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L'Escalade

Geneva's unofficial National Day

L'Escalade commemorates the Duke of Savoy's failed attempt to take the city of Geneva during the night of 11-12 December 1602. The Duke was obsessed with taking the city, which his grandfather had lost, making it his capital north of the Alps and most importantly converting it back to Catholicism. In early December 1602, spies were sent to scout the city and measure its walls. Special telescopic ladders were built that would enable elite troops to scale ("escalade" in French) the walls and bomb the city gates to let the bulk of the troops into the city. The attack was well prepared and the Genevans had no idea danger was lurking. At 2am on 12 December, the attack was launched. The Savoy troops managed to successfully scale the first set of defensive walls. Unfortunately for them, a sentinel heard strange noises, ventured out in the cold to investigate and came face to face with the enemy. The alarm was raised and all the church bells were ringing. In an extraordinary effort, the civilian population joined the militia and threw itself into the battle. Geneva was to win the battle in great part thanks to the actions of three of its citizens:



Re-enactment of fighting during Geneva's annual L'Escalade Festival

www.lake-geneva-switzerland.com/geneve/see-1%E2%80%99escalade-festival-and-celebrations-in-geneva-in-mid-december/

Mère Royaume threw a cauldron of hot vegetable soup out of her window and onto Savoy soldiers; Dame Piaget opened a passage for the militia which enabled them to massacre enemy troops and Isaac Mercier brought down the portcullis, making it impossible for the city gate to be bombed.

L'Escalade is probably the one day in history that most significantly changed the destiny of Geneva.

Nowadays, celebrations include parades in the old town, children dressing up in costumes and going door to door singing in exchange for money and the breaking of the traditional chocolate soup pot filled with marzipan vegetables. If you are in Switzerland at that time, it is well worth popping down to Geneva!

By Nathalie Leamy



Historical depiction of L'Escalade: Celebrating the defeat of the surprise attack by troops sent by Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy to Geneva in 1602 (drawn 1622-1626, anonymous)

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Escalade-battle-2.jpg>

Ho Ho Ho

What do you call people who are afraid of Santa Claus?

Claustrophobic.

