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**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE SWISS SOCIETY OF
NEW ZEALAND (INC)**

**Sunday 31 May 1992 at the
Newmarket Club, Auckland.**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It is my pleasure to present my last report to the members of the Swiss Society after five years as President. During the last twelve months we had to bid last farewell to the following members:

J. Fluckiger and F. Meier from Auckland
Anne Perry from Christchurch
Joe Hiestand, Ted Meyer, Jo Hermann,
Zeno Hospenthal, Mary Hermann, Mrs.
Josy Kaiser and Len Chamberlain from
Taranaki.

Len was for many years the president of the Taranaki Club and their club house is a lasting memory of his enthusiastic efforts to build this facility.

Benevolent assistance

In its function as a benevolent body, the Society assisted one member financially and also assisted in a supportive role compatriots that met with misfortunes during a stay in New Zealand. I acknowledge the splendid job the Embassy staff is doing to help solve problems for compatriots who, for various reasons, require advice or practical help. Since the administration of the Society was conducted from Wellington, it was fortunate that a close relationship could be established between Embassy and the

Society and an insight gained of the problems each one may have, although each one is different in its function.

Functions

The past year has been very much under the banner of 700 years Switzerland. Although it was felt support for functions may not be forthcoming in view of many compatriots' decision to return to the homeland, the Wellington Club ventured to organise a social evening following the Society's Annual Meeting. It proved to be a well patronised gathering with representatives from all clubs and even from as far away as Dunedin and Christchurch. Thanks to Marianne Benkert and Leo Zehnder, the embarrassing music problem was solved and the Swiss atmosphere could be maintained. The brand new cowbell, donated by Arthur and Heidi Muller, was presented to the Hamilton Club as the first holder with Wellington being runner-up and first holder of the baby-bell.

The Jass- Weltmeisterschaft has finished, but we never found out who the Jass-King or Queen is. To Many Zust our thanks for organising this event. He did find it difficult to get information from the Organisers in Switzerland but has assured me that the mementos and surplus money will go to the clubs in the very near future. Perhaps the two lucky participants will describe the event in one of the Helvetias so we all can share the experience. (Note from the Editor: Report is in this issue).

All the clubs kept up their contacts with visits to their nearest rival club for friendly competitions and the interest in the Swiss Society medals competitions is as strong as ever. The Taranaki Club even had a group of 28 shooters from Switzerland and they filled the Taranaki air with friendly echos of rifle fire.

The 700 years celebrations got under way in November when a delegation from Switzerland arrived to hold political panel discussions under the auspices of our Ambassador, Albert Manser and his exhibition of traditional painting, a photographic exhibition "Face to face with Switzerland" and the Alder Family with Appenzeller music. The programmes were directed in two ways. Firstly to celebrate with all the Swiss clubs in a festive and commemorative fashion, and secondly to give our fellow New Zealanders an insight into the Swiss direct democratic system with lively meetings in Christchurch, Wellington, Wanganui, Lepperton, Hamilton and Auckland. A venture of this size has never before been attempted and I felt privileged to render my assistance on behalf of the Swiss Society to the Embassy as the organisers. Some problems did arise and were eventually solved but any future attempts of similar nature could be greatly improved if we all learn from the past mistakes. The first thing would be to polish our communication skills. Looking on the positive side, the concerts and exhibitions brought joy and pleasure to many people, some of our politicians may now be aware that "first past the post" is not the only way to elect a Government and that serious thought is given to proportionl representation and referendum. As witness to our celebrations a plaque in the Botanic Gardens marks the place where 7 trees are now sprouting, planted by representatives of the Crown, New Zealand Government, City of Wellington, Swiss Government, the people of Switzerland, the Swiss Society, the Wellington Club and the second generation Swiss in New Zealand.

Helvetia and Swiss Review

Eight issues of the Helvetia were printed during the last year. This is one more than in previous years. The reason is that we had a request from Bern to increase the advertising fees for the local pages of the Swiss Review and transmit the money to Bern to defray some of the production costs. We called a special meeting of the committee and unanimously decided that this proposition was financially not acceptable and would be an unfair imposition on the new committee that may have to struggle for the financial viability of the Helvetia. Another reason was that films for the Review always had to be sent to Bern many weeks in

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advance and consequently lost much of their news value. We also felt it more important to retain our own independence and concentrate on the Helvetia as our only medium of communication. In this respect I have, however, to say that in my opinion the clubs are not making the best use of the Helvetia and our editor can vouch for the frustrations experienced when waiting for contributions. At the last moment we always had to find "fillers" and some members are quick to criticise but do nothing to bring about improvements. I thank all our faithful advertisers and Stephen Coleman from the Stratford Press for their support and co-operation.

Financial

I am pleased to report that the finances are on a sound basis. When we took over from the Taranaki Club five years ago, we inherited a healthy balance sheet and it was my ambition to pass on to the new committee an equally rosy balance of accounts. We have built up the account by a few thousand dollars and I feel that the benevolent obligations of the Society could now be fulfilled as it is now in a position to render modest assistance if required.

Membership

A slight improvement has occurred and up to 31 March we have received 438 subscriptions in total - 20 more than for the previous year. I recently visited the Christchurch Club and took part in one of their functions - as luck would have it: a wine trail. They had a busload of fifty members and friends and I had the opportunity to talk to many of them. I recommended to the committee to consider a formal joining of the Society. The response was positive and hopefully an increased

membership from the South Island will result. They have a very devoted committee and are upholding Swiss traditions - but of course we have a sharp dividing line in the form of Cook Strait.

Future Outlook

I like to finish my term of office with a few personal thoughts:

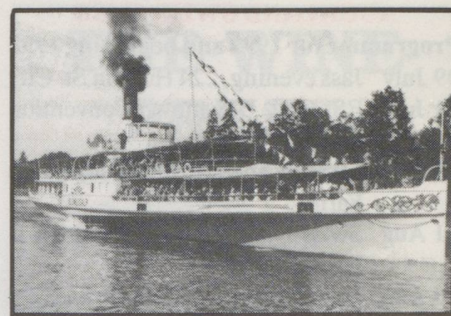
1) The Swiss Society is now in its 58th year. I believe that it has fulfilled an important role and followed the rules laid down in our statutes. Considering the wide geographical spread of our membership this is quite an achievement.

2) Although the Society had few cases when financial assistance was needed, it now becomes apparent that times are changing. Impoverished Governments are unable to adequately fund benefits, pensions and health services for a population that took it for granted that "Father State" is obliged to look after them from the cradle to the grave. It is obvious that fundamental changes are needed and this will ultimately put more responsibilities on the individual. The Swiss, by nature eager to provide and save for the future, may also get involved in this process, especially since the retired people are singled out for extra punishment because they live too long.

3) In Switzerland important decisions are also facing the voters regarding integration with the European Community. With the right to vote for the Swiss abroad, we may ourselves be involved in this decision making. My personal view of such a union is one of slight suspicion. The Roman Empire once encompassed all of Europe, including Asia Minor and Northern Africa. But eventually it came tumbling down. The Soviet Union stood as a fortress for over 70 years and crumbled overnight. How strong will the bonds of the Community be? To be kept informed of the latest development, it is important to maintain a friendly and constructive relationship with the Embassy - it is the lifeline between the Swiss Government and the Swiss abroad, not only in New Zealand but in many countries around the globe, wherever Swiss people have settled.

In conclusion I thank all other members of my committee for their support and hard work. Also thanks to those members of the Wellington Club that lent a hand with despatching the Helvetia when some of us went on holiday. Sincere thanks also to the Embassy for their support to the whole Swiss community. I have enjoyed my term as President of the Society and always tried to give it my best shot. I wish the new committee all the best in their quest to guide the Society through the next five years.

Andre Schleicher



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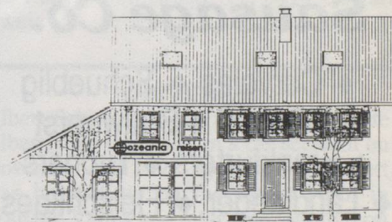
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