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History of the Taranaki Swiss Club

In 1867, Felix Hunger was the first recorded Swiss immigrant to New Zealand.

In August 1910, the Taranaki Swiss Club was formed as a benevolent society to support the life and culture of immigrants in NZ. The committee was President, Martin Steiner; V.President, Charly Schicker; Secretary, Jakob Schuhmacher; Treasurer, John Steiner. This organisation went into recess in 1914, and a new Club was formed fifty years ago, in 1952. The first annual picnic was held at Kaupokonui Beach in 1953. From 1954, until the opening of the current club house, picnics were held at Te Nutu Park.

Society competitions with interclub activities between the Wellington, Hamilton, Auckland and Taranaki Clubs began in 1968

Both Wellington and Auckland had their own clubrooms, and the desire for the Club to have a permanent base grew - Taranaki members were envious of Wellington's "Chicken House"!! (Wellington's former club rooms were a renovated chicken shed - Ed.) So 1975 saw the beginnings of our big undertaking. At a meeting, a member gave a bundle of notes labelled "for the Clubhouse". And with this, the Clubroom seed was planted. At the 1986 AGM, the decision was made to build, and a change of membership rules was made: the sub of one Pound for lifetime membership became an annual sub of \$6 per member. Subsequently, the total number of members dropped from 420 to 270, and is currently 220.

Next, a suitable building or land had to be found, and of course money to fund the project. In 1977, a major fundraiser was a raffle for a trip to Switzerland, and three beer festivals were held over the

next three years. Sponsorship was sought from members, with some very generous cash donations received. Wood was donated from the Sattler and Bishop farms - the timber on the Sattler farm was planted by the Club's founding President, Walter Risi, in 1939/40 when he worked there.

We finally found the site, consisting of four acres, with three registered sections at the front, at Grace Ave. Kaponga, purchased for \$4000 in 1977. And finally, in 1978, the first timber was cut, carted to the mill at Riverlea to be treated and guaged, and carted back to Grace Ave - a total of 15,000 superfeet! In March, 1981, the ribbon to open the Clubhouse was cut by our Patron, Ida Bernold, and since then all of the Club's activities have been held at the clubhouse. The then President of the Swiss Helvetic Society Abroad, Dr Weber, and the Secretary, Mr Ney, were present and donated \$1500 to the Club.

One of the front sections was sold in 1983 to reduce debt, and by 1986 the Club was finally debt free, so it was decided to use the surplus timber, with other donated goods and voluntary labour, to construct the Club's 50m smallbore shooting range. After the 300m range in Hawera was sold in 1989, Charly Schuler allowed the Club to build a new range on his quarry at Rowan. This was built to Swiss Military specifications, again using donated materials and labour, as well as the invention of a young Swiss who developed the target operation. Shooters have their results recorded and registered by the Swiss Military.

Today, the clubrooms are used for the Club's regular activities, as well as a range of private functions - and hopefully this will remain so for future generations over many more years to come.

(As told by Ruedi Dudli in his speech at the Sunday function in Kaponga.)

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