

Rich and powerful - great personalities on securities

This latest exhibition in the museum "Wertpapierwelt" in Olten is devoted to the rich and powerful figures of economic history. Economics, politics, culture, technology and high finance have always been closely linked. Who were they, and where did they come from, the great pioneers of the economy, the great inventors and statesmen, whose deeds have influenced our lives up to the present day?

The exhibition showcases 80 selected securities that give the visitor exciting insights into the biographies of remarkable personalities who shaped the world we live in. Shares and bonds bear the names and signatures of these icons of power and wealth or are decorated with their portraits. This is why securities bear eloquent witness to historical events.

Sometimes the name of a person becomes synonymous with his or her achievements and actions. Thus, the name John D. Rockefeller (founder of the Standard Oil Company) has come to stand for capitalism per se. The fact that he was also – alongside Andrew Carnegie and many others – a great patron of various educational institutions is often forgotten.



Standard Oil Company

The Standard Oil Company turned John D. Rockefeller into the richest man of his day.

In contrast, the inventor Alfred Nobel has remained ingrained in people's memories thanks to his important legacy – the Nobel Prizes. But why should someone who owed all his wealth to dynamite and arms factories found a peace prize at the end of his life?

Bofors-Gullspang

The foundation capital for the Nobel Prizes derived from Alfred Nobel's 355 different patents and 92 dynamite factories all over the world.



The exhibition features a series of great financiers and speculators from Lionel Rothschild, who "bought" the Suez Canal for the British Crown, and J.P. Morgan, who turned Carnegie's steel company into the gigantic United States Steel, via Jay Gould, the "Mephisto of Wall Street", through to the fraudulent investment fund machinations of a Bernhard Cornfeld and his IOS. They were the bankers of power standing shoulder to shoulder with the industrialists of the day.



Investors Overseas Service (IOS)
Bernhard Cornfeld's IOS also left many Swiss investors with nothing but bitter memories.

However, personalities from the arts, literature and culture also invested the fruits of their endeavours in securities, while some of them sought to remain independent by founding their own public limited companies. Others also held a steady job, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who put his name on the share of a silver mine while serving as an officer at the court of the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe signed shares of the **Ilmenauer copper and silver mine**.



The Walt Disney Company
Walt Disney is one of the most widely known protagonists of popular culture.

Earlier still, monarchs, dictators, generals and presidents had already satisfied their needs for cash on the capital market. Thus, the Austrian Empress Maria Theresia signed debentures with her own hand to finance her numerous wars. Konrad Adenauer's signature is to be found on bonds issued by the town of Cologne. Other celebrities were involved in business before launching their political careers, as evidenced by the signature of the present governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, on the share of the restaurant chain "Planet Hollywood".



Bond of the town of Cologne
Konrad Adenauer signed this bond of the town of Cologne in 1920 in his function as Grand Mayor.

It is not unusual for shares and bonds to be adorned with the portraits of historical personalities. The image of Gutenberg on the share of a printing firm or that of Stradivaris on the share certificate of an instrument maker were intended to reassure the investor and win their trust. However, portraits on shares and bonds can also be emblems of a personality cult, as exemplified by the portraits of Saddam Hussein and Stalin on government bonds.



The portrait of Stalin on this bond from the 1930s was supposed to make the rouble roll for the Soviet regime.



An Iraqi government bond of 1986 featuring a portrait of Saddam Hussein. The bond was issued to finance the war against Iran.

Often it is hard to draw clear boundaries between personalities from culture and the arts, inventors, industrialists, speculators and bankers. The exhibition seeks to bring famous historical personalities back to life and to show how securities and the lives of people have always been intertwined. Let Maria Theresia or John D. Rockefeller tell you about their lives. You will meet an wide range of characters at this exhibition from nobility and the nouveaux riches through to great inventors and astute financiers. The profound changes seen in the world in the past four centuries were, after all, the work of people with immense innovative powers. And the share was the instrument that made it all possible – as well as a symbol of its owners' wealth and power.