

700 years Swiss Confederation - 800 years Berne : a double anniversary

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A double Anniversary

Berne was founded in 1191 and the Swiss Confederation in 1291 – two dates which young and old alike can easily remember. However, this historical coincidence means that with so many anniversaries this year the question arises; what is actually being celebrated and by whom?

Luckily, those responsible took the view right from the start that there was no reason why the Bernese should not dance at two weddings which need not compete with each other for attention and that, on the contrary, the Berne 700 years and the Confederation 800 years anniversaries should be sources of mutual enrichment.

City and Canton celebrate

First of all, a widespread misunderstanding should be cleared up: that the Bernese 800 year anniversary celebrations relate only to the city of Berne. Of course, the federal capital has a central role to play but the anniversary is one for all Bernese to celebrate the Canton, the residents' commune and the Citizens' Corporation as the three legal successors to the former city-state of Berne. The 800th birthdays should be celebrated from the Jura to the Saanen region and from the Oberaargau to the Oberhasli.

As for the celebrations themselves, the organisers have eschewed the idea of a historical narcissism recalling Berne's one-time might and greatness. A look at the list of events (see box) shows that much more importance is being placed on a frank, critical confrontation with Berne's present and future and on the community experience. There is great emphasis on meeting and finding out about the unknown through personal experience or on foot. Thus, Berne's "special anniversary" fits smoothly into the concept of the Confederation's 700th anniversary celebrations. *WIL*

Exhibition in Worb Castle

Berne in the USA

It is no coincidence that Worb Castle was chosen for the exhibition about Bernese emigration to the USA and other countries. After all, Christoph von Graffenried, who was responsible for one of the best-known town foundations, New Berne in North Carolina, came from Worb.

To most people Berne means the Swiss federal capital which is, in fact only one of many places in the world that bear the same

The programme of celebrations

Below are some of the main cantonal events, which are at the same time regarded as contributions to the national celebrations.

- "Berne's Municipalities" (April–October): the 27 Bernese administrative districts introduce themselves in their chief towns (see illustration). A specially signposted footpath and cycling routes network and an attractive offer by public transport organisations are intended to facilitate visits, especially by foreign guests.

- "Chutzenfeuer" (31 May): Jointly with Cantons Vaud, Fribourg, Solothurn and Aargau, the historic "Chutzenfeuer" (signal fires) system will be re-enacted to demonstrate Berne's function as a bridge between the German and French speaking regions of Switzerland.

- **Medieval Play** (23 August–15 September): Resumption of an ancient tradition with performances of the "Totentanz" by Niklaus Manuel in front of the newly-renovated main door of Berne Cathedral.

- **City-Procession Berne 800** (8 September): The development of the city of Berne and its present situation will be shown by a colourful parade.

name. This is because for centuries the USA, along with Argentina, was one of the most important – if not the most important – emigration destinations for the Swiss, and the emigrants kept the memory of their old home alive when they named their settlements.

Another main aim of the exhibition is to show the reasons that led people to emigrate. The best known is probably mercenary service, followed by persecution of religious minorities, the flight from poverty and want, people's desire to make something of them-

selves and the longing for adventure. It was also not rare for undesirable citizens to be got rid of by being made to emigrate.

A kind of American counterpart to the Worb Castle exhibition is the "Helvetica Americana" exhibition by Professor Erdmann Schmocker in Chicago.

The «Berne in the USA» exhibition in Worb Castle is open from 17 June to 15 September 1991.



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The “Bärner Visite” consists of personally visiting and getting to know the chief towns of the Cantons’s administrative districts. The diversity of the administrative headquarters buildings – whether castle, monastery, villa or town mansion – reflects the rich history of Canton Berne. Top to bottom: Trachselwald, Aarwangen, Fraubrunnen, Meiringen, Bern (above and below right). (Photos: Markus Senn)

