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DOUBLE CHRISTMAS NUMBER

# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

**The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain**

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## 1969



Church of San Gian near Celerina (Grisons)

By courtesy of Swiss National Tourist Office

### SCHLITTEDA ENGIANDINAISA

Our picture shows the annual outing by horse-drawn sleighs in the Engadine. Many of the old customs have died. Spinning wheel and tallow lamp have become museum pieces. The *Lichtstubeten*, including the old songs and the games, are sometimes reconstructed for folkloristic events. The boys' festival of the *Chalanda Marz* have survived, and so has the *Schlitteda*.

Before modern tourism began to crowd the Grisons valleys with visitors, life used to be monotonous for its inhabitants during the long winter months. Skis were not known there at that time. When snow blocked the way, all one could do was to stay put in one's village.

Only the sleigh would provide the most essential means of transportation. However, one day in winter

these sleighs were gaily decorated. Young couples in their Sunday best boarded them. And under the cloudless sky, the long row of sleighs, with the little bells ringing joyfully on the horses' heads, drove out of the village, to one nearby or to one even beyond it. There, a big meal was served to all, wine and good food enlivening everybody's spirits. Thus, under the blue Engadine skies, everyday cares were relegated to oblivion for a few blissful hours. Under a silvery moon, accompanied by the tingling of the horses' little bells, the sleighs turned homeward, back into everyday's reality.

Today, in spite of all the accomplishments of modern technique, the people of the Engadine still celebrate their "Schlitteda" holiday. They thus reaffirm their love of their country by keeping alive another aspect of sincere, pure folklore.

These unusual sleighs take a couple each, and it is quite a delicate business to decide who goes with whom. An engaged couple has no problem, but with the other youngsters lots have to be drawn at times. The young man sits astride the back of the sleigh, whilst the girl rides in front of him in a kind of "side-saddle" as it were. Both rest their feet on the single skid. The young man holds the reins and becomes some kind of cavalier reminding one of the courtesy of past epochs. The *Schlitrünza*, having made sure that her embroidered bodice and her little bonnet fit well, sits on the sleigh like a

decorative doll, but oh, so alive in her flaming red skirts.

The procession starts out from the village square. A confirmed bachelor in *tricorné* and lace *jabot*, on a fine horse, leads the procession. First, the sleighs drive round the village once more and then out in the open snow landscape. In the middle of the procession is the sleigh with the musicians, (clarinet, violin, double bass and flute). They play old traditional dance tunes, and thus the gay group proceeds to the next village, sometimes at a brisk canter, then again at a comfortable trot. Once arrived at the neighbouring place, there is fool and drink, dancing and festivities in which the local youth join.

The expert says that the return ride is the best, with the star-lit skies above the white winter landscape. Once back home, there is another dance, whilst the horses have gone to rest in their warm stables.

There are many local varieties of the *Schlitteda*. The largest, that of St. Moritz, leaves before lunch and makes several halts. Its sleighs are the finest, and there is a beautiful collection of magnificent costumes. The Tourist Office has been buying up antique sleighs for some time, wherever there is an opportunity. They are well aware of the cultural value of old customs, and the fine collection is given pride of place once a year (mid-January) when the *Schlitteda* takes place.

(Compiled from information received by courtesy of "St. Moritz Courier".)

## "ALL MEN ARE FREE AND BORN EQUAL TO DIGNITY AND RIGHTS . . ."

### The End of Human Rights Year — Whither Now?

When Hitler began the terrible persecution of the Jewish race and thus went against the basic principles of 1789, Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood, but especially from the moment his attacks on other nations plunged the world into a new war, voices began pleading to make the great struggle a kind of crusade for the basic rights and freedoms. In addition to peace, it would be, they claimed of paramount importance to have recognition of such principles anchored in a charter and to make it one of the main aims of a new organisation of nations. On 14th August 1941, in the middle of the war, Churchill and Roosevelt met to discuss strategic planning, but they also laid down the principles of fundamental freedoms and rights of the individual, which should serve as a basis of peace after the war was over. Out of that grew the Atlantic Charter.

The Conference of San Francisco was in full agreement with the principles when they prepared the United Nations Charter in the spring of 1945. The discovery of the Nazi extermination camps forced governments to use pressure, and in Art. 68 of the Charter, a Commission for Human Rights was foreseen and a special section created in 1946. A first meeting of the 18 members took place at Lake Success early in 1947, when this problem was tackled with much goodwill, practical idealism and "excluding philosophical and doctrinal debates". Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt, widow of the late U.S. President, chaired the deliberations.

The second meeting took place a few months later in Geneva, and it was decided to issue a charter in form of a triptych whose centre piece, the declaration itself, should be framed by a pact on one side and a row of directives on the other. The next session in spring of '48 was decisive. The Commission had succeeded in finding a balance between private and political rights on one hand

and social and cultural ones on the other, fully aware at the same time that these depended on means and structure of each nation, as well as on international co-operation.

Great Britain pleaded through Lord Attlee, then Prime Minister, to proceed forthwith, as the "Cold War" had already started. Thus ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council of United Nations) included the draft on the agenda of the UN ordinary session in 1948, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris. Eighty-seven plenary and ten meetings of the special commission were spent on it. The text was reduced to thirty Articles and improved in various ways.

It was nearly midnight on 10th December, when the Assembly accepted the draft. None were against, Russia and satellites, as well as South Africa and Saudi-Arabia abstained, but 48 nations were in favour. With it, an instrument was created to secure the rights of all men and women.

This last word brings us straight into Switzerland: Women have no general suffrage, only in some local and cantonal matters, and that only in a few Cantons. This is almost an anomaly, for Switzerland had opened her universities to women already in the 'forties of the 19th century, and the first woman doctor in Europe, Marie Heim-Voegtlin, was a Swiss who qualified in 1874. As early as 1911, the male electorate of Zurich accepted an Article for their Constitution, which visualised women's vote one day. Today, on the federal level, a good two million adults are excluded from voting; they are in company with their sisters in Kongo-Kinshasa, the Northern regions of Nigeria, Jordania, Kuwait, Saudi-Arabia and Liechtenstein.

This is one of the stumbling blocks why Switzerland, champion of freedom and direct democracy, has not been able to sign the Declaration, the only one next to France