereas the sick asylums were often full of chronically ill people and people who had not long to live, these new hospitals tried not to admit anyone who was not expected to recover.

The Zürich Kantonsspital (Cantonal Hospital) opened in 1842 as one of these new-style hospitals, followed by those in communities such as Horgen in 1868 and Wädenswil in 1877. While August Weidmann was Gemeindepräsident from 1880 to 1883, major factory owners and the local clergy started planning a similar hospital for Thalwil and Oberrieden. The Thalwiler Krankenasyll with eight beds was built and opened in 1884. The majority of patients were female because so many textile workers were female. It did not take long for room for more patients to be needed, so a new 25-bed hospital was built on Asylstrasse to replace the first in 1897. Confusingly, this new building would be later known as Altes Asyl (old asylum).

By 1909, the new hospital (*right*) was full. Contrary to the rules, ever more patients were being admitted with chronic or terminal illnesses. And as a result, the patient death rate rose from the previously very low values, as did the average length of stay. Outside of academic hospitals, care was little more than using antiseptics and providing a calm environment for patients to recover. That started to change around 1925, when the Thalwil/Oberrieden hospital required that new nurses be trained operating X-ray machines. So clearly modern medical care was being introduced. More people started coming to the hospital for modern treatments, and the average stay duration dropped.



With the limited facilities at the hospital, it was felt a new modern acute care facility was needed to better serve those patients. After careful financial planning during the Great Depression, Krankenhaus Thalwil (*left*) was opened in 1934 on land south of the previous facility, which was now called Altes Asyl. Altes Asyl was used to care for chronically ill patients.

Whereas previously the aged would have been cared for at home, just as the sick family members were, society was changing. About 1910, the large factory owners also established a Bürgerheim (community home) in Mettli for the aged.⁷

Cemetery

Originally, the cemetery was next to St. Martin's church at Platte. In 1833 it was expanded to include the neighboring vineyards where Öggisbüel school and playground are today. But as the population grew in the 1800's, even that space was too small. So the cemetery was moved to its current location in 1897. The mortuary remained in the old cemetery until 1923, when a new mortuary was built on the upper west side of the new cemetery. At August Weidmann's death in 1928, money was bequeathed to expand the cemetery and for a funeral chapel (*right*) and new mortuary. This was done with additional funds from the municipality, although the 1923 mortuary was not replaced until 1964.



Cultural note: Cemetery plots are leased, not purchased. If the family does not renew the lease, the plot is reclaimed for reuse.

⁷ Entire section summarized from: Thalwiler Neujaarsblatt 2009, pages 4-14

Industrial Era Landmarks

Wash/Laundry Houses

Although they existed well before the 1800's, the remaining wash houses in Thalwil date from then. Many were shared by several nearby households. Just like in apartment buildings with a shared laundry still today, households were assigned wash days. Women would do their laundry together and chat on those days.



Oberdorfasse #14



Häuslerstrasse #57



Ankengasse #5



Alte Landstrasse #110A

Jenny-Schloss

In 1864 Heinrich Schmid (owner of the Gattikon silk factory) left a silk manufacturing company he had cofounded with Fritz Schwarzenbach-Suter (1830–1893). Fritz continued running the company under his own name until his death. He was also Gemeindepräsident and a member of the Zürich cantonal council. In 1878, he had a villa (*right*) with a scenic view built at today's Mühlebachstrasse #51. The villa property included outbuildings, including his silk factory.



After his death, the property was sold to Conrad Jenny-Jenny (1848-1928), a merchant from Glarus. Conrad refurbished the manor house in grand style, and it was thereafter known as the Jenny Schloss (palace/castle). It was acquired by the Thalwil municipality in 1957.

Firehouses

Each of the watches were responsible for fire fighting. Together in 1733 they bought a hose and pump wagon. But because of the difficulty of moving it in an emergency, Ludretkon bought its own wagon and firehouse in 1761. In 1777, the Unterdorf and Oberdorf watches together built a firehouse for their wagons near the Gesellenhaus. It was replaced by a larger building in 1873 that was used as the Oberdorf/Unterdorf firehouse until 1910 (*right*). The hose tower was added in 1907, along with a detention room (jail). From 1939 at the start of World War 2, the building was used for civil defense.



In 1910, a new firehouse was built at Gottardstrasse #37 (*left*), to replace all of the separate firehouses, including Gattikon's from 1822 and one in Etlberg. Since 1937, firefighting throughout the municipalities of Thalwil and Oberrieden is handled by the TALO volunteer association. The current TALO firehouse was built in 1992 at Zürcherstrasse #70.

Thalwil: Commuter Town

The collapse of the textile industry began with the Great Depression. After World War 2, inexpensive imports from Asia ended any hope of recovery. The Thalwil textile factories employed fewer and fewer people, finally closing in 1970 (Heer, Weidmann), 1976 (Schmid), and 1981 (Schwarzenbach).

For many towns so dependent on one industry, the collapse would have been a disaster. But the legacy of these large businesses and their leaders left Thalwil with the infrastructure needed to support a large working population, including great transportation connections and utilities, as well as debt-free municipal properties. And since so much of the land was already occupied by or available for housing, including the old factory sites, there was plenty of room for residents. In short, many workers found Thalwil to be a good place to live while working elsewhere.

Population Growth

So despite the great reduction of jobs within Thalwil, the population continued to grow. In the Industrial Era, the population grew from 1,294 in 1812 to 3,293 in 1880, to 7,746 in 1910. In the four decades between 1910 and 1950 from World War 1 through the Great Depression and World War 2, the population level plateaued. But after 1950 even as the textile factories shut down, the population grew very rapidly, averaging 255 new residents per year from 1950 to 1975, when the population reached 15,176. See the [population graph](#) in the Appendix for more details.

For all that growth, there had to be housing construction. Over 400 residences were added in the peak year of 1975. But concerns about loss of open space lead to zoning requirements, so in 1976 the number of new residences dropped to less than 150. But if anything, retaining open space adds to the desirability of living in Thalwil. However, lower supply means higher prices.

Between 1975 and 2000, Thalwil's population level again plateaued, this time due to lack of space. Then in the first decade of the 2000s, the population grew from 15,749 to 17,189 and by 2021 it had reached 18,525. Recently, the housing shortage has become more acute because many residential buildings are in the process of being renovated or replaced by buildings with more residences. Thalwil is becoming more densely populated.

It should be noted that Thalwil currently has the [fourth densest population](#) of any municipality in the canton with 3,300 residents per square kilometer. Kilchberg is in third place, then Opfikon. Zürich city is the densest with 4,600 per square kilometer.

About 31% of Thalwil's residents are currently not Swiss citizens. This is a little higher than the whole canton (29%) and the nation (26%). From about 1970 to 2006, it was about 20% in Thalwil.

A3

The already-great transportation connections in Thalwil improved further with the construction of the A3 highway in 1962-1965 and its interchanges, one in Thalwil near *Im Ebnet* where the A3 crosses Sonnenbergstrasse/Gattikonstrasse, and the other just north of Thalwil near *Park Im Grüene* in Rüslikon. Originally, a road was planned from the Rüslikon exit southwards to connect Oberrieden and Horgen. But instead, Zürcherstrasse was built from the Rüslikon exit to near Böni where it connects to Albisstrasse/Mühlebachstrasse as well as the extension of Tischenloostrasse, also built in 1965. Since Tischenloostrasse connects to both Alte Landstrasse and Seestrasse, it provides the desired connections to Oberrieden and Horgen. The Thalwil road system was now well connected to the national highway system with effectively two interchanges.

Schools

In the last 75 years, three more schools have been opened. First was the Feld schoolhouse in 1954. It was further expanded on the west side in 1964 by the addition of the Berg schoolhouse. The Feld-Berg secondary school was renovated and enlarged during 2022-2024,

In 1975, two new primary schools were opened: the Schweikrüti school in Gattikon as well as the Sonnenberg primary school near Aegertli. Schweikrüti replaced the two older schoolhouses in Gattikon, although the oldest schoolhouse is still used for kindergarten. Sonnenberg was expanded in 2018 and is again in 2025-2026.

Health and Aging

Construction began on an expanded hospital in 1972. In 1975, patients were temporarily moved from the adjacent acute care building into the new buildings while the acute care building was renovated. The patients were moved back in 1976 and then the chronically ill patients in Altes Asyl were moved to the expansion. The expanded and renovated hospital had 50 acute care beds, 106 long-term beds, and 11 infant beds.

Altes Asyl was demolished in 1975 and then replaced by an independent-living retirement home in 1983. It is now Serata Oeggisbüel (*right*), serving the elderly who do require daily care.



In 1996, the Zürich Health Directorate decided that the Thalwil Hospital's acute care facility should be closed to consolidate such facilities in fewer locations. Thalwil appealed this decision to the federal government. The appeal was denied and the acute care facility had to be closed in 1999, leaving only the chronic care facility. With the remaining hospital operation financially unsustainable, it was decided that the best way forward would be to convert the entire hospital complex into an Alterszentrum (senior citizens center), which along with the retirement community buildings on the other side of Tischenloostrasse, could offer all levels of service.



Serata Alterszentrum building 1 at intersection of Alte Landstrasse and Tischenloostrasse

In 2005, the nursing home residents were temporarily moved to the former hospital in Adliswil while the Thalwil hospital was being renovated as the Serata Alterszentrum. The old acute care building was replaced and is now Serata building 2. The main buildings 1 and 2 reopened in 2007 and building 3 reopened in 2009. The Serata foundation serves Thalwil and Oberrieden, just as the hospital did.⁸

⁸ Entire section summarized from: Thalwiler Neujaarsblatt 2009, pages 25-38

Sports and Recreation

Beyond the walking and riding trails through the forest, Thalwil has more recently added a number of sports and recreation facilities. These include the Gesundheitspark (health park) in Böni, which opened in 1982; as well as the swimming hall at the Schweikrüti school in Gattikon, which opened in 1998. But the center for field and ice sports is the Brand and Etzliberg areas near the A3 highway.

There are four football fields: Etzliberg, Brand 1, Brand 2 and Brand 3. The Brand 1 field is ringed by a 400 meter running track and has other light-athletic facilities. Brand 2 has the Fussballclub (FC) Thalwil clubhouse. The Brand 3 field opened in 2013 and has artificial turf.

Between Brand 1 and the golf driving range, is the ice skating rink, which opened in 2006. The rink is shared by both the ice skating club and the hockey club, so is quite busy. Unfortunately, the cost of a roof was a considered to be prohibitive for the community. Without a roof, the costs of keeping the ice frozen during all but the coldest months is also too high, so the clubs must practice and compete elsewhere much of their seasons.

In addition to the costs at the Gesundheitspark, there are tennis courts north of the golf practices ranges. A recent addition to the Brand sports facilities is a “pumprack” skateboard and bike track, which opened in 2022.



Gotthardstrasse

Compared to early photos, the character of Gotthardstrasse has changed. Many of the original attractive buildings have been replaced by or changed to be more utilitarian. The tree-lined street became street parking. In the 2020's Gotthardstrasse is being renewed.

Planning for the renewal started in 2015. The plan agreed to in 2023 is for a more pedestrian-friendly street, reducing the traffic flow to a single 30 km/h lane, reducing the number of parking places and adding more trees to the widened sidewalks. That street rework started in 2025, but even before, the street was torn up to install water heating supply pipes.



At nearly the same time, the new Centralplatz and the Central-Treff building (left) were being constructed on the site of some older buildings on Gotthardstrasse just south of Schwandelstrasse. They opened on 1 October 2024. The bus stops were also moved to Centralplatz and the traffic flows rerouted. It took about 10 years for the plans for the plaza and building to have been realized and they seem to have accomplished what the planners intended.

Traditions, Festivals and Events

The Thalwil website has pages for [events](#) as well as [markets and festivals](#).



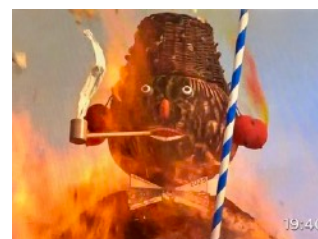
Thalwil Fasnacht

Thalwil celebrates [Fasnacht](#) (Carnival, Fat Tuesday) with [music](#) and a children's parade along Dorfstrasse from St. Martin's church to Chilbiplatz. Bring confetti!

Zürich Sechseläuten and the Böögg

The Zürich [Sechseläuten](#) festival is held near the end of April, ending with a half-day work holiday on Monday afternoon for the city and for some nearby towns. Since so many people in Thalwil commute, many have Sechseläuten as a half day off work. The name refers to the ringing of Fraumünster bell at 6:00 PM to mark the end of the working day. In medieval times, the end of the working day during autumn and winter was sundown when it was too dark to continue working, so a bell was needed in the spring and summer.

A parade of traditional organizations including the guilds takes place, ending at Sechseläutenplatz near the Zürich Opera House. A large pyre topped by the Böögg (an effigy of a snowman) is lit promptly at 6:00 PM, an act that obviously celebrates the end of the cold time of the year. The Böögg's head contains an explosive charge. The longer it takes for the fire to reach the head and blow it up, the wetter the summer is expected to be. The parade and burning of the Böögg is shown on national TV and is much more fun than the equivalent Groundhog's Day in the USA.



Swiss National Holiday



Although Swiss National Day is the 1st of August, the official Thalwil celebration takes place on the previous evening. One of the best places to watch the fireworks of other towns on 1st August and New Years Eve is the east side of St. Martin's church and from Platten Park.

Gotthardstrasse Market

The Gotthardstrassenmarkt takes place on a weekend near the end of August. It is an end-of-summer market with booths for food and things to buy. While it used to take place along Gotthardstrasse, it had to be moved to Dorfstrasse during the renovation. It will return to Centralplatz and Gotthardstrasse.

Thalwil Book Exchange

The Büchermarkt takes place on a Sunday in early September in the hall behind Schützenhaus. Recently, a flea market (Flohmarkt) is held on the same day at Chilbiplatz across the street.

Zürich Knabenschiessen

Knabenschiessen (boys' shooting competition) is another Zürich half-day work holiday on a Monday afternoon in the middle of September. Like Secheläuten, it is included here because so many people in Thalwil work for businesses that close for the half day. Knabenschiessen is Zürich's Chilbi (annual town fair) and like most, is a three-day event ending on a Monday; and it is Switzerland's largest. For Knabenschiessen, the Monday afternoon is the final rounds of the shooting competition, in which girls participate (and win!) even though the name has not changed.

Thalwil Chilbi

The Thalwil Chilbi (annual town fair) is held on last weekend in October. It naturally takes place in Chilbiplatz and extends east along Dorfstrasse. Thalwil's is the last Chilbi of the year of any town in the area.

Thalwil Räbeliechtliumzug

What has to be the cutest Thalwil event, the Räbeliechtliumzug (turnip lantern parade) takes place on a Tuesday in early November. Kindergarten and primary school children hollow out and carve turnips, into which a candle is then inserted. The children assemble in Chilbiplatz then parade through the Oberdorf after dark.



The best known and probably largest Räbeliechtliumzug is held in Richterswil. It includes floats! It is extremely crowded, so it might be better to watch videos if you are curious. Such parades have taken place since the 1800's after gas street lighting replaced using turnip lanterns to light the way to evening church services.

The tradition of carving turnips is widespread in northern Europe. The tradition was brought to North America, where pumpkins were far more common, thus starting the tradition of carving pumpkins and lighting them with candles. Very recently, pumpkins are starting to be available in the local area and Halloween is starting to be celebrated. So jack-o-lanterns are starting to appear, bringing the tradition full circle.

St. Martins Day

Fasnacht preparation traditionally starts on 11 November at 11:11. That day is St. Martin's day by the church calendar, and since the Thalwil church at Platte is dedicated to St. Martin, this day is maybe a bit more celebrated in Thalwil than most places. Of course, there is Fasnacht-style music (Guggenmusik). St. Martin's Day through Fasnacht is referred to as Fifth Season.

Lichterweg Thalwil+Oberrieden

The Lichterweg (lighted path) was first set up in 2021, so is quite new. There is about a kilometer of lighted paths at the south end of Thalwil and the border with Oberrieden. There is a Chäs-Hütte (cheese hut) serving fondue and raclette as well as a Glühwein stand serving drinks.



Advent Windows



Each December, groups of 24 residences each display a decorated and lighted window with a number for the day of the month the window is first lit. By Christmas Eve, all 24 will be lit. The number of advent window groups has varied. In 2025 there are groups of windows in Gattikon and the Oberdorf. In past years, there were also windows in Ludretikon. Maps of windows can be found, or one can just wander around trying to spot them while discovering new parts of the town.

Christmas Markets

The Thalwil Weihnachtsmarkt is held on the first Friday afternoon and evening in December on Gotthardstrasse, and now also in Centralplatz.

The Gattikon Weihnachtsmarkt is held on a Saturday afternoon in mid-December in the Obstgartenplatz.

Expect visits from Samichlaus and Schmutzli!



Schulsilvester

In a tradition unique to the Zürich area, schoolchildren gather early on the last day of school in December to make lots of noise.

Conclusion

Unlike the picturesque Swiss towns with grand medieval buildings, including an old town hall (Altes Gemeindehaus) from the 1500's or earlier, an even older abbey, and maybe the remnants of city walls, Thalwil's heyday of wealth and power didn't occur until the industrial era. The factories from which the wealth was derived were not picturesque and not worth preserving once the era passed. The farms that preceded the factories were just farms. Other than a few villas, the valuable legacy of the heyday is the infrastructure that makes Thalwil a great place to live.

This brief history is what the author considers to be highlights illustrating how and why the town and daily life changed to what it is today. The names of a few people are included, not just to highlight them individually, but also their family names.

A great many more details can be found in Hans Jacob Zwicky-Staub's 1995 book *Chronik der Gemeinde Thalwil* and in the *Thalwil Neujarsblatt* editions to which he contributed. In addition to these works, Hans (1921-2005) and his brother Johann Paul Zwicky (1906-1982) collected the research on Swiss families by their genealogical institute in a 65-volume work.

The author is grateful for the opportunity to learn more about the recent history of Thalwil from Christine Burgener, Gemeindepräsidentin from 1998 to 2014. During her time as community president, she drove the planning for Central-Treff. She is currently one of the leaders of Café International.

Appendix - Thalwil Population

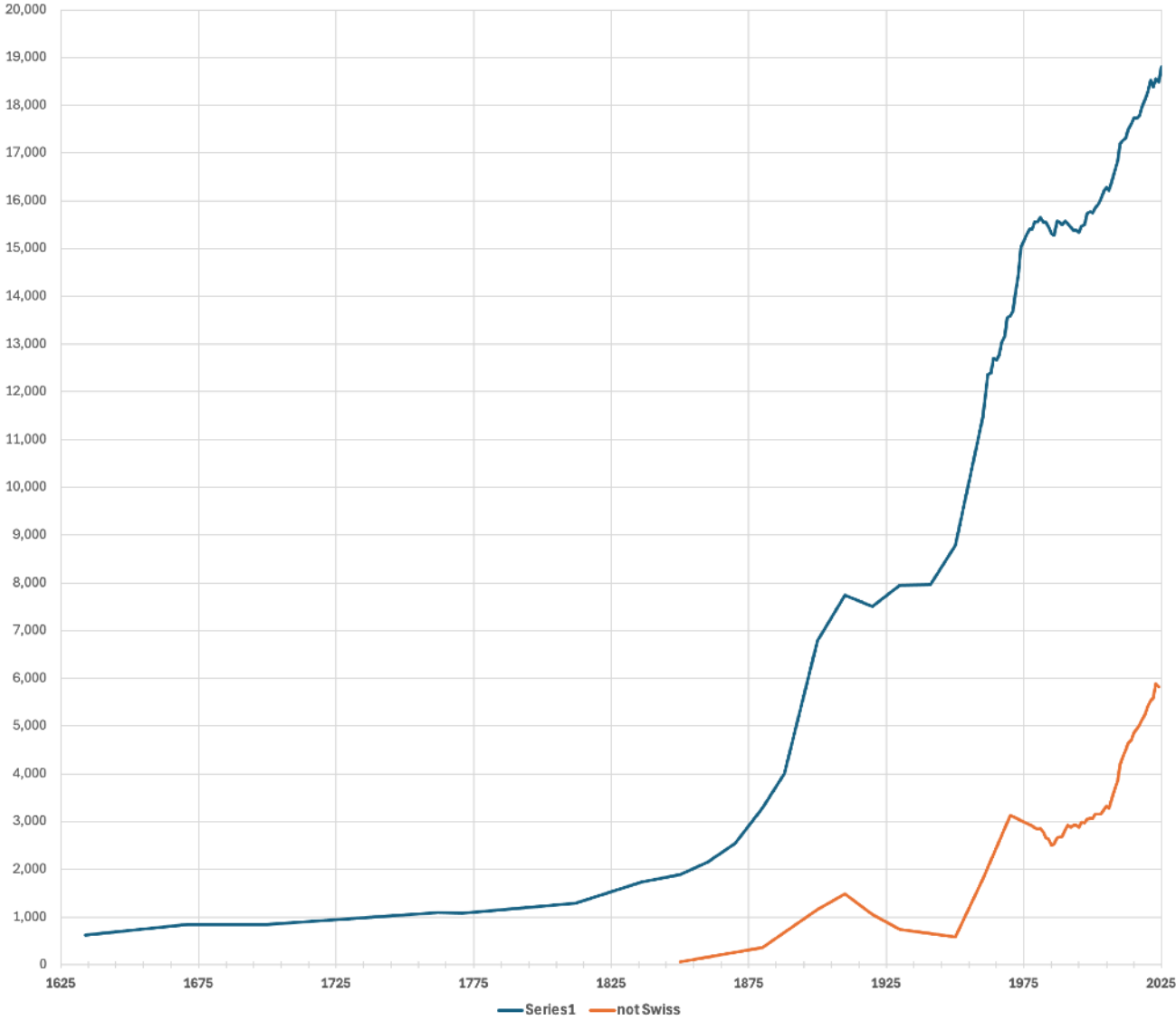


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Page 18: Im Aegertli 1,3 and Etzlibergstrasse 10,12 by Francesco Hässig, via VVT.

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Page 26: Heer & Co. 1899 photo from company archive. 1925 photo by Walter Mittelholzer.

Page 27: Schwarzenbach factory 1925 photo by Walter Mittelholzer.

Page 28: Weidmann factory top photo from company archive. Bottom photo Walter Mittelholzer.

Page 29: Factory door Martin Ziegler. Demolition photos from ETH Zürich archive

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Page 42: TeleZüri broadcast 2025 snapshot by Lisa Bond.

Page 43: Räbeliechtliumzug 2025 photo by Lisa Bond.

Page 43: Lichterweg photo by Wild Boars Oberrieden.

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Tetrtych of the view from Thalwil by Hui Ling Mavroidis.

Editions

- 1.0 2025-12-23
- 1.1 2026-02-17 2025 population and Sport Facility additions. Minor text and photo edits.

The End