

The fifth Switzerland

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The Fifth Switzerland

Almost half a million Swiss live outside Switzerland, many of them in the United States.

With Heidi's Festival and the William Tell Festival, not to mention Swiss chalets and piped Swiss music throughout the town, tourism is clearly the number one source of income for New Glarus, Wisconsin.

At Singapore, on the other side of the globe, expatriate Swiss gather in the rather more dignified setting of the select Swiss club in a colonial style mansion surrounded by well-kept grounds.

In Rome the young Swiss guards in their striking ochre and blue medieval uniforms stand to attention as they perform their Vatican duties.

FIFTH BIGGEST "CANTON"

In Canada and New Zealand numerous hard-working Swiss farmers cultivate holdings far bigger than they could ever have dreamt of back in tiny Switzerland.

Throughout the world Swiss caterers and hoteliers are at the heart of the pulsating hotel business - in Singapore, for example, 80 percent of restaurant chefs are said to be of Swiss origin.

The Swiss have been travelling - and staying - abroad for many centuries, some of them highly successful, like Chevrolet in America or Cesar Ritz in England, some of them miserable, like the hungry Swiss who travelled to Brazil in the 19th century and who ended up as near slaves on plantations.

Almost half a million Swiss are registered in Swiss embassies and consulates throughout the world, enough to populate a canton which would rank number five in size after Zurich, Berne, Vaud and Aargau. They go by the name of "Fifth Switzerland" - since the German-speaking, French-speaking, Italian-speaking and Romansch-speaking domestic population make up the first four Switzerlands.

There are many more people who, while proud to have originated from Switzerland, no longer speak a Swiss language or hold a Swiss passport. In 1980, for example, the US census recorded two and a half million Americans who knew they were of Swiss origin.

FIFTY-SIX BERNES

Perhaps that helps to explain the proliferation of Swiss names in the USA, and the popularity of Swiss cultural events. Berne, Minnesota may only consist of three houses and one church. Yet it attracts a proud crowd of up to 10,000 people for its Swiss National Day celebrations.

They pour into the village in buses from Minneapolis and St Paul to watch the traditional Swiss flag throwing and admire the native costumes. Rather than holding National Day on August 1 as is done at 'home' in Switzerland, they celebrate it on the second Tuesday in August ... there must be a historical reason for that!

Berne, Minnesota is one of a total of 56 towns in the USA bearing the name Bern or Berne. There are 49 Genevas and 36 Lucernes, Lucerns or Luzerns. Professor Erdmann Schmocker, President of the Swiss American Historical Society, has recorded

over 2000 names of places with Swiss names or names also found in Switzerland, in the USA alone.

New Bern in North Carolina was founded in 1710 by Christoph von Graffenried, and Pequea Creek is a colony of Bernese Anabaptists founded in the same year in Pennsylvania. Vevay in Switzerland County, Indiana, was founded on the banks of the Ohio River in 1802 by the Dufour brothers - wine-growers from Le Chatelard who tried unsuccessfully to introduce their European vines to American soil.

Statistics tell us that over 350,000 Swiss travelled to the land of unlimited opportunities between 1846 and 1932. In most cases it was hunger which drove them from their home land to seek a new life in the USA. They were not the first Swiss to travel abroad in search of material improvement.

ONE MILLION MERCENARIES

The tradition began with Swiss mercenaries: From the end of the 14th century until 1861, when the final Swiss mercenary units in the services of the Kingdom of Naples were dissolved, over one million Swiss offered their services to armies abroad.

In many cases it was the cantons themselves who made treaties and agreements with foreign powers to send them soldiers. The Swiss were known abroad for their fighting ability, and for the cantons it was a welcome source of revenue. In 1480, for example, the Bernese Grosser Rat agreed to send the King of France 5900 artillery and 400 calvary soldiers. In August 1792 over 600 Swiss guards lost their lives defending the French King at the Paris Tuileries.

Swiss soldiers played a key role in another historical drama, the Sack of Rome. The Swiss Guard at the Vatican had been founded in 1506 by the war-like Pope Julius II, and just 21 years later it was put to its most severe test. Rome was attacked by the freed serfs of Emperor Charles V, and thousands were forced to seek safety in the Vatican. One hundred and forty members of the Swiss Guard died saving the life of the Pope, Clement VII.

FARMERS FLEE

By the 17th and 18th century religious minorities had joined the soldiers in seeking their living abroad. Groups like the Anabaptists left Switzerland forever to make a new life in the New World. The 19th century saw immense waves of emigration as overpopulation and consequent hunger plagued the farming population in Switzerland.

The largest waves of emigration were recorded in 1840 and 1880, and the most important destination was the United States of America. South America was also significant: from 1860 to 1920 Argentina was number two in terms of popularity, with Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Canada, Australia and South Africa also important.

During the 19th century many cantons and local authorities gave financial assistance to emigrants in order to reduce the costs entailed in supporting the very poor. From 1850 to 1914 half a million Swiss left their homeland.