

Swiss Abbeys

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THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF BEROMUENSTER

The history of Beromünster, a village in Canton Lucerne where the Swiss national transmitter for German-speaking broadcasts now stands, is closely linked with the history of the Chapter to which it owes its existence and its name.

The Collegiate Church (*Stiftkirche*) is mentioned in the document of donation by Count Ulrich of Lenzburg,

dating as far back as 9th February, 1036. According to this document, the church was probably founded by his parent at the end of the 10th century on the site named *Beronis monasterium* where his son Bero had been killed by a bear while hunting.

Count Ulrich erected the church with donations and income of properties situated in the Cantons of Lucerne, Aarau, Obwald and Solothurn.

At the extinction of the Lenzburg family in 1172, the counts of Kyburg, heirs to the Lenzburgs, took over the patronage of Beromünster, the Provost Ulrich II of Kyburg was bishop of Chur in 1233.

The Kyburg family disappeared in 1273. The patronage was transferred to the Habsburgs. Its peace and prosperity increased from that time on until the middle of the 14th century.

It was unfortunately later involved in the wars between Austria and the Confederates. On 8th March, 1385, the Confederates set fire to the Provostship, the Church, village and neighbouring localities. After the battle of Sempach in 1389, the Confederates set fire to the church for the second time.

With the peace of 1st April, 1389, the Michelsamt (District of Beromünster) so named after the convent's patron,

Saint Michael, came again under the suzerainty of the Chapter. From 1480 onward, the Canon's residence became the favourite gathering place of the rich families of Lucerne, who endowed Beromünster with many donations.

At the time of the Helvetic Revolution and of the French Invasion (1798) the Chapter was deprived of all its suzerainty rights and the church was partly looted. But the Chapter's existence was admitted and safeguarded by the Helvetic Government thanks to the intervention of Lucerne.

The Collegiate Church constructed at the end of the 10th century was a Romanesque basilica with three naves. As it was burnt four times, only the outside walls remain from the original construction, as well as the two rows of columns separating the Choir from the side-aisles. At the time of its first reconstruction in 1386, Gothic windows were installed. From 1601 to 1608, the church was restored in Renaissance style.

The stalls of the choir, which are of wooden carvings, date from 1608. They are the remarkable work of the Fischer brothers, of Laufenburg. In 1774 and 1775, the interior of the building was entirely transformed into a Rococo style richly embellished with stucco. In spite of the plunders of 1798, the church treasure is still considerable. The Chapter's library possesses ancient documents and a splendid collection of early printed books.

Pierre Savoie

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