

## History of the UNITED SWISS SOCIETIES OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

To bring into closer connection the Swiss and Swiss-American people in San Francisco and the vicinity and in order to further a friendly relationship it was decided to form a permanent organization. Its inception took place at a special meeting on February 20th, 1910. The organization officially became the United Swiss Societies of California in 1912. Its purpose was to support and promote social activities among the Swiss and Swiss-Americans by entertainment and festivals as well as other activities.

Under the leadership of the first President, E. Randolph, followed by John D. Hutter, George J. Steiger, Joseph Gianini, Albert Enderlin, Leo Schwab, Hans Stalder and Fred Muther, a number of Swiss organizations joined the United Swiss Societies. Activities included the Annual Swiss Independence Day Celebration, Masquerade Balls, Picnics and Receptions for Swiss Dignitaries.

Meanwhile the Swiss House Association, affiliate of the United Swiss Societies of California, filed for Incorporation with the State of California and signed a Trust Agreement with the Wells Fargo Bank on September 26th, 1930. A special provision was added to the Trust Agreement that it could not be broken until the amount of \$25,000.00 was reached. In accordance with the By-Laws the United Swiss Societies held controlling interest therein and pledged to give financial and moral support to a plan to eventually erect a Swiss House and common meeting place for all the Swiss societies. The Board of Directors consisted of 13 members, 7 of which were from the United Swiss Societies as ex-officio members. All funds accumulated by the United Swiss Societies through festivals, initiation fees, etc., in excess of \$1,000.00 were surrendered to the Swiss House Association.

Activities were severely restricted during World War II and it is thanks to Peter Risi, Oscar Bachmann and Joseph D. Marty as Presidents that some of the official functions prevailed. After World War II contemplated programs were resumed at full force under the leadership of President Charles Agadoni and Henry F. Fischer, and in 1949 the United Swiss Societies, with the cooperation of all member Societies, organized a Swiss-American Centennial Celebration to commemorate the discovery of gold at General Sutter's Mill. Three thousand people witnessed the all day and evening gala affair that featured a stage show along with spectacular entertainment. Many other notable affairs were held in later years with the help of the United Swiss Societies.

Realizing that it would take many years to accumulate the \$25,000.00 in order to dissolve the Trust Agreement, the officers of both organizations decided that court action was the only solution and the case was heard in Superior Court with a favorable decision rendered. The amount of approximately \$16,000.00 was deposited into the savings account of the Swiss House Association and it was decided to look for a suitable property. All parties were in favor of purchasing the Canada Road Park in Woodside and the sale was concluded on February 25th, 1952 for the price of \$32,500.00.

In the following years Jean Aeschlimann, Fred Strebel, Mario Muschi, Henry Blaettler, Jos. T. Bieri and John Felder "held down the Fort" with remarkable results.

Much credit must be given to these men for their untiring efforts in promoting harmony among the Swiss organizations and encouraging their participation in official programs.

After several successful years of operating the Swiss Park, serious problems arose because of poor management and financial setbacks; also complaints by the San Mateo County Board of Health necessitated joint meetings to determine the future of the Park. Finally an official request by the Water Department of the City and County of San Francisco to purchase the Park (pollution had been noticed in the entire area) left no alternative than to honor their request. The Park was sold to the City of San Francisco on July 15, 1959 for \$42,500.00.

Meanwhile a group led by Jacques Dubois took a governing role in the Swiss House Association, the Swiss Relief Society and the Swiss Journal Company. They first suggested, then proposed, and finally effected the merger of the United Swiss Societies and the Swiss House Corporation and its assets, changing the name to United Swiss House Association of Northern California (U.S.H.A.C.).

During and after the conversion years Hans Zoller, John Ivantcho, Lea Ryssemus, Brigitta Ammann, Jacques Iselin and Sylvia Iselin presided and maintained a standard of excellence in administering a program of the highest quality, promoting friendly relations and cooperation. On March 15th, 1982 a vote was taken to change the name back to "United Swiss Societies of Northern California, Inc."

John Ivantcho was elected President in 1983, followed by Edwin Reichmuth in 1985, John Zeiter in 1987 and Eddie Reichmuth again in 1989. Under their leadership the 80's were most rewarding years. 1991 was especially eventful celebrating the 700 year commemoration of the birth of the Swiss Confederation and a special tribute must be awarded Eddie Reichmuth for his untiring efforts and leadership in helping to bring the year to a successful conclusion.

Today we can still boast of sharing an excellent relationship with the following societies: Aelpler Gruppe, Inc., in Newark, Golden Gate Swiss Club, Helvetia Society, Peninsula Swiss Club, Pro Ticino North California, Inc., San Jose Swiss Society, Swiss-American Women's Society, Swiss Athletic Club, Swiss Club "Tell" Inc., Mill Valley, Swiss Gymnastic Club of San Francisco, and the Swiss Singing Society of San Francisco.

The newly elected president, Jos. T. Bieri, a man with an enviable background, a man who has served in many capacities and led societies to success, is the right man to lead the Swiss Community to new heights. The first official function under his leadership was the First of August Celebration held Sunday, August 2, 1992 at the Swiss Park in Newark. On October 16, 1992, at the Basque Cultural Center in South San Francisco, he will preside at the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the United Swiss Societies.

In the final analysis, the Swiss Community has accomplished its mission; it has shown that solidarity and cooperation bring results! We can look to the future with renewed vigor and anticipation and show the world that we are living up to the motto:

**"ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE!"**



*Many thanks to Mr. Henry F. Fischer for providing the above historical information. The complete history of the United Swiss Societies of Northern California will be printed in the October Swiss Journal.*

# UNITED SWISS SOCIETY

## SAN FRANCISCO

50 Years of United Swiss Society of California in San Francisco.

One-half century ago it was, that a few dedicated Swiss got together with the idea of forming an organization, which had the purpose of promoting Swiss activities in such a way, as to bring the different societies together and closer in contact with the rest of the Swiss colony. Those men had the foresight and realistic approach that there should be some kind of a delegation where the some 18-20 Swiss clubs could come together, work out their common problems in harmony and good understanding and at the same time promote and maintain Swiss traditions. They also realized one other important thing, that if they wanted a home for all the Swiss, they could only succeed if they would work together, remembering Switzerland's slogan "one for all and all for one." With this in mind they got off to a good start, especially under the very able and fine leadership of the many good Presidents and their assistants who served the Society. In an organization like this, there are many differences of opinions to be ironed out, and many small battles have to be fought, especially if there are 50 delegates representing 17 societies. Consequently the USS had its ups and downs, but with the common interest in mind, they always managed to work out just fine. Of course today, as time has taken its toll, there are some Societies who are not in existence and again there are new ones who have come into existence. The individual Society finds it increasingly difficult to operate today, and this is due to a number of circumstances. First of all, times have changed, and so have some people, to the extent that they are not as society-minded perhaps, as before, with all the entertainment now available, especially in a cosmopolitan area such as San Francisco, so it has become increasingly difficult to attract enough interest in the Swiss public. There is also the problem of increasing costs connected with the arrangement of any affair. At the same time there is, in addition to all above mentioned problems, that of successorship. Very few young Swiss are willing to donate time and effort today, for such an apparently thankless job as to organize an affair for the amusement of others. We even have a hard time recruiting enough people from among our own ranks, but still we always manage to turn the events successfully, thanks to the dedicated few who are offering their help repeatedly.

Well, with a bright outlook into the future and the spirit of unity, harmony and co-operation prevailing, we shall hopefully look forward to the next years — may they bring us lots of success for the benefit of all, and the Swiss colony in general.

Joe T. Bieri  
President

John R. Felder,  
Secretary