

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1978)
Heft: 1744

Rubrik: Swiss Benevolent Society

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Swiss Benevolent Society

Annual Report for 1977

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

We have pleasure in presenting the 108th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society. During the year under review, we have endeavoured, as in the past, to be at the disposal of Swiss people living in the London Consular District who cared to come to us with a variety of problems and difficulties.

The day to day work was not marked by any important changes. The Secretary maintained contact with our 315 clients by means of 565 receptions at the office, 254 visits to their homes or hospitals, letters and the telephone. The 54 pensioners were much in the mind of the Committee at all times but there was also an increase in the number of younger people, particularly families with small children, who needed support, with financial or otherwise.

In some cases, we ourselves were able to meet the needs of our applicants; in others we collaborated with various other agencies, private or official and in particular with the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss Churches. The co-operation with the latter, especially, has been extended during the year, taking in not only the clergy but also individual parishioners. They could maintain the

regular contact with people, which lay outside the scope of our organisation, where scarceness of time and great distances make regular visits difficult, if not impossible. On a number of occasions, the Secretary had to see clients outside the Greater London area. These visits are kept down as much as possible and if feasible, the assistance of local social services is enlisted, but at times, personal contact is of the essence to enable us to find the most effective way of helping a family or an individual.

The lot of our pensioners has improved quite dramatically thanks to the most generous donation of £50,000 conveyed to us by relatives of the late Mademoiselle Irène Carlin, daughter of a former Swiss Minister to the Court of St. James. Mademoiselle Carlin had always shown a keen interest in our Society's activities and to honour her memory the relatives decided to express this in a tangible way. We are extremely grateful to them for this generous gesture and wish to record our sincere appreciation also on this occasion.

At the time, when the money was received, we were approached about the possible creation of a Swiss Home for the Elderly. Two schemes were carefully examined but had to be discarded, one

because it would have required considerably more involvement by volunteers than we could have reasonably hoped for and the other because it would have been of benefit to too small a number of people. Instead, it was decided to incorporate the donation into our general funds and to increase our pensions very substantially. We were able to give this additional help just at the time when our pensioners started to worry about the winter fuel bills.

In addition to the distribution of pensions from our own funds, we have continued to administer the Swiss Old Age Pensions for those who prefer to receive it in regular monthly or fortnightly amounts rather than by quarterly cheques.

We were able again to meet the fares of 16 youngsters who travelled to Switzerland under the 'Pro Juventute' scheme for holidays for Swiss children living abroad. At this juncture, we should like to thank the Secretariat of that organisation for its willingness to help and advise us so that the maximum number of youngsters could benefit from this scheme. To mothers who have to work during the long holidays, it means a great deal to know their children are in a happy home in Switzerland rather than

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have them roam the streets of London. We are always happy to examine applications from parents who are not able to meet the fares.

Here in England, quite a number of our pensioners took up the offer of a break during the summer holiday and we could enable them either to go to some small hotel or boarding house or supply their fares and pocket money for a stay with friends or relatives.

At Christmas, we were lucky to count again on the efficient assistance of Mesdames Burri and Kaluza in the preparation of 153 parcels that benefited a total of 233 people. Our gratitude goes also to Swiss firms and individuals who, in many ways co-operated in making the operation a success and we should particularly like to thank the ladies of the Causerie and the Frauenverein as well as Mmes. E. Dolling, E. Gunn, G. Gyssler, L. Hall, V. J. Turner, Mr. & Mrs. E. Tangemann, and Messrs. E. Huber, St. Kaluza, M. Thlisberger, W. Lockyer and L. Smith.

In answer to an appeal from the Swiss Welfare Office for young people, we increased our annual grant from \$300 to \$500. Altogether, the collaboration with the Welfare Office was again most pleasant. Mrs. U. McCarthy left in July and whilst we are delighted that Mrs. M. Lyster has become her successor, we regret that this means that we shall not in future be able to count on her to replace the Secretary during holiday periods.

However, we have been able to secure the services of Mrs. Elisabeth Gunn who will be at the helm while Mrs. Sharp is away. On the secretarial side, we had the part-time help of Mrs. Marietta Lee whom we thank for her devoted services.

The two properties at Conway Street and Belsize Grove needed considerable attention and expense, but fortunately did not give rise to any undue difficulties. The allowance made to the Swiss Hostel for Girls Ltd. for Swiss girls staying there has increased, and indicates that more of our nationals again make use of the hostel facilities.

The Committee held its regular monthly meetings when all applications for help and any other problems concerning the running of the Society were examined with due care. The Embassy was represented at our meetings by Consul M. Ch. Glauser and in April Councillor and Mrs. J. P. Zehnder invited the Executive and Finance Committees to a most pleasant and delightful dinner at their lovely home. We wish to record our thanks for this most enjoyable evening.

In June, we learned with great sadness of the death of Mr. F. G. Sommer, our Honorary Vice-President. Mr. Sommer was associated with our Society for a great many years. He joined the General Committee in 1930 and was President of the Executive Committee from 1954 to 1964. During these years and even after he had retired from the official leadership, Mr. Sommer remained keenly interested in our activities. Those

who were associated with him during those long years know just how much the Society owes him and remember him with gratitude.

During 1977, Mr. W. B. Buol left the United Kingdom and thus unfortunately, the Executive Committee of the Society. We are greatly indebted to Mr. Buol for his active involvement in our work during the years in which he was in office and our best wishes accompany him and Mrs. Buol. Mr. R. P. Glarner was elected to replace Mr. Buol and we are grateful to him for accepting to help us in our work.

We are grateful to our Hon. President, Ambassador Dr. E. Thalmann for the great interest that he has taken in the Society's activities all through the year.

Our thanks also go to the many individuals and institutions who have helped us in various ways, during the course of the year: the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Churches, the *Swiss Observer*, English social services, both statutory and private and their representatives and, above all, our many individual friends and supporters on whose interest and donations we depend so much in the execution of our worthwhile task.

Finally, we extend our warmest thanks to our Secretary, Mrs. A.-R. Sharp, Social Worker, for fulfilling her manifold duties with enthusiasm and skill.

On behalf of the Executive Committee M. Schneebeli President.

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