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Contents

The Canton of Schwyz	2
Swiss Forests	6
Official communications:	
– Federal act concerning the political rights of the Swiss abroad	9
– The new Swiss banknotes	9
– OAI/DI Pensioners	11
Local communications	12
Communications of the Secretariat of the Swiss abroad:	
– 54th Assembly of the Swiss abroad	17
– Solidarity Fund for the Swiss abroad	19
– «Fête des Vignerons»	19
– Short-term insurance for Sickness and Accidents	20
– Book Corner	22
– Film Service	22
Creating toys	22



The Canton of Schwyz

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A Name

In Swiss dialect Switzerland is called «Schwiiz». This sound was taken over by foreign languages: Suisse, Svizzera, Suiça, Zwitzerland etc. But in addition, there is also a Canton of Schwyz with its capital of the same name. That is confusing for strange ears. As a matter of fact it is from that little Canton in its midst that Switzerland took over its name in the 14th century. Or to be more precise: the nearest neighbours and above all their enemies called the Confederate fighting bodies «Schwyzer», for often enough relevant policy and aggressive impact emanated from Schwyz. In a deed of gift from Emperor Otto II to the Monastery of Einsiedeln, dating back to the year 972, the estate «suittes» was mentioned for the first time. Scholars explain the name of the settlement as a «clearing» of former Celtic inhabitants. The oldest seals of the Canton still show the same name. According to German fashion in the 18th century, the «i» was modified to «ei», just as one wrote Weil at that time instead of Wil.

It was similar with the crest of Switzerland. Following the example of the men of Schwyz, other Confederate troops assumed the white cross on red ground in the 15th century and went into battle with that flag.

Position

Schwyz is a country in the lower Alps, between the Lake of Lucerne and the Lake of Zurich, between the Midlands and the Alps of Uri

and Glarus. It covers an area of 907.8 square kilometres, of which 18% are barren. The limestone peaks East of the Muotatal and the Waegital give way to softer limestone and moraine hills and to the conglomerate rock of the Rigi and the Rossberg. In between there are fertile meadows or poor marshy soil. The former are mainly used for dairy farming and cattle breeding, the latter for growing potatoes. The brown Schwyz cattle is hardy and resistant and was already exported very early on. For it proved an asset even on far continents. Since the High Middle Ages, the monks of Einsiedeln have bred a much sought-after stud.

The landscape is rich in variety. On an average, every Swiss can count on 1525 square metres of woodland – in the Canton of Schwyz the quota is 2377 square metres. The Southern Canton (the districts of Schwyz, Gersau and Küssnacht) borders on the Lakes of Lucerne and Zug; in between lies the little Lake of Lauerz which was hemmed in by a landslide from the Rossberg in 1806 – the catastrophe caused 450 deaths. Between the two world wars, a reservoir lake (11 square kilometres) was constructed in the Sihltal for the Swiss Federal Railways and the power works of North-Eastern Switzerland, and another one in the Waegital (4.2 square kilometres) for the electricity works of Zurich.

The wide side of the Canton lies on the shores of the Lake of Zurich

where some much appreciated grapes are cultivated on sheltered hillsides. Above the high moors which divide the Canton into two distinct halves, both political and cultural, bitter, cold winters invade the land. From the fiord of the *Urnersee* the warm Southerly wind, the *Föhn*, invades the valleys year in year out without warning and makes everything glitter in silver lights, whilst in the Midlands one grumbles about blizzards or rain. Thus it happens that subtropical plants grow in the mild bay of Gersau, whilst, hardly an hour further North, siberian specimens are found. Above the capital Schwyz, amidst green moraine ranges, the Large (1899 m) and the Small Mythen tower like limestone pyramids whose rocks have come from afar.

History

A group of Keltic or even Romanesque settlers – both equally difficult to classify historically – were overwhelmed by the Alemans and gradually absorbed. The conquerors learned alpine dairy farming from the vanquished and administered the country in their

own manner and according to traditional Germanic law. Apart from the free manors, they used the Alpine pastures as common property, *Allmeind*, and held counsel and judgment in the «Ring» of the *Landsgemeinde*. Reluctantly, they bowed to the Frankish overlords and their Christian mission; the patron saint Martinus bears witness to this and his picture is on the seal.

For centuries, the men of Schwyz quarrelled with the Benedictine monastery of Einsiedeln (founded in the 10th century) about the Alpine rights on the watersheds. When the Gotthard Pass made a breach in the Alpine massif, they shared with the people of Uri in the guarding of the waterway and pass route to the South from Zurich and Lucerne. In the course of the 13th century, Uri and Schwyz secured recognition of their independence and old privileges from the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederic II, especially against the infringements of feudal houses, above all the Hapsburgs. In August 1291, after the death of King Rudolf, they renewed, together with Unterwalden, a pre-

vious alliance; it is considered the foundation document of the Confederation. The parchment has been preserved in the Archives of Schwyz.

In 1315, Schwyz opened the wars of independence and attacked the Hapsburg punitive expedition. The towns of Lucerne, Zug, Zurich and Berne joined the alliance and let it expand right into the Midlands. Schwyz stood at the head politically in the jealous front of the rural Cantons against the towns. In the Old Zurich War (1436–1450), the «Old Country» (Central Switzerland) secured the territory around the Einsiedeln Monastery and on the shores of Lake Zurich; it was at that time that the present cantonal boundaries were rounded off approximately. When Zurich took the part of the Protestant cause in the Reformation, old distrust incited the people of Schwyz to opposition; they remained Catholic together with other rural Cantons.

Early industrialisation as took place in the townships was unthinkable in the mountains. The surplus young men still moved away and joined foreign merce-

View of the Benedictine Abbey built by Caspar Moosbrugger from 1720–1726 (SNTO)



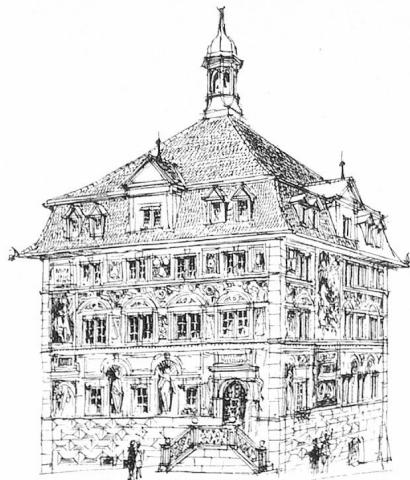
William Tell's chapel near the «Hohle Gasse» at Küssnacht (SNTO)



nary services, led by old families, the Ab Ybergs, the Redings etc. They acquired glory in foreign wars, but also a sense for wide dimensions, for art and finer ways of living. Napoleon's defeats in Spain in 1808 were due to the strategy of Theodor and Nazar von Reding. The men of Schwyz also ruled the subject territories with wisdom, though with strict discipline. Anyone else who wanted to get on chose a clerical career, above all in the monasteries of Catholic Switzerland. The Abbot Augustin II of Einsiedeln was a shrewd theologian; under Tsar Peter the Great, the Capuchin Apollinaris Weber built a monastery in Moscow and became Apostolic Prefect of all Russia.

When, in 1798, the old Confederation collapsed under the onset of revolutionary ideas and rebellious armies, Captain Aloys von Reding, trained in Spanish service, held Schauenburg's battalions in check for several days; then he brought above all in the monasteries of terms. As representative of his country, he negotiated with Napoleon in Paris with regard to the fate of subjugated Switzerland.

Very nearly did the upheavals of the Restoration divide the Canton into two parts, similarly to Basel-Stadt and -Land. Schwyz stood on the side of the Catholic and federalistic separatist (*Sonderbund*) Cantons until the Confederate cause triumphed after short skirmishes in 1847, and then Schwyz retired to sulk for some considerable time. The first large «*Bundesfeier*» of an economically growing Switzerland was held in Schwyz in 1891 on the occasion of celebrating the sexcentenary of the foundation in 1291. This contributed in no small measure to raising the injured self-confidence of the founder Canton. From a purely agricultural Canton, Schwyz slowly grew into the industrial Canton of today – not without risks –, and that specially



Two stonemasons from Lucerne, Anton Ulrich and Melk Rufiner, took four years from 1591–95 to build the imposing town hall of Schwyz (GGKS)

in the Districts along the Lake of Zurich. It means getting out of deep-rooted isolation and facing co-ordination with the neighbours, both in economic as well as cultural spheres.

Six Districts

The meaning of District is less important in other parts of Switzerland and simply denotes election and judiciary area. In the Canton of Schwyz, a District is an essential element in the political structure. Seen historically, the Districts have grown around the core of the Old Canton (the District of Schwyz) and some of them are also distinguishable geographically. The District of Gersau had been an independent free republic since the Middle Ages and was attached to the cantonal territory

only at the beginning of the 19th century. Küssnacht, on the Western side of the Rigi, is orientated economically towards the town of Lucerne and, in 1830, dreamt – together with the outer Districts – of separation from the interior. Einsiedeln roughly comprises the extent of the old monastic possessions. The Districts of March (main township Lachen) and Höfe (main township Wollerau) were more or less on a subject footing with the Old Canton, similarly to Einsiedeln. Even today, the six Districts have their own District Councils, their own tax authorities and administration, their own tribunals and partly even their own educational systems.

One claims that even in disposition and temper a difference is noticeable between the old-established inhabitants of the interior and those in outer Schwyz. The man of inner Schwyz is supposed to have grown into a natural lawyer and functionary, due to his concern with rights and privileges, large and small, over thousands of years. He is of dry and sober feeling and malicious humour; not as talented for the arts as the people of Nidwalden and not as phlegmatic as the people of Uri. At Einsiedeln, in the March and Höfen, on the other hand, an adventurous spirit and light-hearted, extrovert aggressiveness are supposed to reign.

A few figures

Surface area:	907.8 km ²
Population:	92,072 inhabitants in 30 communes (12,400 in the town of Schwyz)
Denominations:	84,087 Roman Catholics 7,271 Protestants 62 other religions
Language:	German
Agricultural estates:	5,295 (2,098 in the mountains)
Tourism:	312 hotels (8,818 beds)
Industrial undertakings:	187 (9,019 employees)
Limited companies:	512
Net of roads:	674 km
Total of engine-vehicles:	24,883

Art and Culture

A land of farmers, statesmen and officers, closely defined and unceasingly occupied with federal and European politics, affords little opportunity for extensive patronage of the arts. Even a monastery like Einsiedeln, rich in tradition and with wide influence as place of pilgrimage and spiritual centre, lived somehow apart. Ever since the Middle-Ages, it educated young people eager to learn and trained them extensively in humanistic, musical and clerical sciences. In latter years, its famous monastery school has also opened the door to modern languages (matriculation) and to young girls. In baroque times, the Gothic building with its many nooks and corners was taken down and a huge symmetrical building complex on the lines of the Escorial was erected between 1704 and 1730, with a church of several halls and a regal forecourt. Since 1924, it has served as the scene of Calderon's «Great World Theatre»; the zest to act of the people of Einsiedeln goes back to the mystery plays and dramatic processions of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Not much evidence has been preserved from medieval times, apart from beautiful parchment documents at the monastery: perhaps the late Gothic chapel St. Johann at Alt-Rapperswil near Altendorf, or the Gothic chapel of St. Josten, both near the Lake of Zurich, where the two islets Ufenau and Lützelau with an ancient parish church, also belong to the monastery of Einsiedeln.

In the Muotathal a convent of Franciscan nuns, seven hundred years old, stands next to a Romanesque charnel-house; the parish church of St. Sigismund is a jewel of late rococo. In Schwyz, next to the resplendent rococo church of St. Martin, there is a Gothic cemetery chapel, two stories high above the charnel-house. At Küssnacht,

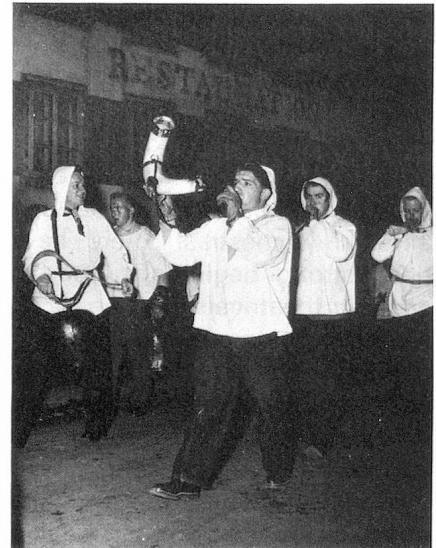
Arth and Lachen, too, the enthusiasm for the baroque style let the old disappear and new, spacious churches be erected. In the interior of the Canton, above all, a large number of charming family chapels from that epoch grace the green land.

Lucrative mercenary service allowed leading families, again above all around Schwyz – to build beautiful mansions, their interior possibly even more lavishly furnished with inlays, panelled ceilings, stucco and stoves. Newer and newest architecture one finds above all in school buildings, and less pleasantly so in industrial plants and consumer centres.

In 1936, the Canton had its oldest historical documents, the colours and parchments transferred from a medieval tower to the newly built «Bundesbriefarchiv». It has nothing to do with the «Bund», the Confederation and the modern federal administration, but contains a fair number of documents of alliance with other Swiss Cantons and States from the 13th to the 16th century. These originals represent the sum total of constitutional law of the Old Confederation.

There are Cantons richer in creative artists and writers. It almost seems as if a certain spirit of perfection were prevalent: Only the best is good enough and worth mentioning! Nevertheless, one let foreign artists work to their hearts' content.

In 1493, a son was born to a German doctor and a native woman of Schwyz near Einsiedeln, Theophrastus Bombast (Baumast) von Hohenheim, better known by his second name *Paracelsus*. After the death of his mother, the young man started out early on study travels through many countries. In the valley forest he had got to know and recognize the power of medicinal plants; and now he made himself conversant with the



«Klausjagen», an old St. Nicholas custom in Küssnacht (SNTO)

secrets of minerals; he staunchly fought academic medicine and taught in speech and writing a new conception of all psychological and physical pain. He died in Salzburg in 1541; his Faustian battle for belief and knowledge made him a forerunner of modern total medicine.

The medal engraver Johann Carl *Hedlinger* (1691–1771) from Schwyz made a lasting name for himself at the courts of Charles XII in Sweden, of Frederic the Great in Berlin and Tsarina Catherine II in Petersburg.

The lively, clear dialect of Einsiedeln allowed an engaging narrator to create gay yet profound lyric works, Meinrad *Lienert* (1865–1933). In inner Schwyz, Meinrad *Inglin* (1893–1971) created an epic work «Der Schweizerspiegel» which deserves a first grade with its strict linguistic discipline. At Brunnen on the lake, the highly talented sons of a Basle citizen, painter and hotel keeper, grew up: Paul *Schoeck* (1882–1952), the architect, wrote his fascinating naturalistic drama «Tell» in Schwyz idiom (1920). Othmar *Schoeck* (1886–1957) became the creator of expressive songs and some operas full of late

romantic passion («Penthesilea»). In the Alpine valleys the ancient natural yodel and the use of original instruments have been kept up; and in these days a well-cared for musical life flourishes in the whole Canton: choirs and amateur orchestras. There have been strong beginnings, too, of amateur theatricals.

Neither poets, musicians, nor painters and sculptors have an easy life on such poor soil, trying to break through to recognition and to keep it. The almost anonymous witnesses of arts and crafts of former centuries (inlays, decorative furniture, goldsmith's work etc.) make one guess that not all creative forces have as yet been awakened. The painter Hans Schilter at Goldau, the painter Lisbeth Schwander at Brunnen, Maria-Luisa Wiget in Schwyz, Joseph Rickenbacher at Steinen

and Joseph Nauer at Freienbach shall be mentioned here, representing a number of other artists still searching.

Customs

As everywhere else where wide planes or woods and mountains keep human settlements isolated one from the other, many an old wild custom has been preserved in the Schwyz Alps, customs which can only be explained by the soul's close relation with nature and magic world perception. Today, one is no longer conscious of the roots of such customs, and especially with the people of Schwyz, they are often covered with rational coolness. Now the customs simply appear in the annual calendar; they belong to the seasons and serve as a loosening and self-portrayal of the individual and his position, be he townsman or

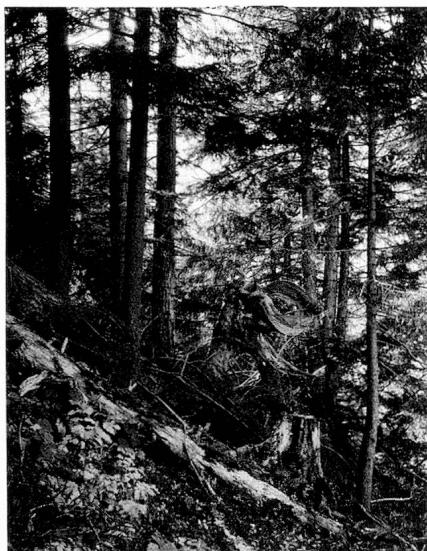
peasant. It is not the tourist with his camera who provokes it, but the delight in noise, movement and high-spirited fun.

The exorcisms of early winter and early spring are particularly noisy manifestations. Just a few shall be mentioned here: the grandiose «Klausjagen» at Küssnacht when, on St. Nicholas Day (6th December), figures in white shirts, wearing man-high lit-up bishop's mitres dance around and create an orgy of rhythmic noise with bells, horns and whips. At new year, the farmers' lads compete in whip lashing with sounds like the cracking of rifles across meadows and in village lanes. Both the inner and outer parts of Schwyz, above all Einsiedeln, are obsessed by hilarious masquerades at carnival time.

*Paul Kamer
in cooperation with Pro Helvetia*

Swiss Forests

Forestry and with it the various branches of forestry science started as more or less independent fields of knowledge not much more than some 200 years ago. The cause was a very extensive lack of wood: what used to be originally an inexhaustible reserve



of wood disappeared very suddenly with the advent of the technical era; consequences of many kinds did not fail to appear. The prophetic utterance by Chateaubriand: «*Les forêts précèdent les peuples, les déserts les suivent*», has been proved right all too often unfortunately also in the recent past. At first, the young forestry quite understandably modelled itself on the experiences made by the ancient agriculture.

An important and outstanding feature of Swiss forestry is the demand for continuity – called the principle of permanence – which has been anchored in the Federal Forestry Law since 1902. Whatever yield of the forest, be it timber or other forest produce, be it protection and welfare measures, in other words services, is tied to the «*Infra-structure Forest*».

*First Federal Forestry Law
Around the middle of the last*

century, our country suffered a number of natural catastrophes which caused immense damage and quite often brought with them loss of life. Whilst Alpine valleys suffered avalanches, landslides and high-water, the lower regions were afflicted by floods.

Experts on forestry and afforestation suspected a connection between the state of the mountain forests and flooding, and the Swiss Society of Foresters sent a request to the Federal Council in 1856 that it should ask for a report on the state of high-mountain woods from all Cantons which had their own forestry administration.

The experts who investigated the state of the woods established the following facts:

- There is a direct connection between the clearing of woodland in the mountains and the waterflow of rivers, avalanches and landslides.