

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 67 (2001)
Heft: [10]

Vorwort: Editorial...
Autor: Rust, Rinaldo

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Editorial..

THIS IS THE TIME OF THE YEAR.... when I can't but remember some of our first Christmas celebrations in New Zealand in the 1950's. Some of the memories that keep coming back are somewhat blurred by now, and understandably so, considering that Christmas and New Year celebrations for myself and many of my compatriots were wrapped in home sickness so long ago. Quite naturally we as members of the newly formed Swiss Club wanted to recreate the Christmas spirit of the Northern Hemisphere so deeply anchored in our hearts. We bravely faced the impossible. A nativity play had to be rehearsed. Swiss Christmas carols were considered a necessity to be learned by heart and to be sung with musical accompaniment of various kinds. For some children of the Swiss community the learning all about Saint Nikolau's and Christmas poems in Swiss-German was traditional and not to be forgotten, as well as the baking of several kinds of Christmas cookies according to recipes held in trust by many generations that

lived and died in Switzerland, the country called 'home' in those days. I remember how we (members of the Hamilton Swiss Club, under the direction of H. and A. Biland) performed various Christmas items according to Swiss tradition on Radio 1XH in Hamilton.

Difficulties arose mainly due to the pressures that are and always will be inherent to summertime Christmas in New Zealand, such as haymaking or preparing for the 'end of year functions' the conclusion of the school year, or preparations for a long summer holiday at the beach for the lucky ones. Other difficulties like finding suitable Christmas tree decorations of a decent standard may have been less obvious, but just as pressing. Some of us new immigrants to New Zealand had been warned by well meaning relatives to bring our own decorations 'from home' as there were few seen in those days in shops and department stores here. - I will never forget the utter despair and disappointment on seeing the first real Kiwi-Christmas-tree in 1956. - There it stood in the middle of a well manicured lawn in front of a classic Waikato farm house, liberally deco-

rated with balloons and crepe paper streamers in colours of the rain bow. We are much more sophisticated now, all the trimmings needed for a 'decent' Christmas are readily available and shops and department stores try to outdo each other offering weird and wonderful decorations.

I have so many memories of change that I am glad to know about the one constant and essential part of Christmas; "Joy to the world and peace to men of good will".

However this message will not 'sit' very comfortably with mankind this year. Are we allowed and will we find joy in a world that has the 11th of September 2001 as a new day of remembrance? Which are the men of 'good will', the terrorists or the ones taking retributions? Is our world a more peaceful place today than it was 2000 years ago when the birth of the ultimate peacemaker was announced? Can we expect peace where there is the injustice of 20 % of the world's population claiming 80 % of its wealth? How peaceful are today's relationships among people of differing ethnic groups? How much peace and trust is to be found in today's smallest cell of society, the ordinary family? And the basic question to each one of us; how peaceful is my outlook towards all who 'cross my path', towards the environment, and in relation to my God?

There is hope contained in the words of a familiar proverb;

Selbsterkenntnis ist der Weg zur Besserung! (freely translated; let everyone examine his conscience and act accordingly to bring about improvements!).

The old year of 2001 has inflicted many scars on Switzerland, and has demanded many important decisions of New Zealand; may both these countries dear to ourselves be blessed with integrity and peace for the benefit of all its citizens and the world at large.

May we as individuals remember and live the message brought by the One whose birth we celebrate on Christmas day.

Happy Christmas and
a healthy and blessed New Year!

SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

PATRON: Mrs Sylvie Matteucci-Keller, Ambassador of Switzerland

PRESIDENT/TREASURER: Beatrice Leuenberger, 44 Montgomery Crescent, Hamilton, Ph.(07) 843-7971 Fax (07) 843-7941 bea.leun.rachel@xtra.co.nz

VICE PRESIDENT: Marianne Drummond, Stratford, Ph. 06 762 8718

SECRETARY: Ruth Waldvogel, 89 Crosby Rd. Hamilton, Ph/Fax (07)855-3417

RIFLEMASTER: Peter Rust, 4202 Pepepe Rd. Naike, RD 2, Huntly 07 8266711

DELEGATES TO THE SWISS ABROAD CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

DELEGATE: Heinz Leuenberger, 33 Russell Terrace, Putaruru, Ph/Fax (07) 883-8537

DEPUTY DELEGATES: Beno Noetzli, Normandy Road RD11, Hawera, Ph. 06272 6727
Roland Schütz, 35 East St. Petone - Wellington Ph. 04 568 6772

EDITOR: RINALDO RUST, 242 TE PAHU RD. R.D.5.

HAMILTON, PH/FAX (07) 871-9946 E-MAIL: RINALDORUST@XTRA.CO.NZ

CLUB REPRESENTATIVES

AUCKLAND

SECRETARY: Trudi Fill, 51 Clifton Rd, Herne Bay, P.O Box 40152, Glenfield, Auckland, Ph/fax (09) 3764923, e-mail <weidfill@xtra.co.nz>

HAMILTON

SECRETARY: Anita Zuber, P.O. Box 11-026 Hamilton, Ph. (07) 8562414

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SECRETARY: Trudi Brühlmann, 1 Marine Drive, Mahina Bay, Eastbourne, Wellington, Ph. 04 562 8019

EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND: Panama House, 22 Panama St. Wellington, Ph. (04) 472-1593 or (04) 472-1594 Fax (04) 499-6302

HONORARY CONSUL: Peter Deutschle, P.O. Box 90-209, Auckland Mail Centre Ph./Fax (09) 366-0403. Email: deutschle@clear.net.nz

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