

1966 the year of "Fifth Switzerland"

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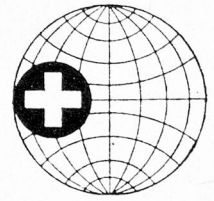
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1966 THE YEAR OF "FIFTH SWITZERLAND"

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION IN LONDON

Wimbledon Town Hall, 1st August 1966



Many are the reasons why the Swiss in and around London attend the National Day Celebration at Wimbledon Town Hall. Some go because they have been used to attending an annual commemoration day at home. Others who never bothered before, suddenly feel the need to meet their compatriots. Some again simply come to have a good time and others because they are curious to see how their fellow-countrymen abroad manage such a manifestation. Some, mainly from amongst the residents, simply attend because they feel they ought to. A good many, no doubt, genuinely want to pay homage to their country, but only a very small number come because they sincerely wish to thank God for having kept their country and to pray in the community of their compatriots for His protection in the future.

These thoughts formed the underlying theme of the Opening Prayer at the National Day Celebration at the Wimbledon Town Hall on Monday, 1st August. The Rev. M. Dietler expressed (in German) heartfelt and appropriate thanks to the Almighty and asked Him to be with us all also on this, rightly a joyful evening. Unfortunately, only a small proportion of well over 1,200 people who finally filled the spacious Town Hall were present when the first part of the celebration opened. Many were the latecomers who, sad to report, lacked in discipline to stay at the back of the hall during prayers and later when the Rev. A. Nicod read the Swiss Pact of 1291 in French.

By the time the Swiss Ambassador delivered his patriotic address, the hall was nearly full, in fact fuller than I have ever seen it. The stage was resplendent with colourful cantonal flags which had been carried in, one by one, to Mr. P. Jacomelli's reciting of the dates of entry of each Canton into the Confederation. With each Canton, its citizens in the audience rose, applauded by their Confederates. I was glad to see that the flags carried on to the stage by young Swiss boys and girls were complete, unlike those with which the hall was decorated. I won't mention which ones were missing — perhaps nobody noticed!

Monsieur de Fischer was accompanied by other members of the Swiss Embassy and their wives, and it was noted with satisfaction that, after a few years' interval, the Defence Attachés appeared in their uniforms again which added distinction and significance to the Upper Circle. Colour was brought to it by the beautiful bouquets of carnations and roses presented to the Mayoress of Merton, Madame Grandjean, wife of the First Counsellor of Embassy, and Mrs. Streit, wife of the President. As a special touch, the Mayoress's bouquet included not only red and white, but also blue carnations. Further lustre was added by the heavy gold chain of office His Worship the Mayor of Merton, Alderman Sir Cyril Black, J.P., M.P., was wearing. He was welcomed by the Ambassador both as host and guest, host because it is in his Borough that the Town Hall of Wimbledon is situated, guest because he accepted the invitation extended to him and the Mayoress by the First of August Committee.

After his introduction, the Ambassador gave a survey of Switzerland's position today. Most of his interesting

speech will be found on the first pages of this paper.

Ever since the first National Day Celebration of recent decades was held in London in 1939, the writer has advocated community singing. How popular this is was again shown at Wimbledon when the audience spontaneously broke into song and thus filled in some unforeseen intervals in a most pleasant way. Their enthusiastic vocal support readily given to the Swiss tunes played once again by Miss Phyllis Gillingham, famous radio and television accordion artist, demonstrated that community singing has lost none of its popularity. Miss Gillingham is a real virtuoso, and her Swiss tunes (amongst them such difficult ones as "Roulez Tambours") and *Ländler* grow in authenticity every year. This is a great compliment paid to our country and not at all easy to discharge. The tremendous applause must have shown Miss Gillingham that young and old alike appreciated her gesture as well as her artistry.

"Symphony of Switzerland" is the name of a film made under the auspices of the "Pro Helvetia Foundation" on the occasion of the Swiss Fortnight in London a few years ago. It is an excellent film, and it can only be hoped that another one like it in purpose and quality will be made in the not too distant future. It was shown before at the National Day Celebration in London, but I feel sure that nobody minded seeing it again, especially as by far the largest part of the audience, hundreds of youngsters, attended for the first time this year.

Much as I like rustic music, I have absolutely no affinity to yodelling. It leaves me cold and the nearest to boredom I can experience. But I found myself positively looking forward to hearing the Giess Sisters from Eiken, having heard and liked them the evening before at the celebration in Bournemouth. They have not only fine yodelling voices but also command true musicianship which they combine with charming personalities. In addition, they looked attractive in their picturesque Sunday costumes from the Fricktal. They were accompanied on the accordion by Mr. Max Schwarz whose Swiss instrument was more in keeping with a First of August than the Accordion Orchestra of the Ivor Beynon School of Music, who were responsible for a delay in the programme, due to late arrival. Much as their performance, especially that of three children, was respected, that particular item could easily have been dropped from the programme which was already on the long side, even without the folk dancing by students of the Swiss Mercantile Society's College, a number which had to be cancelled at the last moment.

After the excellent yodelling of Miss Trudi and Miss Josi Giess had brought the house down, the familiar "Corale dell'Unione Ticinese" gathered on the stage, hailed with affection by the residents and appreciative surprise by the newcomers to the Colony. Mr. Luigi Bruni has his group of twenty-odd singers well trained, and they appeared to be stronger than for some time, both in voice and numbers. It was a pleasure to behold the quaint and comely costumes from many parts of the Ticino, worn by men and women with natural bearing, all the more astonishing as the members are nearly all British by birth and of second-generation Ticinese citizenship.

With all the artists joining the *Corale* on the stage, the scene was set for the President, Mr. Fred Streit, to give his customary speech, words of welcome to the official guests, of appreciation to the hosts and thanks to all the artists, helpers and financial supporters without whom the celebration could not have been organised. Particular mention should be made to those who assisted in bringing over from Switzerland the two yodel artists, the Swiss National Tourist Office and the Anglo-Continental School of English in Bournemouth and above all Mr. A. Schmid of the Norfolk Court Hotel who offered the two sisters hospitality.

And then came the National Anthem. This is always a rather uncomfortable moment when one has to sing more than one verse of this none too easy song, not yet familiar enough to be sung without embarrassment, and, this time, accompanied on the organ with no conception of the right speed and harmony. How much "Rufst Du, mein Vaterland" is still ingrained was shown at one o'clock in the morning when a much smaller audience sang the old words to the tune of "God save the Queen" with a lot more conviction. Let us hope that "Trittst im Morgenrot daher" will remain the *temporary* Anthem, soon to be replaced by an easier permanent Swiss hymn.

Nevertheless, the celebration could be termed completely successful even before the evening was out. Dancing to Harry Vardon's energetic band began, and during the interval, the Giess Sisters once more delighted the audience with their yodelling.

Official guests, organisers, supporters and helpers were entertained in the Mayoral Suite at the Town Hall. The unanimous opinion amongst the "experts" was that Mr. Streit and his untiring assistants could be congratulated on the unqualified success of the 675th anniversary celebration, organised and, apart from a modest admission charge, financed entirely by the permanently resident Colony with no help from Switzerland.

The verdict of some Swiss visitors from home, who are much concerned with the wellbeing of their compatriots abroad, was very favourable. They considered remarkable that even such a "popular" event should be opened by a prayer and the reading of the Swiss Pact. The standard of performance they felt was quite high, but they could not help being surprised that the language mainly used was English and expressed curiosity why so many non-Swiss artists should take part. Once they realised that this was in a way a compliment to our hostess country, they were satisfied. However well integrated we may be in British community life, at heart we are still attached to our homeland, and we affirm our fidelity once again in this year dedicated to us Swiss abroad, the "Year of Fifth Switzerland".

MM

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

(For Information, Advice or Help)

11 Belsize Grove, London N.W.3.

(Nearest Underground Station: Belsize Park)

Telephone: PRImrose 4260

RECEPTION HOURS

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

2 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment.

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION IN BOURNEMOUTH

The Anglo-Continental School of English in Bournemouth is a flourishing concern founded and run by two enterprising young Swiss, F. Schillig from Central Switzerland and G. S. Scheller from Zurich. At the moment there are some 2,500 students at the school, many of them on special holiday courses. As there are several hundred Swiss amongst them (the usual quota is about 40%), and as there is no Swiss Club in Bournemouth, it seems a natural thing to do for ACSE, as the school is known, to take matters in hand and organise the Swiss National Day Celebration. This they have done for several years, and on more than one occasion their *Bundesfeier* took place on a boat moored somewhere outside Bournemouth harbour. That was before the big school hall and restaurant was built, inaugurated in 1965. This is now a most suitable and very pleasant venue for any social gathering. It has a fair-sized stage with effective lighting installations, ample room for 500 people to sit at small tables and leaving enough room for dancing. Well-equipped kitchens and pantries are adjacent. In day time its windows forming an almost continuous glass wall give onto neatly tended gardens, and at night, yards and yards of drawn curtains help to provide a pleasant and friendly atmosphere.

Normally, ACSE celebrate the Swiss National Day on 1st August. This year, they organised it for Sunday, last day of July, which enabled the Swiss Ambassador to attend. This was much appreciated not only by management, staff and students of the school, but by many of Bournemouth's prominent citizens headed by His Worship the Mayor and the Mayoress. A number of Swiss residents from Bournemouth were invited, and an invitation was also extended to the Editor of the "Swiss Observer".

Bournemouth was in a dreary mood when the visitors arrived. Hotels and guest houses, though, were full, and the "No vacancies" sign was up everywhere as I walked through parts of the residential quarters on my way to Wimborne Road. No need to ask for the school — the large number of cars with mainly Swiss number plates was a sure indicator. Nearer numbers 29 to 35, certainty grew as a large Swiss flag boldly beckoned welcome. None too soon could we shelter in the friendly hall from the blustery wind and penetrating rain. The top-hatted ushers and the girls in *Vaudois* costumes could have been in action and evidence anywhere, so could the Swiss flags, and bunting and posters might have been put up in honour of Switzerland in any given place, but what reminded us so convincingly that we were on mainly Swiss ground was the babble of Swiss voices and the genuine Swiss *Ländlermusik* (recorded) which entertained the gathering before the guests of honour arrived. I suddenly woke with a jolt from the trance caused by a swinging polka tune, when I discovered that my own cherished cantonal flag, the red staff of Baselland had been put right at the end of all the Swiss flags tied across the stage in order (nearly) of their entry into the Confederation. We *Landschäftler* joined the Swiss Confederates as early as 1501, and thus we belong in the middle, please note, right next to our "half-brother" Baselstadt.

The programme opened with a rousing old favourite amongst marches, "Old Comrades" played well on the accordion by Mr. Max Schwarz, a modest young Swiss wearing an Alpine herdsman's jacket.