United Swiss Singing Societies of the Pacific Coast

History

Founded in 1934, leaders of three Swiss Singing Societies in the Pacific Northwest: Swiss Singing Society Edelweiss of Tacoma (a male chorus, later known as the Männerchor Edelweiss), Seattle Swiss Mixed Chorus “Alpenroesli” (later to become the Swiss Chorus Alpenroesli), and Helvetia Saenger Club (now the Helvetia-Alpengluehn Swiss Singing Society of Portland) contemplated how beneficial it would be for them and future singing societies along the Pacific Coast to be associated in a parent organization for the purpose of holding singing and yodeling festivals, similar to those held for more than a century in Switzerland. They saw the blessing of bringing together more closely all singing Swiss-Americans on the West Coast and cultivating Swiss folk singing, yodeling, and music.

With this small nucleus of only three societies, it was only a little more than a year before the purpose of the young organization materialized - organizing the first Swiss Singing and Yodeling Festival of the Pacific Coast, June 28-30, 1935, in Tacoma, Washington with Festival President Charles Bischofberger who as the first “Sängervater” (a time-honored Swiss title meaning Father of the Singers). He is considered the founder of the United Swiss Singing Societies of the Pacific Coast. In 1935, the “Alpenroesli” chorus of San Francisco (later named the Swiss Singing Society of San Francisco) joined the association, extending it to a coast-wide organization. Two more Festivals were held in 1937 and in 1939 but because of the outbreak of the second world war further gatherings had to be discontinued. They were resumed in 1946 with the fourth Festival held in Seattle. In those years three additional Swiss Singing Societies became members of the organization almost doubling its size - The Swiss Singing Society “Harmonie” of Los Angeles in 1945, the Swiss Chorus Edelweiss of Salt Lake City in 1947, and the San Joaquin Valley “Swiss Echoes” in 1948. The organization had now grown from three to seven societies. It was nearly thirty years later when the next society joined - the Vancouver Swiss Choir of Vancouver, B.C. in 1975. They became the first member society residing outside the United States. Others who joined were the San Diego Swiss Singers in 1984, the Jodelklub Edelwyss of Portland in 1987, and the Enzian Ladies Chorus of Tacoma in 1990, bringing the number of associated choruses to eleven with an enrollment of over 332 singers.

In addition to the member societies, several other Swiss Singing Societies have participated in the Festivals as guest societies: the Edmonton Swiss Men’s Chorus of Edmonton, the Wildrose Yodel Club of Alberta, the Jodelklub Heimattreu of Calgary in Alberta, the Montagna Singers of Ottawa (all in Canada), and the Swiss Male Chorus of South Africa in Johannesburg. Festivals have also been enriched by guest appearances of soloists, duets, trios and small groups of singers from Switzerland.

With its humble infancy of three societies and 70 singers the organization has grown to nine active and two inactive societies. Originally held every two years (except during the second world war) until 1954, Festivals have since been organized every three years, with a total of twenty-eight Festivals to date. The twenty-ninth Festival will be held June 22-25, 2017 hosted by the San Joaquin Valley “Swiss Echoes”, a mixed chorus of some 30+ members. They are looking forward to greeting their singer friends and families and promoting and strengthening the traditions, friendships, and commitments that are so very important to our Swiss community and provided to us by the first organizing leaders. We thank them for what we now enjoy and join together as one body “all for one and one for all”.

Who has more fun than the Swiss!