

Wilhelm Tell Pageant

Est. 1938



Presented Annually by the People of New Glarus, Wisconsin

Labor Day Weekend

Check us out on the Web: www.Wilhelmtell.org

I. The Wilhem Tell Play in New Glarus

Inspired by the vision of Edwin Barlow, a world traveler with New Glarus roots, the Wilhelm Tell Play has been presented annually on Labor Day Weekend since 1938. For the first three years, the play was performed in German only. The English production was staged for the first time in 1941.

For the first years of the production, the performances were held at another site, Elmer's Grove, immediately to the east of the village of New Glarus. Since 1953, performances have been staged in this wooded valley. In 1974, after years of renting this site from a neighboring farmer, the Wilhelm Tell Community Guild purchased the land.

Some of the actors in today's performance were in the original 1938 performances. Much has changed between that day and this year's performance. However, the actors are, and have always been volunteer performers, bringing to their roles a special enthusiasm.

To learn more about the history of our unique festival and presentation, please ask at either the lunchstand or the ticket booth for a copy of the book *Wilhelm Tell in America's "Little Switzerland"*, by Deborah Neff & Phillip Zarrilli, available for \$5.00.

If you are ever traveling in Switzerland, you won't want to miss the performance of Wilhelm Tell in Interlaken. You can find more information at www.tellspiele.ch.

Thank you for joining us today. We hope your time in America's Little Switzerland is an enjoyable one.

II. About the Author:

Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller was born November 10, 1759, in Marbach, Germany. Schiller's father was a military officer. Although Schiller disliked the strict regimen of military life, his father forced him to attend military school. Depressed by the life forced upon him, Schiller deserted the army and worked in Mannheim in theatre under an assumed name. During this period, he penned such plays as *Fiesko* (1783), *Intrigue and Love* (1784) and *Don Carlos* (1787). Between 1787 and 1797, Schiller devoted himself to historical studies and wrote *The Revolt of the Netherlands and A History of the Thirty Years War*, which won him fame as a historian. During this period he also became friends with noted German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Under Goethe's influence, Schiller soon returned his attentions to the craft of playwriting and subsequently composed his most mature dramas including *Wallenstein's Camp* (1798), *The Piccolomini* (1799), *Wallenstein's Death* (1799), *Mary Stuart* (1800), and *The Maid of Orleans* (1801). In 1799, he took up residence in Weimar, where he and Goethe collaborated to make the Weimar Theatre one of the most prestigious theatrical houses in Germany.



Schiller finished his last play, *Wilhelm Tell*, in 1804. Interestingly, Schiller had never been to Switzerland, but with Goethe's influence, he was able to create one of his best literary works.

Schiller contracted tuberculosis in late 1804/early 1805. His health gradually deteriorated such that on May 9, 1805, at the age of 45, Friedrich Schiller passed away. His plays, however, along with those of Goethe, had established a theatrical renaissance in Germany that would become known as "Weimar Classicism." For more than a century after his death, Schiller remained a favorite playwright of the German people. He remains to this day one of the greatest lights in German literature.

III. The Wilhelm Tell Overture:

Written in 1829 by Gioachino Rossini, the 'Overture to the Opera 'Guillaume Tell', ('Wilhelm Tell Overture'), is most well known as the galloping 'Lone Ranger' theme. In addition to its use for the cowboy series, it has appeared in many films including 'A Clockwork Orange' and 'Brassed Off'. Comedy pianist Victor Borge based a routine on it, and the tune is quoted in the first movement of Shostakovich's 'Symphony No 15'. Rossini composed three dozen or so operas in addition to 'Wilhelm Tell'; perhaps his most widely know composition being 'The Barber of Seville'.

'Wilhelm Tell' was the last opera he wrote, for in 1829 - only in his thirties - Rossini gave up serious composing, and retired to Paris to live off his profits. Rossini lived a long retirement, passing away in 1868 at the age of 76.

IV. Switzerland and the Legend of Wilhelm Tell:

Switzerland is located in south central Europe. The country is roughly one-third the size of Wisconsin. The climate is quite varied. Most think of the Alps when Switzerland comes to mind, which is a true enough representation. However, in the northern regions toward Germany, the land is more rolling. To emphasize the extremes, in some southern parts of the country toward the Mediterranean Sea, palm trees grow.

The three cantons Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden are the original three cantons of Switzerland.



Wilhelm Tell, as legend has it, lived in central Switzerland, in the canton Uri, in the village of Burglen. Many of the villages referenced in the play are shown in the map below. The famous event where Tell shoots an apple from his son's head, as the story goes, occurred in Alddorf. The Rutli, on the shore of Lake Lucerne was the site of the midnight meeting, where the three cantons pledged to unite against Austrian oppression.

Tellsplatte is a low flat rock on the shore of Lake Lucerne (Vierwaldstattersee). As legend has it, Wilhelm Tell jumped onto this rock from Herman Gessler's boat and escaped the tyrant's grasp.

Villages and Other Landmarks Referenced in Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell"



V. Preface:

Wilhelm Tell is set near the end of the 13th century. The gradual decline of the Holy Roman Empire, of which the Swiss territory was a part, had enabled the Habsburg family to ascend to power in Austria and Switzerland.

The Waldstätte (the forest cantons of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden) had pledged a symbolic allegiance to the Emperor years before, though they retained much of their autonomy. The Austrian House of Habsburg, desiring more control and higher taxes, had recently sent a corps of officials to the region to generate higher revenues for their estates.

Discontentment grew due to the increased oversight, and reduction of freedom. The presence of these foreign bailiffs was despised. As our performance begins, plans for their overthrow are well underway.

VI. Synopsis:

Please note that the version of *Wilhelm Tell* we present has been edited substantially from the original version written by Friedrich Schiller. While we do not presume to improve on a great work by our editing, we have made these changes to condense (somewhat) the play. We believe we have retained the essential themes and presentations that have made the original work such a beloved classic.

Opening Scene A Swiss Village

The calming sound of the alphorn welcomes the men of the village home from the Alps after a long summer of tending their cattle and making cheese for the winter ahead. The joy surrounding their return is obvious as husbands are reunited with their wives and young children that were too young to spend the summer in the mountain pastures with their fathers. There will be much revelry in the village tonight!

Act 1 Scene 1 A village on the shore of Lake Lucerne

Something ominous looms on the horizon. A change comes over the landscape. A rumbling, cracking noise is heard from the mountains. Shadows of clouds sweep across the scene. The herdsman remains on the scene and strikes up a conversation with two of his comrades, the hunter and fisher, whom he has not seen the entire summer. Suddenly a fourth man, Baumgarten, rushes up to the men and urges the fisher to take him across the lake. Baumgarten hastily explains to the men how the 'wolfshot' entered his house and attempted to take possession of his belongings, including his wife. Baumgarten confesses that in defense of his honor, he struck down the man with his axe! The fisher, citing the oncoming storm and already rough sea, refuses to help the man across the lake. Just then, Wilhelm Tell happens by. The men explain Baumgarten's plight to Tell and brave Wilhelm Tell volunteers to take the man across the lake. As Tell and Baumgarten push off into the lake, the Seneschal's troopers gallop up only to see they are just moments too late to catch the fugitive Baumgarten. The troopers ride off to wreak vengeance on the innocent country people.

Act 1 Scene 2 The Home of Werner Stauffacher in Steinen

Stauffacher, a respected elder of the canton Schwyz, rests under a linden tree in front of his house, lamenting the fragile state of his beloved homeland. Gertrude, his wife, enters, and asks that he share his troubles with her. Werner Stauffacher relates his concerns regarding the young new ruler of the land, Herman Gessler, and Gessler's dislike for Werner Stauffacher himself. Stauffacher is in a hopeless state of mind when Gertrude suggests he form an alliance with some other men in Switzerland to free themselves from this oppression. Stauffacher welcomes the idea, but laments the prospects of war. Stauffacher consents and agrees to consult with his friend Walter Furst. As Stauffacher and Gertrude retire to their house Wilhelm Tell and Baumgarten arrive at Stauffacher's house after their trip across the lake looking for a safe house.

Act 1 Scene 3 The Home of Walter Furst in Uri

Walter Furst and Arnold von Melchthal, prominent men from the cantons of Uri and Unterwalden, meet at Walter Furst's house and discuss the plight of their nation. Melchthal relates how he refused to allow a servant of the governor to take his best pair of oxen and how he struck the servant down. The men

hear a knock at the door, and Melchthal, knowing that he is a fugitive, conceals himself. Stauffacher arrives with a heavy heart. Not aware that Melchthal is concealed at Walter Furst's house, Stauffacher relates the story of how, in response to Melchthal's attack on the governor's servant, the governor ordered Melchthal's father's eyes be put out and all of his belongings be confiscated. Hearing this Melchthal rushes out and is consoled by the men. After Melchthal has regained composure, the three men agree that a union must be formed between their three cantons to throw off the yoke of Austria. They agree that they will carry the message back to their cantons and garner support. They plan to have a secret late night meeting at a hidden meadow called the Rutli, near the shore of Lake Lucerne in the canton Uri. They will each bring with them 10 men to deliberate over their plans.

Act 1 Scene 4 Altdorf, Canton Uri – “The Stone Mason Scene”

The peasants of Altdorf are being forced to build a castle for the new governor. Wilhelm Tell and Werner Stauffacher watch some of the work and cannot believe they are in Uri, the land of freedom. While they are talking, they see the governor's servants presenting the people of Uri with a hat upon a pole. The people are instructed to treat the hat the same way they would treat the governor if he were to pass by. “All shall reverence it with bended knee, and head uncovered.” Tell and Stauffacher further discuss the plight of the Swiss, when they are interrupted by a scream. The slater has fallen from the roof. Bertha, who the peasants see as being affiliated with the Austrians, rushes out and offers gold to help. The peasants rebuke her. “Till we saw you, we were happy men; with you, came misery and dark despair.”

Act 2 Scene 1 Castle of Attinghaus

Rudenz has been attracted to the flash and allure of royalty, and especially to Bertha. Rudenz questions his aged uncle, the Baron von Attinghaus, why he still keeps his allegiance with this shepherd race of people. Rudenz believes it will only be a matter of time until the Swiss are completely under the governor's rule. The Baron von Attinghausen astutely realizes that Rudenz's judgement is impaired by his love for Bertha von Bruneck. He urges Rudenz to stay true to his sires' ancient customs, but Rudenz refuses and leaves for Altdorf. The aged Baron laments what he sees as the coming decline of his nation.

Act 2 Scene 2 Rutli Meadow, near the shore of Lake Lucerne

As agreed, Stauffacher, Walter Furst, and Melchthal meet on the shores of Lake Lucerne with their comrades to devise a plan for freedom. Stauffacher shares the stories of aged herdsman of how this homeland of Switzerland was settled. The men of the three cantons deliberate over how best to obtain their freedom. The men don't easily agree that war is the best route, and some question whether this alliance should even be formed. The alliance nearly breaks apart on the question of whether to delay their actions. After much discussion the three cantons agree to bind together and renounce the yoke of Austria. A plan is drawn up. The members of the diet vote and agree to proceed. A sacred oath is sworn, and the men leave to take the message of the confederacy back to their home cantons.

---Intermission---

Act 3 Scene 1 Wilhelm Tell's Home – Burglen

Tell is at home with his wife and two boys. Tell's wife, Hedwig, tries in vain to convince Tell to avoid the village of Altdorf, where the governor Gessler is rumored to be. Tell is persistent, indicating that the Viceroy fears Tell more than Tell fears the Viceroy. Hedwig relents, and Tell and his son Walter leave for Altdorf and their date with destiny.

Act 3 Scene 2 The Love Scene, Bertha and Rudenz – Alone at Last

Bertha and Rudenz purposely lag behind a royal hunting party. Rudenz confides in Bertha, ensuring that the prospect of her love is the reason for his allegiance to Austria. To his surprise, Bertha comments "I'd rather give my hand to Gessler's self... than to the Switzer who forgets his birth and stoops to be the minion of a tyrant." Bertha, though Austrian by birth, explains that when Switzerland is free, she will be free. She convinces Rudenz to stay true to his native land, and take up arms against the evil governor.

Act 3 Scene 3 The Apple Shoot - The village green in Altdorf

Soldiers guard Gessler's hat that has been placed on a pole in the center of the village, ensuring that all who pass pay reverence to it as if the hat were Gessler himself. Meanwhile, Wilhelm Tell and his son Walter are passing through the village on their way to see Walter's grandfather, Walter Furst. As Tell and son pass the hat, the soldiers attempt to force Tell to pay homage. Tell refuses. People of the village come to Tell's aid, but not soon enough as Gessler rides into the melee. Gessler is apprised of the situation, and concocts the infamous, evil scheme of forcing Tell to shoot an apple from his son's head. Tell vehemently protests, but realizes that he must shoot the apple to save himself and his son's life. Seeing this cruel and unfair demand, Rudenz confronts Gessler and demands that Gessler release Tell and end this charade. At the same time, Tell is focusing on his task and preparing to shoot the apple from Walter's head. The crossbow snaps and the apple falls to the ground, pierced by Tell's arrow! The villagers roar! After some consolation, Tell prepares to leave as a free man. However, Gessler asks about the second arrow he saw Tell furtively hold at the ready. Tell confesses, "If that my hand had struck my darling child, this second arrow I had aimed at you, and, be assured I should not then have miss'd!" Taken aback, Gessler gathers his composure and then demands his soldiers seize Tell for his impudence, and take him to Kussnacht to Gessler's prison.

Act 4 Scene 1 Tell Escapes! – The eastern shore of Lake Lucerne

The lake is agitated. The violent wind rushes past. Thunder shakes the ground and lightening can be seen above the rugged and singularly shaped rocks to the west. The fisher and his son come across a distraught and exhausted man on the beach. They realize it is Wilhelm Tell! Tell explains how he escaped from Gessler's ship during a horrendous storm. The fisher volunteers his son to guide Tell to Kussnacht along a secluded country road. The fisher asks what his purpose is in Kussnacht. Tell replies, "When once 'tis done, 'twill be in every mouth."

Act 4 Scene 2 Attinghausen Death Scene - Castle of the Baron von Attinghausen

A somber mood is in the air. The aged baron, Attinghausen, is gravely ill. Attinghausen, not privy to the information that a confederacy has recently been formed, sees the plight of the Swiss as hopeless. Stauffacher, Walter Furst, and Melchthal share their cantons' plans for securing freedom for their people from the Austrians. Attinghausen's voice grows weaker and weaker. He offers sage advice and encouragement to the men, saying, "Be one, be one, be one", as his heart beats its last.

Rudenz arrives moments too late to see his aged uncle alive. Rudenz attempts to make amends for his brief allegiance to the Viceroy. After some resentment, the men agree to work together to free their homeland.

Act 4 Scene 3 The Death of a Tyrant – the Hohle Gasse (a narrow passageway near Kussnacht)

Wilhelm Tell waits in ambush near Kussnacht and laments over his decided task. He knows Gessler is fast approaching, but a wedding party blocks the narrow passageway. On horseback, Gessler forces his way through the passage but must wait for the path to clear before he can pass. A poor peasant woman confronts Gessler and pleads with him for the release of her husband who has been imprisoned. Just then Tell's arrow pierces Gessler's chest and delivers a mortal blow. Gessler immediately realizes the archer was Wilhelm Tell. The peasants assemble to watch the tyrant's death, and rejoice at his passing-- The country is free!

Act 5 Scene 1 Tell comes home – His home in Burglen

Returning a hero, Tell embraces his family. Tell comments that his cross bow has been retired.

Finale Switzerland is Free!

Bertha asks acceptance of the peasants into their league. Bertha and Rudenz announce their nuptials. Rudenz grants freedom to all of his serfs!

VII. Glossary

Axen:	Rocks on the shore of Lake Lucerne.
Landamman:	Revered, respected elder of the Community.
Landenberger:	A young noble of Thurgau, who deserted to the Austrians. He became governor of Unterwalden and was infamous for his cruelties to the Swiss.
Landstrum:	The National Militia
Mytenstein:	A steep rock standing near the Rutli, directly across the lake from Brunnen.
Seneschal:	An agent or steward in charge of a lord's estate in feudal times.
Vale King:	The name given to the dense gray mist that sweeps into the valleys... a sure sign that a storm is brewing.
Viceroy:	The governor of a country or province who rules as the representative of a king or sovereign.
Wolfshot:	The young noble of Unterwalden who deserted to the Austrians; appointed Bailiff at the Castle of Rossberg.

**Please join us in the village of New Glarus after the performance
for more festivities!**



Act 4 Scene 3 The Death of a Tyrant – the Hohle Gasse (a narrow passageway near Kussnacht)