

Photos: Local history museum collection



WIN

**THE MOUNTAIN
LANDSCAPE IN AROSA –
SNOW GUARANTEED,
THEN AND NOW**

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Photos:
Local history museum collectionRuth Licht on the terrace of
Hof Maran in the winter of 1929

Portrait of Ruth Licht

A life devoted to guests

Memories of Hof Maran

At almost 98 years of age, Ruth Licht is probably one of the oldest people alive with memories of Hof Maran. Ruth has lived in Arosa since 1928. Her parents moved there in 1910 and then worked in Glarus for some time, before returning to Arosa in 1928 along with five-year-old Ruth and her two older sisters. Her father was a self-employed architect and her mother a passionate cook. She ran the guesthouse «Haus am See», near the Untersee lake, with great dedication. Even as a small child, Ruth had a lot of contact with the guests and loved to play secret games of cards with them late in the evening, when her mother had officially switched off the lights. So, her passion for helping holidaymakers have a good time in Arosa developed early on.

Along with her parents and guests of the guesthouse, she was a frequent visitor to Hof Maran as a child. A large picture in the present-day hotel lobby bears witness to those times. It shows six-year-old Ruth with her mother and guesthouse visitors drinking coffee on the terrace of Hof Maran.

«It was always wonderful to stop by Hof Maran. As children we loved the manager's dog, who let himself be dressed up, allowing us to put a hat, scarf and sunglasses on him. Even gloves. It was a lot of fun for us kids.»

After finishing school, Ruth completed a housekeeping year at her mother's request before working for some time in the children's home «Haus Hildegard», where children suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis had the opportunity to recuperate in Arosa. Later, on the advice of her father, who had himself been a photographer for 20 years, Ruth trained as a photo laboratory assistant with the renowned Arosa photographer Carl Franz Julius Brandt. Soon she was working not only in the photo lab, but also as a photographer.

Ruth often performed this role at Hof Maran. Even the trip to Hof Maran was an adventure for the young photographer. The photographic equipment was mounted on a sledge in a way that protected it from the snow, then Ruth headed up through the drifts to Hof Maran. After finishing her work at the hotel, it was a real treat to whiz down the Maran hillside to the village on her sledge, and then develop the photos in the darkroom so that they could be delivered to the hotel concierge the next morning.

Ruth photographed many gala events at Hof Maran. But she had a unique experience on one occasion when she was invited to a gala evening as a photographer. «Carnival» was the theme of the evening. Ruth always attended evening events dressed in the same way as the guests themselves. On this particular evening, she dressed up as Rembrandt: made-up and splashed with paint, in checked trousers, red shoes and a hat with a bird. On her back she wore a large sign – Rembrandt – on which she had crossed out the «Rem», so that people would immediately know which photo studio she came from.

But as soon as she entered the large hotel lobby, she had a shock – instead of a carnival-themed gala, she found an exclusive gala dinner. The Hof Maran guests were quite astonished when they saw her outfit. She needed a quick solution. Fortunately, the service staff were able to lend her shoes, a skirt and a blouse. After wiping the bright colour off her face, she was ready for her evening assignment. However, only a small number of photos were taken that evening. After her carnival appearance, the guests could no longer take her seriously.

From the darkroom out into the wide world

After long days, and many nights, in the darkroom, Ruth ventured out into the wide world. Arosa was and remains her favourite place, but she had an overwhelming desire to discover the world and experience new things. Ruth's eyes light up when she describes her favourite journey: «My most memorable trip was to Machu Picchu in Peru.» A pastor she knew was elected president of a foundation for which he worked in Peru. On one of his visits to his old home, Arosa, he exhibited pictures of Machu Picchu at a public event organised by the church community. The young Ruth Licht promised the other people present: «I'll be sending you a postcard from Machu Picchu soon.» And it wasn't long before she put her plan into action and travelled with a friend for seven weeks through South America, including Peru, where she also visited Lake Titicaca. Ruth was one of the first people to cross Lake Titicaca by hydrofoil.

From her travels to Europe, South America, Thailand and South Africa, Ruth brought home impressive photographs, which she proudly presented to the guests at her parents' guesthouse in Arosa upon her return. This is how her public slide shows gradually took shape.

Meanwhile, the long working days and the constant availability demanded of a professional photographer took their toll. Ruth did not marry. It was not always easy to remain single in those days.

She teamed up with other unmarried women to form a professional community. They worked together to make their voices heard, organising lectures, day trips, readings and cooking events. To them, it was important to focus their attention not only on Arosa, but also the surrounding valleys. «Some of us had already been to Paris or London by then, but we didn't know what was going on between Chur and Arosa. So, we decided to explore the Schanfigg.» They contacted the pastor or a parish member in a given area and took a tour of the church and unusual buildings there. They were also interested in the problems faced by individual villages.

In the 1960s, Ruth, once again ahead of her time, realised that the world of photography would change in the long term. She started working in a souvenir shop where she was employed until her retirement.

Arosa Tourism – having become aware of Ruth thanks to her slide shows – offered her the opportunity to work as a guest relations manager at the tourism organisation after she retired. During this time, she led guided tours of the Maran Alpine Garden, among other activities. Later she took over as curator of the local museum and continued to give lectures on the history of Arosa. She also got involved in volunteer work for Kulturkreis Arosa early on.

Ruth has many associations with Hof Maran. «For me, Hof Maran is the hotel with the most beautiful location in Arosa, by far – the magnificent nature, soft colours and atmospheres are simply unique. It's a place that always draws you back.»

An established tradition: the 25th of December

In Ruth Licht's calendar, the 25th of December is always linked to Hof Maran. For many years, she celebrated Christmas Day with her sister and a friend in what is now the Golferstübli.

«We always dined very well there and just enjoyed ourselves.» They didn't always manage to finish the generous portions. Once they had a large piece of meat left over and asked the head waiter if they could take it with them. The friend happened to have a dog at home. «Of course,» replied the head waiter, and disappeared into the kitchen. After a very long time he came back, but there was no sign of the meat for the dog. The ladies enjoyed their dessert and a nice glass of wine before it was time to make their way home. Then, they again asked the waiter to give them the treat for their four-legged friend. The head waiter rushed to the kitchen and returned to the table with a bright red face, saying, «Ladies, I'm sorry, I can't find the meat. It's disappeared. But I'll think of something. Just give me a moment.» It took him a while to re-emerge. With a straight back and gallant gestures, he

carried a large plate covered by a silver cloche. While the ladies laughed at this performance, he lifted the cloche to reveal a giant dog sausage. The dog's Christmas Day was saved, after all.

Even today, Ruth still visits Hof Maran on the 25th of December. She enjoys the Christmas dinner of the Lions Club Arosa along with other single people. «It's a very fine tradition,» she says.

Ruth is an impressive individual who has always seemed ahead of her time. She enjoys breaking new ground, working hard to develop a project and make it her own. Meanwhile, she always keeps the guest's experience firmly in mind. She has often faced resistance – for example, when she entered an almost exclusively male field by training as a photographer, or when her hunger for experience and travel met with little sympathy in the old days, and of course because she remained single.

Her passion for new places, adventures and encounters, and her determination to realise her plans, have given her countless unforgettable moments. But Ruth's love for Arosa and the Schanfigg also runs like a thread through her whole life, just like her desire to give guests from all over the world an interesting introduction to the beauty and traditions of this wonderful area.

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