

SWISS SETTLEMENT IN MINNESOTA

The Swiss department of foreign affairs has asked us to ascertain the dates of the foundation and the exact location of certain Swiss settlements in your state. Among others the department mentions Bern, in Dodge County, and Helvetia, in Carver County. We would greatly appreciate it if you could furnish us with information about these places.

CONSULATE OF SWITZERLAND, Chicago

The village of Bern in Milton Township, Dodge County, was laid out in the spring of 1856 by Rudolph Smith and Jacob Klossner in the vicinity of their sawmill, which was on section 17. The village was first named Buchanan in honor of the presidential candidate, but in the same year a post office was established there and the name was changed to Berne. The final *e* seems to have been dropped from the name later. This account follows that given by W. H. Mitchell and U. Curtis in *An Historical Sketch of Dodge County, Minnesota*, 84 (Rochester, 1870). In a *History of Winona, Olmsted, and Dodge Counties*, 1245 (Chicago, 1884), the statement appears that "Berne postoffice was established in the year 1858," though Robert Smith had built a store there in 1856. The name of this village appears in still another form—"Newbern"—in Albert B. Faust, *Guide to the Materials for American History in Swiss and Austrian Archives*, 70 (Washington, D. C., 1916). This author also mentions the village of Helvetia in Carver County, and he states that there is material on both settlements in the archives of the Swiss *Auswanderungsamt*. A number of Milton Township families came from Berne, Switzerland, according to the manuscript census schedule for 1860, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. These families probably formed the nucleus of the village of Bern and gave it its name.

The following account of the village of Helvetia in Hollywood township, Carver County, is quoted from Edward D. Neill's *History of the Minnesota Valley*, 402 (Minneapolis, 1882):

The village of Helvetia was laid out in the autumn of 1856 by John Buhler, who had settled that summer on section 31, in Watertown, and Dr. Lehmann. Helvetia lies on either side of the line between Hollywood and Watertown. Mr. Buhler also established the first store in Helvetia. . . . In August, 1875, the first post-office was established in Helvetia, with Jacob Lahr as postmaster. . . . The name Helvetia was given by the early settlers, derived from the European province of that name. Previous to the fall of 1859 the town of Helvetia embraced the south one-half of the congressional townships 117-25 and 117-26 and the north one-half of these townships was called Watertown. At the general election held at the store of E. F. Lewis in Watertown village, October 11, 1859, the boundaries of these towns were changed by a vote of the people, so that Watertown should embrace congressional township 117-25; and Helvetia congressional township 117-26.

An examination of the census schedules for these townships shows that they also had a large number of Swiss settlers in 1860.

A brief account of Swiss settlement in Minnesota appears in Dr. Adelrich Steinach, *Geschichte und Leben der Schweizer Kolonien in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika*, 306-312 (New York, 1889). This author states that the principal "Schweizer-Kolonien" in Minnesota were in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Winona, Bern, and New Ulm. He gives the names, however, of Swiss settlers in a great many additional places.

During the fifties the Territory of Minnesota appointed as commissioner of emigration to represent it in New York Eugene Burnand, a Swiss by birth. He did much to encourage Swiss settlers to locate in Minnesota. With a letter which Burnand wrote to Governor Willis A. Gorman on June 8, 1856, there is a list of 106 "persons that called at the Agency of Minnesota and left New York for Minnesota," which includes the names of a number of Swiss immigrants. The letter and the list are in the governor's archives. A number of Burnand's letters and reports are published in an account of "Official Encouragement of Immigration to Minnesota during the Territorial Period," by Livia Appel and Theodore C. Blegen, *ante*, 4: 167-203.

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