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Swiss Folk Art...

90 year old Josef Manser "Mülpi Sepp" - peasant farmer, restaurateur and painter of folk art

A profile....

The well known museum of Appenzell (eastern Switzerland) is presently honouring **Josef Manser** (or "Mülpi Sepp" as he is known among the locals) with an exhibition of many of his folk art paintings.

Josef is a sprightly 90 year old living with his wife Magdalena on their own plot of land at Brülisau in Canton Appenzell. He has devoted the past 30 years to painting of folk art, a lifelong hobby he managed to cling to, besides being a peasant farmer and for some time a restaurateur high up on "Mesmer Alp". Josef has painted 'to order' for many clients over the years and so his works became famous. His love for naive folklore painting was kindled early in his life by a picture on the wall of his parent's lounge. The images of his paintings were all set in his mind long before he painted them. In 1928 he sold his first painting for Swiss franc 15.- and for a recent order he demanded and received Swiss franc 1000.-

According to the experts, he could have asked for much more, but humble as he is, he says he is happier to see his client's satisfaction rather than to receive a lot of money.

- Josef Manser attended School for six years on a 'half-day-basis' only, while also working on his fathers farm at the same time. He remembers his class at

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School with 58 boys and only one teacher. As a 12 year old he took responsibility for the parent's farmlet, when his father had to work on the alp high above Brülisau. In those days the grass was cut by scythe and the hay had to be carried to the loft of the barn on one's back.

- Josef was a man of many talents and for 12 years he managed an alpine restaurant on 'Mesmer Alp'.

But before he could offer his guests the alpine cheese with wine, he had to build the restaurant. Josef was well known for his physical strength as he carried the building materials for three hours uphill and then took two hours downhill on every return-trip. In 1936 the restaurant fell victim to a fire and in

1945 the resurrected building was swept away by a snow avalanche. - Josef was also an accomplished skier, and as a member of the Appenzell Ski Club for 14 years, he took part in many military competitions.

Happily married with his wife Magdalena for 65 years, but without children of their own, he has his own advice for people wanting to grow old. Be happy with whatever you possess and drink plenty of goats-milk (Gäassemölch).

Josef only mentioned in passing that his eye sight is bad and that his feet are no longer what they used to be!

The present exhibition "*The Works of Mülpi Sepp*" in the Museum of Appenzell lasts until 20th May 2001.