

History of the Vonwiller Company and its Sample Books



mehr Information & english version

Up until 1999 these premises were occupied by the Vonwiller Company founded in 1833 by the Swiss entrepreneur Nikolaus Vonwiller who also owned a bank and trading house in Milan. Many years earlier a Vonwiller purchaser had come regularly to the weekly markets at Haslach to buy local linen for resale in Italy. Finally a factory was erected on a rock high above the River Mühl. Linen weavers who had been formerly self-employed now worked for Vonwiller. Apart from the advantage that the people of the region were familiar with weaving, the Mühlviertel was a low-wage region at that time.

Vonwiller was the first large concern in the Mühlviertel and soon employing hundreds of people. Apart from one other large textile mill at Helfenberg, all the weaving mills were small or medium sized enterprises and operated like a cottage industry. The factory and its work processes and hierarchies introduced an entirely new form of working which made a mark on the economic and social life of the town.

In the beginning, classical linen fabrics were produced on hand looms. Some workers were employed at the factory, but work was also put out to cottage weavers. In 1854 Vonwiller was the first weaving mill in the Mühlviertel to introduce mechanical looms. Lavishly patterned jacquards were produced from cotton and silk. These materials were mainly used for waistcoats which were in fashion at the time and were famous far beyond the region.

A great number of sample books from around 1900 bear witness to an impressive range of products. Some commercial and accounting records have been preserved and give an idea of Vonwiller's international business connections. Long before 1900 produce from Haslach had been sent to, for example, Egypt, Syria, the USA, Canada, Scandinavia and South America.

Many of the patterns were based on French and English designs and swatches of competitive designs were systematically pasted into heavy volumes. These served as an inspiration for the company's own solutions. They explain why strange motives which have no connection at all with the everyday culture of the Mühlviertel at the time appear in the Vonwiller range of products – for example tennis players, unicyclists or orchids. These were influenced by the fashion of other countries or intended for the international market.