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President's Report

One month of 2003 already gone!!! It seems that every year goes quicker ... I must be getting old!!! Finally summer has arrived, and now the farmers are wanting rain again ... and quite badly in some areas!!! The weather can never be right for these professionals ... it seems that they're a hard bunch to keep happy when weather is the topic!!!

Several weeks ago I had the pleasure of meeting one of the founding committee members of the Taranaki Swiss Club, Heinz Helbling. The first AGM was held on 29 March 1952 at the Mangatoki Hall and he, being one of the younger people there, was voted onto the committee. I have outlined a few details about Heinz and his time in New Zealand which may interest some of our readers. He has written a book entitled "Als Kaser in Neuseeland" - (As cheese maker in New Zealand). Should anyone be interested in purchasing one of these books, written in German, please call me.

Heinz was born into a farming family in Epsach (Bernischen Seeland), and decided to become a cheese maker. He did all the various schools associated with cheese making, and then came time to decide "where to from here?" It was difficult to take over a cheese factory (too many qualified cheese makers applying for the few jobs), so it was either changing professions or emigrating. With his friend Peter Gutmann, also a cheese maker, they decided to emigrate ... where to??? ... the USA, Australia, Canada, South Africa, South America or New Zealand. They decided that each of them must write the name of a country on a piece of paper. They would then confer as to what

they had written down and from there they would make up their minds where to go. Both wrote down New Zealand ... they had heard it was a nice country, lovely people and that NZ was a big exporter of butter and milk powder. They had the address of Werner Gut who had advised them that he would guarantee them a job, which pacified their parents. The journey by boat took forty days, and during this time they met Arthur Kuriger who already lived in New Zealand as a dairy farmer. He took them down to Taranaki, where they then met Werner. He told them to go to the general manager of the Kaponga Dairy Company, and they duly carefully took all their cheese making certificates for him to view. He didn't even look at them!!! He just said "You can both start at the Riverlea Dairy Factory tomorrow!!!" The manager of the Riverlea Dairy Factory gave them one of the factory houses to live in ... a house just for them!!! They couldn't believe it!!! They decided to call their house "Villa Switzerland". Neither of them could cook, so Peter wrote home and asked them to send him a recipe book.

They were then kitted out in whites ... something that wasn't compulsory in Switzerland at the time ... and they were ready to start work the next day!!! Manufacturing of cheddar was totally different to a "Schweizerkaserei", so he had to learn all over again!!! There was no cheese making apprenticeship in those days, as there was in Switzerland. Language was a bit of a problem with the quickly spoken "New Zealand English"!!! Often the men would say "You are doing well, Swiss boy-!!! Meeting Peter in the storeroom one day, he said to Heinz

"Do you realise we are foreign workers now!!!"

Upon leaving Switzerland, Heinz's father had said "foreign country, foreign people, foreign language, foreign cheese..."

The Riverlea Cheese Factory had thirty-five farmers bringing approximately 30 - 35,000 kg milk daily, and all was manufactured into cheddar cheese. In those days, cheddar was nearly the only cheese manufactured, and about 95% was exported to England and the USA. The other workers shook their heads in disbelief when they told them how many different cheeses were made in Swiss cheese making factories!!!

In March 1954, Heinz decided to return to Switzerland for personal reasons, and worked as a dairy industry inspector. He has, however, returned to New Zealand a few times to visit the country and catch up with friends.

It was very interesting talking to Heinz, and listening to some of the experiences he had during his time in New Zealand. We would be most happy to receive any such stories for publication from you, as I am sure it would interest some of our other readers. Thank you, Heinz, for your time. I look forward to hearing from some of you, and would love to print further stories.

Regards
Marianne



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