

The Swiss of Utah

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THE SWISS OF UTAH

The last number of the Ciba-Geigy Quarterly Journal had an original story about the Swiss Mormons in America. It is certainly not a widely known fact that among the first Swiss to emigrate to America were a handful of determined Mormon converts. Moreover, the only Mormon temple on the European continent is at Zollikofen, near Berne.

These hardy families have founded a number of settlements in the outer and arid reaches of Utah and the neighbouring states in the foothills of the Rockies and on the fringes of the deserts of Arizona. We are told that the names of Stucki, Schneiter, Moser, Welti, Ablanap, Fetzer Huber and Wettstein are common in the telephone directories of Salt Lake City and other town of Utah. There is a liberal sprinkling of first, second and third generation Swiss Mormons who are professors on the faculties of both the University of Utah, in Salt Lake City and in the Brigham Young University in Provo. The Swiss presence in that area is in fact large enough to warrant the presence of a Swiss Consul in Salt Lake City and visits by Swiss cultural groups from other parts of the country and Switzerland itself.

The Mormon Sect, or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, a poor American farm boy then living in western New York State, who claimed to have received a set of "golden tablets" from the angel Moroni. He claimed to have found inscribed on these plates what is now known as the Book of Mormon, a text that according to Mormon belief succeeds, if not supplants, the Christian Bible. Smith gained an immediate following and a temple was soon built at Kirtland, a small village in northern Ohio. Missionaries were sent out to many parts of the young country and England. During the ensuing decade they gathered some 30,000 new converts.

The sect was eventually compelled by growing persecution to seek a haven westward. It built a second temple at Nauvoo, a town on the east bank of the Mississippi River which soon developed into a Mormon political and military stronghold. Smith himself was a candidate for the presidency of the United States in the national elections of

1844 - a circumstance, however, that coupled with the Mormon practice of polygamy caused widespread outrage and eventually civil war. Smith was imprisoned and lynched at the country prison of Carthage, Illinois, in 1845.

The Mormons were then decimated as the victims of a real pogrom. They abandoned their holdings and sought refuge outside the territorial boundaries of the United States by trekking further to the west under the leadership of Brigham Young, who was to take over from Joseph Smith as leader of the new religious movement. With an advance party, he arrived at what is today Salt Lake City on 24th July 1847.

Three years later, the new Church sought to increase its numbers by a new missionary campaign in Europe. Missionaries arrived in Britain, Scandinavia and Central Europe. Four missionaries landed in Genoa in the summer of 1850 and soon met with considerable success with the Piedmont Waldenses through whom all Protestant sects can trace their origins.

Encouraged by the success, an English convert called Thomas Stenhouse left in December of that year for Switzerland. There he found proselytising much harder. Towards the end of Winter he had only converted some twenty families. He complained bitterly that the "coldness of Calvinism was a barrier to preaching from house to house" and that "no man ever knew a stranger invited into the house of the Genevese". He almost gave up his effort but Lorenzo Snow, one of the pillars of Mormonism since its earliest days, came from Italy to assist him and continued this work with grim determination.

One of the first Swiss converts of note was Serge Louis Ballif, a native of Perroy, near Lausanne. His conversion represented a turning point in the fortunes of the two Mormon missionaries. The wealthy son of a Russian family, he was instrumental in the publication and distribution of Mormon tracts throughout much of both French and German speaking Switzerland. Baptized a latter Day Saint by Lorenzo Snow in 1852, Ballif is known to have made his own conversions among many families in Neuchatel and Basle, all of whom

emigrated to Salt Lake City. Ballif himself emigrated with his family in 1845 and subsequently settled in Cache Valley, an alpine meadowland in northern Utah that was to become a permanent settlement for many other Swiss converts in the decades ahead.

Thus Swiss emigrants settled in the promised land of Utah only twenty years after the inception of the Mormon movement. Other prominent converts joined the trek. Among them were John Ulrich Stucki, a native of Thurgay, Henry Resier, a native of Zurich, and the Bonellis, father and son, also of Zurich. Stucki emigrated to Utah in 1859 after a long and stormy missionary career in Schaffhausen where he was repeatedly imprisoned and eventually disowned by his own family. Arriving in the "new Zion", Stucki successfully operated farms in both Utah and Idaho. He became the first mayor of Paris, the centre of an important pioneer agricultural district in southern Idaho.

Many of the Swiss who settled in this isolated and hostile environment left their wives and children and trekked back towards the east coast whence they left again for Europe to attract more new converts to the new faith.

The saga of Mormonism can only be compared with the Jewish Zionism Movement. The incredible hardships, the struggle against the desert, starvation, thirst, and the fight against the Indians in a series of wars count among the most heroic venture that brought about the birth of modern America. The Swiss were among the hardest of Brigham Young's followers. They were well equipped to tame the wilderness of Utah and turn a barren and stony land into fertile soil. They knew how to plant vine. Others, like the Bonellis, had been textile manufacturers in their native Switzerland and generated a new industry. Many prosperous settlements today bear witness to their faith and struggle against nature. One of them is at Santa Clara, on the highway between St. George and Las Vegas, a semi-tropical strip just north of Arizona noted for its raising of fine fruits and vegetables. Swiss families settled in Virgin River Idaho, and Midway, a ranching town some fifty miles east of Salt Lake City whose city hall still

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ELEVEN YUGOSLAVS INVOLVED IN MINOR SPYING INCIDENTS

The Department of Justice and Police announced that legal action was being taken at federal level against a number of Yugoslav nationals charged with political and financial espionage. The Department's communique announced three distinct cases. Two of them were not infrequent among the working community of Yugoslavs in Switzerland: In the first instance, a Yugoslav was accused of spying on his compatriots on orders from the Yugoslav government; in the second, a man was charged with bringing pamphlets hostile to the Belgrade government into Switzerland and asking a compatriot to transport this literature to Yugoslavia. He was forbidden entry to the country for an unlimited period.

The third case could involve attempts at breaking Swiss banking secrecy. It is known that the Yugoslav authorities are concerned by the growing number of Yugoslav-held numbered accounts. This trend is due in particular to the presence in Switzerland of thousands of Yugoslav workers. The case reported by the Department refers to attempts by two Yugoslav civil servants to obtain information on a particular firm based in Switzerland, which a Yugoslav bank was interested in acquiring. Two Yugoslav executives of this firm and another person had broken into the Zurich flat of another Yugoslav employee in order to obtain certain confidential documents. These were handed to the Yugoslav civil servants. Eleven Yugoslav nationals have been involved in these cases, which were reported with considerable indignation by the Belgrade daily *Politika*. The paper complained over the total absence of evidence supplied for the Swiss move and at the fact that the Yugoslav Embassy had not been informed.

Delicate workers

The Public Works Department of Canton Aarau resorted to flocks of sheep to trim the grass growing on the banks of the Motorways crossing the Canton. After two or three years, the experiment had to be abandoned. The sheep proved to be of precarious health and unable to live in the polluted atmosphere surrounding the motorway. They had to be moved to more salubrious pastures.

displays all of the Swiss cantonal shields as a permanent part of its exterior design. Towns called Geneva and Berne are sure reminders of the origins of their founders. Prosperous Swiss colonies were founded in the alpine valleys of northern Utah and southern Idaho. They have received an influx of new Swiss converts as recently as the immediate post-war years. Swiss dialects and tradition play an important role in the varied Mormon ethnic patchwork.

Polygamy was instituted by Brigham Young in 1852 but was banned in 1890. It appears that only a fraction of the Swiss Mormons availed themselves of this right during these thirty-eight years. One of them was the pioneer Henry Reiser, who had four wives, but left them to carry out his missionary calling in Europe. It appears on the other hand that the settlers had some difficulty in abiding by the teetotal rule imposed by the Mormon leader and were told to uproot the wine vines of Santa Clara. The Mormon ban on alcohol eventually

became so strict that the wine for Holy Communion was substituted by water.

Today, the Swiss National Day on 1st August is an important occasion in Salt Lake City and "Swiss Days" in the highlands of central Utah draw thousands of tourists to their annual fair. The traditions of Swiss folklore—native costumes and music—and of Swiss culinary arts have by no means been forgotten.

1st August celebrations traditionally feature a concert by the Swiss Edelweiss Chorus and a lively dance in one of the city's Mormon Wards. Salt Lake City's Peace Garden has a Swiss section in which a huge concrete replica Matterhorn stands amid ornamental flower beds with transplanted edelweiss dominated by a flag that flutters in the dry winds of Utah.

These displays are a sure sign of the impact of the Swiss in the heroic history of this area and of the bonds that still exist between its citizenry and the homeland of their forefathers.

smoke-bombs in the hall at Delemont where he was addressing a crowd attending the Jura's annual "*Marche Concours*".

Over the past three years the Beliers have made their existence felt with several other "pranks" such as lighting a bonfire in the heart of Berne, walling up the entrance of the capital's town hall, pouring asphalt over tram-lines and storming into the middle of a world-championship ice-hockey match. They have also sent delegations to the European Parliament in Strasburg. Surprisingly, they have had remarkably little trouble from the law. A highly-publicised trial following their occupation of Police headquarters in Delemont two years ago ended in a few trivial prison sentences.

The authorities have shown great restraint in an effort not to deteriorate the situation of the Jura, whose inhabitants have an identity distinct from Berne, but are prepared to work towards self-determination democratically and constitutionally.

However vocal and militant, the Beliers are a minority among their own people. Their attitude has brought increasingly more pressing calls for a firmer stand against them in the Jura.

P.M.B.

COMMENT

PROSPECT OF VIOLENCE IN THE JURA

The demonstrations of the *Belier Group*, or youth organisation of the Separatist movement of the Jura, is confronting modern Switzerland with the prospect of internal violence for the first time.

While many of the activities of the *Beliers* can be ascribed to their ebullient Latin temperament, and to a certain degree of gameness, the possibility of an outbreak of violence in the Jura and elsewhere cannot be ignored. The Separatist militants have been the first to talk of violence. Recalling that their struggle for independence from Berne has not reached its objectives 25 years after the creation of the "Rassemblement Jurassien", their spokesmen have often threatened to speed up proceedings by resorting to violence.

The Beliers have stepped up their activities during the past few weeks. Their main outburst was the occupation of the Belgian embassy in Berne, and of the Swiss embassy in Brussels. A few days later, they heckled the President of the Berne Executive Council, throwing bangers and