

[Impressum]

Objektyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): **72 (2006)**

Heft [8]

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

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Editorial

A brief history of our Society, Part two: But before 'Helvetia', issue 1, volume 1, went to print in late 1934 or early '35, it is necessary for us to understand and remember the main happenings over many months prior to this event. The Society was up and running, a committee had been elected, and the Consul-General in Wellington, had been as good as his word and had managed to persuade the NHG to give this fledgling Society a small annual grant towards its' costs, at least for the first few years. But in return for this, the NHG in Bern, requested that our new Society's monthly newsletter, 'Helvetia' also carry this subheading on its' front page: 'Group New Zealand of the New Helvetic Society.' 'Helvetia' carried this caption into the 1970s or even 80s, if memory serves me correctly.

I also think the Society's first president was a Dr Bosshardt (I may have mis-spelt his name) and first secretary was Ernst (Ernest) Merz, both living in Auckland at the time. Certainly, these two gentlemen were the primary 'editing committee' for 'Helvetia' for many years at the beginning of our Society's life. We must remember that at the time there

were no regional Swiss Clubs in existence on whom the committee of our new Society could call on for help, be it re: financial, membership, or just plain regional news! So those early committees had to do everything by mail and telephone, news, membership, etc. I believe regional volunteers were quickly found who acted as local Society reps and gave freely of their time and effort to obtain memberships and news bits from their local Swiss settlers and send these to Auckland. One can not help but feel an awesome admiration for all those 'founding fathers', and their many helpers, of our Society! They had no computers and fax machines to keep in touch almost instantaneously!!!

It is surely fortuitous for 'our' Society today that, during 1934, our 'founding fathers' did not foresee the landslide victory of the first Labour Government in November 1935, with its' policy of looking after all New Zealand citizens 'from the cradle to the grave'. Had they done so they would almost surely have given up in dismay during those early 'formation' months and decided there was now no need for a Benevolent Society with

the imminent new radical social policies of the new Government?

But with the outbreak of WW2 in September 1939, our fledgling Society faced another huge hurdle but somehow managed to scrape through those dark war years into the second half of the 20th century. However, the booming post-war years brought new financial problems not only for our Society but, many other clubs as well. As national economics started booming, inflation rates in many countries often reached double figures per annum, especially during the 1950s through to the 70s. The main financial pressure on our Society during those years was, of course, then as now, the printing and posting of 'Helvetia', and during this time it became increasingly difficult for the committee to make ends meet from primarily membership fees only.

By about 1950 Dr Bosshardt had retired from committee and Ernst Merz took over as team leader ably assisted by a new deputy, (from Hamilton, I think) Arnold Biland. These two committee leaders battled on valiantly for the Society and 'Helvetia' for many years until Mr Merz retired, I think in the early 1960s. The late Walter Risi senior, of Hamilton, was elected sub-editor to Arnold Biland. It was under these two leaders that the Society committee realised it could not afford the costs of 'Helvetia' much longer without a radical change to its' financial base. But in a small survey it became obvious that a majority of members throughout the country wanted to keep their 'Helvetia'!!!

There was one bright light on the Society's dark horizon at the time. There already existed four thriving, independent Swiss social clubs throughout the North Island. All had been founded after the War, Taranaki in 1952, Hamilton and Auckland both in 1956, and Wellington about 1960, from memory. Soon after Wellington, one was founded in Christchurch as well. Although all five clubs encouraged their members to subscribe to 'The Society' also many club members chose not to do so, and paid only their nearest clubs' subs. It was at this time, about 1960, that the committee of the Society came up with a plan to put before all our Clubs, to give the Society a sound financial base and safeguard the continuation of 'Helvetia'. It was a simple and yet brilliant plan: All clubs were to charge all their members a set annual Society subscription added to their Clubs' sub, the Society's portion to be sent annually to its' secretary. One could be a Society member only, without being a member of any Swiss Club, but not vice versa. After quite a bit of teething trouble and early 'bumps', the scheme began to run quite smoothly and after the retirement of Messrs Biland and Risi, it was inevitable that the clubs took over the running of the Society and I believe for over 20 years now, each of the four North Island clubs take turns providing an elected committee for the Society on a five-yearly cycle. Correction, I should have said, each term is for five years! The Society now has a sound reserve in case of a rainy day!!! And 'Helvetia' looks good to celebrate its' 100th birthday in the future!!!

Cheerio everyone, from Paul

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