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IV.

POSTAL "HELVETICA" IN THE UNITED STATES*

Non-historic Observations of a Stamp Collector

Felix Ganz

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A few weeks after arriving in this country, thirty years ago, friends drove me to a place called LAKE GENEVA, Wisconsin, and on the way back we passed a town called LAKE ZURICH, Illinois. Neither of these two towns seemed to have direct ties to Switzerland; but a few months later, in NEW GLARUS, Wisconsin, I learned much about that town's being founded by Swiss immigrants--a story well known to all members of the Swiss American Historical Society.

When, in 1960, sudden nightfall stopped us in the town of GRUETLI (Grundy Co., Tennessee) an inquiry at the post office as well as a visit to the cemetery unquestionably established that this place had been settled by families from Vaud, Neuchatel, and Bern/Aargau about one hundred years earlier; when, on the same trip a few days later, we crossed the Ohio river from Warsaw to Florence (Kentucky/Indiana) and saw the sign: ENTERING SWITZERLAND COUNTY and arrived a few miles later at the county seat, VEVAY, Indiana, where to this day Americanized Swiss names of once-upon-a-time immigrant Swiss wine growers have remained; and when a little later I had to travel to INTERLOCHEN, Michigan, passing in the process the town of ENGADINE, Michigan, the interest regarding other Swiss town names in the United States had been challenged, and subsequently a collection of postmarks from U.S. post offices with Swiss-sounding names was formed which by now numbers well above two hundred.

How many of these town names actually are derived from their Swiss counterparts is not a task which this observer wishes to undertake. (ZURICH, Montana, for instance, is named that way because the builders of the railroad could not think

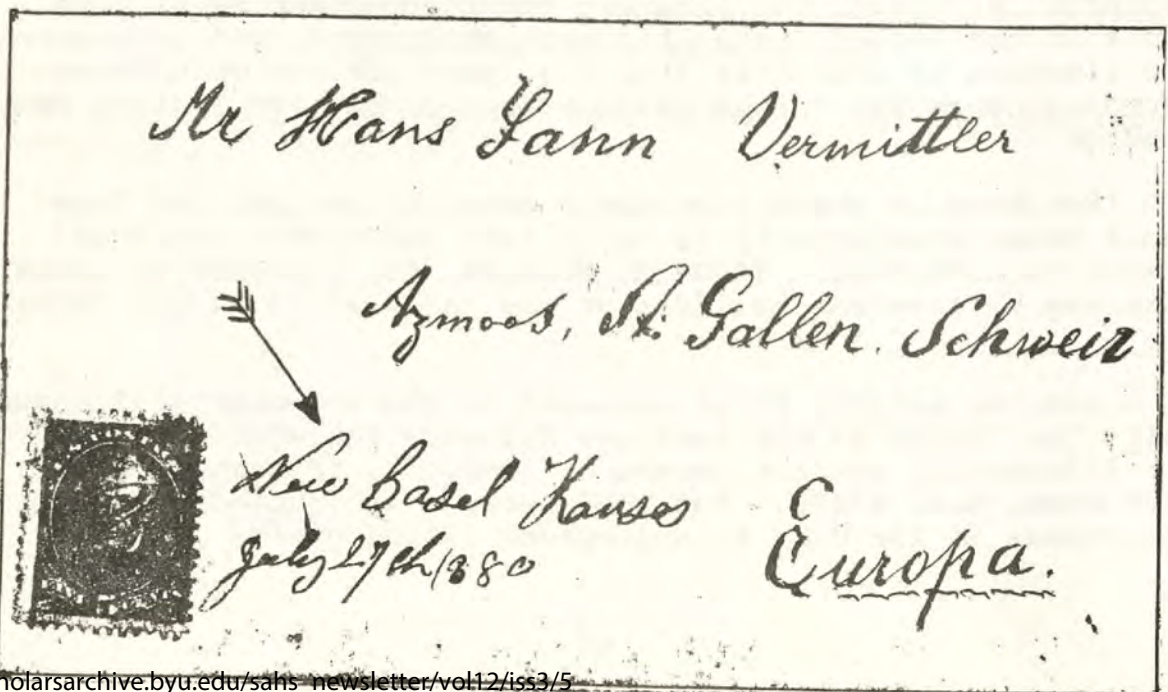
* A similar article first appeared in the November 1975 issue of Tell, the "Voice of the American Helvetia Philatelic Society." For information contact Robert C. Ross, ed., 28 Kenmore Place, Glen Rock, N.J. 07452. The AHPS pursued the subject of Swiss town names in the U.S. in subsequent issues of its journal.

of additional names for all the whistle stops they created every six miles or so, and thus they simply took a newspaper and copied down the names of all places from which a story had originated. Since Zurich was among these by happenstance, Zurich, Montana came into being!)

While this observer satisfied only his philatelic curiosity by putting together a U.S. "Helvetica" cancellation collection, it should be interesting to delve into the relation of all these Swiss-sounding town names from the viewpoint of actual history, and this writer has been made aware of the existence of studies conducted around 1940 by then consul general Dr. Victor Nef in New York, papers of which at least photo copies exist--currently in the possession of an American Swiss in New Jersey. These studies perhaps will find their way into this society's Newsletter at some future time.

The following observations or listings are based on two articles written for philatelic publications in Switzerland (Berner Briefmarken-Zeitung) and in this country (TELL of the American Helvetia Philatelic Society; November 1975), but include data discovered since, as well as corrections furnished by readers of those two writings. The listings are based on an eye-straining perusal of various U.S. Postal Directories, and to possible collectors of these postmarks a sad observation must be transmitted: since the United States Postal Service has taken over the mail handling in this country almost one half of the towns named with Swiss "overtones" have lost their postal facilities and their cancellation, as a perusal of the most current postal directory will show.

One of the earliest pieces that has come to my attention is pictured as Fig. 1: it is a letter of 1880, to St. Gallen (Switzerland) with a manuscript postmark of NEW BASEL, Kansas--a town the location of which has not yet been ascertained.



From about the same period would be (if it exists at all) the cancellation from the now collapsed ghost town of BURGDORF, Idaho (on the Secesh River, Idaho Co.) which is so isolated and inaccessible that one risks smashing one's car in the ruts of the "road" that leads there from Riggins or McCall!

Historians should be warned that the listing, as given below, undoubtedly is: a) incomplete, and b) inconclusive inasmuch as the ACTUAL connection between a Swiss-sounding name and the origins of its population have not been undertaken. Also, there are cities and towns in this country that are inhabited by many Swiss, but that do not have a Swiss town name. Nevertheless this Swiss-related set of observations is submitted to the S.A.H.S. at the urging of Professor Schelbert of the Dept. of History at the University of Illinois at Chicago-Circle. Because he considered it amusing as well as perhaps one basis from which a truly history-minded member of this Society might start. Town names that have unquestionably been given to them by Swiss settlers are underlined. Included are marginally possible "Swiss origin" names as well as names of a few towns that most likely were named after German or Austrian towns (WALDENBURG, BERNSTADT, etc.) but where towns of the same name DO exist in Switzerland.

LISTING:

- a) THE COUNTRY: SWITZERLAND (SC); SWITZERLAND (FL); LITTLE SWITZERLAND (NC); HELVETIA (WV); HELVETIA (OR);
- b) ITS INHABITANTS (the term also can mean a cow milker in East Prussia and the Baltic states); SWITZER (SC); SWITZER (WV); BERNER (MN); BERNER (GA);
- c) THE ADJECTIVE: SWISS (MO); SWISS (NC); SWISS (WV);
- d) OTHER COMBINATIONS WITH "SWISS": SWISSHOME (OR); SWISSVALE (PA); SWITZ CITY (IN);
- e) OUR EARLY HERO: GRUETLI (TN); TELL (TX); TELL CITY (IN); TELSTAD (MO)??;
- f) WHERE THE COUNTRY IS LOCATED AND HOW THE CLIMATE IS: ALPINE (AL); ALPINE (AZ); ALPINE (AR); ALPINE (CA); ALPINE (IN); ALPINE (KY); ALPINE (MT); ALPINE (NJ); ALPINE (NY); ALPINE (OR); ALPINE (TN); ALPINE (WA); ALPINE RURAL STATION, Thayne (WY); ALPENA (MI); ALPENA (WV); ALPENA (AR); ALPENA (SD); LAKE ALPINE (CA); GLEN ALPINE (MI); (all of these may be disregarded -- probably);
- g) OUR LAKES: LAKE ZURICH (IL); LAKE GENEVA (FL); LAKE GENEVA (WI); LAKE LUZERNE (NY);
- h) OUR LARGER CITIES AND TOWNS: NEW BASEL (KA); BERN (ID);

BERN (KA); BERNE (IN); BERNE (NY); BERNE (PA); NEW BERN (NC); BERNE (OH); NEWBERN (VA); NEWBERN (AL); NEWBERN (TN); NEWBERNE (WV; disc. '76); FRYBURG (PA); FRYBURG (ND); FRYEBURG (ME); NORTH FRYEBURG (ME)?; GENEVA (AL); GENEVA (FL); GENEVA (GA); GENEVA (IL); GENEVA (ID); GENEVA (IA); GENEVA (IN); GENEVA (KY); GENEVA (MN); GENEVA (NEB); GENEVA (NY); GENEVA (OH); GENEVA (PA); GENEVA (TX); GENEVA (UT); GENEVA (WA); GENEVA ON THE LAKE (OH); GENEVA RURAL STATION, Coneaut Lake (OH); LAUSANNE (Carbon Co., PA where now the town of Mauch Chunk calls itself the Switzerland of America); NEW GENEVA (PA); NEW GLARUS (WI); LENZBURG (IL); LANGNAU (KY); INTERLAKEN (MA); INTERLACHEN (FL); INTERLAKEN (NY); INTERLOCHEN (MI); LUCERNE (WA); LUZERNE (PA); LUZERNE (IA); LUZERNE (MI); LUZERNE (KY); LUCERNE (CA); LUCERNE (MO); (some of these could also be named after the Chevalier de la Lucerne (or Luzerne), French envoy to the USA and supporter of the Continental Army in its darkest days); VEVAY (IN); WALDENBURG (AR); WINTERTHUR (DE); ZURICH (KA); ZURICH (MT);

- i) SMALLER TOWNS: BERTHOUD (CO: the French name for BURGDORF); SAINT LEONARD (MD); SAINT MAURICE (LA); SAINT BERNARD (AL)?; SAINT BERNARD (LA)?; ST. PETER (IL); ST. PETER (MN); ST. PETER (PA); MARIA STEIN (OH); MOUNT ANGEL (OR), literally translated from Engelberg where the settling monks came from; APPENZELL (PA); BURGDORF (ID); ARBON (ID); ARDON (IA); BADEN (PA and elsewhere); MUENSTER (TX)?; MUENSTER (IN)?; LOHN (TX); LAURA (several states)?; SELMA (five different)?; SAN BERNARDINO (CA)?; SAN ANTONIO (TX)?; CARONA (KA); KULM (ND); FONTANA (CA)?; ROUGEMONT (NC) and its immediate neighbor town: RED MOUNTAIN (NC); SAINT CROIX (IN); ELM (PA); ZELL (SD); WEINGARTEN (MO); SAINT MARTIN (MN); SAINT MARTIN (OH); LINDEN: eight (in CA, IN, IA, NC, NJ, TN, TX, WI; all ?); SELDEN (above Kandersteg, Bern, in Switzerland): (ME; VA; KA); ST. BENE-DICT (LA);
- j) QUESTIONABLE TOWN NAME ALLITERATIONS: DELMONT (SD); DELMONT (PA); DELMONT (NJ); WALLISVILLE (TX); BOICOURT (KA); OBERNBURG (NY); BERNVILLE (PA; though a correspondent advises that this settlement was settled by Swiss); BERNSTADT and EAST BERNSTADT (KY); LUCERNE VALLEY (CA)?; LUCERNE-MINES (PA)?; SCHERTZ (TX); BALM (FL); BALM (NC); NEWMUENSTER (WI); PATRIOT (IN);
- k) RIVERS, DISTRICTS, ETC.: WALLIS (TX); ENGADINE (MI); CHAUMONT (NY); LANDENBERG (PA); RHINE (GA)?; RHONE STATION, Nanticoke (PA) (??);
- l) SAINTS, REFORMERS: SAINT MEINRAD (IN); CALVIN (IL); CALVIN (KY); CALVIN (LA); CALVIN (ND); CALVIN (OK); CALVIN (PA); CALVIN (WV); ZWINGLE (IA);

- m) FAMILY NAMES (some of them certain; others questionable):
BERNER (GA); BERNER (MN); BUHLER (KA); BURKLEY (KY); BALLY
 (PA); ARP (TX); DeBARY (FL); BRODBECKS (PA); CHEVROLET
 (KY); DUBACH (LA); EPPERLY (akin to Aeberly or Eberle)
 (WV); GARDI (GA); GERBER (CA); GERING (NEB); HUFSMITH
 (TX); HERSHEY (PA), from Hirschi); GALLATIN (PA); ISELIN
 (PA); ISELIN (PA); ISELIN (NJ); ISELIN RURAL STA., Salts-
 burg (PA); IMBODEN (AR); HAAS (WA); IMBODEN (VA); JENNERS-
TOWN (PA); KREBS (OK); KELLER (TX); KELLER (VA); KELLER
 (WA); MARTY (SD); MOHLER (OR); SHARER (KY); SHINDLER (SD);
SCHALLER (IA); RAHNS (PA); SUTTER (CA); SUTTER CREEK (CA);
TANNER (AL); THALMANN (GA); TRAER (IA); THOENY (MT); YODER
 (OR); IMPACH (WA); LANTZ (MD); also perhaps: BUTZTOWN
 (PA); MERTZTOWN (PA); KELLERVILLE (TX); KERNVILLE (CA);
 and AMMON Branch, Idaho Falls (ID); LANDIS (NC);

and on, and on, and on.

Someone truly interested in pulling from all of these names those truly Swiss might have a ready-made contribution for the Swiss museum in New Glarus! To this writer the venture was strictly a fun hobby.

A SELECTION OF "AMERICAN HELVETICA" POSTMARKS



Fig. 2

Most of these postal markings have been taken from actual postmarks, but have been reduced in size and cleared of "killer bars" that usually accompany postmarks from small towns.