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This history of a small ethnic-national association is not the usual anniversary publication, listing glorious achievements and displaying pictures of smiling officers or of happy gatherings. It presents instead a concise anatomy of the ups and downs, even near collapses, the organization faced during its first five decades.

Founded in 1927 by a group of Swiss immigrants of Chicago who were interested in the history of their compatriots in the United States, it was to accomplish these tasks:

'To institute, conduct, and encourage historical research; to collect and preserve the data and materials of history; to record the achievements of Swiss-American citizens and residents of Swiss extraction and their influence upon the progress and development of governmental institutions, and of industry, science and education in the United States of America, and to publish and distribute information and data concerning the same' (14).

This was an ambitious program, even if somewhat filio-pietistically slanted, and is a valid plan of action to this day.

Professor Meier divides the Society's history into four phases: the early years centering in Chicago (1927-1940), the Madison phase (1940-1948), the Philadelphia period when Alfred Senn presided over the organization (1948-1961) and, finally, the years since its reactivation in 1963. Each of the first three phases followed a similar pattern; in their initial years a publication venture absorbed the dedicated efforts of some key members, then a slow but certain decline set in. In the first phase the book Prominent Americans of Swiss Origin (New York: J.T. White, 1932) appeared, a collection of seventy biographical sketches that offer valuable detail, but are in part hagiographical and inflate somewhat the significance of some of their subjects. At the beginning of the Madison years The Swiss in the United States (Madison, 1940), edited by John P. von Grueningen followed, "the product of much painstaking work", but lacking in "internal coherence" (32). In 1948 Alfred Senn decided single-handedly to publish a yearbook named The Swiss Record of which one appeared in 1949, the other in 1950. The issues contained some excellent articles, others were rather slim and derivative.
The actors of the story are portrayed throughout with remarkable tact, yet without halos, be it the staunchly Catholic Bruno Buchmann, editor and business manager of the Katholischer Jugendsfreund, or the typesetter August Ruedy, a Marxist by persuasion and accused of being a communist, or the urbane and learned physician Jacques Holinger. Alfred Senn, John Paul von Grueningen, Albert Bartholdi, Emil J. Schaefer — their dedicated efforts are given careful and concise assessment, not to forget the indefatigable Mrs. Ehrensperger: "Treasurer, corresponding secretary, mother confessor, genealogy consultant, publicity agent, lonesome hearts editor, and whatever other jobs could be hung on me" (41), as she once described herself. Meier's sure touch in this regard is all the more noteworthy since some of the key figures were still alive at the time he wrote his essay, or they had descendants who were vitally concerned as to the just portrayal of their forebears.

The chronicling of the events reveals some important lessons. First, the absence of trained historians brought a measure of uncertainty that led to destructive dissension as to the quality of materials presented for publication. Second, valiant and repeated attempts to reach a wide audience willing to buy the Society's publications and support its activities failed dismally, and outlays could not be recovered. Third, the initially vigorous activities during the Chicago, Madison, and Philadelphia years changed all too quickly to inaction, depleted resources, and disillusionment over membership apathy.

When therefore the nearly defunct Society was reactivated in 1963, largely by the vigorous efforts of Lukas F. Burckhardt then a diplomat at the Embassy of Switzerland in Washington, a different model had to be found without, however, breaking sharply with the past. Trained historians could be engaged, among them especially H.K. Meier, whose professional qualifications were beyond challenge and whose pragmatic and critical sense kept the organization on an even course. Membership lists were carefully monitored, outlays kept rigorously to a minimum, publications were supported or distributed rather than sponsored outright. Annual meetings were held with strict regularity in a professional manner and rigorous standards were applied in the selection of papers and other scholarly materials. A newsletter, appearing two to four times a year, emerged as the principal means of communication and included essays of high quality. Thus harmony returned, relevant publications were distributed or publicised among the membership, regional meetings held whenever circumstances seemed propitious, and a membership of about 200 kept up.
In this then lies, at least for this reviewer, the substantial merit of this work: It is carefully documented, sharply analytical, and unhesitatingly forthright. It reveals that for a small organization to want too much (in relation to its given strength) must surely lead to exhaustion and dormancy; that to remain strictly within the limits of available resources assures best the implementation of stated goals.

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