

The Switzerland of Our Ancestors

This presentation draws on Jonathan Steinberg's *Why Switzerland?* published by Cambridge University Press, and on photographer Peter Ammon's *Schweizer Bergleben um 1950*, published by *Aura*. Immigrant quotes are from Leo Schelbert's *America Experienced*.

Swiss Stereotypes

- Orderly
- Bankers, keepers of their own and others' money
- Quaint Alpine cattle raisers
- Beautiful landscapes, but not very interesting unless you ski
- Yodeling
- Good at making watches and chocolate
- Neutral in times of war, but . . .
- Source of mercenaries and the Swiss Guards

A Different Perspective

- Switzerland has a very complex history
- The Swiss did not follow the common European path toward more centralized state government. Even today, Swiss government proceeds from the bottom to the top.
- Switzerland was sometimes torn by religious conflict; religious differences contributed to Jura Conflict as recently as the 1970's.
- It is sometimes said that “the peasants won” in Switzerland, in contrast to rule by royal families. However, the process of developing the rights of rural citizens was still the subject of serious conflict when our ancestors left their alpine homes.
- Regardless of politics, farming life in the Swiss valleys was remarkably stable through many centuries.

So what was life like in Ferenbalm
in the Aare Valley (Schüler)?



Higher, in the Bernese Oberland at Guttannen? (Hörger)



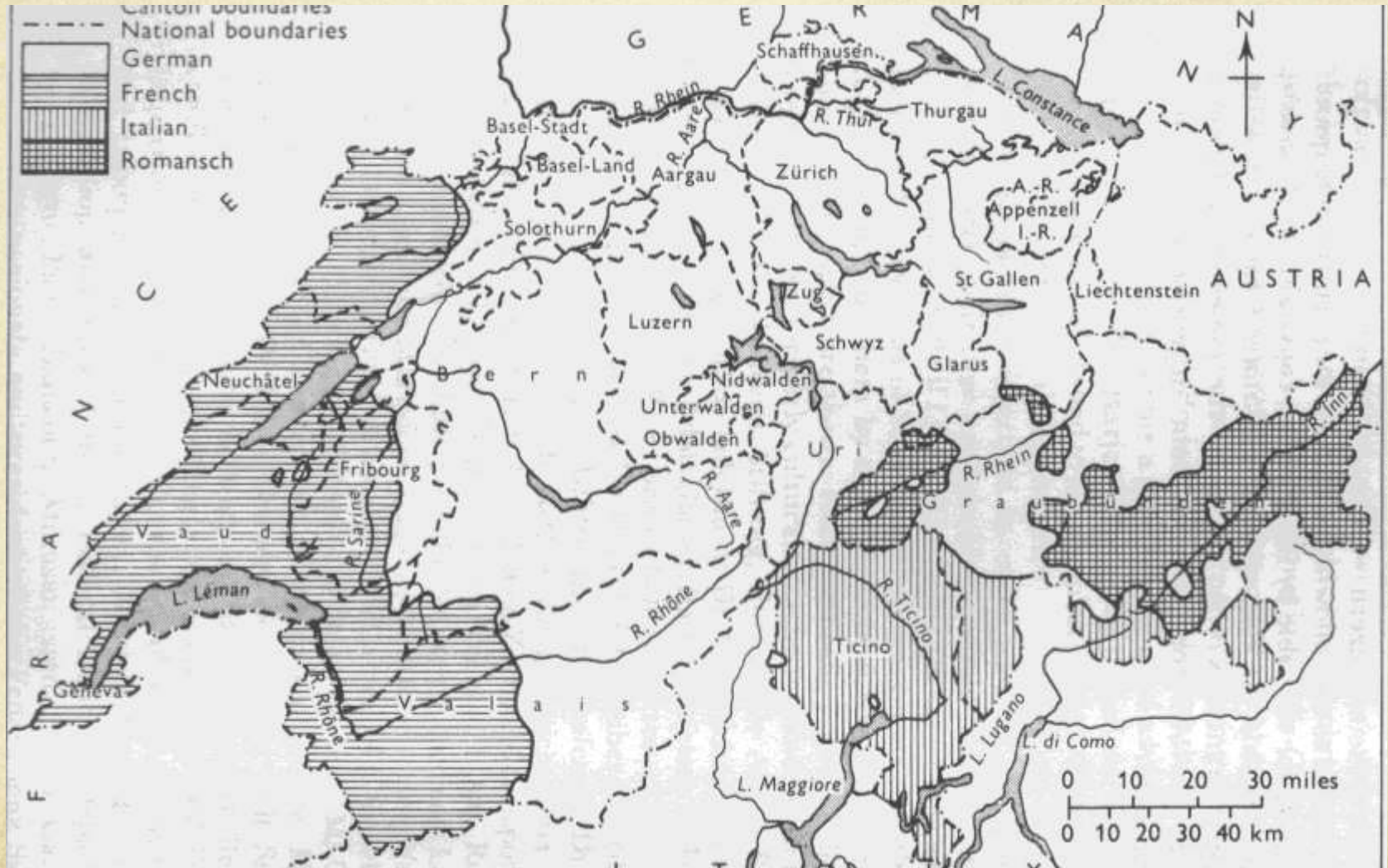
And higher yet in an Alpine pass at
Zweisimmen (Mürer, Moorer)



Their Languages

- Traditionally (and officially) the Swiss speak four languages: Schwyzerdütsch (about 70%), French (about 20%), Italian (about 9%) and Romansch (about 1%).
- Schwyzerdütsch consists of many dialects. The dialect in the high Alps (where the Moorer and Horger families originated) is regarded as particularly thick and distinctive. The people of Basel (for example, the Myers family) have historically been most easily understood throughout German-speaking Switzerland.

Switzerland: Basic Geography



The Old Confederation

The period 1291-1523 A.D. in Switzerland is called the Old Confederation. This period did much to shape later Swiss life and government.

The cantons of the Central Alps (Uri, Schywz and Unterwalden) were under the Holy Roman Emperor, but without a local governor they were largely autonomous. (William Tell, whose exploits are said to date to around 1307, probably didn't exist.) Additional cantons affiliated with these over time.

The *Landsgemeinde* assembly was the foundation of local government, and is one of the oldest surviving forms of direct democracy. It has roots even earlier than the Old Confederation, probably ultimately traceable to the earliest farmers, but it achieved national importance during this period. It is a gathering of all citizens of the canton to debate and vote on laws and expenditures. (Today this assembly has been largely replaced with referenda and ballot initiatives, for practical reasons. It remains a slow method of government. It has been said that "when the end of days comes, it will be two days late in Altdorf and Schwyz.")

Our Citizen Ancestors

Through the *Landsgemeinde*, Swiss citizenship has been grounded in the community and in the canton. For example, Orangeburgh immigrant Hans Georg Schüler was identified in official records as member of Bern Canton's *Landsgemeinde*. This status did not just provide a right to vote, but also a right to use of communal lands and resources and the right (and obligation) to bear arms. Men proved citizenship at meetings of the *Landsgemeinde* by showing their ceremonial sword, establishing that they were entitled to bear arms.

The Reformation

The Reformation in Switzerland is dated to 1523 through 1648, and was first led by Huldrych Zwingli of Zurich. The cantons of Zurich, Bern, Basel, and Schaffhausen became Protestant very soon. Appenzell Ausserrhoden followed quickly.

It is largely because they were firmly Protestant (Swiss Reformed) in faith that much Swiss immigration to South Carolina was from these cantons.



Switzerland when our Ancestors Left: The Ancién Regime

From 1600-1798 Switzerland was a loose confederation in which a few families from urban centers held disproportionate power. By the 1700's there was much turmoil in the region as both religious issues and the weak position of rural populations caused unrest.

The Villmergen Wars almost ended the Swiss Confederation. However, the Peace of Aarau in 1712 forced Catholics to accept parity of religious faiths in Switzerland. This was almost two hundred years after Zwingli introduced the Reformed faith in Switzerland.

Between 1712 and 1739 there were multiple largely unsuccessful peasant revolts. Additional revolts occurred in 1755 and 1781 on the way to the Swiss Revolution of 1798. That Revolution ultimately affirmed the importance of all citizens and codified the bottom-up nature of Swiss government.

Mercenary Soldiers

During the Ancien Régime, the practice of serving as mercenary soldiers became a civic problem, although it was very profitable for the ruling class. Too many wars drained too many young men from the countryside.

In 1474-1477 the Swiss developed their reputation as mercenary soldiers in the Burgundian Wars. Thereafter the Swiss cantons entered into contracts to provide soldiers in many European wars. This was also the foundation of the famous Swiss Guards at the Vatican.

Parish records of the Eisenhut family of Gais in Appenzell Ausserrhoden (later of Orangeburg as Yssenhut or Hazelwood) show many deaths in foreign wars over the centuries.

Against this background of change, millennia of stability in rural life

The history of Switzerland in the centuries leading up to the mid-1700's is one of political and religious change. However, when we look at the lives of our ancestors at the time of their emigration from Switzerland, we see that despite political and religious change, there was great stability in the lives of Swiss farmers and craftsmen. To examine this, we will begin at the beginning of permanent occupation of what is now Switzerland.

The Paleolithic and Mesolithic

- There are few “stone age” Swiss remains because Switzerland was heavily glaciated through the end of the Pleistocene era, about 11,700 years ago. Thus there was no substantial settlement of early hunters and gatherers. However, evidence from a cave in Appenzell suggests that some hunter-gatherers settled in the lowlands north of the Alps in the Upper Paleolithic.

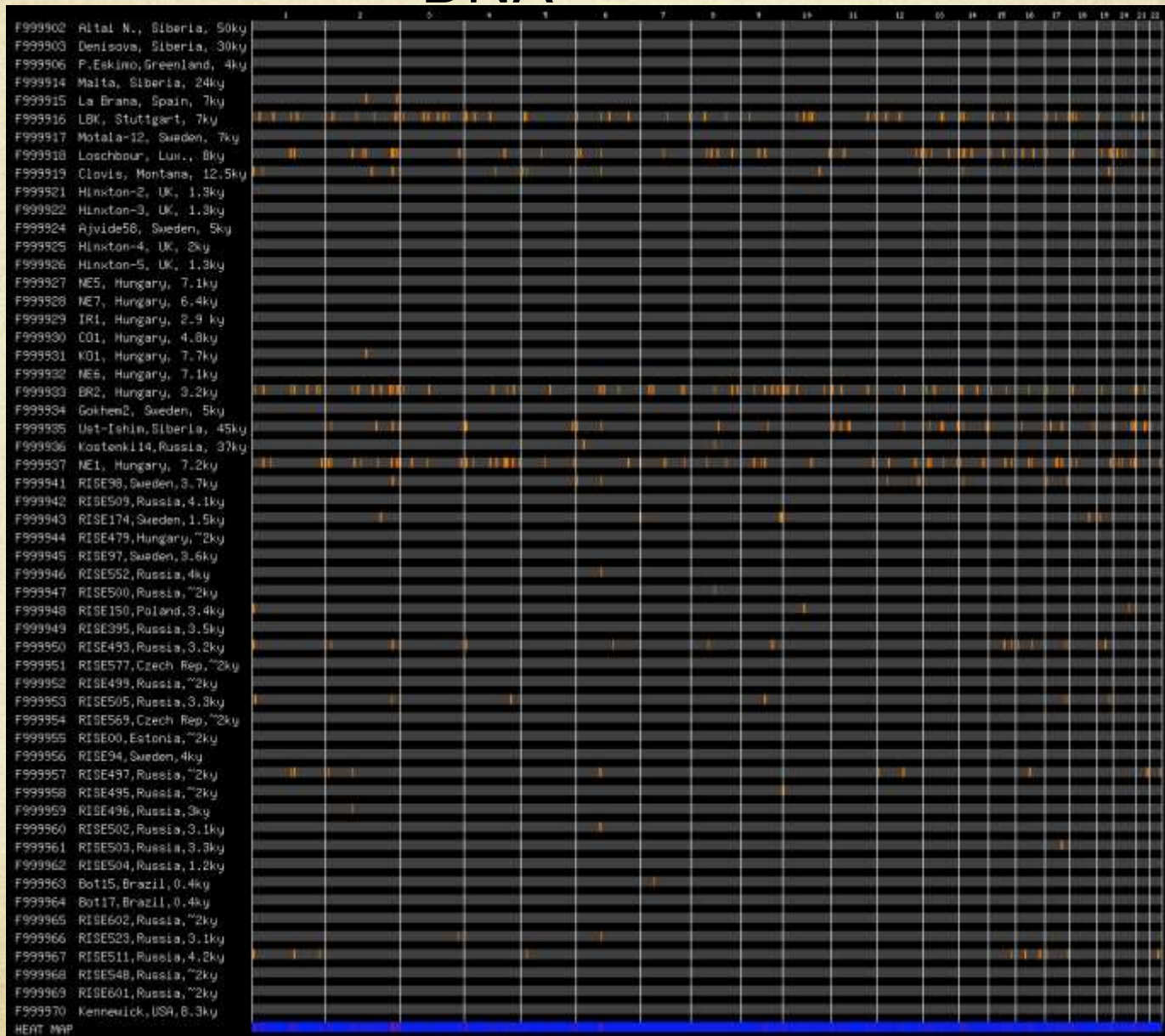


Neolithic Farmers

- By the time alpine Switzerland was habitable, the farming revolution had begun in the Near East and soon began to spread into Europe. By about 5,000 B.C. early farmers reached Switzerland, entering both along the Rhone River from France and Italy and from the east via the Black Sea, Hungary and Austria.
- These early farmers established the deep foundations of Swiss economy and traditions.



Our Neolithic Ancestors in our DNA



These matches show a clear origin of our Orangeburg Swiss settlers in the European Neolithic of the region that included modern Switzerland.

GedMatch Comparison of autosomal DNA (atDNA) from archaeological human remains with atDNA of Lynn Teague, matches of at least 2.0 cM.

The Neolithic gave Switzerland more than DNA. . .

The Neolithic in Switzerland and other parts of central Europe established much of the genetic heritage of later Swiss populations, but also established much of the economic and social foundation.

Small communities that relied on cultivated plants, on domestic animals, on wild plants, and on hunting continued to dominate the landscape through the millennia until our ancestors left their Swiss homeland in 1735-37.

“Lake Dwellers”

From 4300 B.C. to 800 B.C. “pile dwellers” constructed wooden houses on piles or posts on the shores of Switzerland’s lakes. The same middle Neolithic cultural tradition is found in bogs around the Alps of Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia. This period marks the beginning of Swiss farming life.

Neolithic Houses

Swiss pile dwellings appear to have had as their most significant purpose the storage of grains under their high raised roofs, with human habitation on the floor a secondary function.



House exterior.

Even though it is fairly modest in size (4 meters wide by 8 meters long), **the outside of this 30th century house is impressive**, with a very steep roof that peaks 8 meters above the ground. The size of the roof suggests that the basic housing unit was designed first and foremost for storing large quantities of harvested grains, rather than for providing shelter for daily activities and sleeping, which took place on the raised floor.

Farmers and Fishers



The Pile Dwellers were both hunters and farmers, using a diverse economic base to sustain them through several thousand years.

They cultivated grains and legumes (beans, peas), and used granaries, often in their houses, to store their crops.

They raised familiar domestic animals including pigs, cattle, sheep and goats, although all were smaller than their modern counterparts. However, hunting provided most of the meat consumed by these people.

We assume that they were fishers, but actual direct evidence for this is

Prehistoric Swiss Knife

Contrary to what can be found on the internet, they did NOT have a prehistoric Swiss knife



The Tools and Crafts of Early Swiss Farmers



Pottery

Pottery was produced classic jug, bowl and jar forms. The pottery of the time is so ubiquitous that archaeologists named whole time periods for pottery styles, in particular the *Linearbandkeramic* or Linear Banded Pottery Period.

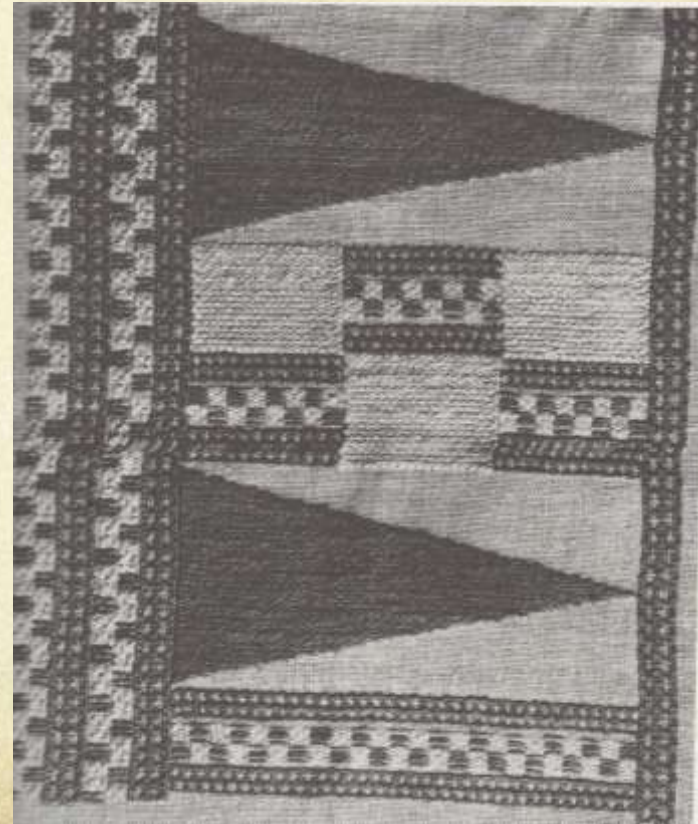


Neolithic Swiss Textiles

Ordinary cloth was made with wild plant stem fibers (like nettle) in simple twined structures that did not require the use of a loom.

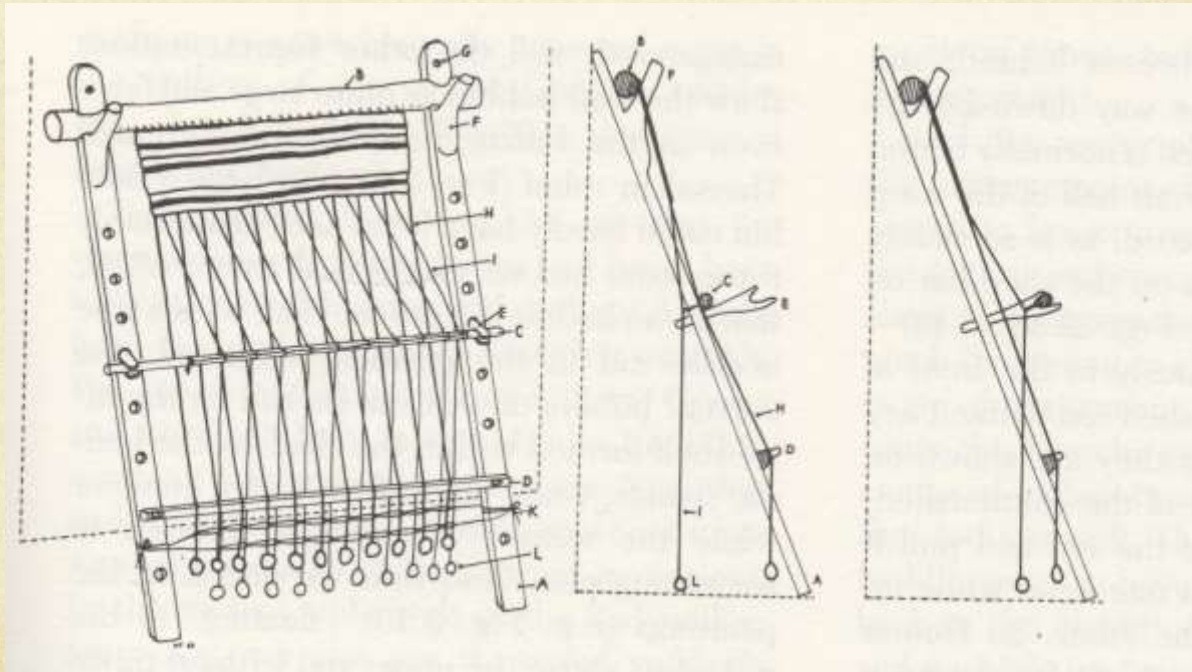
Early Swiss farmers also made very sophisticated fabrics from flax (linen) using looms.

These specimens are plain weave with a supplementary weft making the pattern, in one case a complex arrangement of triangles and rectangles, in the other simple stripes.



The Warp-weighted Loom

The Neolithic Swiss used simple vertical looms with warps held under tension using stone weights were in use throughout Switzerland and much of Europe. They appeared in Switzerland in about 3000 B.C.



The Bronze Age

In about 2000 B.C. metalworking appeared in Switzerland. First there was copper, which was too soft for tools, but bronze was used to make sturdy metal copies of late stone age tools. Later new forms like barbed hooks were produced.



The Iron Age: Hallstatt

Iron smelting was known in the Middle east by 3000 B.C. but did not appear in Switzerland until much later. By 800 B.C. the Iron Age reached Switzerland, which was at that time united with other adjacent areas in the Hallstatt archaeological tradition. The Hallstatt Culture was associated with pre-Celtic and Celtic

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La Tène



- In 500-50 B.C. the La Tène Culture dominated Switzerland and indeed much of Europe. This is what we often think of as classically Celtic, and tend to associate with Scotland and Ireland. However, its homeland was here, in Switzerland and adjacent parts of Europe.

The more things change . .

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When we look at traditional Swiss life as it survived in recent centuries, we can clearly see roots in these original Neolithic farming communities.

Farming and Land

Jim Rickenbacker gave an excellent presentation a few years ago on Swiss land use customs. I will not attempt to replicate that very detailed and fascinating report.

It is of interest, though, that Bob Netting of the University of Arizona studied Swiss practices in using land for farming and grazing in the village of Torbel. Netting reported on a system of small individual fields accompanied by forested areas along the crest of hills used communally for grazing and strictly regulated woodcutting.

Netting regarded the system that he recorded in Torbel as very ancient and stable. The system combined communal tenure and private individual land ownership in a system that was sustainable for centuries. This basic system was certainly in place at the time that our ancestors lived and farmed in Switzerland, and probably for millennia before.

Technically, change has been slow. Sleds drawn by oxen were found in Neolithic villages in Switzerland. Horses replaced oxen, but the sled itself was unchanged as late as 1950.





Animals
were housed
on the
first
floor
of the
house.



Butchering a Pig

Slicing into the
head, and
making
sausage; little
was wasted
although the
Swiss never
developed a
taste for pigs
feet.

Bern Potter

The pottery forms
of 1735 would
have been familiar
to someone of the
Neolithic
Linearbandkerami
tradition.



A Kitchen in Bern Canton



Note the continued use of local traditional pottery and simple tools.

Spinning Yarn

The Swiss grew and spun both wool and flax (for linen), as they had thousands of years earlier.

The traditional Swiss wheel is upright, as shown here. It represents an increase in efficiency over the Neolithic handspindle, but the process was the same.



Weaving in Bern Canton

The horizontal loom is an improvement on the warp weighted loom of the Neolithic, but the process is largely unchanged



Alpine Games: Wrestling

Does anyone suppose that this changed much through the millennia?



Our Ancestors in 1735-37

In 1735-1737 our Swiss ancestors left a place that had been home to many of their ancestors for around 7,000 years. They left a way of life that had gone through political turmoil and experienced some technological change but that was fundamentally similar to that of their ancestors.

They came to a place as radically different as one might imagine, and yet their traditional farming way of life continued to serve them well in the backcountry of South Carolina.

Why Leave?

Given the stability of Swiss farm life, why did they leave? Their letters home make that clear. Swiss farm life was indeed stable, but it was hard. From Charleston in 1733 Andreas Klaffter reported:

- “We have begun clearing the land and everything comes up well and in great abundance.”
- “If one works two months in the year, one can live on it.”
- “The pasture is much better for livestock . . . than in Switzerland.”
- “I have already eaten more meat here . . . than in all my life in Switzerland.”
- “The earth is quite easy to work because no rocks are in it, it is black and loose. Everything grows in it without tilling.”
- “One doesn’t see spite and quarrels here like back home because everybody has enough.”

Another reason to go . . .

In the 1730's Johannes Tobler was *Landeshauptman* of Appenzel Ausserrhoden but ran into trouble because he opposed raising mercenary armies in the churches. He then left Switzerland to found New Windsor, one of Orangeburgh's sister Swiss townships. South Carolina valued the military abilities of the Swiss because they could defend their own townships and, as a consequence, the coast. However, they were not sent to die in foreign wars.

In closing: A familiar custom

One thing did not change with the move to South Carolina. South Carolinians can easily relate to the common way in Switzerland of getting to know someone new. First, the question about where one is from and who one knows – “Ah, you are from Zug, do you know . . . ?” Then, family. “Are you a relative of Burris in Hergiswil?”