



2-1993

Prefatory Note

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Recommended Citation

Roberts Chapman, Jane Adèle (1993) "Prefatory Note," *Swiss American Historical Society Review*: Vol. 29 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sahs_review/vol29/iss1/2

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Prefatory Note

The theme of this issue of the Review is the 19th Century SAHS emigration from Canton Valais of Switzerland to the United States. All the materials in the issue were written by Valaisans or by American descendants of Valaisan immigrants. My own article, "Nineteenth Century Swiss Valaisan Immigration to the United States," developed from a desire to understand the experience of my great-great grandparents who left the canton in 1854. Their final destination, according to the ship's manifest, was Mishicot, Wisconsin.

For the most part, these Valaisans joined the tide of European immigrants pouring into the midwest, clearing and claiming the land for their farms. It cannot have been easy to make such a challenging break with all they knew and to migrate to vast areas where constant innovation was necessary to survive. The Carrons speak eloquently of the courage of the immigrants in their great adventure and cite this as a major theme for their book series, discussed below in "Our American Cousins."

"Profiles of Immigration" presents brief accounts that illustrate the emigration/immigration process in the 19th century. Although economic pressures were an underlying cause of the departures from Switzerland, the individual stories reveal a diversity of personal circumstances and motivation.

Valaisans are known for their warmhearted hospitality. In 1991, they demonstrated this by inviting descendants of those who emigrated back to learn about and renew their ties to the Valais in celebration of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation. In reciprocation, descendants from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and the United States presented trees native to their countries to the canton to commemorate these ties of ancestry. Reflections on the symbolic meaning of the trees are presented in the poem "Valaisans All" written by Gordon Chapman for the occasion. The trees have been planted in a grove in Sion with a bronze plaque that states:

These trees are dedicated to the memory of those who emigrated, with thanks to Valaisans who invited their descendants to return to restore the bonds of blood and friendship.

--Jane Adèle Roberts Chapman
Guest Editor