

The History of the Swiss Club Chicago

Although the real birth of the Swiss Club of Chicago can not be pinpointed to an exact date. Even though there were gatherings and parties especially to be named the first Fondue Event held on May 13 1955 organized by the Swiss Romand population of the Swiss Colony, a forerunner of many more Fondue Events.

A formal cocktail party was held on February 18 1955 where 50 Young Swiss from the Swiss Colony were invited to bring them closer together. Talks were held of forming a more official group . On May 23 a letter from the Consul General Dr. Schilling advised the committee of three original non-official **gatherings** that Albert Baettig was stricken by a blood disease Leukemia. The committee made it to their goal to raise funds to grant Albert's wish to fly back to Switzerland.

The real start of the activities of the Young Swiss of Chicago (YSC) started with the Grand Opening of the Rathskeller on February 25 1956 as written by Dick Segesser, in his paper " The Young Swiss Club of Chicago". Starting in June 1955 a group of young Swiss, urging for a clubhouse, started with the cleanup and renovation of the Rathskeller.

The YSC hosted many small and large events at the Rathskeller and became know as the driving force of the Chicago Swiss Colony for gatherings and events. Joining the United Swiss to create a stronger Swiss Colony and to protect their portion in the Rathskeller in 1959.

Source: [SwissClubHistory1961.pdf \(swissclubchicago.com\)](#)

The Young Swiss Club of Chicago Its History from Mid- 1960's to Mid 1980's

With the end of the old Swiss Club House on 635 W. Webster Avenue in Chicago looming, the Young Swiss Club moved in 1967 to the Swedish Engineers Society, 503 W. Wrightwood Avenue. This new home was quite a place, a large mansion , originally built in 1896 by a wealthy brewer. Walking up to the building, the entrance was flanked by two large stone lions. On the lower level of the building, the Swiss would meet many Friday nights for a "gemuetlich" evening or meetings. The two Fondue parties a year were in the classic rooms on the main floor. Wide stairways with ornate railing lead to the second floor with its "Grand Ballroom".

On April 20, 1968, the United Swiss Societies organized a special "Farewell Dinner and Party" at the old Swiss Club House. Many members of the Young Swiss attended this sentimental event. The same year, the Young Swiss Club celebrated its 10th Anniversary with a party in the ballroom on Wrightwood Avenue.

With a large influx of young Swiss that had arrived during these years, there were many activities to enjoy... - a Fondue Party in December and another in Spring, Christmas and New Years' parties.

In the Summer of 1969, many members traveled to New Glarus for a "Schuetzenfest" (Shooting Festival). The shooting results were sent via telex to the National Festival in Switzerland competing with over 200 other Swiss clubs around the world.

With all the young Swiss around, the Young Swiss Club became a matchmaker's heaven... - from the late 60's to the early 70's, at least 16 couples met at the club and ended- up getting married. Sadly, a few have passed, but all others are still married

In the Winter of 1972 the Winter Olympic Games were held in Sapporo, Japan. Not to be left out, the Young Swiss Club organized its own Alpine Skiing Competition in Tyrol Basin, Wisconsin and the "après-skiing" in New Glarus. (This Winter activity continued for over 35 years.)

Some of the other club activities in the 70's were the Fasnacht (Mardi Gras), Breakfast Rides in the Lakes of the Hill, "Gourmet Picnics" at Lake Geneva, Car Rallies, Jass Tournaments and canoe trip and grape picking weekends in New Glarus.

In 1973 a former American Legion Post on Laramie Avenue in Chicago became available. Between the United Swiss Societies (Werner Anderau, Pres.) and the Young Swiss Club (Peter Herdeg, Pres.) the money was brought together to buy the one story building at 2634 Laramie Avenue. During the following years, many days and nights were spent by volunteers to fix- up the place. After a tornado hit an over 100 year old Swiss barn in Highland, Illinois, a group of "strong" Young Swiss traveled to southern Illinois and with chain saws cut many of the hand-hewn oak beams. Once back in Chicago, the beams were used to build an authentic Swiss Chalet "Aelpli Bar" inside the new clubhouse. From Swissair we received large photo panels with an aerial view of the Swiss mountains. This beautiful scenery, covering most of one wall in the Clubhouse, added the real "Swiss touch". .

In 1978 the Young Swiss Club celebrated its 20th anniversary "in style". A good size ship, the M.V. Trinidad, was chartered for a more than three hours cruise on Lake Michigan, a live band provided the music and a delicious buffet dinner was served..

On July 29, 1979 the first Swiss National Day (August 1) Celebration organized by the United Swiss Societies was held at the Swiss Clubhouse. Every other year this event took place at the spacious "Illinois Turner Camp" on the Fox River in Algonquin.

For many years thereafter, the new Swiss Clubhouse served as the meeting place of the Swiss Mutual Benefit Society, Swiss Singing Society, Swiss Ticino Society and every Friday the Young Swiss Club. The United Swiss Societies' "Novemberfest", the Swiss Ticino's Sunday dinners and the Young Swiss Club's Fondue Parties took place the Swiss Clubhouse.

The Young Swiss Club's 25th Anniversary was celebrated with a "Gala Dinner Dance" at the beautiful Nordic Hills Country Club in Itasca, Illinois

In the Mid 80's, the bills for the Swiss Clubhouse (liquor license, real estate taxes, roof repairs,...) were mounting. The shareholders decided to sell the building in 1987...

After the sale of the Swiss Clubhouse, the Young Swiss Club continued its activities by renting facilities, the first one being a Knight of Columbus Hall in Evanston.

Source: Peter Herdeg - November 27, 2021

The Swiss Club in the 21st Century

After the sale of the clubhouse, it became harder to maintain a community as that anchor was missing. However, many events were held at various locations, from the Swissotel, to American Legions, church basements and ballrooms. The board members put in countless hours of volunteer work organizing many fun events. We started to include our kids with a fun Samichlaus event and activities on August 1st, like a pinata, a bouncy castle and a lampion parade. This changed the club demographic and we became young again with many events in a social and relaxed atmosphere. Soon, ski weekends to New Glarus and canoe trips in the summer followed to keep the fun going.

Early on the Jass events were always a hit, and organizing them and making dinner was a lot of work but rewarding. However, not many younger Swiss that came to Chicago learned to play cards or wanted to commit to play cards, so after many years we had to sunset the regular Jass tournament. During these times, not only did the Swiss Club evolve, but also how we engaged with members; the first website was launched, email and facebook were omnipresent. Financially we stayed afloat and tried to balance every year. In all this was a great way to have fun events, and social gatherings to keep the Swissness in Chicago.

A major event during this time was the announcement in 2012 to close the Consulate General in Chicago. It was like someone told us that William Tell was a Spitzbueb. How could they close the consulate when Chicago was so important, from an economic, cultural and political standpoint. But we rallied the Swiss community and collected signatures from everyone we knew, not only to show that we are not a small group of people in Chicago but also that we have a will to keep that Consulate open. After we collected over 770 signatures, we sent the petition to Bern, to the commissions of foreign affairs of the Senate and the House or Representatives. We were amazed, they actually had it on their agenda and had a discussion about it. Democracy was alive! The National Rate voted in favor, both in the commission and on the floor. However the excitement was short lived as the Senate declined our request and our efforts were halted. Did someone in Bern make a "Chue Handle", a cow trade? So the "Bund" left Chicago but long and behold, about 6 years later they came back...not with all services, but with an economic representation. Go Swiss!

Martin Lagler, February 2022

Swiss Club Chicago 2022

These days the members of the Swiss Club gather for several festivities and activities. An active group of ~ 250 Swiss and Friends of Switzerland keep the traditions going.

The year starts with the annual Meeting and Fondue event. The executive board is elected and instated followed by a fun evening of Fondue and Raffle. An event that gathers 120 - 140 cheese lovers every year. February and March hold the Ski weekend at Tyrol Basin and gathering in New Glarus and Raclette event in Chicago. Both smaller events with 20 – 50 participants.

The Brunch at the lake is always a fun summer event normally held on Fathers day. A group of approximately 30 Swiss and friends of Switzerland gather at the shore of Montrose beach on Lake Michigan for a traditional Swiss brunch with breads, zopf, bircher muesli, cheese and cold cuts accompanied by the standard brunch drinks.

At the end of July – beginning of August the Swiss National Day celebration becomes the highlight of the Club year. 160 plus gather outdoors with polka music, eat grilled Cervelat and Bratwurst served with homemade salads and great deserts. The celebration includes the singing of the national anthem followed by a lampion parade led by cowbells. A truly great celebration that brings young and old together and makes many hearts pound proudly.

A canoe weekend in early September brings a small group of Swiss and Friends of Switzerland to Wisconsin for a fun weekend of camping and canoeing. The highlight of the event has become the Saturday night Fondue under the Stars. Some say it has become a little competition of who has the tastier mix of cheese. At the end, all agree that they all taste amazing and the comradery is what makes it so special every year.

In October, the Ticino night pays tribute to the southern kitchen of Switzerland. An event held in the City of Chicago.

Every year the members of the extended board of the Swiss club decorate the Swiss Christmas tree at the Museum of Science and Industry, where the tree is on display for two months as a part of the “Christmas around the World” exhibit.

With Samichlaus and Guezli baking the club year comes to a closing on the first weekend of December.

In between the events, there are monthly Stammtisch that brings small groups of up to 30 together to exchange their stories, practice the Swiss Languages or inquire about the whereabouts for new comers to the city.

Due the Pandemic many indoor events in 2020 2021 and 2022 were compromised. The clubs extended board adjusts and find simple ways to keep the Swissness going in many ways.