

**Home**

Summary

Timeline

**Early Swiss History**

Prehistory

Helvetians

Age of Romans

Aventicum

Middle Ages

**Old Swiss History**

Confederacy 1291

William Tell

Reformation

**A Modern Constitution**

Swiss Revolution 1798

Constitution 1848

Switzerland's Flag

Direct Democracy

Women's Rights

**Industrialisation**

Industrialisation

Johanna Spyri: Heidi

**World War II**

World War II Timeline

Switzerland's Role

Spiritual Defense

Economic Dependence

Refugees

Looted Assets

Neutrality

Radio Beromünster

**Country & People**

Switzerland

Population/Languages

Monuments

**Links**

History

Museums

# Switzerland's History

Switzerland is a small country situated in the heart of Central Europe and shares a lot of it's *history* and of it's *culture* (four national languages spoken in different regions) with it's neighbours Germany, France, Italy and Austria.

When does the history of Switzerland begin? The answer depends on the interpretation of the term *Switzerland*:

- Archeology shows that Stone Age hunters have been living in Switzerland already before the last Ice Age (approximately 350'000 B.C.).
- Switzerland's official latin name "Confoederatio Helvetica" goes back to a Celtic tribe called [the Helvetians](#).
- The majority of Switzerland's "native" [population](#) settled during the Germanic *Migration of Nations* that set an end to the Roman Empire in Western Europe at about 400 A.D.
- [The Old Swiss Confederacy](#) was founded in the first days of August, 1291 (hence Switzerland's national holiday is celebrated on August, 1<sup>st</sup>).
- Switzerland was officially accepted as an independent nation by its neighbours in the 1648 European peace treaty.
- [The Swiss Revolution and the Helvetic Republic](#) have set an end to the rule of a small number of privileged cities, valleys and families over the majority of the country.
- Today's borders and [Switzerland's Neutrality](#) were defined at the *Vienna Congress* of 1815 ending the wars of Napoleon.
- [Switzerland's modern Federal Constitution](#) dates back to 1848 (with total revisions in 1874 and 1999).

There might be good reasons for any of these choices because Switzerland has been changing a lot during the centuries of its history and there is not really too much common ground between the *Helvetians* or the medieval *Old Swiss Confederacy* and the modern Swiss *Civil Society*.

Nevertheless this website starts with the first inhabitants we have any accounts of, but it does focus on Switzerland's change into a modern democratic society and on [Switzerland's Role in World War II](#).

## Chronology / Overview

Switzerland

600000 - 30000 B.C.	<b>Ice Age</b>	Human Evolution in Africa. Central Europe more or less covered by glaciers, some warmer intermediate periods allow human activities, however.
30000 - 1800 B.C.	<b>Stone Age</b>	Hunters using weapons and tools made from stones in Europe.
1800 - 800 B.C.	<b>Bronze Age</b>	Weapons and tools made from bronze.
800 - 58 B.C.	<b>Iron Age Helvetians</b>	Weapons and tools made from iron. Celtic tribes all over Western Europe. <a href="#">The Helvetians, a celtic tribe</a> , give their name to the Swiss territory: hence <b>HELVETIA</b> on Swiss coins and stamps, <b>ch</b> = <i>Confoederatio Helvetica</i> on cars and internet domains.
58 B.C. - 400 A.D.	<b>Roman Period</b>	Helvetians stopped by roman commander <b>C. Julius Cesar</b> when trying to move towards Southern France. Switzerland occupied by roman troops, beginning of written history in this region.
400 - 1500	<b>Middle Ages</b>	Germanic tribes set an end to the Roman Empire and build new states and empires in Europe. Feudal system. Monasteries keep up roman and greek heritage (reading and writing) and develop new agricultural methods.
1291 - 1515	<b>Old Swiss Confederacy</b>	Three valleys in Central Switzerland unite against the counts of Habsburg and fight for autonomy. Cities join the confederacy. They conquer territories in northern and southern Switzerland.
1523 - 1536	<b>Reformation</b>	Swiss Reformers Zwingli and Calvin even more radical than Luther in Germany. Calvin's doctrine has influenced denominations in many other countries.
1536 - 1798	<b>Ancien Regime</b>	Switzerland is a loose confederacy of 13 cities and small valley communities dominating the rest of the country. A few families control state affairs. Several rebellions put down by military force: repressed aspects of history in a country so proud of it's tradition of democracy.
1798 - 1802	<b>Helvetic Republic</b>	Revolution in Switzerland. Farmers in occupied territories become free citizens. Centralistic parliamentary republic according to French model. Occupation by French troops and some battles of Napoleon vs. Austria and Russia in Switzerland.
1803 - 1815	<b>Mediation</b>	Civil war brings Helvetic Republic to an end. French emperor Napoleon enforces a constitution negotiated under his "mediation"
1815 - 1830	<b>Restauration</b>	Confederacy reestablished, however with 22 cantons [member states]. Liberals in minority position.
1830 - 1848	<b>Regeneration</b>	Second French Revolution (1830) also boosts liberals in Switzerland. Some federal states with liberal governments and new constitutions. The conservative catholic governments of some cantons [federal states] set up a

		secret <i>Special Alliance</i> ["Sonderbund"] against the liberal governments of other cantons. This leads to a short <b>civil war</b> ["Sonderbundskrieg"] (1847).
1848	<b>Federal State</b>	New Federal Constitution combining elements of the U.S. constitution (Federal State with central and cantonal [state] governments and parliaments) and of French revolutionary tradition. The Principles of this constitution are still valid today.
1800 - 1900	<b>Industrialisation</b>	Switzerland is one of the first industrialized countries in Europe.
1914 - 1918	<b>World War I.</b>	Armed neutrality works when surrounded by warring nations.
1918 - 1933	<b>Economic Crisis</b>	Twenties are not so "roaring" in Europe. Inner conflicts, general strike in 1918, 1929 world economic crisis hit this industrialized country severely.
1933 - 1939	<b>Spiritual Defense</b>	Hitler in Germany is soon seen as a danger to Switzerland's independence. Thousands of German refugees (Jews, intellectuals) accepted. Socialists and trade unions seek cooperation with liberal employers against fascist threat.
1939 - 1945	<b>World War II.</b>	Neutral Switzerland surrounded by fascist troops (Germany, Austria, Italy) or collaborating regimes (Vichy-France). Some trade with Hitler was inevitable for sheer survival (and the survival of more than 150,000 refugees). Other, not inevitable aspects were: (Too) rigid refugee politics (25,000 sent back), uncritical collaboration in case of looted assets and accepting stolen gold.
Since 1945	<b>Prosperity</b>	Recent history is characterized by political stability, economic progress, increased social security and a new openness and tolerance.

## History of Switzerland: Sitemap

[Swiss History in Brief: Summary](#)

[Swiss History: Detailed Timeline](#)

### Early Swiss History

- [Prehistory, Lake-dwellings](#)
- [History of the Helvetians](#)
- [Switzerland during the Age of Romans](#)
- [Aventicum, Switzerland's Old Capital](#)

### The Formation of Modern Switzerland

- [Swiss Revolution and Helvetic Republic \(1798-1815\)](#)
- [The Federal Constitution \(1848\)](#)
- [Industrialisation](#)
- [Switzerland's Political System: Direct Democracy](#)

- [Switzerland during the Middle Ages](#)

- [Women's Right to Vote](#)

#### Old Swiss History

#### Recent Swiss History

- [Old Swiss Confederacy](#) (1291 - 1515)
- [The Legend of William Tell](#)  
Swiss National Hero
- [Reformation](#): Zwingli, Calvin, Farel

- [Second World War](#) (1939 - 1945)  
seen from a Swiss perspective

- [Spiritual Defense](#) (1933 - 1945)
- [Economic Dependence and Rationing](#)
- [Neutrality during World War II](#)

#### Local History and Monuments

- [Jewish Refugees](#) (1933 - 1945)
- [Looted Jewish Assets](#) (1933 - 1945)
- [Beromünster](#): a legendary AM radio station

- [Basel landmarks & history](#)
- [Bern landmarks & history](#)
- [Geneva landmarks & history](#)
- [Lausanne landmarks & history](#)
- [Lucerne landmarks & history](#)
- [Winterthur landmarks & history](#)
- [Zurich landmarks & history](#)
- [History of Lake Geneva](#)
- [Important Swiss Monuments](#)

#### Switzerland's Coat of Arms

- [History of Switzerland's Flag](#)
- [Regional Coat of Arms](#)