

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 5 (1939-1940)
Heft: 7

Artikel: Fascinating old customs are observed in Switzerland in carnival time
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943255>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 06.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

the most hidden valleys of the Alps. However, they added nothing to the Gallo-Roman civilisation in Helvetia. For example, no Germanic settlement has yet been discovered, doubtless because the dwellings were of wood and modern villages have been built on their ashes.

Little by little the different parts of present day Switzerland became differentiated from the linguistic point of views. As it was less romanised the population of eastern Switzerland more easily adopted the Germanic speech, whereas in western Switzerland, on the other hand, the German invader allowed himself to be romanised by the Gallo-Roman population. In Rhaetia Romansch has only very slowly given way to the Alemannic dialect and it has been preserved up to the present day in many valleys in the Grisons canton. On the southern slope of the Alps and even in certain valleys formerly Rhaeto-Romansch, Italian was the language that was finally adopted.

As regards religion, the inhabitants of present-day Switzerland adopted Christianity early. From the political point of view, and in spite of attempts made by a few Alemannic chiefs to keep their independence, the former Civitas Helvetiorum came under the domination of the Merovingian and then of the Carolingian kings. But all subsequent history, as far as politics and civilisation are concerned, brought no changes in the ethnological composition of the Swiss population. Since the great invasions during the first centuries of the Christian era, no new invasion, no migration took place to modify the ethnological picture of Switzerland. In the 19th and 20th century, however, the populations of the different regions of the country were destined to become mingled to a greater extent.

+++++

FASCINATING OLD CUSTOMS ARE OBSERVED IN SWITZERLAND IN CARNIVAL TIME.

Climax of Carnival festivities in Switzerland is the Basle Carnival, known throughout Europe for its art and wit. In preparation for this gay event groups are formed and costumes are fashioned with the greatest secrecy. Clever illuminated posters and lanterns make fun of all that happened in the city during the past year. Blunders of the town council and of magistrates are revived, and whosoever provided food for the gossips or disturbed the peace of the citizens gets some sarcastic knocks.

The festivities start at four o'clock in the morning, when all lights in the centre of the town are turned out. Then to the sound of drums, groups arrive from everywhere on Market Place, while Fife players begin to furnish a befitting accompaniment. The Basle Drum and Fife players are famous for their skill and artistry, also for their so-called Beresina uniforms-- an attire reminiscent of the participation of Swiss troops in the ill-fated Napoleonic Russian campaign in 1812.

Drum concerts are a specialty of Basle and school boys receive early training in this form of musical expression in regular drummers' schools.

On the big carnival days, inns and restaurants are fully prepared to receive the early paraders and delicious soup of roasted flour, as well as open-face onion pie, are obligatory delicacies served everywhere. After 7 a.m. the merry-makers usually proceed to their daily tasks, but at 2 p.m. the real festivities begin. A kaleidoscopic parade heads the program and is later followed by fancy dress balls and other gaiety far into the night. There are scores of historical cliques in Basle who exist for carnival only, and who rack their brains months before for the most original group in the pageant. Often their float is shaped according to the particular subject of their sarcasm. Each time a vehicle passes people rush to obtain a leaflet explaining in jolly Basle dialect the subject of its display. Later prizes are given to the best groups by a committee of judges.

The second festive day belongs more to the children, and they, too, have their masquerade parade and their opportunities for dancing.

"To be merry and charitable" is the motto which guides the Risotto Festival, celebrated yearly on Tuesday before Ash Wednesday at Bellinzona, capital of Switzerland's Italian speaking canton of Ticino. As a result all the aged, the sick, the widows and orphans of the town and immediate neighbourhood are given a generous portion of risotto before general merry-making begins.

Early in the morning the "Compagnia Risotto" starts its work with some 35-40 men. The town furnishes 15 huge cooking vessels, which are placed in a semi-circle on Independence Square on simple portable stoves, equipped with high stove pipes. Before 10 a.m. the pots start to steam and a tantalizing aroma begins to permeate the usually mild air. Enthusiasm runs high among the cooks and their helpers. Delicious sausages, onions, huge rolls of fresh butter and other ingredients help to make this rice dish into a treat fit for kings. Always on the alert is the commander of the "Compagnia Risotto." He tastes here and there and the finishing touches are invariably added at his expert suggestions.

Shortly after 11 a.m. the distribution of Ticino's favorite dish begins. And now the recipients-to-be, both young and old, arrive in large numbers, each and everyone equipped with a container and with happy expectation reflected on their faces. While finely cut up sausages form part of the risotto, the portions handed out also include some tiny sausages served with a delicious sauce. Gifts of risotto and sausages are also sent to invalids, hospitals, homes for the aged and orphanages at Bellinzona and environs.

After some 4,000 portions of risotto have been distributed Prince Rabadan, the "Lenten Saint," is honored with a jolly parade through the town, and a colorful masquerade concludes the day.

Not far from Einsiedeln is Lucerne. Highlight of this lively city's pre-Lenten festivities is the Fritschi Parade. Its origin goes back to medieval days when masquerades, archery and wrestling matches, also open-air theatricals were frequently arranged for the benefit of the inhabitants and neighbouring towns. The latter in turn staged similar affairs to which Lucerne was invited.

Then came a time when war clouds dimmed Lucerne's carefree happiness. Many citizens enlisted for foreign military service and diversions became fewer. In those dull times the amusing sayings and merry pranks of Fridli an der Halden, generally known as "Brother Fritschi," became the topic of the day.

After his participation in the Burgundian wars Fritschi's fame as a humorist spread throughout the land. Once he was carried off to Basle and several hundred burghers of Lucerne marched to that city. They were welcomed by a reception committee attired in martial uniform and Fritschi waved a greeting from one of the patrician residences. The mock warriors from Lucerne then were induced to enjoy several days of feasting at Basle.

Upon his return to Lucerne, Fritschi inaugurated a celebration whose main feature was a parade of men and boys in armor. This procession was held on the last day of the pre-Lenten Carnival, and with the addition of several historical scenes it still is today an outstanding attraction of the Carnival season.

+++++

NEWS IN BRIEF.

Radio licenses issued in Switzerland at the end of 1939 amounted to just below 600,000.

The total voluntary Swiss contribution for the Finnish Red Cross at the end of January was over 1 Million Francs.

A relief labourer in Avenches (Ct. de Vaud) whilst digging a trench, discovered a pure gold Bust of the Roman Emperor Aurelius. The Bust is considered one of the finest pieces of Art and is exhibited in Berne.