

Celebration in New Zealand of the 650th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation : a summary account

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CELEBRATION IN NEW ZEALAND OF THE 650TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION.

A Summary Account.

In Wellington the "Great Day of the First of August" was ushered in by wind and rainstorms, for which this city is rightly famous, but nevertheless the local Swiss group was well represented at a Mass at the St. Mary of the Angels Church on Boulcott Street, which was celebrated for Switzerland at 7 o'clock in the morning. Later in the morning the Swiss Consul was received by His Grace Archbishop O'Shea, at his residence. On this occasion the Archbishop referred to the Swiss people in New Zealand in most gratifying terms, and it was surprising to hear how well he knows his Swiss flock in New Zealand.

In the afternoon of the 1st. of August a strictly limited official reception took place at the home of the Swiss Consul for representatives of the different branches of officialdom in New Zealand. Among those present at the reception were Mrs. P. Fraser, the wife of the Prime Minister; the Acting Prime Minister of New Zealand and Mrs. Nash; the Hon. F. Jones and Mrs. Jones; the Hon. W. E. Parry and Mrs. Parry; the Hon. G. Sullivan; the Hon. P. C. Webb; the Hon. A. Hamilton; the Right Hon. Sir Michael Myers, Chief Justice, and Lady Myers; His Grace Archbishop O'Shea; General Sir Guy Williams; Commodore and Mrs. Parry; Air-Commodore and Mrs. Saunders; Wing-Commander and Mrs. Humphrey Bevan; the High Commissioner for Canada and Mrs. Riddell; Messrs. W. Garnett and F. E. Cumming-Bruce of the Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, and Mrs. Garnett; the Consul-General of Belgium and Madame Nihotte; the American Consul-General and Mrs. Cox; the Consul-General of China and Mrs. Feng Wang; the Consul-General of Poland and Countess Wodzicka; the Consul of France and Mrs. Pouquet; the American Consul and Mrs. Robert English; the American Consul and Mrs. B. Dahl; the Acting Consul-General of Japan, Mr. N. Nakafuji; the Acting Consul of the Netherlands and Madame Vigeveno; the American Vice-Consul and Mrs. Horner; the Vice-Consul of China and Mrs. Lai Shih Chen; H. M. Trade Commissioner, Mr. R. Boulter; the Australian Trade Commissioner and Mrs. J. L. Menzies; the Adjutant-General Colonel and Mrs. A. E. Conway; and others.

Just before this reception began, the first celebration broadcast from Switzerland had started with patriotic speeches, music and songs. The reception was excellent, but unfortunately the reporter was able to listen in but a few minutes. The same day, from 7.45 p.m. until 8.30 p.m., the special Swiss Celebration Programme, which was featured by the New Zealand National Broadcasting Service, was on the air. It was not only an inspiring tribute of New Zealand to Switzerland, but the excellent work accomplished by the producer, Mr. A. Mulgan, deserves great praise for the deep understanding and knowledge displayed by him regarding the history of Switzerland, her economic and cultural achievements. We may, if space permits, publish in future issues of our "HELVETIA" some of the salient features of this most interesting broadcast.

One does hardly realise the great amount of work which the planning and accomplishing of such a programme causes, and it is therefore also in this direction that we are greatly indebted to the New Zealand National Broadcasting Service.

In the evening of the 1st. of August, the local Swiss groups of Auckland and Taranaki were celebrating the Swiss Anniversary Day. A report of the Swiss Party at Auckland, which was attended by 50 members of the Swiss Benevolent Society and their friends, has already been given in the July issue of "HELVETIA", and we only wish to repeat here that the occasion turned out so successfully, that our Swiss friends at Auckland are encouraged to get together more often from now on.

It goes without saying, that the Swiss Party in Taranaki, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Engelberger at Kapuni, was a great success too. Your reporter at Wellington received a telephone call from the Party at 11 p.m. advising that the evening was in full swing. There were enthusiastic and lively messages exchanged over the wire with many of our fellow-countrymen in New Zealand's "Urschwyz" at the foot of the "Great Taranaki", including such local New Zealand personalities as the Constable and Chief Detective of Kaponga (!). The unusual telephone session ended with a musical performance of the Taranaki Swiss Band, genuine Swiss stuff, and of course with a Jodel song.

In the afternoon of the 2nd of August the New Zealand National Broadcasting Service again devoted about 15 minutes to the 650th Swiss Anniversary, in its regular children's session, on which occasion Elisabeth and Benno Cotti were allowed to talk to the young folks in New Zealand. Again an official of 2YA Wellington, Mr. K. B. Atkinson, spoke about Switzerland's place in the world, with the same expert knowledge. We most sincerely wish to include Mr. Atkinson in our expression of thanks.

In the evening of that day, it was the turn of the Swiss groups in the Waikato and at Wellington to celebrate. There were 2 Swiss Parties in the Waikato, one at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Josef Werder, Springdale, and the other one at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Steiner, Waihou. From reports received the two Parties wound up together at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Steiner, when 45 persons altogether were present. The appearance of a number of Swiss costumes, Swiss decorations, songs, music and dances attributed to a most pleasant evening, which, we understand, lasted until sunrise.

At Wellington the Club Room of the New Zealand Educational Institute looked happy and gay with genuine Swiss decorations to receive approx. 50 festive fellow-countrymen and friends. In the background of the stage stood a most excellent, man-sized replica of the "Aepler with the Swiss Flag" of the official celebration picture card, the artistic work of our fellow-countryman, Max Bruelisauer. Another unusual attraction was a Swiss chalet made specially for the occasion, of cake and chocolate, by our fellow-countryman Anton Komminoth. All cantonal emblems were displayed, paper garlands and innumerable little Swiss flags spanned the room. The little Swiss group at Wellington can boast of a number of very good musical artists and in addition some New Zealanders with the same distinction, and a dramatist, attended as guests. The entertainment therefore was excellent. Quite a group were garbed in different cantonal costumes. At around midnight the Party shifted to a special dance room on the same premises, and it is said that the Party broke up in the morning only.

The emotional climax of the celebrations, no doubt, came on Sunday afternoon, August 3, with the shortwave broadcast from Switzerland. The reception could not have been better, and the programme was a reproduction of the complete celebrations in Switzerland. It started with the beginning of the celebrations at midnight of the 31st. July-1st. August on the Ruetli, when we even heard the roaring of the Ruetli Fire which had been kindled. Then the tolling of the bells of St. Martin's Church at Schwyz and the playing of the organ at the opening of the Mass on the morning of August 1st were conveyed to us out here in New Zealand. Short-

waves carried us to Schwyz in the afternoon of the same day to listen to an inaugural speech at the monument donated by the "Swiss Abroad." The parading of a battalion was heard and subsequently the addresses of the Commander-in-Chief, General Guisan, and Federal Councillor Celio. A few minutes later we listened to the momentous speech of the President of the Swiss Confederation, which he made on the 2nd of August on the Ruetli, after the multitudes, who had gathered there had repeated the "Oath of the Ruetli" in the words of Schiller's "William Tell." This taking of the Oath rose to epic grandeur, and I know that no one who heard it, is likely to forget it in a lifetime. At about 6.30 the programme ended, and for a while everybody present was considerably shaken up, trying to regain control over his emotions.

From a number of "isolated" fellow-countrymen in New Zealand telegrams and notes were received at the Swiss Consulate at Wellington, expressing patriotic thoughts, including the President of the Swiss Club of New South Wales, Sydney. An official telegram message of congratulations was also received by the Swiss Consulate from the Mayor of Auckland, Mr. J.A.C. Allum, as well as similar messages from a number of British Commissioners, Consuls, etc.

In the name of the members of the Swiss Benevolent Society in New Zealand the following cable, in French, had been despatched by the Swiss Consulate to the President of the Swiss Confederation, in time to reach him for the celebrations at Schwyz on the 1st. August:

"Will you please convey to our fellow-countrymen gathered on the 1st. and 2nd. August on sacred soil of our fatherland on the occasion of the 650th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation our most ardent good wishes for our free and independent country and express to the Swiss Federal Council and General Guisan for the Army our profound gratitude and confidence stop By instructions of the 160 members scattered all over the country of the only Swiss Society in New Zealand."

The New Zealand Press referred to the occasion of the 650th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation in an article which had been put at their disposal through the courtesy of the New Zealand Director of Publicity of the Prime Minister's Department, and the weekly radio magazine, "The Listener", carried in its weekly issue of the 25th July an illustrated full page article: "650 Years of Democracy - Switzerland's Anniversary." There appeared in addition in different N.Z. papers very interesting and complimentary editorials on the occasion.

In conclusion of this summary account I feel entitled to say that the celebrations of the 650th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation in New Zealand fully have served the ideal purpose, for which they were intended.

The occasion has strengthened in the hearts of many of us the attachment to our homeland, our confidence in the forces, which are the best guarantee for its existence and our continued thankfulness for a kind destiny, which so far has protected it.

We were shown on this occasion such genuine and sincere sympathy for Switzerland by representative groups and the people all around in New Zealand, that we feel encouraged, because we again had an opportunity to test the simple fact, that if we remain true to the spirit in which we have been brought up in Switzerland, we are sympathetically understood in this country and very well fit into its framework, or, as a high New Zealand official explained it to me: "We are pleased to have this opportunity to express to the Swiss people in New Zealand on this occasion, that coming from a country like Switzerland, whose traditions we fully appreciate, we consider them as our friends and want them to know this."