

Centuries ago Swiss cheese began rise to present fame

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **6 (1940-1941)**

Heft 5

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943020>

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As regards internal affairs we have learned that the question of an increase of the membership of the Swiss Federal Council from 7 to 9 councillors is again under parliamentary discussion.

On January 23 a function was held in memory of Guiseppe Motta, the former Swiss Foreign Minister who died a year ago. There is no doubt that the Swiss Government and the Swiss people are still looking up for guidance to Guiseppe Motta, our greatest statesman and citizen in recent times.

Under the heading "Sports News of the Day" we heard that snow conditions in Switzerland have been great for skiing and all other winter sports. Further, the Swiss football team has been successful against the Italians at an encounter which was staged at Basel, scoring 7:2.

A great entertainment of the broadcast was a musical recital entitled "A Winter Evening in Switzerland". Unfortunately, the spoken word was not always comprehensible, but when it was, it was very much enjoyed. The songs and the instrumental music, which came to us from a cosy and warm drawing-room of a typical Swiss farm house, were a great treat. The quality of the voices and of the instruments was excellent, and fortunately the reception became better and better all the time as the program went on.

Unfortunately I could not very well understand the spoken correspondence, because it was too fast for me, which everybody will understand, when I say that I am hailing from Berne. However, I gathered that on the 2nd of March, Mr. Blau, the former Acting Consul of Switzerland in New Zealand, will send personal greetings through the ether to his friends in New Zealand.

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CENTURIES AGO SWISS CHEESE BEGAN RISE TO PRESENT FAME.

The Swiss thrive on it. Roman legions took it back to Rome with them after invading northern Europe 2,000 years ago. It constitutes one of Switzerland's principal industries.

As far back as 1291, when the three tiny mountain states of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden united to promulgate the first Confederation, the Swiss cheese, with its heavy outer coating and its maze of holes inside, was treasured as an "essential food."

It had its place in Alpine legends and figured quite early as a medium of payment. As such it is mentioned in a twelfth century document of the Monastery of Engelberg. As a gift to "honor its recipient" cheese was being used since the end of the thirteenth century.

Export of Swiss cheese had its beginning in the fifteenth century. At that time the Monastery of Murbach, in the Alsace, one of Switzerland's foreign clients, had issued a decree that on certain days each of the brethren should receive as final course of his dinner a quarter of a cheese "Caseus armentarius" (dairymen's alpine cheese) - generally known as Swiss cheese. Italy also was an important customer for Swiss cheese in that period, its purchases including the so-called "Sbrinz" variety, particularly suitable for grating. "Sbrinz" cheese originated at Brienz in the Bernese Oberland, but was later also exported from Unterwalden as "Unterwaldner hard cheese."

Today cheese production in Switzerland is no longer the primitive industry it used to be. There are about 2,900 cheese factories all over the country and most of them are equipped with up-to-date machinery and appliances. As a result of careful scientific study present-day Swiss cheese has attained a quality which is known all over the world.

Cheesemaking starts at the point when the milk is delivered at the cheesery. First the fluid is cleaned, then weighed or measured. It then is warmed in a large copper boiler and brought to coagulate by means of rennet. After several other manipulations, the coagulated cheese mass is caught in a cheese cloth, then placed into a wooden form and finally under a press. There it remains about 24 hours, being frequently turned, and each time placed into a fresh cheese cloth.

From the press the cheese proceeds to the "salt cellar" for a salt-bath cure. After 10-14 days it goes into a warmer cellar where it remains some 8-12 weeks for a daily washing, salting and turning. Here the temperature causes fermentation which slightly curves the flat sides of the loaves and produces the characteristic holes. After this process the cheese is put into a cool cellar for two months, then inspected and weighed.

So expert have the Swiss cheese makers become that they can judge the appearance of the inside of a cheese by tapping the outside with a "cheese trier." The weight and inspection results are carved into the curve of each loaf, and every loaf of genuine Swiss cheese gets the word "Switzerland" printed all over on its rind in large red letters.

Transporting the cheese from factory into dealers' cellars is accomplished in swift and modern manner. Again weights are checked, then cheeses are treated with salt and placed on wooden shelves. Here they are turned two or three times weekly, also spread over with salt. The latter produces drops of water on the surface of the loaves, and is rubbed into the rind of the cheese with a brush, to hasten its ripening.

Great is the variety of cheeses manufactured in Switzerland. There are hard cheeses, soft cheeses, rich fatty cheeses, "quarter fat" cheeses, cheeses with hardly any fat - known as "Magerkäse." Then there are those delicious little rindless cheese packed in boxes holding six larger or 12 small portions.

Not to be overlooked is the tasty Schabzieger - Sap Sago - an herb cheese made in the canton of Glarus. Finely grated and thickly spread on bread and butter it is a delicacy which has to be tasted in order to be appreciated.

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ELECTRICITY REPLACES STEAM ON SWISS RAILROAD.

Despite war problems, the Swiss Government continues the electrification of its railroad system. This year work is going forward on the construction of the connecting railway between the Cornavin and Eaux Vives railroad stations at Geneva. Also reconstruction work in the Geneva and Neuchatel Station is being carried on.

Appropriations for 1940 include for rolling stock 10,000,000 Swiss francs; 250,000 more francs than were allotted for 1939. Orders will, as usual, be given to Swiss firms, such as the world-renowned Machinery Works Oerlikon; Brown, Boveri & Co. A.G.; Ateliers de Sécheron, Geneva; and Locomotive Works Winterthur.

Switzerland is one of a few countries in the world whose Government-owned railroads are being systematically electrified. With a total lineage of approximately 1,-800 miles some 1,323 were operated by electricity at the end of 1938, leaving only 27 per cent of the total length to be run by steam. Only on lines with very little traffic has the old system still been retained, but even some of these sections will be electrified as soon as conditions permit.

In a land devoid of coal and oil resources, but with abundant water power, railroad electrification presented itself as a logical problem. A beginning was made with the 12½ miles long Simplon tunnel, which from its inaugural in 1906 was electrically operated. From 1906-13 followed the building of the Lötschberg Railway, connecting the Bernese Oberland with the Valais and, incidentally, the Simplon route