

# Schwyz gave Switzerland name and flag

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## SCHWYZ GAVE SWITZERLAND NAME AND FLAG.

Of the three little mountain states Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, which pronounced their declaration of independence in the "Ewiger Bund", or perpetual pact, on August 1, 1291, Schwyz has ever since remained the heart of Switzerland. It has given the Confederation its name (Schweiz) and its coat-of-arms, with a change only having been made in the shape and placing of the cross. It is said that the original flag of Schwyz was entirely red, and the little white cross which now appears in the upper right hand corner was a distinction bestowed upon the Schwyzers after a campaign at Besançon. The federal flag displays its cross in larger form directly in the centre of the red field, and this same arrangement, but with colours reversed, was, as a compliment to Switzerland, adopted by the International Red Cross Society, which came into being at Geneva on August 22, 1864, with Jean Henri Dunant, a philanthropic citizen of Geneva as its founder.

That Schwyz, the tiny cantonal capital, and the districts of Steinen, Seewen, Auf Iberg, Brunnen and the Muotta valley, which made up the state in the beginning, were much more populated in their early days, is indicated by the historic records showing, for instance, that 1500 men of Schwyz participated in the Besançon campaign, also by the fact that of the three pioneer cantons Schwyz assumed leadership.

A delightful patrician atmosphere prevails today yet in the little town of Schwyz, which is impressively located at the base and on the slopes of the twin peaks of the Mythen. Here one encounters a "Herrengasse", a freie Reichsgasse, and along these and other less pretentiously named thoroughfares stand fine old patrician residences. High walls, towers and gables, are some of their visible marks of distinction, and through handsome wrought-iron gates one gets glimpses of the attractive gardens in which they stand.

As Schwyz was the victim of a big conflagration in 1642, all these residences were built afterwards. Among these mansions are included the Reding houses, homes of branches of one of the most illustrious families of Schwyz, whose name appears 45 times in the annals of the state's chief magistrates. Thus, in a beautiful framework of trees in the Schmidgasse, which leads to nearby Brunnen, on the lake of Lucerne, beckons the Reding von Biberegg residence, with the family's escutcheon above the hospitably open entrance gate. Higher up in the town rises, like a fortress, the Ital Reding domain.

The spacious, sloping Rathaus Square is, however, the beauty spot of Schwyz. Here, as its name suggests, stands the medieval City Hall, whose two main façades are strikingly adorned with frescoes from Swiss history. Portraits of 53 magistrates, from 1544 on, are displayed in the large council-chamber. A fountain, crowned by a standard bearer, rises on the square, and on the north side of the quadrangle invites the lofty church of St. Martin. Behind this edifice are two interesting chapels, "Heiligkreuz" and "Kerchel", the latter reminiscent of the days when the liberty-loving, independent Schwyzers had been temporarily excommunicated by the Pope, and had been forbidden to celebrate divine services "on" Schwyz ground.

A three-stoned tower behind the Rathaus, known as the "Archiv" houses some of the most sacred Swiss documents, including the priceless original deed of confederation between Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden. It is written in Latin and bears the date of August 1, 1291. At Schwyz it becomes clearly apparent to a visitor that these pioneer Swiss were by no means an ignorant people of herdsmen, as some of their haughty oppressors chose to describe them, but men of culture, courage and unusual foresight.

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