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Photo courtesy, Sacramento Helvetia Verein

SWISS PRIDE. Members of the Sacramento Helvetia Verein gather together during the club's picnic at Oak Park in 1898.

Know your neighbors

# Sacramento Helvetia Verein celebrates 120th anniversary

By LANCE ARMSTRONG  
East Sacramento News writer  
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The Swiss-American organization, Sacramento Helvetia Verein, recently celebrated its 120th anniversary with a special gathering that was held at the Croatian-American Cultural Center on Auburn Boulevard.

The March 24 event began with a reception with music and a hosted bar, followed by a dinner with wine service, the parade of the cantonal (state) flags, entertainment, including the blowing of the alphorn and yodeling, dancing and dessert. The music was provided by Lisa

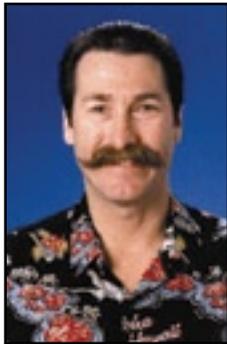
Dillier Ward and the Ronald Sheiber Orchestra.

Another feature of the event, which was attended by 175 Sacramento Helvetia Club members and guests, was an invocation given by the guest of honor, Swiss Consulate General Julius Anderegg.

## Merger

Additionally, Sacramento Helvetia Verein President Ernest Gudel proposed a toast to the merger of the Sacramento Helvetia Verein and the Sacramento Swiss Ladies Society,

See Anniversary, page 17



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# Anniversary: Today's Helvetia Verein members continue proud Swiss heritage

Continued from page 2

with special recognition for their leadership to outgoing presidents, Kathi Omli and Ed Lambert.

Prior to the merger, the former ladies society had been meeting since its establishment on May 11, 1922.

A special recognition was also given to longtime member Paul Kiser for his "lifetime of tireless and caring support for the group."

The aforementioned parade of the cantonal flags ceremoniously featured the 26 regional "states" within Switzerland that constitute the federal government, including Geneva, Zurich and Lucerne.

## Blended cultures

Gudel described Switzerland's unique mixture of German, French and Italian cultures as the "Swiss experience."

And continuing, Gudel said, "This variety has endured into the adopted home of the Swiss immigrant here in America and found expression in our local organization."

The local Helvetia Verein, which is among the nation's oldest existing Helvetia Vereins, was established on March 13, 1892.

## Founding fathers

The local club began through the efforts of Johann Schärer and Albert Bürgi from the canton of Aargau and Karl Schilter from the canton of Schwyz. These men worked together to solicit other Swiss natives to form the organization, which, in part, cultivated friendship and preserved and promoted Swiss culture.

The Sacramento Helvetia Verein was officially established when 33 Swiss immigrants signed their names in an official club book at the Ebner Hotel at 116-118 K St.

The local Helvetia Verein, which was originally led by its president, Emil Schmid, held its first official meeting at Schmid's Hall on 7th Street, between K and L streets.

## Purpose of the Verein

Shortly after its formation, the organization created its constitution, which was first written in German. An English translation of the constitution was later written.

Article 2 of the club's constitution presents the organization's "Object of the Verein," which reads: "To give all moral material aid in its power to its active members and those dependent on them. To educate its active members socially, morally and intellectually. To provide relief and aid in sickness and at death."

## Active lives

Like the German organization, the Sacramento Turn Verein, which was organized in 1854 and has been meeting in East Sacramento since 1926, the Sacramento Helvetia Verein once included a gymnastics section.

Other important parts of the organization during its earlier years were its rifle club and singing group.

And very early in the club's history, dances and picnics became a tradition.

In its Jan. 1, 1898 edition, the *Sacramento Record-Union* reported about an early New Year's Eve Helvetia Verein Ball, which was held at Smith's Hall at 1115 7th St.

The brief article summarized the event, noting that "a pleasant evening was spent and all present thoroughly enjoyed themselves."

Details regarding an early local Helvetia Verein picnic were presented in the June 24, 1893 edition of the *Record-*

*Union*, which ran an advertisement with the heading, "Grand Picnic."

Included in the advertisement were the following words: "Flag dedication and summer night festival by the Sacramento Helvetia Swiss Verein, Sunday, June 25, 1893, at Oak Park. Cash prizes for all games. Music by the First Artillery Band. Admission - Gents, 50 cents; ladies, free."

## Helvetia Park

In 1928, Albert Marty, Anton Petrig and John Waechter were appointed to a committee to locate a picnic site for the club to purchase.

A year later, a site was acquired on the Marty Brothers Ranch, which was located about six miles up the Sacramento River. The area was dedicated as Helvetia Park.

The organization also became important for families of deceased members who did not have sufficient funds for burials, as the Sacramento Helvetia Verein covered the costs for such burials.

## Remembering the past

Ferdinand Morant, one of the longest term active members of the local Helvetia Verein, having joined the club in 1953, spoke briefly about the immigration of the Swiss in the 19th century.

"There were some Swiss here in the time of (Captain John) Sutter, but it wasn't until the 1880s that very large numbers of Swiss immigrated to America," Morant said. "At the time, there was an overflow of farm workers with large families who could not obtain enough work. People wanted to come here because the opportunities were much greater."

In a history of the Sacramento Helvetia Verein's first 50 years, which was written by the late Alfred R. Wackerli in 1992, Wackerli noted that 13,500 Swiss immigrated to America in 1883.

In the same history, Wackerli added that many Swiss immigrated to the United States in 1885 and 1886 during an industrial depression.

Wackerli also wrote that between 1860 and 1890, California was the favorite destination place of the Swiss, notably those from the Innerschweiz (Inner Switzerland) and the Italian canton of Ticino.

## Proud heritage

Gudel said that the Sacramento Helvetia Verein's anniversary gathering was a fine tribute for such a historic local organization, and added that he was honored to play a role in this celebration.

"On behalf of the organization, I am proud to represent the Sacramento Helvetia Verein and to celebrate our 120th anniversary," Gudel said. "Within our organization are friends, family and colleagues of my parents and grandparents, who were immigrants from Switzerland in the early 1900s. I am often overwhelmed with the touching remembrances of current members and the accomplishments of our forefathers during the formative years of California's history. I am not alone when I say that I am proud of my Swiss heritage and I enjoy sharing the culture with all."

Anyone who is interested in exploring their Swiss roots or simply learning more about the Sacramento Helvetia Verein is invited to visit the club's Web site at [www.sacramentoswiss.com](http://www.sacramentoswiss.com).

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