

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 34 (1971)  
**Heft:** [9]  
  
**Artikel:** The Swiss ocean-going fleet  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942271>

### **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](#)

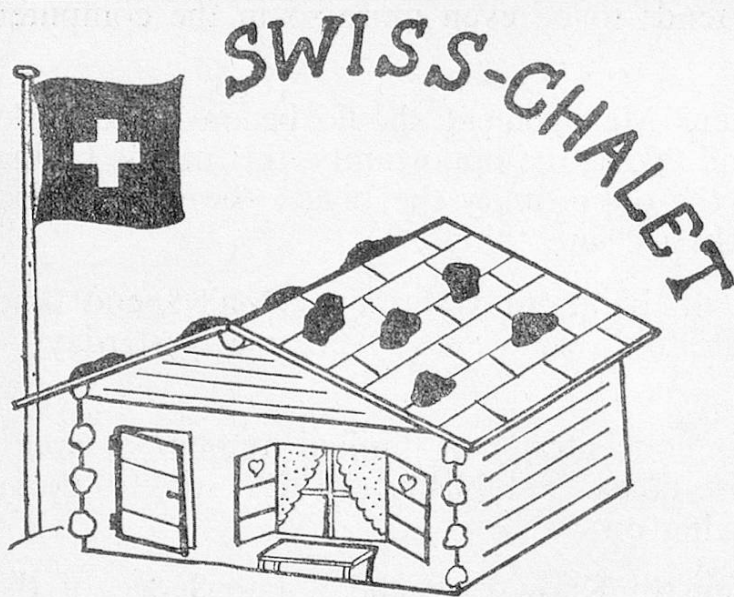
**Download PDF:** 20.02.2026

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

## THE SWISS OCEAN-GOING FLEET

ALTHOUGH situated in the heart of Europe over 300 miles from the nearest sea, Switzerland is still one of the shipping nations. We are not referring here to her shipping on the country's many lakes, or even to her river navigation on the Rhine, which started over 60 years ago, but to her ocean-going shipping. Compared with the big maritime powers, the Swiss ocean-going fleet is naturally minute; compared to the smallness of the country however, its size appears in a different light. In April 1941, in order to overcome the increasing difficulties which the country was coming up against in its efforts to obtain necessary supplies, the Federal Council decided to purchase and fit out a certain number of ships which together with the vessels belonging to Swiss shipowners, were used to ensure the country's replenishment of vital supplies. In spite of many difficulties, this small fleet succeeded in bringing indispensable foodstuffs from overseas, in exchange for Swiss export products. At the end of the war, the ships belonging to the Confederation were sold to Swiss shipowners. Numbering eight vessels at the time of its creation, today the fleet possesses 32 vessels sailing the seas all over the world; it has thus almost quadrupled in size in the last 30 years.

The right of countries deprived of their own seaboard to sail the seas under their own flag was recognised at the International



**HOME MADE cakes**  
**our speciality**

Props. Mr & Mrs Bert Fluhler

**OPEN**  
**7 DAYS**

**Restaurant**  
and  
**Coffee-Bar**

**ENGLISH and**  
**CONTINENTAL**  
**MEALS**

**HAMILTON**  
270 Victoria Street  
(Opp. Commercial Hotel)

**Phone 82-305**

Transport Conference in Barcelona in 1921. Swiss legislation submits navigation under the Swiss flag to the supervision of the Federal Political Department, which exercises it through the Swiss Office for Maritime Shipping in Basle, the only port for the registration of ships. Only vessels belonging to a company which can prove its capital to be purely Swiss in origin, which has its registered office in Switzerland and an effective management in the country are permitted to fly the Swiss flag. Consequently a Swiss shipowner owning a ship jointly with a foreign shipowner cannot sail it under the Swiss flag and has to register it in another country. The shipping company Suisse-Atlantique Co. Ltd. in Lausanne, for example, owns 4 ships sailing under the Liberian flag, in addition to 8 vessels registered in Basle.

Shipowners are free to do what they like with their ships and may do charter work for foreigners; in time of war, however, their vessels would have to be placed at the Confederation's disposal. Furthermore, the Confederation makes its contribution to the development of the national fleet by granting shipowners loans in the form of maritime mortgages, sometimes amounting to as much as 75%, or by guaranteeing the loans granted by banks for the modernisation of fleets (construction and purchase of new vessels).

With 32 modern ships — their average age being about 12 years — with a total displacement of 300,000 dwt, Switzerland's ocean-going fleet comes 40th among the world's fleets. The biggest ship is the "Romandie", a 32,750-ton cargo boat, while the smallest, the "Leman" is a coastal vessel of 440 tons, reserved exclusively for the shipment of wine in the Mediterranean. In addition to another ship of the same type and two refrigerator ships, the Swiss fleet comprises 28 cargo boats, able to carry a limited number of passengers (12 at the most); half the 24 ocean-going vessels, whose tonnage varies between 3000 and 32,750 dwt, run on regular services, while the other half act as tramp ships, that is to say they do not make regular trips but take cargo such as cereals, ores, etc., when and where it offers and to any port. The recent growth of Switzerland's private merchant fleet means that countries all over the world with direct access to the sea have had an opportunity of seeing the Swiss flag flying in one or other of their ports, whether in Canada, with a ship loading cereals, in Japan, delivering a cargo of phosphates from North Africa, or in Europe, unloading timber from the Philippines.

The Swiss, in spite of their reputation as a mountain people, also have the sea in their blood; in fact, over half the 920 men forming the crews of the 32 ships are Swiss; 120 other Swiss seamen are employed on foreign ships or ships belonging to Swiss shipowners but not sailing under the Swiss flag. Like the fleet itself, the development of crews of Swiss nationality has progressed satisfactorily. In fact, to start with, crews were composed almost



exclusively of foreigners, for the most part Germans and Italians, even though many Swiss had already served on foreign ships before the first World War. Today Swiss sailors occupy the most varied posts: on the upper-deck, in the engine-room, radio and supplies. Of the 32 ships, 12 are commanded by Swiss captains, while 15 deck officers out of a total of 70 are also Swiss nationals.

As Switzerland has no naval school of her own, young Swiss sailors wishing to become officers or captains have to attend foreign establishments and pass an examination recognised by the Shipping Office. By virtue of a decree for the encouragement of the vocational training of Swiss captains and seamen, the Confederation pays subsidies to candidates, generally amounting to one-third of the expenses involved in these comparatively expensive studies; in some cases, this financial help may even amount to two-thirds of the cost. In addition, certain shipowners grant loans to specially qualified members of their crews wishing to perfect their training. In this way, Switzerland is sure of having Swiss crews on whom it can rely under all circumstances.

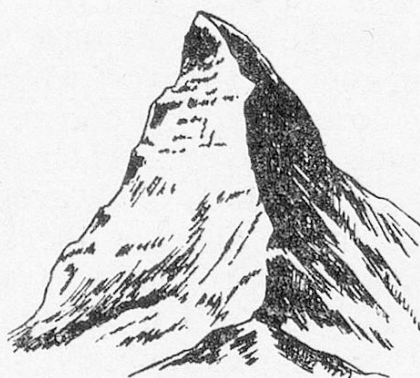
Although she imports over 6 million tons of petroleum products annually, Switzerland has no tankers of her own. This deficiency is a result of the structure of the petroleum market, since the big foreign companies which supply the Swiss market are organisations handling all operations right through from the initial prospecting to the final refining. Under these circumstances,

**WHEN IN WELLINGTON**

**VISIT THE**

**MATTERHORN  
COFFEE  
BAR**

**AT 106 CUBA STREET**



**DELICIOUS MORNING & AFTERNOON TEAS — LIGHT LUNCHEONS**

**Proprs. Mr & Mrs Toni Tresch**

the Swiss importer, forming an integral part of the chain, has no part to play in the field of transport.

The future of Swiss shipping is to a large extent bound up with the development of both national and world trade, since Swiss shipowners also work for foreign principals. With Switzerland's trade steadily growing and world trade expanding considerably, the Swiss merchant navy's prospects are exceedingly promising.

## NEWS OF THE COLONY

### Hamilton Swiss Club

We really had a "gmütliche" Fondue evening on the first Saturday in September. Over seventy Fondue-lovers, amongst them some guests from Auckland, came to sample this delicacy of wine and cheese.

For a change the dance music was provided by a stereogram with loudspeakers. There was never a dull moment with Ernst Rust's large collection of records, both "urchig" and modern. Thanks Ernst for playing such a variety of records, so old and young could enjoy themselves on the dance floor.

During the evening our Riflemaster, Mr H. Meister, presented the various winners of the recent shooting competition with their trophies and merit awards.

A big 'thank you' goes to all the Ladies who provided the Fondue-sets and the "busy bees" in the kitchen. —R.E.W.

### Taranaki Swiss Social Club

Memories were brought back to 1920 when a party of young Swiss left Switzerland to migrate to New Zealand. On Tuesday, 10th August 1971, at the Waimate Hotel, Manaia, a party of twelve people met to celebrate the coming to New Zealand of seven of them fifty-one years ago.

The party of seven were: Mr A. Kalin, Hawera; Mr J. Zimmerman, Hawera; Mr M. Kalin, Napier; Mr F. Nolly, Stratford; Mrs R. Kuriger, Oaonui; and Mr & Mrs J. Kaiser, Hawera.

With their wives and two guests, Mr & Mrs L. Chamberlain, Kapuni, they recalled many of the past things that had happened in the fifty-one years.

The evening was spent with a social hour and then a dinner. A moment's silence was observed for the deceased who had come