

# Swiss wedding customs

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Limited quantities of the highly treasured anthracite are found in various parts of the canton of Valais. Approximately 12 mines were operated in that section of Switzerland from 1917-1920. However, the mining proved expensive. There were also experimental but unsuccessful drillings for coal in Northern Switzerland. Equally disappointing was a quest for oil.

#### Peat Available.

Peat, however, is available in considerable quantities. Peat moors in Switzerland cover an area of more than 12,000 acres. They are mainly found in the midlands, in the Jura and in certain Alpine regions. During the present emergency, Riet, in the St. Gall Rhine Valley, has become a busy spot for the digging out of peat.

Since Switzerland has about 2,500,000 acres of fertile soil covered by forests, she is less dependent on the foreign market for timber. Nevertheless, in 1938, her imports of firewood amounted to 1,680,730 Swiss francs, and in 1939 to 2,152,450 Swiss francs. In rotation the chief sources of supply were France, Italy and Germany.

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#### SWISS WEDDING CUSTOMS

In days gone by wedding customs were a very important feature in Swiss peasant life. However, times have changed, and progress everywhere has done away with some of these ancient traditions. Nevertheless, in sequestered regions and especially in alpine districts, off the beaten path, some of these customs are still in vogue to a certain extent.

Thus, in some places of the Valais and the Alpine realm north of the Rhone Valley, the cheese which is made on the day a child is born to a couple is carefully marked with the infant's name and the date of its birth. Bacon, too, is salted on that day and later consumed on festive occasions. To serve a guest later with this cheese and bacon is to show him special honors.

Such historic cheeses and old bacon are also served, as a special treat, to guests at christenings, engagements and weddings. Some of this cheese and bacon is carefully reserved until the person in whose honor it was originally prepared, and at his or her funeral, even if this should be 80 years later, the funeral guests receive another portion of it.

Customs connected with weddings in the Grisons Oberland are most original and varied. Thus, for instance, there is the "Fratga," in which instance the young men of the village obstruct the bridal procession with a rope stretched across the street; or, if they are more romantically inclined, with a chain of roses or other flowers. The obstruction is removed as soon as the bridegroom gives them enough money for a drink of native wine.

Another curious wedding custom in some parts of the Grisons Oberland requires the bridegroom to wait on the bride at table while the first course of the wedding dinner is being served. The significance of this custom is to emphasize to a young husband that he cannot be lord and master of a happy home without giving due consideration to his wife.

Here and there in the Grisons Oberland another custom features school boys, wearing cow bells of varied size around their necks, parading before the house where the wedding feast is held, and later marching several times up and down the village streets. The music of their bells adds a joyous note to the festive atmosphere.

In the Grisons, too, preparations for a wedding include a profuse floral adornment of the house. Like everywhere, even in the U.S.A., the trousseau, which includes enough homespun linen to last for a lifetime, is duly inspected and admired by friends. Often the wedding guests delight in leading the bride and bridegroom under the "matrimonial yoke", a yoke adorned with a garland of flowers. The bridal pair have to entertain the guests with a "song-dance" and a "Festival dance" is performed by the guests.

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