

Fifth Switzerland on the fifth Continent : gold-diggers and tradesmen

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Gold-diggers and Tradesmen

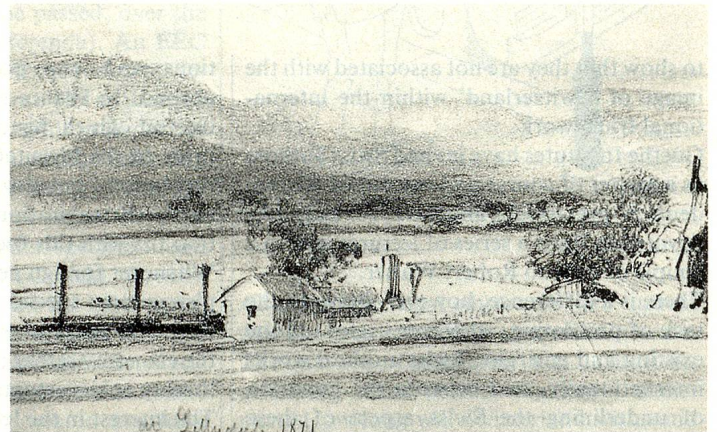
Changes to Australia's Swiss community have been considerable since its early days over 150 years ago. During the last century the majority of Swiss migrants lived in rural Victoria, but today they usually settle scattered in the metropolitan areas of either Sydney or Melbourne. Early immigration was dominated by French speaking wine-growers and Italian speaking gold-diggers, whereas the twentieth century saw the arrival of predominantly German speaking tradesmen. Other contrasts are the former almost exclusive dominance of males and, apart from the gold-diggers, their intention to settle permanently or at least until their retirement. Now the Swiss community's sex ratio is almost balanced and the Swiss plan to stay for a couple of years only and then basically to learn English. At first social organizations were founded with a strong emphasis on benevolent activities, but today's clubs and societies have shifted more towards conservation of culture and social functions.



Without doubt the distinction of the Swiss contribution with the longest lasting effect on the Australian people belongs to Henri Tardent from Canton Vaud. As a resident of Queensland around the turn of the 20th century he was involved in moulding the constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia.

However, a few characteristics have remained unchanged. Swiss migrants enjoyed a favourable reception throughout by Australians. Adaptation to local conditions was always considered important in order to become an integrated part of Australia's society. The emigration of couples and families still comprises only a small proportion which favours the ongoing dominance of the English language at home.

The artist Louis Buvelot from Canton Vaud is the best known Swiss ever to settle in Australia. Our picture: Sketch from the vine growing area of Lillydale out of Melbourne.



Economic Imprints

The general perception of Swiss industrial activities in Australia is very positive due to demonstrated high standards of quality and reliability. It has become quite common to identify and market diverse products with the label «Swiss» irrespective of their origin. For example «Swiss cheese» terms all cheese with large holes, whether manufactured as the original Emmentaler in Canton Berne, or in Austria, Sweden and even in Australia's Tasmania. This forced producers of other Swiss cheese varieties to create exotic names to avoid confusion.

«Swiss» in the Australian language also seems to substitute superlative expressions for tastiness and health without having a corresponding equivalence in Switzerland. There, «Swiss chocolate» flavoured milk drinks are just chocolate drinks, «Swiss muesli» common on Australia's breakfast tables are unknown in variety and frequency on their Swiss counterparts, and Swiss visiting Australia are surprised to learn that their Dr Vogel has created a well known bread for the people «Down Under».

Drive towards punctuality

On a more personal and subtle note the heritage of early Swiss migrants, irrespective

of their social status, remains distinguishable among many descendants. It may be quite a comfort for contemporary Swiss settlers, not only in Australia, to learn that despite their own children's lack of interest in Swiss culture, third, fourth and fifth generation descendants seem to develop at times rather strong affinities towards Switzerland. Typical Swiss characteristics sometimes reappear after several generations even in physiognomy. Stunned descendants may encounter surprising situations, when during visits to their ancestors' country they are treated like fellow citizens and are asked for street directions in an unfamiliar lan-

guage. However, the most frequently passed on characteristic of heritage must be a passionate drive towards punctuality, a distinctive mark affecting Swiss indiscriminately independent of language, location and generation!

Susanne Wegmann

This is an edited extract from «The Swiss in Australia, 1788-1988» by Susanne Wegmann. This book, which has been partly funded by Pro Helvetia and the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, is a byproduct of the author's Ph.D. thesis on the same subject at the university of Zurich. This title is available through bookshops in Australia and Switzerland (SFr. 28.-) and through the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad. It may also be ordered directly from the publishers (Verlag Rüegger, Postfach, CH-7001 Chur, Phone 081 52 22 44) and from the distributor in Australia Cliff Imer, 13, Jack Street, Mt. Waverly, Victoria 3149 (Australia). The Ph.D. thesis «Zur Migration der Schweizer nach Australien» will be published later this year at the above-mentioned Swiss editor.