

First of August 1956

Autor(en): **J.E.**

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FIRST OF AUGUST 1956

Letters and postcards arriving from home decorated with another set of postage stamps depicting some of our more picturesque lakes and water-courses remind us that very soon we shall be celebrating another anniversary of the Ruetli Pact of 1291. The First of August is the day on which the heart of every Swiss, at home or abroad, fills with gratitude towards the three brave men from Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, and their thirty followers, who showed the way to keep our Country free from tyrants and to make it respected by all the world. Thus the celebration of our National Day is not only an occasion for rejoicing on the village square, for patriotic speeches and for bonfires on the mountain-side, but also a moment for inner reflection on the duty that is laid upon each one of us to maintain inviolate the sacred heritage that has been handed down to us these six centuries and a half.

The historic date falling during the holiday season, most Swiss abroad are enabled to visit the homeland to take part in the stirring celebrations that are held there in town and country. But those of us who are detained in foreign parts always find an opportunity to join with other compatriots in a common celebration. I well recall, on my return to London in the late 'twenties, the early National Day celebrations of the London colony at the Swiss Rifle Association range at the Welsh Harp, Hendon. Owing to lack of support, this joint function was allowed to lapse until an influential group under the leadership of Col. Anton Bon, and the energetic secretaryship of the lately departed Mr. H. Bingguelly, revived it in 1939.

This was a most successful gathering at the St. Pancras Town Hall. Perhaps because of the war clouds then looming the Hall was unequal to the task of holding the throng of compatriots that went to Kings Cross, and reluctantly the order was given to close the doors. To the consternation of Committee members word then came that our Minister, the late Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, was amongst the excluded and a strategem had to be resorted to in order to bring him inside. The new impetus thus given fortunately was not allowed to spend itself and official celebrations of our National Day have been held in London each year since then at various meeting places, but always with interesting programmes, thanks largely to the generous and continued support of a number of Swiss firms and prominent citizens, not to mention some unselfish devotion on the part of Organizing Committee members.

This year the gathering will take place, again at a Town Hall, at Battersea, which is centrally situated South of the River, on the summit of Lavender Hill, S.W.11, next to the now derelict Shakespear Theatre, and in close proximity of Clapham Junction Station (S.R.). Although the capacity is given officially as about 1500, it is advisable to obtain tickets early; these are issued *free* upon application as directed in the official advertisement, and in the enclosed hand bill.

Whereas for reasons of convenience this function had to be held as a rule on the Sunday nearest to the 1st August, this time a departure is being made in holding it on a weekday evening, at the actual date.

At St. Pancras the entertainment provided was an all-amateur programme contributed by the colony itself, including speeches of welcome in our four national idioms! At Battersea instead, the main feature will be a gymnastic display given by the "Società Ginnastica CONCORDIA" of Giubiasco (Ticino), who will be visiting London in pursuance of their established custom of performing each year in some important foreign centre (next year's target is Moscow!). They will be supported at intervals by vocal productions of the "Quintetto Vocale Radiosa" who are familiar to listeners of Radio Monte Ceneri. For the right "Stimmung", there will be singing by the Swiss Male Choir, whilst the Swiss Accordeon Club will accompany the community singing. The Ruetli Pact (abridged version) will be read with suitable solemnity.

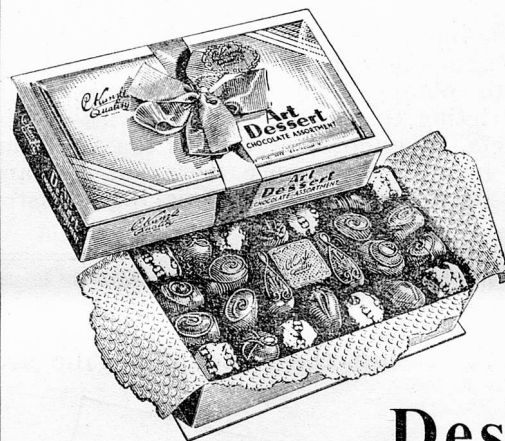
Thus one can look forward to a most entertaining evening in a typically Swiss environment. At the close of the programme, while the main Hall is being evacuated, (to be rearranged for the Dance) a refreshment service will be operating in an adjoining Hall. The Organizing Committee hope this year to offer, besides some succulent "Wuerstli", also newly imported Swiss table wines, as well as other conventional snacks.

The Dance, for which there will be an admission charge, will go on until 1 p.m. to the toe-teasing tunes of Harry Vardon's Band of "Unione Ticinese" Tea Dances fame.

So everybody is enjoined to reserve the evening of 1st August next for the NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION AT THE BATTERSEA TOWN HALL!

J.E.

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