
THE STORY OF A **NOBLE MAN** IN HOROLOGY

Pioneer watchmaker Heinrich Moser was the founder of H. Moser & Cie. Roger Nicholas Balsiger, great-grandson of Heinrich Moser and honorary Chairman of H. Moser & Cie, is the most appropriate person to introduce us to the fascinating story of his noble ancestor – a story most fittingly expressed in the rare timepieces that bear his ancestor’s name, real gems of Haute Horlogerie

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CONSTANTIN STIKAS: *Heinrich Moser belonged to a watchmaking family. What was at his time the activity of watchmakers in Schaffhausen and what do we know about the activities of his ancestors in the area?*

ROGER NICHOLAS BALSIGER: There was an officially appointed ‘City Watchmaker’, who was in charge of the church and other City clocks. Both Heinrich Moser’s father Erhard (1760-1829) and his grandfather Johannes (1730-1820) held this office, next to political and juridical positions. A more pronounced activity in watchmaking commenced when Heinrich Moser invited F.A. Jones to set up a factory in Schaffhausen in 1868. Heinrich Moser supported him financially, infrastructurally and with his ideas and experience. This, at the time, was the birth of the International Watch Co., today’s IWC, which would not exist without Heinrich Moser’s initiative

Could we attribute his move to Le Locle at the age of 19 to the fact that in Le Locle there was already significant activity in the field of watchmaking, or watchmakers who could teach him new techniques?

Yes, very much so. Heinrich underwent a second apprenticeship (a master apprenticeship) in Le Locle for another 2½

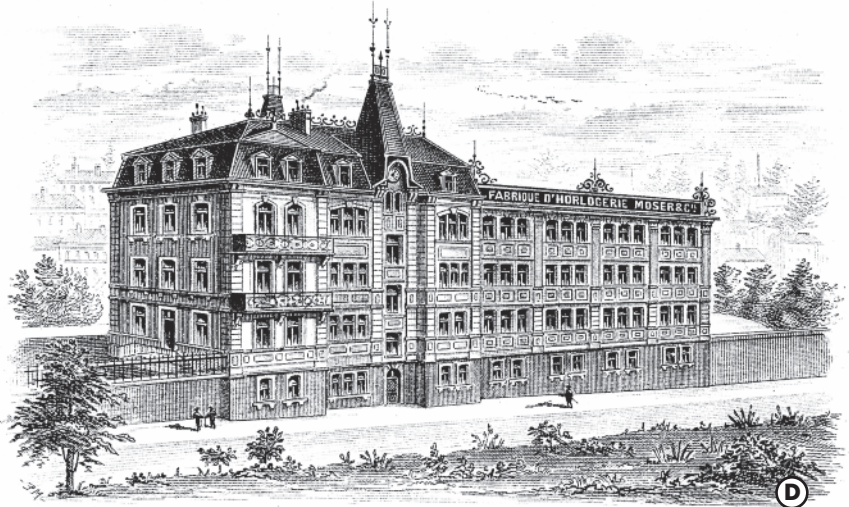
years, picking up valuable knowledge and experience for his future successful career. He also began trading in watches in order to earn some money, since in those days apprentices had to pay their masters!

Why did he establish himself in St. Petersburg in 1828? Was he disappointed in his own country or was there some family connection with Russia? Did he already know the language, or was there something else that made him try his luck so far away from home?

His father wanted to see him turn south towards Italy. But Heinrich was as gifted a watchmaker as he was a shrewd marketer! He realised that Tsarist Russia was still very much a greenfield operation to be cultivated, albeit with a high risk/reward ratio. This was exactly to his liking in his young years. Heinrich knew French, especially from his time spent in Le Locle, and the upper classes in Russia spoke French, of course.

The next year he set up his own workshop in Le Locle. What was his activity in Switzerland and in Russia in the late 1820s?

Whilst making St. Petersburg his head office, especially for marketing and distribution, he opened his subsidiary in Le



- A.**
Heinrich Moser
- B.**
*Charlottensfels Country Manor, near
Schaffhausen,
now the site of the family museum*
- C.**
*Heinrich Moser & Cie.
in St-Petersburg*
- D.**
*The factory in Le Locle,
built around 1900*
- E.**
*Roger-Nicholas Balsiger,
great-grandson of Heinrich Moser*

Locle for the production of his watches. Practically all other Swiss industrialists kept their head offices in Switzerland and opened branches abroad. Not so Heinrich Moser.

In 1831 he set up a subsidiary in Moscow and started working for the Royal Family, the Tsars and the Russian Army. Would you like to tell us about that time? What watches did he create in those days and have any of them survived?

He could sell to the Royal Family, the aristocracy and the Tsarist Army because of his success in being the only person able to repair a mechanical instrument of Tsar Nicholas I at the time. His production palette comprised mainly pocket watches – ranging from medium-priced to luxury ones – and table clocks. He also produced movements for utilisation in Fabergé eggs. Some Fabergé eggs have survived, as have pocket watches from around the turn of the century and later. We have no inventory of watches produced at the time: it is highly possible that, together with other vital historic documents of the company, it was lost in the turmoil of the Russian Revolution! Knowing how pedantic Heinrich Moser was in every walk of life, I cannot conceivably imagine that he did not keep an inventory of his production of watches!

About that time he also started selling watches in Japan, China, Persia and Turkestan, as well as in Siberia and Kamchatka. How easy was international business of that sort at the time?

It was extremely difficult to export, not only because of the hazardous routes (the Silk Road among others!), but also because of the complicated procedures in each country, as well as the high duties applied in various countries on the import of watches. Sales were also made to the United States and, of course, within Europe. No regional markets were known at the time; one of the first to emerge was the tariff union established in the south of Germany in 1834 (Baden). When we consider the distances and also the means of transportation at the time, his success in supplying foreign markets with his quality products warrants the highest of admiration.

What determined his final return to Schaffhausen in 1848 and what was his watchmaking and other activity there?

One of his main reasons for returning to Schaffhausen was the regular breakout of diseases in various countries of his activity, such as, e.g. the cholera. Next, he had installed country managers in the main Points of Sale, alleviating his own involvement there. His return, as an exceedingly wealthy man, was also based on patriotic considerations, since the region around Schaffhausen was pauperised and Heinrich Moser utilised his money to industrialise the region. There was no watchmaking activity worth talking about around the mid-Century.

What became of his company and fortune after his death on October 23rd, 1874?

Heinrich Moser's second wife, Baroness Fanny Moser von Sulzer-Wart (my great-grandmother) inherited the entire watchmaking business, i.e. the Company in St. Petersburg with its Russian outlets, plus the watchmaking factory in Le Locle. Since she was not cognizant in this business, she sold out the Swiss production company to its manager, Paul Girard, and the Russian company to its joint managers, Cornelius Winterhalter and Octave Meylan (Octave Meylan, incidentally, is in all probability the grandfather of Georges-Henri Meylan, today's Chairman of Moser Watch Holding Ltd.). Tragically, the two co-owners lost all their proprietary rights when the Russian Revolution commenced.

What was the fate of the company after 1877, when H. Moser & Cie passed into the hands of Paul Girard?

The Company continued to be active in the premium segment production of watches, retaining the quality principles of Heinrich Moser. Wristwatches were added to the product palette. It is known that, e.g. in 1953, water-proof watches as also an automatic watch were on the market, whilst the production of pocket watches declined. It is further known that, in 1973, precision timekeepers (18-carat gold watches with jewels fixed to the case) were produced and sold. The company "H. Moser & Cie." in Le Locle suffered under the so-called "quartz watch crisis" in the 1970s, in analogy with the entire Swiss watchmaking industry. The company was finally sold as "H. Moser & Cie." to DIXI S.A. in 1979.

Since H. Moser & Cie was well established in Russia, how were the company's activities influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1918 and the 70-year communist rule?

The Russian part of the company was nationalised in 1918. The Soviets continued producing watches and retained the brand's long-standing quality standards. It is known that up to the late 1960s, 18-carat gold watches were presented as gifts to high-ranking military officers of the Soviet Union (one of those is on display in the family museum in Charlottenfels Manor, the ancestral castle situated in the Canton of Schaffhausen).

Would you like to tell us about the evolution of the company after our entry into the third millennium, as well as about the company's re-launch?

In 2000, I was contacted by Jürgen Lange, the former production head of IWC. He was on the lookout for an old and valued watchmaking brand which he wanted to revive. As I had published a number of biographies about pioneering members of the Moser family, he most probably found out about me being a direct descendant of Heinrich Moser. He enquired if I was interested in joining up with him as the representative of the Moser family for reviving the brand, to which I agreed. The re-launch occurred in 2005. In 2012, Jürgen Lange left the company, which was then taken over by the Meylan family whilst retaining the 180-year-old brand name of "H. Moser & Cie".



A

A.
*Minute repeater
with perpetual calendar and moon phases,
ca. 1870*

B.
*Gold hunter pocket watch or H. Moser & Cie.
Imperial eagle in colored enamel*

C.
*Hand-engraved
two-headed imperial eagle*

D.
*Fabergé table clock
with Moser double barrel movement*



B



C



D

Today's collection comprises two lines:

1. "Endeavour", reminding us of the first years of Heinrich Moser's life in mastering watchmaking and establishing H. Moser & Cie. in Russia, with the Endeavour Perpetual Calendar, Endeavour Moon, Endeavour Dual Time, Endeavour Big Date, Endeavour Centre Seconds and Endeavour Small Seconds. This collection has been developed since 2005 and includes references to H. Moser & Cie. historic pocket watches.
2. "Venturer", inspired by Heinrich Moser's entrepreneurial spirit and a second phase of his life, as expanded H. Moser & Cie., with the Venturer Tourbillon Dual Time and the Venturer Small Seconds.

Among the prizes H. Moser & Cie. has been honoured to receive, one we are most proud of was the "Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève" in the category of "Montre Compliquée" for the Endeavour Perpetual Calendar in 2006.

Could you tell us, in a nutshell, the philosophy of the company's founder concerning the development and production of watches?

From the onset, it was crystal-clear to Heinrich Moser that sustainable success could only be achieved by producing watches which had quality and a beautiful design. The start would be slower this way, he maintained, but the sustenance of a more pronounced nature.

Which of the models of H. Moser & Cie's contemporary collection of watches do you think best represents its founder's philosophy?

In principle, all of the pieces in the collection represent the founder's philosophy. If there was one watch that represents the culmination of this, it is the Endeavour Perpetual Calendar, with its ingenious display and functionality: our very large Flash Perpetual Calendar, month indication referencing the 12-hour indices, as well as the ability to adjust the time and date forward or back without risk of damaging the movement.

Which of the company's historical watches would you set apart?

Difficult to say, all the more as we are extremely pleased with the collection we hold in our family museum today. They all form part of the Moser family of watches. However, our minute-repeater pocket watch, which is truly delightful to behold, and the craftsmanship in the pocket watch cases give you two examples that I cherish most in our historic H. Moser & Cie. watches.

Apart from being a descendant of Heinrich Moser, you are also his biographer. Would you like to tell us about the book you wrote?

I wrote and published three books, one about my grandmother, one about Henri Moser, Heinrich's son, the adventurer, explorer of Central Asia, and diplomat. The last book is about my great-grandfather Heinrich Moser, a biography in short about his life. It is based on the family archives at my disposal as also the original biography written at the time by Prof. Adam Pfaff one year after Heinrich Moser's demise. I have more projects in store about my family in this respect.



Today's manufacture
in Neuhausen am Rheinfall



*Endeavour
Perpetual Calendar,
red gold case,
fumé dial*