

Swiss ghetto

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **77 (2011)**

Heft [4]

PDF erstellt am: **25.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943368>

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Bachfischet

Aarau has a Stadtbach, a town creek. For many centuries this creek was nourished by several springs and provided all the water for the town. Once a year the creek bed had to be cleaned; the Stadtbach bed was dry for four days. In former times, when the Stadtbach was vital for the city, these were difficult times, as the citizens relied on this water for their everyday needs, and it was also the water supply needed in case of a fire. No wonder that the return of the Stadtbach was celebrated ever since the foundation of the city in 1248.



Bachfischet lanterns in Vordere Vorstadt

The children of Aarau traditionally went to welcome the water into the freshly cleaned creek bed – and they still do so, even though the Stadtbach has been covered over long stretches, and Aarau doesn't rely on the Stadtbach anymore for its water supply. It is one of the oldest traditions still alive in Switzerland. The youngsters create all sorts of lanterns and hang them into long green branches. They go to the place where the creek has been diverted and accompany the Stadtbach through the old city down to the Schachen. The evening ends with fireworks and the Mords-Chlapf – and free grilled sausages for all children.

from the internet

Swiss Ghetto

The two townships of Endingen and Lengnau in the Surbtal, district of Baden, were the Swiss ghetto for several centuries. In the 17th century, or even earlier, when the Jews were banished from the confederation, several Jewish families were collected here. They were, however, forbidden to buy land or to own houses, and they were not permitted to live under the same roof with Christians.

The Jews were heavily taxed. The authorities, who renewed their charter every sixteen years, received pay for protection. The provost and the district clerk and his secretary received "recognition money" and "settlement dues"; and whenever the Jews passed through a locality in the canton they paid a polltax. However, this didn't stop the country people from pillaging the Lengnau Jews in 1712.

The renewal of the charter to the Jews in 1760 was granted only upon the express condition that "they should not multiply nor allow marriages between poor persons, and that all brides from without should bring with them a dowry of at least 500 gulden"; but there was the further restriction that "they could neither acquire houses, nor practise usury, nor buy estates, nor discount notes, without the permission of the authorities."

Influenced by the results of the Revolution in France, several broad-minded Swiss statesmen gave their attention to the improvement of the precarious position of the Jews, who had increased from thirty-five to one hundred and forty-seven families during the interval between the years 1702-92. In the year 1799 all special tolls and imposts were abolished, and in 1802 the polltax was also abrogated. A riot broke out in Endingen and Lengnau; the Jews' dwellings were ransacked, and they lost nearly all their possessions.

The right of citizenship was granted to Jews by law in 1809, and they were permitted to engage in trade and agriculture. The right of settlement, however, still remained restricted to Endingen and Lengnau until 1846, when they were allowed to settle in any portion of the canton of Aargau, but it took another 33 years till the Swiss Jews became regular Swiss citizens with the same rights as Christian citizens.

For a long time the Swiss Jews were not allowed to bury their dead in Swiss soil. Their burial place was an island in the Rhine near Koblenz (AG), which is still called Judenäule, or Jews' Isle. It was only about the middle of the eighteenth century that they received permission to acquire a joint cemetery situated between Endingen and Lengnau, which has been in use ever since.

The first synagogue was erected at Lengnau in 1755, the first on Swiss soil after the general expulsion; and nine years later the congregation of Endingen had their own house of worship.

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