

# Landsgemeinde comes of age

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## LANDSGEMEINDE COMES OF AGE

### The Swiss of the Midlands and the North meet at Hardcastle Crags

Travelling back to London after a weekend with the Swiss of the Midlands and the North, I have time to reflect. The landscape flies past the windows of my carriage, alternating between peaceful green fields and grey stone and drab brick. The fast inter-city train eats the miles at an amazing speed, the noise of the wheels touching the iron rails makes conversation impossible. One's state of mind after a full weekend is one of lethargy, and one's thoughts boggle at the very idea of work. So what is easier than to daydream: I see a gold chain made up of individual pieces. Surely I saw such a chain on Councillor Holt's chest, or was it the Rotary President or Councillor Wetherhill — or all three? That is not what I mean — the chain I see is made up of memories, reminders of a wonderful weekend. One after the other they pass by:

**Conference on Wheels.** From the modern station at Euston, a number of men and women travelled up to Manchester on a Saturday afternoon in June (14th). Papers, discussions, exchange of ideas; people who care about the Swiss Colony and take its well-being seriously. By no means all the societies in London took the trouble of sending a representative to the Federation Meeting, and some of the larger organisations were conspicuous by their absence. But more of that later.

**A Rose and a Smile.** It was hot in Manchester on Saturday, and the three minutes the police constable estimated for the walk to the hotel turned into six or seven. But what a delightful welcome on arrival! The President of the Manchester Swiss Club, Dr. K. P. Jaggi, and his committee greeted us "foreigners" with a special smile, and the beautiful red rose in my room just made my day and gave me the feeling of being really wanted.

**AGM in a Turkish Bath.** Did I say Manchester was hot? An under-statement — the room in which the Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K. took place, was in the basement of the Grand Hotel, and I have never worked in such a hot place. It speaks well for the interest of the delegates that they sat through the meeting with iron discipline. Dr. H. W. Egli was in the chair, and the Swiss Ambassador attended. The agenda was dealt with expeditiously; details of the business will be published at a later date when the minutes are out. The Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne, Mr. Marcel Ney, had specially come from Switzerland to be at the meeting. Both delegates to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad were present, Manchester's Dr. H. R. Bolliger, and Mrs. M. Meier, Editor of the "Swiss Observer".

**Swiss Wine and Solidarity.** After the heat of the basement, it was a double treat to get a drink and to meet all the members and guests who attended the dinner arranged by the Swiss Club in Manchester. It was grand to see old friends again, then our compatriots serving the Swiss Club Manchester, and last but not least, friends and delegates from Scotland. Apart from the Swiss Ambassador and Madame R. Keller, there were Consul and Madame R. Born, newly arrived in Manchester, Mr. W. Zellweger, Vice-Consul in Manchester, and Mr. O. Hartmann, Vice-Consul in Edinburgh.

After dinner, during which a thunderstorm brought relief, the President welcomed the guests and thanked the Ambassador for the gift of white wine so much enjoyed by all. The first to reply was the Ambassador who said that one of the most important things about a Swiss Ambassador was that he was not representing a Head of State, but that his principle of service should be based on "one for all, all for one". Monsieur Keller spoke of solidarity and emphasised that it was no empty word. For the guests from the South, Mr. Ch. de Maria, President of the Unione Ticinese, thanked the Manchester hosts. He was followed by the new Consul whose eloquence was matched by Mr. Ney in his own thanks and appreciation. Only a Basler could have brought the house down with his witty remarks — Mr. B. Simon, one of the pillars of the Manchester Club and Vice-President of the Federation. Mr. Berner and Mrs. E. Heisch (Cercle Genevois) brought the speeches to a close, but it was obvious that nobody was in the mood to retire — the *Stimmung* was far too happy.

**After midnight.** This picture is different for each group of people, some went swimming, others went to a night club, and some even went to bed early. But some of the officials of the Federation and some of the London and Scotland visitors, were amongst those who enjoyed themselves well into the night, getting to know Manchester from a gay and uninhibited angle. Nevertheless, they were all up early for the Big Day.

**Home from Home.** Posters and flags welcomed the party of over 100 on arrival at Hebden Bridge's Memorial Gardens. But the welcome was a special one — the flags and the posters were *Swiss*. The town had made this gesture to show appreciation of the Annual Swiss Visit. Most of the visitors had arrived by car, and to be greeted in such a friendly manner augured well for the whole day.

**Yorkshire takes over.** Whilst Saturday had been under the aegis of the Manchester Swiss Club, the "Landsgemeinde" Sunday was arranged by the Yorkshire Swiss Club under the guidance of Mr. E. Berner and Prof. J. Inebnit. A number of Yorkshire friends had come some considerable distance to Hebden Bridge, and thus the four main

centres of Swiss activities in the U.K. — London, Manchester, Yorkshire and Scotland — had come together.

**Swiss Badge on Yorkshire Breast.** Imagine the scene: the main street of the little town full of Sunday motorists; a traffic holdup on a usually smooth route; why? Because the local police give the Swiss visitors the right of way from the Gardens (photos have been duly taken for the local Press) to the Hall. And there is this year's National Day Badge on many a breast — sellers have been busy — and for the British hosts to wear the double-cross emblem, that of the Red Cross and that of Helvetia, is surely a tribute to Switzerland.

**"Fondue" Interlude.** This is a link in my chain, of which I could dream only from hearsay. The Swiss Weekend had been opened at Hebden Bridge on the previous Thursday by Prof. J. Inebnit; a Swiss wine and cheese evening when *fondue* was one of the dishes, and when the entertainment included accordion playing and yodelling by a Swiss called Hans who also gave a hair-dressing demonstration. Over 200 people packed the little theatre on Saturday evening to see Swiss films. And now there is a plan to link Hebden Bridge with a town in Switzerland. What a compliment!

**Swiss Tunes and Trestle Tables.** My next memory takes me to the Carlton Ballroom where the whole party was entertained to morning coffee. The official welcome by the local Council and the Rural District Council had been extended in the Gardens, and it was to Swiss tunes that the large party settled down at long trestle tables. There were many families with children, all eager for a day's enjoyment.

**Good Fellowship, Good Followship.** That was the theme of Pastor Dietler's sermon. He had come up from London, and he addressed the gathering with a clear message of how to love and how not to treat one's neighbour and to accept the path in following Christ. I was apprehensive when I heard that the open-air service of previous years was to give way to a service indoors during morning coffee. The *Feldgottesdienst* I remembered from Hardcastle Crags seemed vastly preferable. But it must be said, there was complete silence, and if I was impressed by the Rev. Dietler's words, I was affected even more by the absolute quiet — a strange sight all the men, women and children sitting at coffee tables, listening with utter attention and praying in united spirit.

My twelfth picture is called **Blue Bells and Boulders**, one of the most enchanting ones of that weekend. What bliss to get into the cool woods and walk along the stream! The sunshine filtered through the old trees, and the bluebells held their own amongst grasses and moss. The leisurely walk ended by the crossing of the river — gingerly we stepped from one piece of rock to the next and on the other bank, we climbed