

Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Eisenbahngeschichte SGEg

Exclusive tour of the Grabenkeller and reception with guided tour of the St. Gallen State Archives

Friday, 5 July 2024

Meeting point 13:00, entrance to the Graben gymnasium, Unterer Graben 17, St. Gallen

Dear members of our society

You think you know all the railway lines in our country and have already seen them? Then I'll make a cheeky bet against it. Or have you ever travelled through the Graben Tunnel? And because it is so mysterious, let's take a look at some of the treasures from the St. Gallen State Archives that are once again coming to light. Finally, if you want, you will have the opportunity to marvel at a corpse more than 2,600 years old in a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But first things first.

When the St. Gallisch-Appenzell Railway (SGAE) opened the Rorschach-St. Gallen line on 25 October 1856, the route, which was still single-track at the time, ran in an open cut through the centre of St. Gallen. When the Bodensee-Toggenburg Bahn (BT) started operating in 1910, the single-track line, which was used jointly with the SBB, reached its limits and an extension to double track in the densely built-up urban area was out of the question. The solution was to run the line underground. With financial support from the city of St. Gallen, SBB built the Rosenberg Tunnel, which still exists today, and began full operation on 1 April 1912. The old railway line was taken over by the city and filled in. One section continued to serve as a connecting track from St. Fiden railway station to the abattoir for several decades. The section in front of the long since demolished Grabenschulhaus was covered over and converted into the so-called Grabenkeller. Initially, the 135-metre-long building served as a warehouse for a wine merchant who set up a trolley railway in it. When the merchant moved out in 1951, the town fire brigade continued to use the Grabenkeller as a training facility until 1983, after which it fell into a deep slumber. Today, the site is deserted and is only used as a route for district heating pipes.

We have the unique opportunity to briefly visit the mysterious tunnel and explore the oldest testimony to railway traffic in St. Gallen. Embedded light railway tracks and rusty trolleys are reminders of the time when it was a wine cellar, while a quarystone wall on one of the cellar walls is a reminder of the SGAE's time as an open railway line. After the 20-minute visit, we walk to the abbey district and are welcomed by the St. Gallen State Archives in the government building.

In addition to its main task of documenting the canton's state activities, the archive also preserves non-state archives with documents from private institutions, organisations, families and individuals. These include the archive of the former Bodensee-Toggenburgbahn-Gesellschaft (BT) and holdings of Dornier-Werke Altenrhein AG and its legal successor Flug- und Fahrzeugwerke Altenrhein AG (FFA). In the case of the latter, there are overlaps with the archive holdings of our company. The SGEg was founded in 2003 with the aim of preserving the photo archive of Bombardier Switzerland from destruction - and this also included the railway photographs of the FFA.

A co-operation with the St. Gallen State Archives and the SGEG has already taken place with the exchange of photo directories as finding aids and more will probably follow.

During our tour of the State Archives, we will gain an insight into the work of the specialists and learn about the many steps required to preserve archival records and make them accessible in the long term. The archive also works together with specialists in the respective subject area who have acquired their expertise outside of archival work. Our member Anton Heer, for example, is involved in the cataloguing of railway photographs and will tell us about his commitment. We will see some treasures that have been brought back into the public eye thanks to the tireless work of archivists. Anyone who maintains a (photo) archive themselves will certainly be inspired by tips on how to store these fragile documents in a way that makes sense from a conservation point of view.

Further history can be found in the neighbouring Abbey Library of the former Benedictine Abbey of St. Gallen. We have not organised a guided tour, but if you are interested, a visit to the baroque hall, which was built in the second half of the 16th century, is highly recommended at your own expense. And just in case your need for mysterious experiences is not yet satisfied, the Egyptian mummy of Schepene, possibly a daughter of the Amun priest Pestjenef in Thebes, who lived between around 650 and 610 BC, is also on display in the library.

As the number of participants is limited, this exceptional excursion is once only open to members of our organisation. However, one guest per member can be taken along. Registration is mandatory, closing date is 28 June 2024, places will be allocated in the order in which registrations are received. The cost is CHF 25 per person, registration by bank transfer to the bank account CH35 0070 0114 8083 3256 4, in the name of Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Eisenbahngeschichte SGEG, 8038 Zurich. We recommend that you bring a torch or mobile phone with a light function for the visit to the Grabenkeller.

As usual, the proceeds from our events contribute to the preservation of our archives and the operation of bahnarchiv.ch. So not only are you treating yourself to a mysterious railway day, you are also supporting our work. Thank you very much!

Roger Bennet
President & Head of Archives

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