

“Small Number – Big Impact” – Swiss immigration in the USA
March 2 to October 28 at the Swiss National Museum, Zurich

A project of the Society for a Migration Museum

The present exhibition belongs to a number of theme-centered projects realised by the Society for a Migration Museum, Switzerland.

«Small Number – Big Impact» was initially – and successfully - presented in summer 2006 on Ellis Island, New York. More than 55'000 visitors have made the rounds of this special exhibition.

In 2002 the Society for a Migration Museum was invited by the board of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum to document Swiss immigration in the USA by means of an exhibition at this renowned institution which annually attracts more than five million visitors. This offer helped initiate the special program of Präsenz Schweiz (www.swissroots.org) and brought about the partnership of the society responsible for the exhibition with Präsenz Schweiz and the Swiss National Museum.

We are especially glad to have realised our society's project with the help of these two highly respected partners. Thanks to the efforts of Felix Graf and his team its content was substantially enlarged for the Zurich exhibition.

The special bias of Swiss emigration to the USA helps to familiarize the public in an interesting and entertaining way with the fact that Switzerland has not always been an immigration country. On the contrary – towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries Switzerland was profoundly shaped by emigration. A majority of the emigrants succeeded in finding a new homeland in the USA. Some even left a substantial trace in their new surroundings – by means of their achievements or their inventions.

The Museum of Migration: a new cultural institution

The Society for a Migration Museum, founded in 1989, has set itself the goal to realise, in Switzerland, a new museum covering the themes of migration and Switzerland as a migratory country. The museum and its institution aims to show Switzerland in an attractive way as a country whose historical development was deeply influenced by migration. Similar to Ellis Island, the new museum sees itself as an institution that helps establish identity and shows Switzerland as a country open to the world – above all by tracing migration's historical roots and showing up its future potential.

Whereas countless Swiss and their descendants have contributed to the success story of the multicultural USA, the same thing goes for Switzerland, where numerous immigrants enriched economy and everyday life by means of their special capabilities, starting with the huguenots, founders of the watch-making industry, by way of industrial pioneers such as Nestlé or Brown&Boveri, up to Nicolas Hayek of Swatch fame oder the Navyboats of Mr. Bencivenga ...

Thanks to a move in the Zurich town parliament as of last winter, the Migration Museum is now on the political agenda. We hope that the authorities of the town and canton of Zurich, as well as their federal counterparts, will find the necessary conviction and enthusiasm needed to initiate and finance a cultural institution based on a new and fascinating concept.

The Zurich region comes easily to mind as the ideal place for our project. Throughout the centuries immigrants have helped shape its history – from the silk merchants and manufacturers of the 16th

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Projekt **MIGRATIONSMUSEUM** Schweiz



centuries to the founding fathers of the university to the recently opened European headquarters of the Google company. For this successful and cosmopolitan community a Migration Museum would form a welcome novelty, at the same time expressing the city's thanks to the huge part of its population that has a migratory background and serving as a pledge to generosity and urbanity.

Examples for already existing and successful thematical museums on migration are:

- New York : Ellis Island Immigraton Museum - www.nps.gov/elis/
- Melbourne: Immigration Museum - www.immigration.museum.vic.gov.au
- Auswandererhaus Bremerhaven - www.dah-bremerhaven.de
- Paris: Cité National de l'Immigration - www.histoire-immigration.fr (Ab April 2007)
- Göteborg : Museum of World Cultures - www.varldskulturmuseet.se

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