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A History Of The Swiss In California

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In 1848, the same year that Switzerland’s political structure took on its present constitutional form as a modern nation-state, a Swiss settler-entrepreneur named John Sutter became aware of gold deposits at his mill in Alta California. This led directly to the California Gold Rush. Two years later, in 1850, the United States accepted the freshly acquired and promising region now known as “California” into the Union as a state. Swiss immigrants enhanced the development of California from its very inception.

Sutter, the charismatic chameleon-adventurer, had marketed himself at times to prospective clients and business partners as “Captain John Sutter of the Swiss Guards.” His contribution to the development of California, which was transitioning from being part of a sparsely populated Mexican province to a booming American state, was significant. He had begun his career as Johann Augustus Sutter, a failed tradesman in Burgdorf, Canton Bern; but by the 1840s, he had established a

1 Full disclosure: the Swiss and American author of this article was born in Sutter Memorial Hospital, a short distance from Sutter’s Fort in an area of California that was once called “New Helvetia.”

2 John Sutter was born in Germany to a Swiss family; lived and worked in Canton Bern as a Swiss citizen; traveled to North America on a French passport; became a Mexican citizen; a reluctant accomplice to the Bear Flag Revolt for California’s independence, and an American citizen. See Richard Dillon, Fool’s Gold: The Decline and Fall of Captain John Sutter of California (New York: Coward-McCann, 1967).

3 See Agathon A. Aerni, “The Swiss Guards of San Francisco,” Swiss American Historical Society Newsletter, vol. 2, no. 2 (June 1966), 5-6. Not to be confused with the Pontifical Swiss Guard that has served in the Vatican since the fifteenth century, the Swiss of California organized their own “Swiss Guards” in 1860, also known as “Swiss Sharpshooters,” more as a shooting club and later, benevolent society, than as a militia. General Sutter himself was considered a good marksman.
In addition, Sutter’s drinking binges, his sloppy accounting practices, and his unrequited generosity practically guaranteed that hardened swindlers would siphon off his holdings. He ruled over Indian slaves with a heavy hand, but could not stand up to Gold Rush hucksters. See Dillon, 332, 340 et passim.


Sutter was bitterly disappointed when his eldest son later founded a city there and named it “Sacramento” rather than “Sutterville” or “New Helvetia.” See John Paul von Grueningen, The Swiss in the United States (Madison, Wisconsin: Swiss American Historical Society, 1940), 86-87.

A full chapter in Grueningen, The Swiss in the United States, 88-92, is devoted to Kyburz, who had become a trusted lieutenant to Sutter. An unincorporated winter-resort community of “Kyburz,” located along the South Fork of the American River at 4,000 feet elevation in the Sierra Nevadas, was named in honor of Samuel Kyburz by his Postmaster son Albert. See also Martin Hochstrasser, “Kyburz, CA 95720, USA,” Swiss American Historical Society Review 35, no. 2 (June 1999), 3-20.
Sutter had left the family (and his creditors) behind 15 years earlier, though his eldest son Johann Augustus Jr. joined him in 1848. 

Lienhard, A Pioneer at Sutter’s Fort, chapters XXI-XXIII.


From a compilation of biographical sketches from Lienhard in Grueningen, The Swiss in the United States, 92. Family names of other probable Swiss include Thomann, Rippstein, and a goldsmith named Steinach. The orphaned sisters from the Donner Party were Eliza and Georgia Donner.

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Reconstruction of Sutter’s office in its original Sutter’s Fort location (Sacramento). Courtesy of Calisphere.org.
The 1850s: Swiss Surveyors and City Planners in the Bay Area

The entry of California into the Union in 1850 turned a formerly remote coastal Mexican border area into an internationally recognized American whirlwind of metallurgical and economic promise, but also increasingly into a state with great agricultural, civic and demographic possibilities.

Due to the 800-mile length of California, along with dichotomies in climate and terrain, the designations of “Northern California” and “Southern California” often point to the semblance of two separate states. At the time of the Gold Rush far to its north, Los Angeles was still a small village and had scarcely reached 5,000 occupants by the 1870s, with no recorded Swiss immigrants. Thus, the bulk of the state’s growth was at first in Northern California, where Californians from Switzerland naturally gravitated. The largest population center was centered around San Francisco, which numbered 775 Swiss immigrants in 1870. Los Angeles and San Francisco were not to reach rough equity in Swiss American population until 1960, at which time both cities had over 4,000 each.\(^{12}\) For the nineteenth-century narrative of immigrants from the Swiss Confederation, therefore, the historic scene remained squarely in the Bay Area, while the predominantly Italian Swiss preferred rural, mainly north or central coastal, areas.

The written account of Gustav Schlăfli, a nephew of Sutter’s wife Anna, bears witness to the diversity of California landscapes, towns and countryside, in 1850. Of the city of San Francisco, Schlăfli gushed: “One year ago St. Francisco [sic] consisted of only a few houses and now it is already an immensely big town, and I believe it will get to be the biggest town in the world.”\(^ {13}\) Schlăfli characterized the more rural but eminently inhabitable areas of the new state in similarly optimistic fashion: “Speaking about the Californian land, it still looks quite


\(^{13}\) *America Experienced: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Accounts of Swiss Immigrants to the United States*, ed. Leo Schelbert; trans. Hedwig Rappolt (Camden, Me.: Picton Press, 1996), 369. Schlăfli’s ultimate growth prediction for a city confined to a narrow peninsula has proven to be less than accurate.
wilderness-like in many places. But towns are being built as if there were no tomorrow. Oncle [Sutter] has again planned two new towns; one of them he named ‘Elisa’ in honor of his very worthy daughter, and the other ‘Blumas.’ The former has a splendid location and already numbers 20-30 houses and is growing by the day.”

The middle of the nineteenth century was the lull before the gathering storm of rural and urban growth in the Golden State that eventually led to today’s population of 40 million people, of which less than one percent claim single or multiple Swiss ancestry. Nevertheless, at least two Swiss immigrants among the state’s very earliest surveyors and city planners helped to pioneer the state’s development.

The earlier-mentioned Swiss surveyor, Jean Jacques Vioget from Combremont-le-Petit in Canton Vaud, had the distinction in 1839 of being the first person to make a survey and map of Yerba Buena, which later became San Francisco. With great foresight, he attempted to orient the blocks to approximate the lines of the solstices, hoping to provide for the maximum amount of sunshine at both the north and south declinations. Yet, his ideas were too advanced for the bureaucratic establishment who insisted on a more conservative grid plan. He was also an artist whose watercolors and drawings serve as unique historical documents depicting a nearly bare coastal peninsula, from the time of Mexican rule, that would soon sprout into the City on the Bay. Hired in the 1840s to survey land grants in the Sacramento area and to serve as Sutter’s agent in San Francisco, the polyglot Vioget also witnessed Sutter’s purchase of Fort Ross from the Russians in 1841.

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14 American Experienced, 371. Neither of the two settlements named can be found on the California map today. “Blumas,” however, the original settlement in Yuba County had disbanded by 1862. Because of Rio de las Plumas (anglicized to Feather River), “Plumas” became the name source for a small community in Lassen County as well as an entire county through which the river flows and a national forest for which the river is the main watershed.

15 Mick Sinclair, San Francisco: A Cultural and Literary History (New York: Interlink Books, 2004). Vioget’s Yerba Buena map of 1839, with its trapezoidal blocks, covered only the area of San Francisco now known as the Financial District. Fort Ross, settled in the early nineteenth century on the coast of what is now Sonoma County, had represented the southernmost Russian outpost in North America.
Vioget’s life story also included earlier stints as a soldier who was wounded in Napoleon’s fourth Swiss Regiment, as a captain in the Brazilian Navy and in the merchant marine. Though a seaman at heart, he turned to hospitality to take advantage of his outgoing personality, setting up a saloon at Yerba Buena on the corner of Kearney and Clay in 1840. It became the primary meeting place for well-to-do patrons, not to mention deep-sea skippers, to conduct their public and private business over good liquor. The proprietor with the gentle French accent installed one of the first billiard tables on the Pacific Coast of North America, and his “sparkling wit and genial hospitality soon became proverbial from Mazatlán to Sitka.” When the building became recognized as a hotel four years later, it became known as the first hotel in early California. Vioget invested his profits well in real estate, owning ranchos in Sonoma and Marin Counties that came to total forty-one square miles of land.

John Sutter was the best-known Swiss in America, but not the best representative of Swiss behavior. Sutter has been called, rather, an exemplar of the American frontier: bold, grandiose, a self-aggrandizing

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risk taker. The lesser-known Viogel, on the other hand, apparently more accurately represented recognized Swiss virtues of “technical competence, good citizenship, modesty in behavior, amiable fellowship and the respect of the community, ability to live within one’s means . . . and independence of judgment and action.”  

A decade later, in 1851, just as J. J. Viogel was spending his retirement years in San Jose, a German-Swiss contemporary from Baden in Canton Aargau, Julius Kellersberger, had just moved to San Francisco with his new wife and with dreams of riches. Quickly realizing that mining was not his forte, and, having been trained as a surveyor in Vienna with additional practical experience in New York City’s Central Park, he turned to his professional métier. It was a time when surveying had started to boom. After California’s acceptance into the union in 1850, each of the counties had been established with requirements for its own surveyors. In the following year Congress created the office of a U.S. Surveyor General for California to lay out the basic grid of meridians, base, and standard lines.

Kellersberger settled on the bay shore opposite San Francisco to the east, in the lands of the aptly named “Contra Costa” (“opposite shore”). With his background in surveying and city planning, he was hired as City Engineer for laying out a town in 1852. The town of Contra Costa was incorporated as “Oakland” the following year in the newly formed county of Alameda. Following his platting of properties and streets, Kellersberger was assigned the duty of establishing important public highways and of extending them to their termination at the Bay. When the job of City Engineer became subject to an election in 1854, an opposing candidate outmaneuvered him despite having lesser qualifications than Kellersberger.

The loss of municipal surveying opportunities actually led to Julius Kellersberger’s appointment as United States Deputy Surveyor for California in 1855 and to more important work. His first contract,

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19 Studer, Julius Kellersberger, 8.
requiring him to pre-finance the work and manage and outfit a surveying team himself, was to “extend the Humboldt Meridian . . . north to or near the State [of California] line,” while also extending “. . . the second standard line north . . . from said meridian West to the Pacific Ocean, and East as far as it can be extended with accuracy . . .”20 This eventually involved a survey of about one hundred miles.

He was allotted five months to complete the work. As employees, runaway sailors were his preference; he found them to be good workers and content with whatever situations they encountered. The contract was underwritten or insured by the Italian American banker F. Argenti and Kellersberger’s own brother, Rudolph, who was the honorary consul for Switzerland in San Francisco at the time. The work was completed on time and inspected by Deputy Murray, who had drafted the preliminary meridian that Kellersberger was contracted to extend. Murray reported: “Taking the work as a whole, I consider it well and faithfully executed and have no hesitation to report it as such.”21

Julius Kellersberger fulfilled further survey contracts at a profit, documenting and mapping thousands of miles of California for the first time, while building a reputation as a reliable and conscientious surveyor. Of the first contract, however, which had lost him money as he faced the challenges of federal contracting, he mentioned good-naturedly in his memoirs: “We poor Swiss, who have no uncle sitting in Congress and no brother-in-law in the Senate, had to survey those lands, which the Americans did not desire to do. But the position was a dignified one.”22

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21 Studer, “Julius Kellersberger,” 10-11, and National Archives, as quoted in Studer, 11.
22 Julius Kellersberger’s Memoirs, manuscript format, New York Public Library, as quoted in Studer, “Julius Kellersberger,” 11. In several final twists to Kellersberger’s life story, he left California to survey and lay out the roadbed for a railroad across Mexico from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific; served as an engineer for the Confederacy in East Texas during the Civil War; returned to Mexico as a construction engineer on the Vera Cruz and Mexico City Railroad during the short reign of the Austrian-born Mexican Emperor Maximilian; and he then returned to Switzerland to live in Baden for the final years of his life. See W. T. Block, “The Ghostly-Silent Guns of Galveston: A Chronicle of Colonel J. G. Kellersberger, the Confederate Chief Engineer of East Texas,” *East Texas Historical Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1995), 23-34.
The Swiss in California: A Snapshot from 1853

A Swiss notary from Bern, C. A. Scheurer, published clearly and carefully worded observations on his new California home in 1854, claiming to provide “a general description of the situation there, with particular consideration to satisfying the interest of those planning to emigrate or to invest capital there.”23 To these views, augmented by a number of helpful statistics, he also appended an annual report on California conditions in 1853 sent by the Swiss Consulate in San Francisco to the Federal Council of the Confederation (Bundesrat), dated January 12, 1854.24 The Swiss consulate was only one of many quickly set up to profit from the economic and geographic advantages of the new state of California: Scheurer also listed the consular presence in San Francisco of Austria, Prussia, Hanover, Hamburg and Bremen.25

The consular report represented of necessity a temporary snapshot of the state of affairs within a rapidly changing scene. For instance, the Swiss population in California had increased in the single year of 1853 to some 2,500 souls, showing an annual increase of 67% from the previous year’s total of 1,500 Swiss-Californians. Even at this early point, though, the only canton not represented in the Golden State was Zug, and, as would continue for decades, the most strongly represented was Ticino (Tessin).26 Such quick growth was mirrored in almost all of

23 C. A. Scheurer, Das jetzige Kalifornien: Allgemeine Schilderung der dortigen Verhältnisse, mit besonderer Rücksichtnahme auf das Interesse Derjenigen, die eine Uebersiedlung dahin oder die Anlegung von Kapitalien in diesem Lande beabsichtigen (Bern: Dalp’sche Buchhandlung, 1854). Despite his claim of attending to the interests of prospective emigrants, he went on in his foreword to disclaim that it was “not necessarily his intention to encourage emigration to California” (“nicht in [meiner] Absicht liege, dadurch zur Auswanderung nach Kalifornien besonders aufzunimtern.”) Rather, he wished “to lay simple facts before the reader, leaving each to make an independent judgment.”

24 The first Swiss Consul after California statehood (the Consul in charge of the report to the Federal Council) was Rudolph Kellersberger from Aargau, brother of Julius Kellersberger mentioned above.

25 Scheurer, Das jetzige Kalifornien, 15.

26 Scheurer, Das jetzige Kalifornien, 65. The Italian-language name for this canton (“Ticino”) recurs throughout this article, rather than the English term “Tessin,” in order to match the journalistic and general practices found in written California sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and to honor the emigrants’ own usage. Accordingly, the plural noun “Ticinesi” indicates citizens from this canton and their offspring, while the adjective “Ticinese” appears in descriptions.
the statistics. The descriptions and numbers of Swiss societies, imports, ships and cargos mirror a city quickly leaving behind the rough-and-tumble social crudeness of the Gold Rush.

Natives of the Swiss Confederation introduced customs and activities of Switzerland to their new California neighbors: Scheurer reports that “the Swiss shooting matches near the city of Sacramento on May 7-8 [1853] created great enthusiasm due to their focused planning and appeared there, as in Switzerland, to be a general festival of public joy.”

The Freischießen in May had been a success due to scrupulous organization, but Swiss participation in the Fourth of July parade that year required agility and adaptability after fireworks in a house at the corner of the main plaza [presumably Union Square] exploded and burned the edifice to the ground. Almost immediately after the successful quenching of the fire, Sutter, dressed in his impressive general’s uniform, led a parade of international militia volunteers through the streets. Reviews afterwards were mixed: the appearance and armament of the troops were good, though the exercises and maneuvers themselves had left something to be desired.

The influx of Swiss immigrants to California was paralleled in a way by the import of Swiss goods. Among the statistics offered by the San Francisco Consulate to the Federal Council were trade balance figures between the two countries and in particular a list of the popular and less-popular 1853 Swiss imports to California. The most popular imports (both for the Swiss abroad and for their new neighbors) were the foodstuffs and beverages: 428 boxes and 20 barrels of *extrait d’absynthe*; 286 boxes of *Kirschwasser*; 760 cheese wheels; 6 centner [metric hundredweight] of chocolate and cocoa products; 480 bottles of champagne, matched by 480 bottles of wine from Cortaillod (in Neuchâtel); and 200 containers of Schabzieger curdled cheese.

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29 Scheurer, *Das jetzige Kalifornien*, 49-51. The performance review was not a part of the report to the Federal Council.

Glarus). Also high on the list were clocks, clock parts and music boxes, 80,000 cigars, and various forms of textiles and ribbons. Less resonant Swiss imports for Californians were jewelry and silk goods.30

Worthy of note in the consular report are the disembarkations of passengers and goods in San Francisco Harbor in 1853 of 1,902 ships, an average of one ship arriving every 5 hours through the year, and an increase in shipping over the previous year of some 44%. Likewise, the number of passengers arriving from foreign ports (39,285) compared to those leaving California by sea (30,316) throws partial light on immigration growth, even without taking into account those arriving overland, around 22,000 that year.31 An estimated one in eleven (9%) of those arriving to settle were Swiss.

By the end of the year in 1853, the population of California approximated 400,000, consisting of 250,000 Americans; 32,000 German

30 Scheurer, Das jetzige Kalifornien, 66-67. It is possible that Chinese immigrants, also quickly establishing themselves in San Francisco, may have become keen competitors in the silk trade locally around this time.
31 Scheurer, Das jetzige Kalifornien, 69-70.
and Dutch speakers, including German-Swiss; 30,000 French, French-Swiss and Belgians; 19,000 Chinese and Malay; 23,500 with “Spanish blood;” 13,000 “other foreigners,” presumably including Italian-Swiss; 30,000 Indians of various tribes; and 2,500 Blacks and Mulattos. Among the 400,000 residents were approximately 65,000 women and 30,000 children.\(^{32}\)

### The Appeal of California to the Swiss

Immigration from Switzerland to the United States reached its apex in the second half of the nineteenth century. Over 21% of all Swiss-Americans who arrived in the nineteen decades between the presidency of James Monroe and the presidency of Barack Obama did so in one single decade: the 1880s.\(^{33}\) Relative Swiss-American population rankings for California, compared to those for other American states, were to move from ninth place in 1870 to sixth place in 1890 to first place from 1930 onwards.\(^{34}\)

In 1859, as the Gold Rush was fading, a front-page feature article of the *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences* directly contrasted the growing conditions of Switzerland with those of California, advising Swiss farmers to take advantage of the agricultural promise which was about to supplant gold fever in the Golden State:

> How would the Swiss exult in the superior advantages afforded by the mountains of California! Here the arable land is abundant, cheap, and prolific, needs no costly terracing and walling, and below the line of winter snows, can be cultivated for various purposes all through the year. The vine yields double, or more than double, what it does in any other country, and wine is made of a quality so excellent that it is already in demand for exportation. The pasturage for

\(^{32}\)Scheurer, *Das jetzige Kalifornien*, 70. Note that the population numbers listed in the consular report are not ordered strictly by diminishing totals, but perhaps reflect the perceived racial hierarchies of the day.

\(^{33}\)Calculated from Leo Schelbert, *Switzerland Abroad: Historical Contours of a Nation’s People Global Presence* (Morgantown, Pa.: Masthof Press, 2019), 239.

\(^{34}\)Grueningen, *The Swiss in the United States*, 17; see also Schelbert, *Switzerland Abroad*, 241.
sheep is extensive and lasting, and for cattle during the summer season, very rich and easy of access. Above all, we have a climate which rivals that of the plains of Italy. These facts warrant the belief, that, if every gold-field was exhausted, there would still be in the Sierra Nevada attractions sufficient to draw thousands in search of homes, and advantages great enough to hold them there contented.35

In 1869, the California Immigrant Union was founded as a booster organization to promote immigrant settlements by touting the benefits of California, considering itself the “proper source to obtain general information in reference to the State.” In 1872, for example, the Union sent 903 letters answering inquiries and received 1,652 visitors in its office.36

The efforts of the California Immigration Union to attract Swiss immigrants to the Pacific Coast were assisted by interested entrepreneurs and corporations. In one case, H. Meiss, general agent of the North German-Lloyd in Switzerland, “[having] had many inquiries of late from would-be Swiss emigrants about . . . California,” made an offer to translate and distribute literature in Switzerland at his own expense, e.g., pamphlets and other materials “describing [the state’s] climate, lands, products, etc.” This offer was relayed by the U.S. Consul in Zurich, who called the Swiss “a most desirable class of immigrants, being frugal, industrious and naturally good citizens.”37

There were, of course, darker sides to the immigration story. For some decades in the nineteenth century, certain Swiss communal officials had made an economically advantageous habit of “shipping to the United States paupers and diseased persons, so as to get rid of the

35 California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences (San Francisco, August 12, 1859), 1. In this and all subsequent quotes from newspapers and journals of the nineteenth century, the original forms of syntax, spelling and punctuation are retained.
36 Daily Alta California (San Francisco), October 14, 1872, front page. Reflecting the prejudices of the day, which would be reflected by an anti-Chinese employment statute in section 2 of article XIX in California’s 1879 constitution, the Union only encouraged and entertained queries of interest from the Eastern United States and Europe.
37 “Swiss Emigrants: United States Consul Sends for California Literature,” Los Angeles Times, March 11, 1897, 14. In the twenty-first century, this type of transatlantic outreach is somewhat approximated by organizations such as the Swiss-California Foundation: www.swisscalifornia.org (viewed 12/8/2019).
cost of maintaining them.” After U.S. negotiators made the point that America “ought not to be looked on as a poor-house for the reception of the imbecile, crippled, diseased, helpless or criminal classes of Europe,” the Federal Council of Switzerland “adopted a law . . . to correct [that] long-existing evil.”

Seldom announced were also the cases of Swiss emigrants who were unable to make a living in the new land, were cheated out of their savings, or suffered from home sickness too much to remain in the New World. We do not know the numbers of repatriated emigrants from California as precisely, nor are they recorded as faithfully, as those of the immigrant arrivals.

Following a series of disappointments and losses, John Sutter had left California for good, moving to the Washington, D.C. area to petition Congress, to no avail, for reimbursement of his property losses. The search for gold in California had, in practical terms, ended for individual placer miners by 1853, as corporations with the means to divert entire streams and dig more deeply took over the lion’s share of profits until even those corporations faced the law of diminishing returns by the 1860s.

Following Sutter’s impetus to the growth of California, it was corporations growing out of the Gold Rush that made huge subsequent financial strides. They morphed and adapted to other fields, to other products and to other purposes, feverishly taking over the economic landscape that had been lost to the Swiss “Captain.” Touching on both the Gold Rush and emigration, Maureen Jung has noted:

California’s unique contribution to the history of corporations has been neglected, in part, because of the long-standing interest in the more romantic, individualistic, and un-

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38 “Swiss Emigration,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), April 8, 1881, 2.

39 The word “placer” rhymes with “Vassar.” “Placer mining” was done by dredging streambeds with anything from shallow “gold pans” to heavy machinery, then winnowing or processing the tailings to isolate the heavier gold. Thus, it was in mid-nineteenth-century California that the unique idiom for failure came into existence: “It didn’t pan out.”

organized aspects of the Gold Rush. Thus, we still think of the Gold Rush as an adventure undertaken by individuals, although historians have recognized for more than a century that most emigrants traveled to California as members of companies.\footnote{Jung, “Capitalism comes to the Diggings,” 52.}

The Italian Swiss Colonies in California

The Swiss companies of immigrants were not long in arriving. Various communal forms of immigration assistance, often based on an aid society or a company for profit, soon sponsored immigrant colonies more interested in farming or ranching than in the mining of precious metals. Such endeavors, whether individually or in a company, had to be financed via private, family or speculative means. This was especially true for a flood of Italian Swiss emigrants from Ticino, the major supplier of Swiss workers to California. On June 13, 1855, following a great population decline by loss of local workers bound overseas, the cantonal Ticinese parliament tightened into law a series of measures restraining municipalities from financing emigration expenses. In particular, the law put strictures on loaning or advancing travel costs to a departing citizen of the canton, levying a loan guarantee of 20,000 francs on public agencies in each instance.\footnote{Gérald Arlettaz, “Émigration et société: un regard neuf sur la Suisse du XIXe siècle,” Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte = Revue Suisse d’histoire = Rivista storica svizzera 31, no. 3 (1981), 326.}

Even so, “the community often paid the expenses of the voyage and guaranteed the debts contracted for it. The emigration was extremely high.”\footnote{Maurice Edmond Perret, “The Italian Swiss Colonies in California,” Master’s thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1942, 23.}

Settlements or colonies of like-minded emigrants from Swiss communities pooled resources for starting afresh in the Golden State, always with the expectation that earnings in California would find their way back home in order to more than repay the investment. As an early example preceding the cantonal restrictions on community support for emigration, we read from the biography of Attilio Martinelli:
The father [of the Martinelli family] came to the United States in 1852 with a party of thirty of his countrymen from the town of Maggia,44 which municipality “staked” the party to thirty thousand francs to defray the expense of the trip to the New World. As an instance of the integrity of the Swiss people, be it noted that all of this money was eventually repaid. During their long voyage on a sailing ship around Cape Horn they encountered severe storms, and it was a frequent remark among the members of the party that the prosperity of Maggia hung in the balance, depending on their safe passage.45

From biographies and other data available about Italian Swiss immigrants to California, concentrating on ranchers, vintners, dairy-men and real estate investors, the historian Giorgio Cheda estimates that the total extent of property belonging to the Ticinesi in California eventually grew to around 1,800 square kilometers by the end of the nineteenth century, corresponding to two-thirds the surface area of the Canton of Ticino itself.46 The potential pathway to individual progress for rural workers in California began as a hired laborer, then as a farmer on rented land, and finally as a landowner.

Meanwhile, as the historian Cheda outlined, the causes for extensive local Italian-Swiss emigration and the resultant absence of (principally male) citizens back home in the Maggia Valley were cyclical and sometimes punishing.47 A serious food crisis during the first years of the Risorgimento48 at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which necessarily impacted the import-dependent mountain valleys of Ticino, forced some to grind corn stalks, walnut husks, bark of the beech tree, vines, hay and straw into polenta and flat bread. Yet the relatively minor demographic changes of those years were to be dwarfed

44 In the eponymous Maggia Valley north-northwest of Locarno in Canton Ticino.
48 In Italy, the movement that would eventually lead to freedom from foreign dominance and to Italian unification.
by later waves of emigration in the second half of the century, fueled successively by economic depression, an isolating Austrian blockade at the Italian border, hoof-and-mouth disease among the cattle, massive flooding,\(^49\) and, ironically, improvements in nutrition and health that caused the population to far outpace what the valley’s resources could sustain.

Between 1851 and 1856, as one example, almost a third of the population (of men for the most part) left the village of Maggia to go overseas. As the demographics of the village of Maggia went, approximately so went the Maggia Valley, which registered a population in 1900 that was only 70% of what it had been in 1850.\(^50\) Due to the gender imbalance back home, marriages became a rarity and the larger part of the work fell to the remaining women of the valley. Coincidentally, the cattle population in the village of Maggia alone steadily decreased from 182 in 1850, to 133 in 1865, and by the end of World War I to only 66.\(^51\) These numbers also clarify why the funds and resources sent back from California, and to some degree from Australia, by the successfully employed family members and relatives overseas were so crucial to bolstering the economy of the Maggia Valley in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

After having settled in various counties of California and having lived and labored about a quarter of a century in California, the Italian Swiss were seen as a well-liked, respected and prosperous people, according to an article of 1878 in the *San Francisco Chronicle* entitled “Our Ticinese Population:”

\(^{49}\) Following the catastrophic floods of 1868, an “Appeal to the Swiss of California” went out from the Swiss Consulate in a number of newspapers, culminating in a request for assistance: “There remains no doubt but that we find ourselves confronted by a calamity such, perhaps, as our [Swiss] history has not recorded for centuries . . . the deaths are numerous. . . . In the canton of Tessin more than 60 persons have been drowned or crushed to death, and more than 1,000 head of stock have perished. . . . The undersigned respectfully announces to the Swiss population of California, and all others who may desire to assist the unfortunate victims of the inundations, that he has opened a subscription book at his office, No. 527 Clay Street, corner of Leidesdorff.” Francis Berton, Consul for Switzerland, *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), November 21, 1868, front page.

\(^{50}\) Arlettaz, *Émigration et société*, 327.

One of the most industrious, frugal, temperate and well-to-do elements in this cosmopolitan State is the Ticinese, composed of former inhabitants of the Canton of Ticino, Switzerland. Their number is estimated at 7,000, distributed principally in Marin, Napa, Santa Clara and San Luis Obispo Counties. The great majority are engaged in the dairy business, and notably so in Marin County. Quite a number of the Ticinese are small farmers, some of whom own their own land, but as a rule, both for farming and dairy purposes, the land is rented. Their property in cows, horses, wagons and other things necessary to their business is very large.

As a reward of their unceasing industry and frugality, they are never “hard up,” and, when the proper occasion offers, are generous to a fault in spending their money. In their feasts and convivial parties, they are as jolly a lot of fellows as ever sat down to do honors to the inner man.

Given the evident good will of the California newspaper editors in welcoming the Swiss to California, it is possible to pardon certain simplistic stereotypes, such as those of one journalist who claimed: “... it is found that nearly all the Italian-Swiss ... bring with them the echoes of the Ranz des Vaches in their ears, or else have not wiped off the bloom of the ripened grapes from their fingers.” At the same

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52 This number would nearly double in size during the twelve following years, as an 1890 statement from the same newspaper declares: “Out of 17,000 people who emigrated from Switzerland to make California their future home, fully 13,000 came from Canton Ticino, which is the only Italian speaking canton in the little European republic.” San Francisco Chronicle, September 17, 1890, front page. It should be added that Canton Grisons (Kanton Graubünden, Chantun Grischun, Cantone dei Grigioni) has also historically had an Italian-speaking population ranging between 10 to 17%. Though there may have been Swiss speakers of the Rhaeto-Romanic dialects that emigrated to California from Grisons, there was no organized colony, nor was there an obvious presence.

53 Marin County, the county immediately north of the San Francisco metropolitan area, provided a ready and lucrative market for quality dairy goods. In Marin’s County Seat, San Rafael—more recently, in 1971—the part-Swiss filmmaker George Lucas founded Lucasfilm, a breeder organization for the Star Wars franchise and for the Pixar animation studio.


55 Also known as Kuhreihen, Ranz des Vaches is a melody traditionally played by Swiss Alpine herdsmen driving cattle to or from the pasture. A well-known version of it appears in the overture to Rossini’s opera, William Tell.

56 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
time, the reporter appeared to show genuine respect to those who “pay but little heed to the blandishments of the city” in order to “turn their faces to the dairy nooks of Marin and Contra Costa or the vine patches of St. Helena.”57 The final analysis, he suggests, comes down to character, since the “sun-browned, dark-haired dairymen and vineyardists” are “good, honest, self-helpful, family-helping fellows” who “[save] up their money, [purchase] a little plot here and a little meadow there, [grow] up into competence from nothing and [send] $100 or $200 now and then to bring a cousin, or a brother, or a father over to this wonderful country, where a man can own what he tills and be . . . a nobleman in his own right.”58

The rhapsodic judgments of Swiss character by the big-city San Francisco editors were perhaps influenced by earlier reports of journalists in more rural areas. One case in point was an 1874 article from San Luis Obispo County:

Switzerland is the oldest republic on the face of the earth. . . . The Swiss who have left their native land and adopted this as their home do not show any disposition to forget the claims of the mother [country]. They are not wanting in patriotism. When their day to celebrate comes round the emblem of their land is seen floating in the breeze even in this far-off country of their adoption. In this county there are about fifty Swiss families. They nearly all come from the Maggia valley in the north [sic] of Switzerland,59 and were close neighbors and therefore acquaintances before emigrating. They are principally engaged in dairying here, and are prosperous because they are temperate, industrious and honest.

This year their anniversary was celebrated by a grand ball given in Granger Hall, Cambria, on last Tuesday night… Many came in from the adjoining county. Old Creek60 was

57 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
58 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
59 More accurately, Canton Ticino and the Maggia Valley are situated in the very south of Switzerland.
60 As mortality, entropy and the passage of time dictate, the Swiss-American farming community at Old Creek has now disappeared, though an “Old Creek Road” does proceed east from the ocean just south of Cayucos to cross an old creek and eventually loop north, renamed, to Cambria.
“Morro” was a name familiar to the Italian-Swiss, as it shared with Spanish the connotation of a great rock, and in fact at Morro Bay on the Pacific is one of the seven large and distinctive volcano plugs in San Luis Obispo County. Next to another “morro,” abutting San Luis Obispo, the descendant of a Swiss-Italian pioneer, Alex Madonna, constructed a famous and quirky “Madonna Inn” with a pseudo-Swiss-Alps exterior. Having been denied permission to place his inn on top of the rock, he apparently decided to build a rock on top of his inn.

San Simeon is now probably best known as the site of William Randolph Hearst’s unique hilltop complex, “Hearst Castle.” That is, San Luis Obispo itself.

“Long live the Swiss! The republic contains about two and a half millions, and if they were all right here in California it would be a blessing to the State, for they make the very best class of citizens.”

From a Marin County newspaper came an explanation for the rapidity with which Ticinese Swiss assimilated into American culture while still holding ties to the land of their birth:

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62 San Simeon is now probably best known as the site of William Randolph Hearst’s unique hilltop complex, “Hearst Castle.”

63 That is, San Luis Obispo itself.

64 “The Swiss Ball,” Weekly Tribune (San Luis Obispo), September 26, 1874, 3.
The Swiss population of this section is constantly increasing by immigration from the old country. . . . Born in a country in which compulsory education is a law of the land, in the oldest Republic of the world, and trained under the influences of Republican institutions, they assimilate very rapidly with the American people, and most of them, as soon as they are eligible, become naturalized citizens. Their wives and sweet-hearts come after a while, and steadily the Swiss element of the population of this section, both youth and adult, is increasing. . . . Our Swiss inhabitants form a very desirable portion of our population. As a mass they are law-abiding and industrious, and take an intelligent interest in development and future welfare of their adopted country. A large majority of those here are employed in the dairy business, an occupation in which they were principally engaged in their native land.65

Italian-Swiss societies and organizations, devoted to service, fraternal gatherings, leisure pursuits and political action, became central features and comfortable retreats for the immigrant population:

Of our Ticinese population, about one-third are married; the other two-thirds are composed of robust bachelors, ranging in age from 20 to 40 years. In this city [San Francisco] they have the Bachelors’ Society,66 which gives a costly banquet yearly, following on the evening of their annual picnic day. They have organized benevolent societies in San Francisco, San Jose, Petaluma, Cambria and Old Creek (San Luis Obispo County), and other points. The Ticinese Liberal Society of this city is a strong organization, and is a branch of the parent society in the mother country, established to defend the principles of civil liberty against ultramontane aggression.67

66 A Chronicle article of two months later, May 1878, commented on this society in terms that may have been considered high wit at the time: “The Bachelors’ Club is a moneyed social organization, but is not violently anti-marital as there is scarcely a month during the marrying season that some member is not violently attacked by Cupid and carried off by some Venus. If the attacks keep up as has been the case lately, women’s rights in the legitimate sense can claim a victory over man’s wrongs, for is it not wrong for a man to be a bachelor in this California paradise with all its budding, blooming Eves?” “The Swiss Societies,” San Francisco Chronicle, May 27, 1878, 3.
67 Regarding resistance to the Ultramontane Party, this Chronicle article of 1878 predates by 12 years a revolt in Ticino. George F. Cavalli, the (continued on next page)
The Swiss Sharpshooters and the Swiss Philharmonic Band are mostly composed of Ticinese. All speak the English language, and in religion are Catholics or Free Thinkers, the latter said to be the most numerous. They send considerable sums of money home yearly to parents or friends, and pay the passage for many who come here to settle.68 The more wealthy visit their native land occasionally, and then return to the home of their adoption.69

Though the rural Italian-Swiss immigrants far outnumbered their city-dwelling counterparts, it is natural that the big-city paper would want to feature the urban Swiss, especially in regards to their hotelier and business skills:

The Ticinese are masters in the difficult role of “knowing how to keep a hotel,” according to their ideas, the guests of which seem to congregate together as one family. They eat, chat, smoke and drink as if around the family board, never thinking that the principles of the Blue Ribbon Brigade70 are in any way violated. Temperance in all things is much more natural to them than total abstinence. With music and songs they delight to pass the time away when the more arduous labors of the day have passed. In their domestic relations they live happily and have large families. . . . As business men, of whom there are several in this city, they are upright and honest, their word being as good as their bond.

67 (continued) editor of San Francisco’s Swiss-Italian weekly journal L’Elvezia, would explain: “The trouble now agitating Ticino is an old one, and originates from the fact that liberalism is becoming daily stronger in that [canton], so as to become a power to be feared by the Ultramontane or Conservative party, which has ruled the canton from time immemorial . . . [A] section . . . in the Constitution governing the canton of Ticino . . . provided that if . . . a petition signed by 7,000 citizens [were] presented to the Government asking for a revision of the Constitution an election [should] be ordered. On the seventh day of last month 10,000 people presented such a petition to President J. Respini . . . but no action was taken. The consequence of this refusal to listen to a constitutional demand is the cause of the present rebellion and the installation of a liberal government.” As quoted in “About the Revolt: Information in Regard to the Present Trouble,” San Francisco Chronicle, September 17, 1890, front page.
68 See Arlettaz, “Émigration et société,” 326.
70 A euphemism for those who shun alcohol, i.e., tee-totalers.
Not believing in the perplexities and costly luxury of law, they have no legal representative amongst them. . . .

Other Ticinesi who lived in San Francisco found themselves somewhere along the restaurant-business spectrum between waiters and proprietors:

What few Italian-Swiss remain in town seem somehow to follow their noses and drift into the savory cook shops. Fewer still rise to be the proprietors of popular houses, such as old John Jung, whose two sons are now in the wine business, the original Campi, and N. Giamboni, who succeeded him, but the rest remain waiters, and admirable waiters they make, understanding Italian, French and English, being civil and obliging. Ask any one of the “French” waiters at the fashionable restaurants what his nationality is and the chances are a score to one that he will smile, flick off an imaginary crumb from the table-cloth and answer, “I am Suisse, Monsieur.”

The German Swiss in California

While the Italian-speaking Swiss outnumbered their fellow countrymen from other cantons, settling in the countryside as dairymen, ranchers, vintners, and so forth, the German Swiss formed a majority in California’s developing urban areas, particularly San Francisco. A number of these were to make a name for themselves as trusted businessmen and craftsmen:

The German-Swiss having the strongest representation in the city . . . have an independent turn of mind and like to have a little shop or bench of their own, where they may ply their handicraft as carpenters, machinists, tailors or cabinet-makers. Being particularly adept at the lathe, they are largely employed in billiard manufacturies, some of the cleverest turners here being German-Swiss. They are found to be strictly trustworthy and temperate also, these qualities having given the German-Swiss a stronghold on the favor of Wells,

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71 “Our Ticinese Population: Their Numbers and Business Occupations,” San Francisco Chronicle, March 9, 1878, 2. We read that the “Ticino and St. Got[t]hard Hotels [were] looked upon with particular favor by the Italian-Swiss.”

72 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
Fargo & Co., their most trusted porters being of the above nationality. . . . These immigrants, who chiefly come from the cantons of Uri, Zurich and St. Gall, bring with them much perseverance and business shrewdness, which qualities have enabled them to accumulate for themselves quite respectable fortunes. Among the more prominent German-Swiss are John C. Rued, the leather merchant; Harry W. Syz, Treasurer of the Helvetia Insurance Company; Musser Brothers, the importers; J. J. Pfister, a manufacturer of woolen goods; Moritz Stuber, the capitalist; Messrs. Fri and Luchsinger, the furniture men; and J. Steinegger of Britton & Rey. The German-Swiss have no particular liking for the country and even when they go afield keep as near to the town limits as possible. So it happens that while these self-exiles from the little republic make the best dairymen, they seldom venture into the distant ranches, but are to be found on the milk farms immediately contiguous to this city.73

Analogous to the lives of many other German-Swiss immigrants in California, and illustrative of the varieties of landscapes into which they settled, is the biography of John Hilfiker (1857-1940) from Kölliken in Canton Aargau. As many other newcomers before and after him, he soon adopted an anglicized given name, in his case “John.” After crossing the country in 1884 and arriving in San Francisco, he booked passage to Portland, Oregon, intending to visit friends of the family, who had farms on the Columbia River. One of the ports of call was Humboldt, on the northwest coast of California, though, and he was so taken by its appearance that he got off the ship and made Humboldt County his home.74

Hilfiker, with his background in farming in Switzerland, managed a large ranch that principally supplied dairy products. Simultaneously, he was the bar pilot for ships coming into Humboldt Bay. The ranch cook became his wife, and his father-in-law was the cooper who made barrels for the butter to be shipped to market. He then moved his

73 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
74 William Hilfiker, “Swiss Immigrant’s Dream Realized in Hardwork & Faith,” The Humboldt Historian (May-June 1980), 3. After Hilfiker arrived, the sandy “town” of Humboldt gradually washed into the bay, and Eureka, on higher and more stable ground, became the county seat.
Hilfiker Family, John, Christine and four children. Courtesy of the Humboldt County Historical Society.

growing family to Eureka, patiently reclaiming swampy tideland for a truck garden. Gradually, this Swiss immigrant from land-locked Aargau learned how to profit from the river, subdue the bay, and coexist with the ocean. When he partnered with a well digger to make concrete well casings, he would use gravel from the beach, including clam shells for his aggregates. In time, he was able to build and own a concrete pipe plant. With increasing population and the construction needs in the county, he became well to do.75

In the twentieth century, Othmar Ammann from Canton Schaffhausen (1879-1965) became a celebrated bridge engineer, designing and directing construction in New York for the George Washington, Bayonne, Triborough, Bronx-Whitestone, Throgs Neck and Verrazzano Narrows bridges and diversifying to plan and supervise construction of the Lincoln Tunnel. His California connection was as a member of the Board

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75 Hilfiker, “Swiss Immigrant’s Dream,” 4-5.
of Engineers in charge of the Golden Gate Bridge linking San Francisco with Marin County (1929-1937). It was also in California, after the death of his first wife, née Lilly Wehrli, that he married his second wife, Klary Vogt Noetzli.76

The French Swiss in California

Though relatively small in numbers—forming only one-fifth of the Swiss element in California—the “Frank Contingent” from Geneva, Vaud, Valais, Fribourg and Neuchâtel became in many ways the most influential portion of the colony for some decades after the Gold Rush.77 This was due to the rise of prominent individuals in crucial positions, such as the previously mentioned Jean-Jacques Vioget, but also an ongoing series of French-speaking Consuls. For decades following the service of Rudolph Kellersberger, Swiss consular guidance for California was entrusted to a series of French-Swiss businessmen/diplomats who had settled in San Francisco.

Henry Hentsch and Francis Berton, both emigrants from Geneva, became highly successful bankers before serving in turn as unsalaried, honorary Swiss Consuls.78

Following the death of Berton in 1885 and the subsequent naming of Antoine Borel79 of Neuchâtel to the consular post, the Swiss-Californians of San Francisco made a grand show of their respect for the latter: “The Swiss Sharpshooters, the Swiss Benevolent Society and a number of prominent Swiss residents tendered a public serenade . . . to Antoine Borel, the Swiss Consul, in order to celebrate his [appointment] to office.”80 The serenade proceeded in grand fashion:

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77 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
78 See the “Banking” section below for further details.
79 Borel, like Hentsch and Berton, was a banker. One of his key financial transactions was to purchase the California Street Cable Railroad from Leland Stanford in 1879 in order to help complete a much-needed San Francisco cable-car line expansion. This company proved profitable well into the twentieth century. See http://www.cablecarmuseum.org/co-california-st.html. (Viewed 11/18/2019).
The societies . . . headed by a band, paraded the downtown streets and then proceeded to the residence of Consul Borel on Stockton Street, between California and Pine. The large house was lighted up to receive the serenaders, the porch and sidewalk being illuminated with over 200 torchlights. [The societies and friends] assembled on the large veranda of the house and sang Swiss national airs, after which the band discoursed music, while a crowd of over 1,500 people congregated on the street. Speeches were made . . . to which [Borel] feelingly responded. On the conclusion of the music and speeches the friends and guests of the Consul were invited into the house to partake of a collation.81

Antoine Borel was, by all appearances, beloved among all segments of Swiss-American society, not just those from Romandy. He was a proponent for a monument to the Swiss minister Pioda that was later erected in the latter’s home canton of Ticino, for instance, and Borel also led a fundraising effort during a Sempach celebration on July 11, 1886, to support one of the Swiss-American aid societies.82

Borel held a position of trust throughout San Francisco’s business community, as he became “a director of many of the State’s most important businesses, including the Bank of California, the Spring Valley Water Company, the San Francisco Dry Dock Company, the United Railroads Company, the Bankers Investment Company, the San Francisco Gas and Electric Company, the Los Angeles Railway Company . . . as well as many lesser known companies.83

Three years later, the same Borel residence that had been the scene of pride and celebration for the newly-named Consul became the center of an international conspiracy theory with headlines like “The Borel Robbery: Rumors that Its Motive Was Political” and “The German-Swiss Affair: Helvetian Residents Excited Over Extradition of Refugees.”84 On
Sunday, July 8, 1889, the house had been broken into and “thoroughly ransacked.” The conjecture was that the robbery was actually staged in search of certain documents regarding “the Helvetian republic allowing its territory to be the abiding place of German socialists and Russian nihilists.” The sheltering tendencies of the Swiss in California seemed to be the main issue: “An informant of the Chronicle states that there are between 300 and 400 Russians, Germans and Italians in this city who owe their presence here to the neutral position of Switzerland. . . .”85 It is unclear how much credit went to this conspiracy theory or what eventually became of it.

As Antoine Borel increasingly spent time in Switzerland, his son, Antoine Borel Jr., served as Swiss Consul in his turn and oversaw the business interests of his father. The elder Borel was in Neuchâtel at the time of the infamous 1906 earthquake and fire, and his son reported back to him in letters, e.g. from Alameda on April 20, 1906:

A terrible thing has happened. San Francisco is no more. . . . Many persons killed downtown . . . Market Street near the ferries sank many feet . . . Portions of the City Hall were destroyed, but worst of all was the fire. The whole city is destroyed—from the Ferry Building to the Presidio and from the Beach to the Potrero.86

Though the family and its businesses lost a good deal of money in the disaster, the home of Antoine Borel, Jr. (at 1882 Washington Street) itself was left mostly intact: “The house was saved from fire though the demon crept to Van Ness . . . also swept out California Street . . . then returned to Van Ness . . . . It is a very sad sight, but with Yankee grip I think it will not take long to make a new San Francisco.”87

Other prominent French-Swiss in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the time of greatest Swiss immigration to California, were “Vignier, the wine importer; Pichoir, Secretary of the North Bloomfield Mine; Edouard Galliard, Berton’s partner; Deuerraud, an associate of

87 Borel and Fick, “San Francisco is No More,” 15. After the fire, Borel allowed the Pacific Union Club to use his mansion as their clubhouse.
Borel; Dirking and Huguenin, the watch importers; and Jullierat of the firm of Paillard & Co.”

The resettlement of a small number of French-speaking Swiss from Canton Valais to Placerville, El Dorado County has been narrated by a descendant of one of the California immigrants, whose book title refers to Placerville as the epicenter of the Gold Rush. That title is geographically accurate but chronologically somewhat misleading, since the rush for gold was well past when the first of the Valaisans arrived in 1887. The new immigrants didn’t seriously pan for gold as individuals, but they could find employment in large mining operations that still existed. As Leo Schelbert notes in a review: “The immigrants hailed from the neighboring Valais communes Martigny-Combe, Martigny-Bourg, Salvan, Vernayaz, Dorénaz, and Trient to find employment in mining, but then gradually shifted from mining to cattle raising and farming.”

The products of the Valaisan farmers of El Dorado County included wine grapes, walnuts, pears and dairy products. An advertisement placed by the Pierroz Brothers Dairy in the local Mountain Democrat in the early twentieth century read as follows:

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88 “Our Swiss Citizens,” San Francisco Chronicle, January 20, 1884, front page.
89 Philippe Pierroz, Des Valaisans à Placerville. Haut lieu de la ruée vers l’or. [Valaisans in Placerville, Epicenter of the Gold Rush] (Martigny-Combe: Imprint Vert, 2017). Placerville had the more infamous name of “Hangtown” at the time, reflecting the lawlessness and violence of that earlier age.
90 Leo Schelbert, book review of Pierroz, Swiss-American Historical Society Review, 54, no. 3 (November 2018), 104-106. See also SAHS Review, 29, no. 1 (February 1993), an issue dedicated to the history of Valaisans who settled elsewhere in the U.S.
“YOU USE MILK
and we have it to sell from well kept
stock and sanitary equipment, in
any quantity desired. Route delivery
twice daily, and no trouble spared to
please customers. For prompt service
call up Phone 84x2.
PIERROZ BROS. & CO.91

Trades and Occupations of the Swiss-Californians

The choices of employment for Swiss immigrants to the Golden State were largely a matter of inclination, tradition and training brought from their home cantons, but the choices also had to adapt to California employment opportunities, available resources, and circumstances of varying landscapes. Farming and ranching depended on soil quality, water supply and suitability of climate. Thus, emigrant dairymen found the coastal regions of California amenable to their profession, while former Jura-hillside vintners discovered the excellent conditions of Sonoma and Napa counties. Analogous considerations governed the ways that other Swiss Californians made their rural or urban livings. As always, proximity to similarly situated countrymen from Switzerland provided social and labor associations of value.

Dairy Farming

One well-known Swiss occupation calling for a cooperative effort by its nature is that of dairy farming, since some of the final products, e.g. cheese, butter, condensed milk, require processing skills beyond what a single dairy farmer could reasonably carry out. The first dairy farms of Swiss emigrants were in Marin County near the markets of San Francisco. With an average (annual) yield per cow of 150 pounds of butter and with cheese manufacturing that reached a yearly output of 250,000 pounds by 1897, Marin County became known as “the Switzerland of California.”92

91 Pierroz, Des Valaisans à Placerville, 50.
A simple secret for dairy success brought over from the cantons to the California coastal regions called for what Americans peers called “underfeeding,” i.e., the Swiss dairy farmers’ almost exclusive reliance on grass and hay for the fine milk- and butter-producing animals’ fodder throughout the year. The Americans’ provision of “cotton seed and oil cakes, ensilage, boiled fodder” and other artificial feed, they had learned, impaired the quality of the milk. The Swiss in California felt that “good sweet grass,” “pure running water” and “systematic economy” were the foundation of dairy success. While they made fine products by American standards, there were barriers to reaching the quality found back home. One newly arrived cheese maker from Vaud, Ulysse Greidaux, claimed that the most important of the grasses was a species of Swiss bunch grass that grows between the rocks, “finer, more tender and delicate than anything . . . in this [California] climate . . . and . . . . it possesses that peculiar savor for which Swiss cheeses are noted.”

If Greidaux’s claim is true, then cheese produced in California, even by the most talented Swiss, would never quite match in taste those from the Alpine valleys.

A dairy ranch established in San Luis Obispo County employing a number of Italian-Swiss emigrant laborers became the second largest dairy enterprise in the state by the 1880s. This was in spite of the lack of rail transportation to San Francisco, the nearest potential market, since “by 1875 the problem had been solved by means of coastwise steamers which made regular trips to the city.” There were close relations between the Ticinesi of San Luis Obispo County and those of geographically distant Marin County, where the aforementioned dairy ranch had earlier been situated. The mild climate of these coastal counties made year-round grazing possible and almost negated the need for barns: “the coast had much to recommend it to the Swiss milkers.”

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96 Raup, “The Italian-Swiss Dairymen of San Luis Obispo County,” 5.
According to one report from the late nineteenth century, the milk for San Francisco, Sacramento and other California cities was being furnished almost exclusively by immigrants from Uri, Unterwalden and Ticino.\textsuperscript{97} One journalist stated “upon good authority” of the Ticinesi dairymen, “that they manufacture fully one-half the amount of butter and cheese made in this State, and the products of their labor always bring the highest price in the market because of the excellence of quality and fullness of weight.”\textsuperscript{98}

**Wine Making**

In 1880, the land under cultivation for wine grapes in the United States totaled 181,583 acres with an annual yield of 23,453,827 gallons. Of that total acreage, it is reported, California had 32,268 acres, only around 18% of the land dedicated to viticulture but profited from almost 58% of the total production, 13,557,155 gallons.\textsuperscript{99} These figures point to a yield of over 500 gallons per acre in California (in 1880) versus less than 70 gallons per acre for the rest of the nation.\textsuperscript{100} It is clear why Swiss and Italian immigrants would be drawn to such a wine-growing region.

Italian-speaking Swiss had planted vines in the Napa Valley from 1860 on. Within 20 years, five Italian-Swiss vintners had 47,000 vines under cultivation in that county, and the Swiss owned six wine cellars, one of which was excavated into the side of a hill, imitating the same conditions for keeping wine as those in Canton Ticino. Other Italian Swiss had vineyards in Sonoma Valley, Santa Clara Valley, and around Stockton, Modesto, Fresno and Livermore.\textsuperscript{101}


\textsuperscript{98} “Our Ticinese Population: Their Numbers and Business Occupations,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 9, 1878, 2.

\textsuperscript{99} Steinach, *Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien*, 236.

\textsuperscript{100} These statistics may be the result of early and unimproved methods of wine-making rather than the natural outcome of soil suitability alone. Nowadays, the Calif. wine yields, converted from tonnage, average anywhere between 300 and 1,500 gallons per acre. (*Sonoma County Fact Sheet*, 2018).

\textsuperscript{101} Perret, *The Italian-Swiss Colonies in California*, 119-121.
In 1879, a telegram arrived on the desk of a Southern California newspaper editor that announced the imminent arrival of “200 Swiss emigrants [who proposed] settling in the state to engage in the cultivation of the grape.” This was seen as a win-win situation for the region and for the nascent wine industry in the Golden State:

The immense strides in public favor which have been made of late by California wines is turning the attention of some of the most frugal and industrious classes of Europe to the advantages offered by us to the cultivator of the vine. There are thousands of acres of land in the southern portion of this state, now classed as unproductive, that with proper tillage may be made the finest wine-producing district in the world. The Swiss colonists will undoubtedly receive a hearty welcome from the residents of San Bernardino and vicinity.\textsuperscript{102}

Two years later in 1881 and 500 miles further north, Andrea Sbarbaro founded the Italian-Swiss Colony Wine Company on 1,500 acres in Sonoma County. Sbarbaro was Italian and the colony itself became chiefly Italian. It did, however, take on the name “Italian-Swiss” (with the marketing panache and soothingly sibilant sounds of the word “Swiss) because a Ticinese investor was on the board of directors. In an interview, Sbarbaro had once claimed that “few Swiss Americans in California were interested in wine making.”\textsuperscript{103} Nevertheless, a visit in 1895 of the Swiss Ambassador to the United States, Minister Pioda from Ticino, to the Italian-Swiss Colony seemed to contradict Sbarbaro’s off-hand comment about Swiss disinterest in viticulture. The president of the colony, P. C. Rossi, greeted Pioda on that occasion by saying that the work there “showed what the Swiss and Italians by co-operation were able to accomplish in California” and the Minister in turn expressed his pleasure at “seeing his countrymen and the Italians working hand in hand.”\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102}“Swiss Immigrants for California,” \textit{Ventura Signal}, April 5, 1879, 3.
\textsuperscript{104}“Minister Pioda at Asti: Pays a Visit to the Swiss-Italian Colony,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, Nov. 20, 1895, 8. Pioda continued his visit to other nearby towns with a “large Swiss population,” Petaluma, Tomales and Olema.
The obituary of a “prominent member of the Swiss Italian Colony,” Giosuè Rottanzi, originally from Faido in Ticino’s Valle Leventina, reports a few years later that [Rottanzi] had been “greatly interested in the propagation and development of the California wine industry, and in order to further this cause became a director in the Swiss-American Bank.”  

Similarly, a second-generation Swiss-American, Henry M. Naglee (an anglicized form derived from “Nägeli”), is said to have co-founded the first bank in California at San Francisco. After serving as a brigadier-general for Union forces in the Civil War, he spent his last years as a vintner in Santa Clara County, becoming the “father of California’s brandy industry.”

Another beverage business founded by a family of Maggia Valley emigrants got its start in the coastal area now known as Watsonville, with hard apple cider first bottled in 1868:

In the mid-1850s, as the promise of gold lured migrants from around the world to the newly formed state of California, two Swiss immigrants [Luigi and Stephano Martinelli] settled in the Pajaro Valley near the Monterey Bay.

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105 “Death of Giosuè Rottanzi,” San Francisco Call, May 15, 1899, 10.
106 See “Banking” section below.
This valley, with its mild coastal climate and fertile soil, was perfect for farming uniquely sweet and tart apples. These migrants, [Americanized as Louis and Stephen Martinelli after 1861], would make a successful apple crop of their own and eventually pressed those apples into cider. Credited as the first family of American cider, few may know that the first sips of Martinelli’s taken in 1868 were a hard version of the famous sparkling cider and juice we know today.108

S. Martinelli & Co. won its first Gold Medal in 1890 at the California State Fair. When Stephen died in 1917, just as many cities in California and Arizona were going dry as a precursor to Prohibition, his wife Jane suddenly had to keep the family business together through the coming turmoil. Her son, Stephen, Jr., developed an unfermented but bubbly cider before leaving for service in World War I, and she was able to oversee sales of the adapted product for the Prohibition market (1917-1933). The company survived by gradually widening the market and the promotional buzz, aided by the use in Hollywood of Martinelli’s sparkling cider as a counterfeit for champagne in the movies.109

Breweries

Some German-Swiss in California, having had no experience with viticulture in the fatherland, built and managed beer breweries. This industry was largely centered in Sacramento, thanks to its setting in the agricultural Central Valley with easy access to barley and hops. Two Sacramento breweries worth mentioning were Arthur Hensler’s *Schweizer-Brauerei*, and Frank Rustaller’s *City-Brewery*.

Ranching and Farming

The extreme variability in California landscapes and soils conditioned the availability of arable lands for the emigrant farmer: in this single state there were, and are, alkaline deserts; forests; sandy coastal meadows; swampy delta lands; loamy, sandy and baked clay regions of the Central Valley; and Alpine-like valleys in the High Sierra Nevada.

In 1870, one quarter of the Ticino natives and their descendants in California were located in the Sierra Nevada mountain valleys. This was the landscape most reminiscent of home, resembling by nature the Maggia and Leventina Valleys. Many of the immigrants had been drawn there by gold before turning to other mining professions. As mining declined in yield, much of the Ticinese presence transferred to the San Francisco Bay area and the Central Valley. Once away from the mines, the Italian Swiss often changed their focus to farming. A significant segment of the Ticinesi remained in the mountains, though, especially in Plumas County. They had come for gold, but the lingering attraction was land similar to that back home.

As the Italian Swiss of Plumas County, bolstered as a close-knit settlement by community support, land purchases and business partnerships, began farming, their natural Swiss inclination was to develop a dairy enterprise. Over time, a good number of them found the market

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110 Steinach, *Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien*, 349.
for butter, milk and cheese dwindling in their mountain locale, and they converted their dairy ranches into beef operations.112

In one daring and dangerous calculation at the beginning of the twentieth century, pioneer Swiss farmers settled in the Imperial Valley of Southern California, a flat, hot and dry desert more than 200 feet below sea level. It was a touch-and-go existence up through the Depression, as the settlers often lived in tents and endured alternating extremes of heat and Colorado River floods. “In place of [Switzerland’s] sparkling spring mountain water, they gagged on the dirty, muddy and almost unpotable water from . . . ditches and sump holes.”113 One compensation was the unbelievably fertile land, which, when adequate water was available, produced bumper crops that could vary from cotton to lettuce, sugar beets to tomatoes, carrots to melons. Finally, in the 1940s, “a permanent and effective water sup-

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112 Hall, _Italian-Swiss Settlement in Plumas County_, 46-47.
113 Joseph H. Anderholt and Dorothy M. Anderholt, _The History of the Imperial Valley Swiss_ (Holtville, California: The Imperial Valley Swiss Club, 1984), 9.
ply [was] achieved due to the building of the Hoover Dam and of the All-American Canal. . . .”\textsuperscript{114}

Nicholas von Rotz, an immigrant farmer from Obwalden, who had come to work at various farm jobs in California in the first part of the twentieth century, sat down with an interviewer to give his impressions of how farm life in the Golden State differed from that in Switzerland. Of his life in Obwalden, he said, “In the mountain country where I was you don’t farm the land. You cut the grass in the winter . . . you put the manure out . . . fix the fences, cut the grass in the spring. . . . Then you start haying when the hay comes; and it’s not easy to make hay back home, especially that type of land—real, real steep.”\textsuperscript{115}

The boredom and long hours made him want to emigrate: “Morning and night make cheese. You’re up four o’clock in the morning til eleven-thirty at night. And that’s seven days. No other way. So, I figured there must be another way of making a living. That was one thing I had always in my mind. America was in my mind many years before, because we hear of it.”\textsuperscript{116}

In California, by contrast, von Rotz had to help an uncle in Imperial Valley with his harvest,\textsuperscript{117} deal with a cranky, mean Norwegian co-worker in Humboldt County,\textsuperscript{118} choke down alkaline water in San Diego,\textsuperscript{119} and work a variety of jobs up and down the 800-mile-long state to make a living. But finally, he made the Americans around him jealous, because he had attained the luxury of a decent savings account.

Silk Cultivation

Despite low demand for imported Swiss silk in the 1850s, as reported in the 1853 consular report,\textsuperscript{120} the ideal conditions for silk cultivation in the Golden State and a growing market for silk products

\textsuperscript{114} Anderholt, \textit{The History of the Imperial Valley Swiss}, 8.

\textsuperscript{115} Nicholas von Rotz and Charles Bacon, \textit{The Americanization of a German Swiss Farm Worker} (Chico: Northeastern California Project, 1977), 3.

\textsuperscript{116} Rotz and Bacon, \textit{The Americanization of a German-Swiss Farm Worker}, 35.

\textsuperscript{117} Rotz and Bacon, \textit{The Americanization of a German-Swiss Farm Worker}, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{118} Rotz and Bacon, \textit{The Americanization of a German-Swiss Farm Worker}, 26.

\textsuperscript{119} Rotz and Bacon, \textit{The Americanization of a German-Swiss Farm Worker}, 28.

\textsuperscript{120} See footnote 30.
tempted potential sericulture farmers. A report from Louis Prevost lays out his own numerous setbacks and ultimate success, aided by the banker and fellow immigrant, Henry Hentsch: 121

In 1863 or ’64, I had occasion to meet with Mr. Henry Hentsch who had the same opinion of our beautiful climate, and its adaptability for silk cultivation . . . From that conversation was born the culture of silk in California. Mr. Hentsch imported the mulberry seed from France, from which I raised a number of fine mulberry trees. Mr. Hentsch was informed as soon as the trees were of some size, and he made arrangement to import silk-worm eggs from China.122

The eggs arrived dead, and Prevost was unable to hatch any of them. The same thing happened the following year, and he decided to destroy most of his mulberry trees. The third year was different, however, as Hentsch persisted:

Mr. Hentsch imported eggs again from the same place, and at the same time from France. I was then very sorry to have destroyed so many of my mulberry trees, as the eggs from France proved to be in good condition and hatched out very well . . . the worms did well and produced fine cocoons of silk of the first quality, as I can prove by certificates from the two highest silk societies in Europe [where they were tested] . . . the question of labor is now fully settled, and silk can be raised in California with great profit.123

Prevost seems to have gone overboard in the enthusiastic preface to his book: “California alone can produce silk . . . for exportation. With

121 See the sections on “French Swiss” above and on “Banking” below. Hentsch was also an early Swiss Consul.
122 Louis Prevost, California Silk Grower’s Manual (San Francisco: H.H. Bancroft, 1867), 136. Prevost himself was a Frenchman working closely with his French-Swiss banker Hentsch.
123 Prevost, California Silk Grower’s Manual, 137-138. In Henry Hentsch’s subsequent remarks, he noted that the California climate is best for producing silk because of “the absence of rains and storms during the months of May, June, and July, which, prevailing in Europe, kill millions and millions of silkworms annually.” (141-142).
that staple only, we would soon be able to pay our national debt. . . .” 124
By 1889, the German-Swiss in the nation as a whole, while not having paid off the national debt, were nevertheless credited with having saved the American silk industry and having expanded it successfully. 125

Merchant, Manufacturing and Service Industries

The reputations of Swiss quality workmanship and conscientious service are not only recently won. As one San Francisco journalist noted: “Of the Swiss residing here, they represent nearly all the mechanical arts and are superior workmen. There are about twenty Swiss watchmakers in the city, who command the highest prices paid for that kind of labor. A number are commission merchants, on small and large scales, and are very successful.” 126 The French Swiss without a business of their own were drawn to become employees within the profession of watchmaking or as hired help in the hospitality industries. 127

Whenever American journalists reviewed Swiss hoteliers, restauranteurs or saloon keepers in the nineteenth century, it seems, the discussion inevitably turned to the hosts’ ethno-sociological features. These quirks came down to their Swiss manner of hosting乡men and customers, or to a quaintness of family life foreign to Anglo society, as in this example:

The Swiss have hotels, saloons and coffee shops, but they are kept in a style very different from what is known as the English and American plan. A Swiss does not go up to a bar, Drink Like a Horse, and then walk off with his harness on for hard work. . . . The Swiss sits down, makes himself at home, feels that he is one of the family, and that mine host is the recognized father. The affair is entirely of a domestic character with him, so that repugnance to drinking in a saloon

124 Prevost, California Silk Grower’s Manual, viii.
125 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 86-87.
never comes into his mind. Songs and music invariably en-
liven his festivities. The wife of the landlord sits down at the
same table with the visitors, and side by side enjoys the foam-
ing lager, while her children may be scampering and playing
about the saloon. This is the Swiss idea of drinking, and it is
interesting to note that the children grow up without the least
love of liquor of any kind, although guests frequently invite
them to taste a glass of this or that kind of fermented liquor,
an invitation which is accepted as a social courtesy.128

The bottom-line analysis of such a review, however, inevitably
shows the Swiss mannerisms in a positive light, albeit with a touch of
patronizing appreciation: “In miniature we have here the picture of a
colony which is notable as a feature of our cosmopolitan society. It at
once represents the charming social life of the Old World and the pro-
gressive, practical life of the New.”129

Banking

Henry M. Naglee, a second-generation Swiss-American,130 is
credited with having formed the first bank in the state of California
(January 9, 1849) on San Francisco’s Portsmouth Square. It is said that
“the chief requisite to become a banker in the wild and woolly days of
’49 was ownership of a strong safe.”131 Following his lead, fifteen or
twenty other private bankers soon opened for business. Among the suc-
cessful financial pioneers were Henry Hentsch132 and Francis Berton,
both from Geneva and both of whom later served as Swiss Consuls.133

Henry Hentsch arrived in Gold Rush country from a Geneva
banking family, after the unexpected death of his father, with plans for

128 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 346. The phrase
“mine host” refers to the proprietor of the establishment.
129 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 346.
130 See Naglee also in “Wine Making” section above.
131 “Remarkable Record is Made by Banks Here: First Opened in 1849: Confusion
132 The name of Hentsch is perhaps best known, at least in numismatic circles, for
having been engraved on gold ingots recovered in 1988 from the S.S. Central America,
which had sunk off the Carolinas in a hurricane in 1857.
133 See also “French Swiss” and “Silk Cultivation” sections above.
processing gold miners’ proceeds. To do so, he created an early hybrid business of assay and banking in San Francisco. Francis Berton, an acquaintance of Hentsch from Geneva, soon joined him in the banking business, which also served the Swiss Mutual Benevolent Society, a small but flourishing beneficial association. The business incorporated in 1863 as “Hentsch and Berton.” The type of banking they managed was principally based on proceeds from the Gold Rush and other types of mineral mining, including fiduciary duties for successor businesses and individuals.

The Ticinese emigrants to rural areas of California, on the other hand, were in need of a totally different type of financial arrangement. They were in the habit of maintaining close ties to their home canton, but the banking models of Ticino arising in the last decades of the nineteenth century offered no physical presence abroad. *La Banca Svizzera Americana* (The Swiss-American Bank), founded in 1896 in Locarno, became an exception that was designed to fit the Ticinese economic realities as an “Immigrant Bank.” Emigration was accompanied by financial flux in the form of remittances, principally back to family and friends in the Maggia and Leventina Valleys.

The immigrant needs forced a new financial twist, answered by *La Banca Svizzera Americana*, which broke the mold by setting up dual branches in Locarno and San Francisco. The “immigrant bank” was designed in the first instance to facilitate fund remittances from Ticinesi.

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Californians back to their home canton (in transfers considered to be monetary repatriation to family, friends and creditor businesses) with a concomitant economic boost, and only secondarily to provide banking services to the immigrants themselves in their new country.  

San Francisco was quite inaccessible for many of the emigrants located in agrarian areas far from that powerhouse financial center. In fact, the reach of banking services would extend to at least San Luis Obispo (230 miles distant), the home of two of the bank’s founders, as the following local newspaper account of the bank’s founding and purposes suggests:

Mr. [Henry] Brunner and Mr. Antonio Tognazzini will leave on Saturday morning for Switzerland, where at Locarno, the bank will be established. It is to be incorporated under the laws of Switzerland with a capital of $1,000,000. Of this $300,000 will be paid up, one-half by the Swiss residents of this state. . . . The bank proper will be established in Locarno, under the direction of a board of directors named there. Mr. Pioda, the brother of the Swiss Minister, will probably be a prominent member and Messrs. Brunner and Tognazzini will have charge of the San Luis Obispo house.

An article in San Francisco the next day, while repeating the financial news, also clarified: “The scheme is to loan money to Swiss

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137 It was also in San Francisco that A. P. Giannini, an Italian American, founded the Bank of Italy in 1904. That bank initially served the ignored Italian immigrants and eventually grew into the Bank of America. In its infancy, it was also instrumental in helping the city to rebuild after the 1906 earthquake and fires. See: Juliana Dana, A. P. Giannini, Giant in the West: A Biography (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947), 21.
138 “The Swiss-American Bank of Locarno, Switzerland and San Luis Obispo, California. A New Institution of Profound Importance to the Future of This County,” Morning Tribune (San Luis Obispo), July 3, 1896, 3. The article also indicated that the two local Swiss-American moguls would make an important business stop before embarking for Europe: “On their way east, Messrs. Brunner and Tognazzini will stop in Nebraska and deliver to parties there the deeds to the Burnet tract of 2,000 acres in the Estrella. This is a sale consummated with a colony of Mennonites . . . described as people of great industry and intelligence. . . .” The “Estrella” was an area near current Paso Robles in San Luis Obispo County. According to “A Centennial History of Mennonites in the Paso Robles Area,” California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin, no. 35 (January 1998), a group arriving in the area in 1897 indeed established the first recognized Mennonite congregation in California.
residents in the county at very low interest rates. There are 145 Swiss of means [behind] the scheme."\textsuperscript{139}

The \textit{Banca Svizzera Americana} established an agency in New York in 1902, but by 1904 it had to close. The California branches, in response to American banking regulations, split apart in 1909. The San Francisco branch became \textit{Swiss American Bank} and was then folded into \textit{Anglo California Trust Company} around 1912.\textsuperscript{140}

In the end, the San Francisco branch of the bank, perhaps as a result of its distance from many of the rural Italian-Swiss immigrants, had been much less active in promoting mortgage payments than its southern office, since in the final tally 48\% of the loans were taken out in San Luis Obispo, 28\% in Santa Barbara, and only 6\% in San Francisco. On the other hand, the San Francisco location had permitted the bank a concentration on healthy gains from equity investments, especially in public railroad projects.\textsuperscript{141}

While the beginnings of the \textit{Banca Svizzera Americana} had allowed Ticinesi immigrants to place their savings in, and to get loans from, a bank conducting most of its business in California, bit by bit the relations between Locarno and California weakened until finally the Locarno location became autonomous. The American operations rapidly diminished,\textsuperscript{142} and the California emigrants soon had to search elsewhere for their banking services.

Andrea Sbarbaro, the founder of the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony in 1881,\textsuperscript{143} “learned about the operation of ‘cooperative banks,’ which allowed people to deposit their money; that money was then loaned to their neighbors to build homes. This type of banking, a forerunner of credit unions, was new and innovative.”\textsuperscript{144} He then applied this idea in the San Francisco Bay area, becoming a principal in numerous “mutual loan associations” while bolstering the commercial success of his own Italian-Swiss Colony winemaking business in the

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{San Francisco Call}, July 4, 1896.
\textsuperscript{140} Nosetti, “\textit{La Banca Svizzera Americana},” 114.
\textsuperscript{141} Nosetti, “\textit{La Banca Svizzera Americana},” 116-117.
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Gazette de Lausanne}, February 19, 1914.
\textsuperscript{143} See the “Wine Making” section above.
\textsuperscript{144} “The Italian-Swiss Mutual Loan Association,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, January 11, 1895, 9.
process. The “Swiss” contributions to, and profits from, this colony remained minimal, however, since workers and shareholders were mainly Italian.\footnote{See “Wine Making” section above.}

**Swiss Clubs & Societies in California: Then and Now**

On September 11, 1881, a vast rockslide thundered down on the village of Elm in Canton Glarus, killing 115 people and destroying 83 buildings. Collections for relief and aid spread through Switzerland. The efforts extended overseas as well, and in far-off California an event was held to raise funds: “Half a dozen of the Swiss societies of this city united in a ball at Platt’s Hall Saturday evening, the proceeds of which are to be equally divided between the sufferers of the village of Elm, Switzerland, and the Swiss Relief Society of San Francisco. The laudable object conducd to the sale of a large number of tickets, and quite a sum was realized.”\footnote{*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 21, 1881, 4.}

In this and other instances, expats of the Swiss Confederation, having resettled in the Golden State, were willing to provide what help they could. While this occurred most visibly through a number of Swiss societies in urban and rural locations, at times it was handled spontaneously. Ten years before the Elm disaster, the San Francisco residents had contributed to recovery efforts of Swiss residents who had been victims of the Great Chicago Fire:

The Swiss Residents . . . Held a meeting in Mozart Hall, and after electing officers, appointed the following collectors to canvass among the Swiss residents: F. Berton, A. Borel, C. Croce, G. Sturzenegger, M. Schmidt, W. Hardmyer, Wm. Jury, John Jury, Chas. Murizet, Paul Surry and S. Petruzzi. Subscription papers can be found at all prominent Swiss places in the city. The sum raised will be forwarded to the Swiss residents of Chicago.\footnote{*The Swiss Residents,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1871, 3. The first two names of the collectors will be recognized as those of Swiss Consuls.}
Swiss clubs and societies in Northern California, especially in San Francisco, began organizing for the following purposes (among others):

1. Philanthropy and mutual financial support; e.g., Swiss Mutual and Benevolent Society of San Francisco; Swiss Relief Society; Swiss Sharpshooters Benevolent Society; and the Grütli Society.  
2. Engagement in song and societal enjoyments; e.g., the Grütli Men’s Choir; the Dramatic Society.  
3. Honoring traditional Swiss weapons and festivals; e.g., Swiss Rifle Club; Garibaldi-Company.  
4. Participation in practical, literary and political discussions; e.g., The Liberal Ticinese Society; Swiss Club; Agricultural Society.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the San Francisco Chronicle regularly reported on celebrations such as Swiss National Day and other festivities, usually sponsored by small clubs in smaller Northern and Central California towns, such as Petaluma, San Luis Obispo, and Tomales. The 600th Anniversary of the founding of Switzerland in 1891 called for multi-day reveling in San Rafael and San Francisco with bands playing, parades that included the Carbineer Corps and numerous Swiss clubs, speeches, poetry, song, reenactments of the Rütli pledge, excursions to Schützen Park, tournaments, and the presence of “four little girls dressed in white, garlanded in flowers,

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148 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 339-342. Respectively, Die Schweizerische Gegenseitige Unterstützungs- und Wohltätigkeits-Gesellschaft von San Francisco; Die Schweizer-Wohltätigkeits-Gesellschaft; Die Wohltätigkeitsgesellschaft der Schweizer Scharfschützen; and Der Grütli-Verein. The latter umbrella organization, as elsewhere in the U.S., sponsored sub-sections in choral performances, drama and marksmanship.

149 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 342-343; Der Grütli-Männerchor and Der Dramatische Verein.

150 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 344; Der Schweizer Schützen-Klub and Garibaldi-Compagnie, the latter composed of both Italians and Italian-Swiss.

151 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 343-344; Società Liberale Ticinese; Schweizer-Klub; and Der Landwirtschaftliche Verein.

152 San Francisco Chronicle, September 21, 1888, 6.

153 San Francisco Chronicle, September 21, 1888, 6.

154 San Francisco Chronicle, September 21, 1889, 6. The Chronicle reported the Tomales festivities one year to the day after those in Petaluma and San Luis Obispo.
which were caught up at the shoulder and waist by bows of red and white ribbon, the national colors of Switzerland.” 155

Other areas with conglomerations of Swiss settlers gathered together regularly in clubs and societies as well.

In Los Angeles, for instance, there was a long-standing “gymnastics club” (Turnverein), which became a social gathering place as well. There was, from 1887 on, a club named “Helvetia” for entertainment, social gatherings and support of any sick or needy fellow Swiss Californians; a section of that club formed both a men’s chorus and a mixed choir. Los Angeles Swiss then followed the example of compatriots in other states (and San Franciscans) in creating a Swiss Club (Schweizer-Klub). 156

In Santa Cruz, emigrants formed a Swiss Aid Society (Schweizer Hilfsverein); those in Oakland, across the bay from San Francisco, created their own Swiss Rifle Society (Schweizer Schützen-Gesellschaft); and the Swiss in San Jose organized a Swiss Gymnastics Club (Schweizer Turnverein). In 1888, in San Diego, new arrivals from the Confederation formed a Swiss League (Schweizerbund) near the Mexican border. 157

155 San Francisco Chronicle, August 3, 1891, 10.
156 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 347-348.
157 Steinach, Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien, 349.
Italian-Swiss societies included a Bachelors’ Society, the Ticinese Liberal Society, Swiss Sharpshooters, a Swiss Philharmonic Band, and benevolent societies in large towns and small, mostly Swiss enclaves such as Old Creek and Cambria.158

Into the twenty-first century, Swiss-American emigrants and their descendants in California have continued the Swiss sense of gathering. A list of active clubs in Northern California, as compiled by the Consulate General of Switzerland in San Francisco,159 includes the following: Aelpler Gruppe Swiss Club, Feldschiuetzenverein, Golden Gate Swiss Club, Humboldt Swiss Club, Monterey County Swiss-American Club, Monterey County Swiss Rifle Club, Peninsula Swiss Club, Pro Ticino Nord California, Sacramento Helvetia Verein, San Francisco Helvetia Society, San Joaquin Valley Swiss Club and its Swiss Echoes Singing Society, Stanislaus County Swiss Club, Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce—San Francisco Chapter, Swiss Athletic Club, Swiss Benevolent Society of San Francisco (the oldest continuous Swiss society in California, founded in 1886), Swiss Club Tell and United Swiss Societies of Northern California.

A list of active Swiss clubs in Southern California, also compiled by the Consulate General of Switzerland in San Francisco,160 includes the following: California Swiss Youth Society, Colonie Suisse Romande, Pro Ticino South California, San Diego County Swiss Club, Santa Barbara Swiss Club, Swiss Athletic Society, Swiss Club of Imperial Valley, Swiss in the South Bay, Swiss Ladies Society, Swiss Mixer San Diego Area, Swiss Park, Swiss Relief Society, Swiss Singing Society Harmonie, Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce—Los Angeles Chapter, The Matterhorn Swiss Club and United Swiss Societies of Southern California.

The contributions of Swiss-American immigrants to American life in California continue as they have since the days of the Gold Rush.

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158 See footnote 60.