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# HELVETIA

MAGAZINE OF THE SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



DECEMBER 2012 / JANUARY 2013

YEAR 78



## HIGHLIGHTS:

- Focus on the festive season
- More Helvetia survey results
- Swiss Society website
- Val Müstair and the convent of St John's

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## "Swiss-mas" in New Zealand

**Swiss-mas in New Zealand:** While it is a humorous play on the word, it symbolises for many of us a yearly quandary of how to marry up all the different Swiss and New Zealand traditions around Christmas time.

Of course, these traditions are mere "accompaniments" of Christmas and do not take away from the central reason: the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago.

Nonetheless, they play a central role in bringing together family and friends around Christmas, and shining the light on our children and their joy at this time of year.

The differences in Christmas traditions are probably most pronounced between the European and Anglo-Saxon worlds and centre around the Christ Child and Santa Claus.

In Switzerland, Santa Claus makes an earlier appearance on 6 December, bringing in his sack many goodies, and checking on children to see how well they have done and what they could do better.

However, it is the Christ Child who brings presents on Christmas Eve. Many of us remember waiting behind closed doors on Christmas Eve with baited breaths, until a bell tinkled. This was the sign that Christ Child had come: we ran into the living room, hoping to catch a glimpse of Christ Child as it slipped through the window – only to find a beautifully decorated and a Christmas tree lit with real candles, with a few presents underneath it. Dark winter nights meant that lights were off and the candles and decorations seemed all that more magical. Christmas generally was a small, family-based affair. (cont. p2)



Pohutukawa - New Zealand Christmas tree



Celebrating advent



Swiss Bakery Christmas bread



Winter landscape, Val Müstair, Switzerland  
[www.graubuenden.com](http://www.graubuenden.com)

## From the Editor

I am sure you, like me, are asking yourself once again how did we get through the year so quickly? New Zealand's year is definitely marked by a distortion of time - starting off slowly while we are enjoying summer and early autumn, with plenty of time up our sleeves. Time seems to be pretty slow also during the endless winter. With spring, time all of a sudden starts to speed up, until it turns into a blur around Christmas time! I wonder what Albert Einstein would have to say about this curious perception of time.

This year, we take, with your permission, a lighter look at Christmas, exploring how we Swiss-New Zealanders resolve and marry up the various traditions. My Swiss Ladies' Choir friends have generously contributed to this discussion. If I asked each and everyone of you as to how you celebrate Christmas, I expect I would get as many different answers! Our tongue-in-cheek writer David Latham has taken it upon himself to enlighten us comically further about this subject.

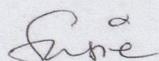
As usual, we dedicate a bit more space and attention to the Swiss Society children in this issue, acknowledging that Christmas is very much about them and that they have a long holiday ahead of them.

Trudi Brühlmann, our past Editor of the *Helvetia* has just come back from her first major and well-deserved break after editing the *Helvetia* non-stop for five years. I asked her whether she would tell us a bit about her trip and I am delighted that she has agreed.

Over the last few months, David Latham and his wife (our president) Tanja Latham-Zurbruegg have created a new Swiss Society/Swiss Club website. It's been a huge effort and they deserve all our thanks. Make sure you have a look at it when it goes live on 1st December - it looks very nice indeed.

I wish all of you a very enjoyable festive season in the company of family and friends, including a few "slow" hours of relaxation and contemplation.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



## "Swiss-mas" in New Zealand (cont.)

(from p1) Santa Claus in the English tradition of course comes on Christmas Day, a great, benevolent and booming figure who somehow manages to squeeze through chimney stacks and other cracks, and fill those socks for the sleepless and delighted children.

Celebrations centre around Christmas Day lunch and tend to be a more open affair, including the wider family and friends. As celebrations take place in the middle of summer, warmer temperatures mean that much activity takes place outdoors, on decks, in gardens and on the beach. However, even New Zealanders sometimes struggle to make the choice between a traditional Christmas roast or simply a barbecue.

In asking around Swiss/New Zealand families, it appears that each family

has somehow created their very own mix of traditions, often having two celebrations to honour both customs – particularly in mixed Swiss/New Zealand families. In fact, having two celebrations is often very convenient as it allows adult children with partners or divorced parents to accommodate the different families. Thankfully, children seem to fit into these mixed traditions quite seamlessly.

Children are very clever anyway. They know that there are plenty of "fake" Santa Clauses around at Christmas time, and that the real Christ Child and Santa Claus will appear in the right place, at the right time. Swiss Auckland children agree: the real "Swiss" Santa Claus arrives by helicopter on the Swiss farm, which is to be expected from someone who has to travel far and wide.

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