

# 50 years of effort, devotion and hard work

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## 50 YEARS OF EFFORT, DEVOTION AND HARD WORK

Many were the changes brought about by the first world war. Life had been easy and pleasant for the Swiss living in England during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. There was plenty of work for anyone who cared to settle here, and the relationship between the two countries was one of friendship and mutual respect. During the war, the attitude changed, and the Press became hostile towards aliens. The reputation of the Swiss changed, and many were suspected of being pro-German. This attitude caused alarm in the Colony and to the authorities at home. When tension was at its worst in the summer of 1916, one of the founders of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in Switzerland (1914), Prof. Georges Bonnard, gave a lecture in London on the aims and objects of the new patriotic society which had done splendid work in removing misunderstandings between the Swiss and various linguistic regions. And 260 Swiss present at Prof. Bonnard's lecture in London decided to strengthen the ties amongst the Swiss in Great Britain and to re-establish the old Anglo-Swiss friendship, by means of better mutual information of the Press in both countries.

Dr. Arnold Laett took up his work as Secretary of the N.S.H. in London, and he did sterling work. The activities of the London Group were highly successful and held up as an example to other Swiss communities.

It was in 1919 that a few influential friends of the N.S.H. and the City Swiss Club gathered round Mr. Paul F. Boehringer of the Frederick Printing Company and launched the project of a new paper for the whole of the Swiss community in Great Britain. There had been an attempt at running a Colony paper before: Mr. Scheidegger's very small "Gruetli" which, however, had not been successful. Mr. Boehringer

could give the necessary financial backing, and Dr. Laett was invited to be its first editor, a job he could easily combine with his secretarial work for the N.S.H.

On 17th November, 1920, the first copy of "The Swiss Observer" was published from 21 Garlick Hill, E.C.4. It was a fortnightly periodical, of eight pages, and the annual subscription was 8/6d. In its "Publishers' Introduction", Mr. Boehringer said amongst other things:

*"The Swiss Observer will be run on independent lines—independent of any party, creed or group—and its columns will be open to all shades of opinion compatible with Swiss honour, traditions and aspirations. It will exert itself in strengthening the existing societies in the Swiss Colony by giving their reports and announcements a publicity they are unable otherwise to obtain. It will co-ordinate in the most economical way any efforts or movements undertaken by the Colony as a whole, and it will assist in the formation of a sound and well-considered judgment and appreciation of any question vital to our Colony or Country by inviting and encouraging every Swiss to make use of the Correspondents' column . . . provided correspondents will conform to the principles of truth and common fairness in discussion".*



Paul F. Boehringer  
(1879-1948)

To say that the "Swiss Observer" went from strength to strength would be far from the truth. Yet the very fact that the Colony Organ has reached its Golden Jubilee proves some measure of success. This is due in the first place to the founder and his son Oscar who have carried the main burden for half a century. Without their financial sacrifices—today greater than ever—there would be no "Swiss Observer", and the Colony owes a great debt of gratitude to the Boehringer family. We are anxious to put this on record, also for the benefit of Mrs. Paul Boehringer who lives at Peacehaven and who has supported both her husband and her

son in their efforts to keep the paper alive.

The first Editor's term of office was a short one; Dr. Laett was asked to become London Editor of the "Anglo-Swiss Review", the official organ of the British Chamber of Commerce in Switzerland. Dr. A. Lang and Dr. H. W. Egli followed Dr. Laett as editors in the 'twenties. In 1929, Mr. Boehringer proposed a new man who was to edit the S.O. most successfully for three decades and more—Alfred Stauffer. When he took it on, the paper was a mere child. It was left to Fred to guide it through its adolescence.

All during the second world war, the "Swiss Observer" appeared regularly, though it changed from a weekly back to a fortnightly paper, and like most British dailies and periodicals, reduced its format; in fact it went back to the original size which is much the same as today. It was a struggle to keep going. The difficulties the Editor and Publishers faced were considerable, but thanks to their enthusiasm, idealism and tenacity and the support of the Colony, the "Swiss Observer" survived.

Mr. Paul Boehringer died on 6th April, 1948. An Advisory Council was formed a few years later under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Raoul de Cintra. Subscribers came and went, but Fred Stauffer carried on, staunch, unruffled, with his lively sense of humour and his lovable Bernese ways, writing and editing, pasting-up and correcting proofs, canvassing for advertisements and writing letters, sending reminders and doing all the jobs normally left for the office boy, plus, of course, attending innumerable dinners, meetings and other gatherings.

Early in 1961, the faithful "ST." retired after 32 years of devoted service. A young Vaudois journalist, Pierre Hofstetter, took over for a short year. Then Fred Stauffer came back for a few months until the new Editor took up her duties. The "Swiss Observer" Council had appointed a woman, Mrs. Mariann Meier, to whom it was left to see the paper through the following seven years. During that time, the death of Fred Stauffer came as a great blow not only to the S.O. for which he had gone on writing after his retirement, but to the Colony at large. The many tributes paid to him showed to his wife Elsie how much affection he had won in the Swiss community, and today she will remember once again the many years during which she stood at his side loyally supporting him and his life's work. Our thanks go to her, too.

MM retired from her editorship just over a year ago, and she was succeeded by the present Editor, Mr. Pierre-Michel Béguin. The fact that the honour of looking back over the half-century has been given to MM, is due to the Editor's modesty; he felt that somebody who knew Fred Stauffer and had lived through part of the S.O.'s lifespan should tell the story. And the Council agreed.

When the S.O. was 45 years old, I said that I was convinced of the important and useful function of the "Swiss Observer" as the Colony's paper. I quoted Geoffrey Tier's words "Ideals are precious things to be nurtured and cherished by care and understanding". I was confident that with the Editor's care and the readers' understanding the S.O. would continue successfully on the road to the Golden Jubilee, its quality improved, its finances strengthened and its reputation unimpaired. That would be the time to celebrate on glossy paper.

If once again we have now had to decide not to celebrate in a special double anniversary number on art paper, it is purely a matter of economics. The ideals are still there, and the publishers, the Editor and all those connected with the paper want to go on looking after the "Swiss Observer". How long this will be possible, depends on the support of subscribers, advertisers and societies. Let us hope that there is still plenty of idealism and enthusiasm of the brand which induced Paul Boehringer and his friends to start the venture, and which compelled Fred Stauffer to devote half a lifetime to the noble task.

(MM)



*Alfred Stauffer (1889-1965)*

## FEDERATION OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN U.K.

### FROM THE PRESIDENT

The continuance of any serious newspaper or periodical during half a century is a remarkable achievement in our time anywhere. How much more reason have we for rejoicing when it is our own "SWISS OBSERVER" that has survived such a long and troubled period in independence and dignity!

Writing as President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom I feel sure that I am expressing the thoughts of our whole Colony in congratulating the S.O. for this achievement and wishing it as great a success in the next half-century.

Both as a sole recorder of the life and events of our Colony and as a medium of continuing contact with the homeland, keeping us informed of its problems and development, the S.O. is held high in the hearts and esteem of all of us treasuring our Swiss heritage and anxious to continue to share in its maintenance to which the Swiss abroad can make an important contribution.

As a journalist of long experience,

including even a short spell of editing the S.O. in the late 'twenties, I may perhaps add my professional appreciation of the untiring work and personal sacrifices I know to be required for each number of this publication on the part both of the editor and the publisher. My admiration of the sterling work of Mr. Stauffer and Mrs. Meier, that has brought the S.O. to its high standing, also goes out to their present successor Mr. Béguin in his valiant attempt to fashion the paper in a younger mould despite the criticism he is bound to rouse thereby from time to time.

My jubilee message to the S.O. would not be complete without due appreciation being expressed also to the Advisory Council, especially its former and its present chairman, Mr. Robert Keller and Mr. Gottfried Keller, as well as to the publisher for their determined efforts to keep the publication going. Those of us who knew the founder of the S.O., Mr. P. F. Boeh-

ringer, were particularly happy to witness the continuance of his self-denying patronage of the paper as publisher and printer by his son Mr. Oscar Boehringer.

Regretfully I feel, in conclusion, that I should not omit to refer to the fact that, despite so much devotion, the S.O. still is and has always had to be run on a shoestring. In a relatively small Colony as background it could obviously never be a flourishing proposition. Yet it may be recognised that there are still many Swiss in the U.K. not subscribing to the S.O. though they could easily afford it. Surely, a great proportion of them could be persuaded to make this small sacrifice in appreciation of the patriotic importance of continued publication of the S.O.

Let this, then, be our resolution on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee: to recruit, each one of us, at least one new subscriber to our cherished paper.

*Dr. H. W. Egli*