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Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein (Helvetia Beneficial Society) Columbus, Ohio

Founding Documents & Membership

by Donald G. Tritt

Introduction

Having grandparents, aunts, and uncles who emigrated from Switzerland in the 1860s, I treasured the many occasions hearing stories of our ancestral homeland—the “old country.” With peers of my Swiss relatives, I reveled in August 1st celebrations, picnics, club house gatherings, sängerfests, and shooting events. Captivated by these stories and events, I wanted to know more about their life and times in Switzerland and—what happened after their arrival in America. My Swiss grandparents settled in a German-speaking area of Columbus, Ohio, known today as “German Village.” The first Swiss club in Columbus, the Grütli Verein, was founded in 1870. Beneficial and singing societies came later in the 1880s and 1890s.

Starting in the late 1980s, I offered to be volunteer historian for the five clubs making up the Swiss community in Columbus. With alarm, I learned early records such as membership lists, secretaries’ minutes, event accounts, incorporation documents were widely scattered, in decay or apparently lost altogether. After providing a place for safe-keeping, historical materials were located and donated to an archive. Drawing from this collection, offered here is an account of

the founding and initial membership of the Columbus, Ohio Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein (Swiss Beneficial Society).

Columbus Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein

- Founded: March 24, 1889.
- Incorporation, State of Ohio: October 28, 1889.
- Insurance with *Nord-Amerkanischer Grütli-Bund*, 1889-1911.
- (name changed) Insurance with the *Nord-Amerkanischer Schweizer-Bund*, 1911-1940.
- (name changed) Nord-Amerikanischer Schweizer-Bund became *North American Swiss Alliance*, 1940 (see note later).
- In 1940, the North American Swiss Alliance designated Columbus Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein as Club #20.

Contained in the following 1916 publication (in translation from German) is an account of the founding of the Columbus Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the North American Schweizer-Bund.

[Sigbert Meier] 50 jähriges Jubiläum des Nord-amerkanischer Schweizer-Bund, 1865-1915. Union Hill, New Jersey: Michel & Rank. 1916. Pages 55-56, 117-118, 200.

“This association [Columbus Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein] was founded 24 March 1889. Following an invitation sent to interested persons, a number of Swiss gathered in Jacob J. Trueb’s Hall on East Mound Street at 2:00 pm for the purpose of founding a second support association [Grütli Verein earlier] in Columbus, Ohio.

“At this first meeting, Mr. J. J. Trueb was elected as the Interim Chairman and Emil Stämpfli as the Interim Secretary. In this first meeting, among other matters, immediate connection to the *North American Grütli Bund* [founded 1865] was warmly recommended. After application for membership was received by the Bund, it was unanimously

approved by the Executive Board on May 26 of the same year [1889] and the Association was included as a section of the Bund, to which it belongs today [1915].” [Note: “*Grütli Bund*” and “*Schweizer Bund*” are names sometimes used interchangeably].

“When names were called during the first meeting, the following attendees joined the new Association [in Columbus]: Emil Stämpfli, Jacob J. Trueb, Jos. Kappler, Alb. Baumer, Fred Haeseli, Ed. Schmid, Jak. Wildi, Fred Gfeller, Henry Hablützel, John Gigax, Emil Schaub, Jos. Lauber, Adam Richenbacher, Gotfried Durtschi, Jak. Neidermann, Ferd Buehler, the last who died later in the year. The above are therefore to be regarded as founders of the Association.

“In the course of the year, membership increased from 34, compared to 57 today [1915]. In the years since its founding [1889-1915], the Association has mourned the death of 15 members. So far, the round sum of \$1,200 has been paid in sick support, along with other funds for charity. Total assets are nearly \$3,000, along with an extensive library. With other clubs and societies in the city, the Association is in the best possible condition and enjoys the support of other local Swiss associations, such as the Helvetia Men’s Choir, Wilhelm Tell Schützen Club and Swiss Theater Club. Last year [1914] the Association celebrated its Silver Anniversary, which went on in a great way.

“The local section of the Women’s Death Benefit Fund consists of the following 17 members: Mrs. Fred Fiechter, Mrs. Louis Frey, Mrs. S. Haeseli, Mrs. J. Kappler, Mrs. J. Wildy, Mrs. S. Diehr, Mrs. W. Diehr, Mrs. S. Gigax, Mrs. Fr. Schaer, Mrs. Fred Liechti, Mrs. S. Grosenbacher, Mrs. G. Durtschi, Mrs. J. Richenbacher, Mrs. J. Burger, Mrs. Fr. Ellenberger, Mrs. Fr. Racle, Mrs. W. Schaub, Mrs. K. Zwigard. The first named sister has died over the years. The business of this section is managed by the Helvetia Support Association.

“Following are names of Presidents of the *Columbus Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein*, listing years of service: J. J. Trueb 1889-1890, J. Kappler 1890-1891, Ed. Schmid 1891-1892, E. Stämpfli 1892-1894, R. Jenny 1894-1895, J. Kappler 1895-1896, J. Zuber 1896-1897, Fred

Schaer 1897-1899, Aug. Werner 1899-1902, G. Durtschi 1902-1904, Christ. Glauser 1904-1906, Al. Kunz 1906-1907, Fred Peter 1907 (current President).

“It would go too far to top the list of other civil servants, but it is to their honor that they have always performed their duties faithfully, helping the association survive and flourish.

“We offer good wishes and prosperity as the *North American Schweizer-Bund* advances beyond its golden anniversary.

“Extending greetings on behalf of the Helvetia Support Associations of Columbus, Ohio.

Fred. Mueller, Recording Secretary [1915].”

State of Ohio Incorporation

Within seven months after its founding, *Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein* applied for Incorporation by the State of Ohio, stating the following:

Name: Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein of Columbus, Ohio

Location: Columbus in Franklin County, Ohio

Purpose: a) The mutual protection and relief of its members,
b) To elevate their social, moral, and intellectual condition,
c) And for the payment of such sums of money to the families and heirs of deceased members as may be provided in the By-Laws of the association.

The following officers appeared as signatures to the application:

Jacob J. Trueb, President

Joseph G. Tritt

Eduard Schmid

Albert Baumer, Treasurer

Gottlieb Gottier

Incorporation was granted October 28, 1889, and filed November 1, 1889 (Ohio Record of Incorporations, Vol. 49, p. 282). A framed certified copy of this document can be viewed in the MSS1530 manuscript collection at the Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio.

Historical Note

At the 1938 Convention of the *North American Schweizer-Bund*, groundwork was laid for a thorough transformation of the Bund into a fraternal life insurance organization and, in 1940, changed its name to North American Swiss Alliance.

Its initial statement of purpose reads:

“The North American Swiss Alliance is a strictly NON-POLITICAL fraternal organization and has no other affiliations or commitments. It fosters loyalty to our adopted country, the United States of America, and urges full observance of its laws.”

Its initial goals were:

- Consolidation of the separate efforts of all the various Swiss societies into one great group.
- Protection of members in time of need and in case of death.
- Promotion of cultural relations and good will between the United States and Switzerland.
- Preservation of the traditions and cultural heritage of the old Fatherland.

**Individuals
Listed in Founding Documents
of the Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein**

Integrating information from the 1915 Schweizer-Bund record of the Columbus Helvetia Unterstützungs Verein with materials from the Columbus historical archive yields the following account of the initial 57 members.

<i>Person</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Canton/State</i>	<i>Death</i>
Adolf Basler	1867	Uerkheim	Aargau	1895
Albert Baumer	1832	Aarwangen	Bern	1891
Ferdinand Bommer	1866	St. Gallen	St. Gallen	1926
John F. Buehler	1867	St. Gallen	St. Gallen	1896
Ferdinand Buehler	-----	St. Gallen	St. Gallen	1889
Anna Burger (John)	1879	Küllstett	Thüringen, Ger.	1921
Rosina Diehr (William)	1867	Ochlenberg	Bern	1927
Elisabeth Diehr	1870	Ochlenberg	Bern	1928
Gottfried Durtschi	1862	Thun	Bern	1931
Frederika Durtschi (Gottfried)	1877	Eberdingen	Württemberg, Germany	1957
Anna Ellenberger (Friedrich)	1871	Münchenbuchsel	Bern	1938
John Engelhard	1857	Neerach	Zürich	-----
Friedrich Fiechter	1863	Dürrenroth	Bern	1947
Bertha Fiechter (Friedrich)	1863	-----	-----	1914
Louis Frey	1849	Zuchwyl	Solothurn	1933
Theresia Frey (Louis)	1863	Grove City	Ohio	1923
John Gerber	1845	Röthenbach	Bern	1929
John Gigax	1862	Thun	Bern	1939
Lizzie Gigax (John)	1868	Walterswyl	Bern	1922
Christian Glauser	1863	Muri	Bern	1936
John Robert Glauser	1867	Münchlingen	Bern	-----

<i>Person</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Canton/State</i>	<i>Death</i>
Gottfried Gottier	1863	Interlaken	Bern	1898
Otto F. Graf	1862	St. Gallen	St. Gallen	1916
Henry J. Grob	1852	Affoltern	Zürich	1902
Verena Tritt	1867	Beggingen	Schaffhausen	1951
Grossenbacher (Samuel)				
Friedrich Gugger	1844	Buchholterberg	Bern	1926
Henry Hablützel	1835	Feuerthalen	Zürich	1894
Siegfried Haeseli	1858	Oberfrick	Aargau	1919
Elisabeth Haeseli	1863	Columbus	Ohio	1933
(Siegfried)				
Rudolf Jenny	1852	Iffwyl	Bern	1932
Joseph Kappler	1838	Wattwyl	St. Gallen	1902
Emma Kappler	1868	Münchenbuchs	Bern	-----
(Joseph)				
Alfred Kunz	1865	Pieterlen	Bern	1934
Joseph Lauber	1840	-----	-----	1896
Elisa Liechti (Fritz)	1874	Bern	Bern	-----
Fred Mueller	1870	Bern	Bern	1932
Jacob Niedermann	1844	Niederbüren	St. Gallen	1891
Friedrich Peter	1864	Wiggiswyl	Bern	1923
Bertha Räle (Friedrich)	1872	Grulich	Bohemia	1959
Adam Rickenbacher	1856	Zeglingen	Basel-land	1928
Theresia Richenbacher	1869	Küllstett	Thüringen,	1927
(John R.)				
John Schaad	1845	Oberbipp	Bern	1892
Friedrich A. Schaer	1865	Walterswyl	Bern	1941
Emma Marie Schaer	1871	Maur	Zürich	1944
(Friedrich)				
Emil Schaub	1865	Bubendorf	Basel-Land	1942
Barbara Schaub	1866	Lancaster	Ohio	1945
(William)				

<i>Person</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Canton/State</i>	<i>Death</i>
Stephan Schluemp	1847	Breiten	Bern	1927
Eduard Schmid	1857	Wyl	St. Gallen	1931
Emil Stämpfli	1852	Aeschi	Solothurn	1924
Daniel Studemann	1853	Wahlern	Bern	1934
Friedrich Studer	1857	Niederösch	Bern	1891
Joseph Gustav Tritt	1842	Uster	Zürich	1902
Jacob J. Trueb	1843	Maur	Zürich	1901
August Werner	1856	Schaffhausen	Schaffhausen	1945
Katharina Wildi (Jacob)	1854	Wernfeld	Germany	1932
Jacob Wildi	1856	Wiggiswyl	Bern	1902
John Zuber	1856	Obergerlafingen	Solothurn	1942
Rosa Zwigard (Karl)	1873	Bern	Bern	1959

Sources

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~ *Donald G. Tritt, Granville, Ohio*

Postscript. It has been a pleasure sharing with our readers, one hundred and five years later, something about—“what happened after their arrival in America.” (DGT)