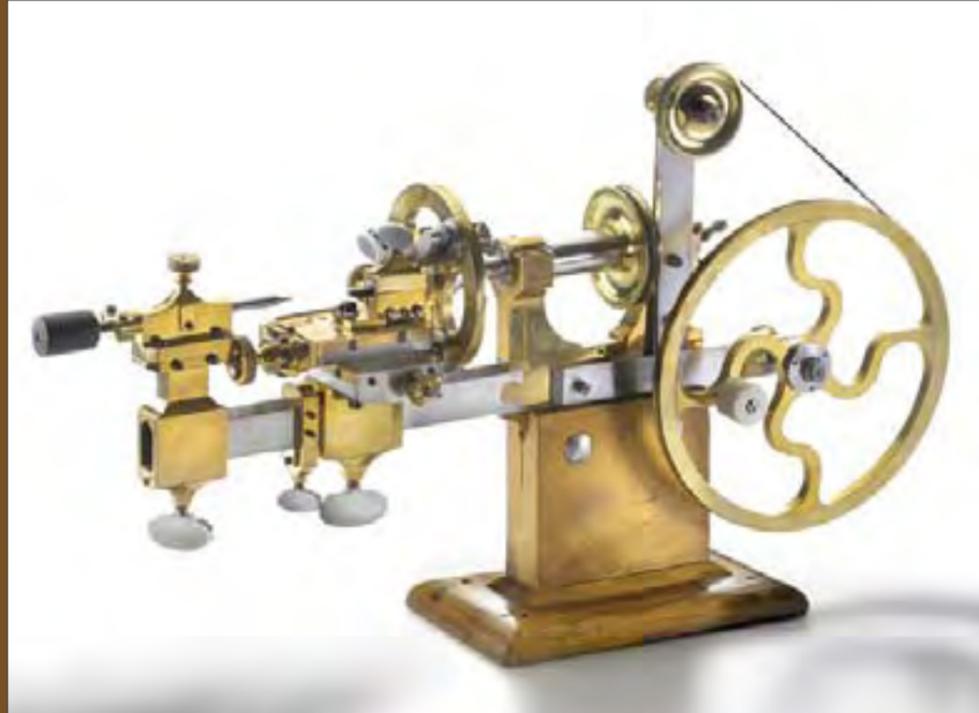




Daniel JeanRichard

Theodore Diehl looks into the past of one of Switzerland's most revered watchmakers

⌚ Daniel JeanRichard is, as a person, of great historic and symbolic importance to the Swiss watch-making industry. In fact, streets, squares and avenues named in his honour can be found throughout Switzerland. His exact date of birth is shrouded in mystery, and only part of his exploits are documented, thus providing the perfect conditions for an unimpeded and steady flow of legends that endow him with an aura of watchmaking sainthood.



A self-made man who seems to have possessed the same kind of intense horological single-mindedness that typified John Harrison, he was born sometime in the last quarter of the 17th century in the canton of Neuchâtel. He was raised in a farming family and, during the hard, cold winters when the fields were covered in deep snow, very soon developed an intense interest in watchmaking. Many of the upper floors of the farmhouse, with their solitude and excellent lighting conditions, were the perfect place for the production of small batches of watches and watch parts, and it was there that Daniel JeanRichard succeeded in the remarkable feat of teaching himself the necessary theory as well as the functions of the various tools and machines used in the watchmaker's workshop.

Legend has it that during one of his journeys to Geneva, JeanRichard came across a specialized machine for the manufacture of pinions (a special type of watch gearing whose "height" allows one or more gears to communicate in the watch movement). Machines of this type

were virtually unknown at that time, and pinions are notoriously difficult to make completely by hand. Enterprising as he was, he immediately saw the potential of such a device and wanted to purchase one of these machines in order to create a similar industry in the Neuchâtel area. As was to be expected, the Genevans were less than pleased at the prospect of their monopoly being broken, and refused his request. Undaunted, he ventured off on his own to design and then build a new pinion-cutting machine. He also designed several complementary machines, thereby single-handedly building up the local watchmaking industry, which later fanned out from Neuchâtel to La Chaux-de-Fonds and the surrounding area. This combination of enterprise, knowledge, hard work and fairness are the four pillars on which his legend – as well as the very legend of Switzerland itself – rests.

History

Watches bearing his name continued to be produced throughout the next two-and-a-half



centuries, with all the expected ups and downs that such a span of time entails. The company relocated twice, first to Geneva and then to the Joux Valley, where JeanRichard watches were made until the 1960s. Just as it did with so many other watch manufacturers, the upheavals of the time forced the closure of JeanRichard as a watch-making concern. However, just over 20 years later the name was purchased by Luigi Macaluso of Girard-Perregaux, who had the idea of reviving a new line of watches that would do justice to the legacy of Daniel JeanRichard.

The historical background of JeanRichard has been paid tribute to in the form of a museum. Located in a beautiful restored villa just a stone's throw from the Girard-Perregaux headquarters, the museum is set up in a complete yet intimate



fashion, and for that reason tours of the museum are by request only. The exhibits, which have taken many years of research and collecting to accumulate, pertain almost solely to tools and technique, with an accent on not only the earliest existing examples but unusual and rare modern ones as well. The curator of the museum is Willy Schweizer, and he has already spent a lifetime assembling the collection. "Our goal is to have everything fully functioning and operational – almost all of it already is – and to be able to show people the development of tools and machines in the watch industry throughout the course of the past 400 years." Although the technical nature of the collection may seem daunting to the uninitiated, it is certainly worth the visit for anyone interested in the JeanRichard brand and its history. ●

A statue of Daniel JeanRichard near La Chaux-de-Fonds depicting the watchmaker with one of his creations, similar to the pocket watch above.

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