

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 6 (1940-1941)
Heft: 10

Artikel: Ourselves and the 650th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation
Autor: Schmid, Walter
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943036>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 09.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

OURSELVES AND THE 650TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
SWISS CONFEDERATION.

The 650th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation takes place in one of the most fateful and crucial years in history. We are in the midst of darkness as regards the future of the nations. Under such circumstances the Swiss people will, it goes without saying, celebrate the occasion in the appropriate spirit.

Our ancestors, in the most crucial hours in the history of our country, knelt down in prayer before their battles. In the first place the forthcoming 650th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation will lead our generation also to meditation. Our famous "Swiss Psalm", no doubt, inspires us with the right sentiments, and we shall remember too, that the Symbol for Switzerland is not only one cross - the white one on a red panel - but three crosses: The Cross of Christianity, the Red Cross for Humanity and the White Cross for Liberty.

Then our thoughts may very well turn to the more realistic facts about the past, present and future of our homeland. The history of our undaunted country will fill us with confidence and strength to face the present and future with stout hearts and clear heads. There is no room for gloom. True, an unknown destiny lies ahead of us and tasks, too, worthy of the greatest nation. But whatever may await the Swiss people, we must remain true to ourselves and to the history of our country, - ready to cope with any emergency and any difficulties, at any cost....That, in contrast to the spirit of meditation, is the spirit that will inspire us to live.....

An essential element of this spirit is the principle of neutrality, steadfastly followed by the Swiss people for more than 400 years in their foreign relations. In the light of its humanitarian aspects it is a great contribution to the civilised world. In wartime, of course, among belligerents on both sides, neutrality usually does not evoke praise only; but it is her policy of neutrality which is enabling Switzerland to carry out her humanitarian obligations. It is evident for instance that the unique mission of the International Red Cross in times of war can only be performed by a neutral country, and the Swiss people realise, that it is not enough to have the honour of harbouring the great humanitarian institution of the International Red Cross within their territory. They desire to make their International Red Cross contribution unconditionally; whatever financial sacrifices and voluntary work may be necessary, the Swiss people are considering such as being their own special obligations.

No nation, placed like the Swiss, in the middle of this world-wide tempest, could survive without the spirit of unconditional sacrifice. The sacrifices which the Swiss people have taken upon themselves to make are twofold:

1. The independence and liberty of the country, symbolised by the white cross in her flag, must be defended at all cost, the cost of life, if need be, and by willingly accepting all the sacrifices, both economic and material, which these difficult times demand.
2. In this war, as ever, Switzerland must carry out her humanitarian obligations, in every respect unconditionally and wholeheartedly, in the name of the two other crosses for which she stands.

In previous issues of our monthly bulletin we published a radio address given by the Swiss Federal Councillor Etter, explaining to the Swiss people in what spirit the Swiss Government wished them to approach the celebrations of the 650th Anniversary of Switzerland. We also published a number of other recent speeches, in English translation, made by various Swiss magistrates and the Commander-in-Chief of

the Army, on conditions in Switzerland and on the principles, which should guide the Swiss people in the present world crisis. These are full of philosophical, historical, practical and courageous thinking, and we would refer the earnest reader to these rich and reliable sources of information and inspiration.

Dr. Walter Schmid, Swiss Consul.

.....

HISTORICAL FACTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF SWITZERLAND.

The statement, that the Swiss people are celebrating the 650th anniversary of their country, must not be understood as if Switzerland during the course of these centuries has always been the country she is to-day. Figuratively, the growth of Switzerland can best be explained by comparing it with the building of a house, where the start is made by putting up a small building, and then adding in the course of time new structures, so that in the long run a house stands before us, in which the original building is not recognisable any longer from the outside. In 1291 three communities around the Lake of Lucerne set up a rough and tumble little log cabin for the purpose of defending their old individual rights and territory against the intruding Counts of Habsburg, and with the further aim of keeping law and order in a lawless time. In the course of 60 years an additional structure had been added to this simple blockhouse, after five more neighbouring communities had joined the original league, among them the three towns of Lucerne, Berne and Zurich, and two more small peasant communities. This was not achieved without bloodshed, because during these 60 years the Swiss had to fight it out with the Habsburgs and other potentates of these early days. After this it took another 150 years, before the second additional structure had gradually been added. In the course of these 150 years four more towns and one peasant community had joined the original old Swiss league. This new growth of the Swiss league, which had taken place in the 15th and in the first year of the 16th century has cost the Swiss a good deal of blood too, and indeed the 15th century in their history is called the heroic epoch. The house of Habsburg had been beaten off for good and the territorial ambitions of the Archduke of Burgundy and the German Emperor had come to nought through defeat. From approx. 1500 on the Swiss Confederation remained about the same as far as membership in the league is concerned, until the advent of Napoleon. But the Swiss had now started to round off their territory through conquests and alliances. Under the influence of the general European trend of autocratic Government, democracy also decayed a great deal in Switzerland, although it can be said that in comparison with other countries her people still were the freest perhaps on the European Continent for the whole of this long period.

Napoleon invaded Switzerland and made of her a centralised state according to the French model, which, however, was shortlived, because it proved entirely unsuccessful. Compromise organisations between a centralised state and a federation followed, but when the chapter of Napoleon was closed, the Swiss State in 1815 reverted to the old loose structure of a confederacy without a central government. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 fixed the boundaries of Switzerland as they are to-day, and the number of individual states or cantons had finally reached the figure of 22 as at present. Some of the conquered districts had been lost for good, while others and allied territories had been added to the Swiss Confederacy as new cantons. A loose state of affairs lasted until 1848, when the present Swiss Constitution finally was conceived. For Switzerland 1848 was the happy ending of the so-called regeneration movement, which began with the Revolution in Paris in 1830. In neighbouring countries the struggle for liberty did not turn out so well. The whole Continent of Europe was in the clutches of reactionary potentates, and only the revolutionary crisis in 1848 frustrated their plans for dividing up Switzerland. Thus Switzerland was