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Reminiscences of Swiss Pioneers - L. Mettan 1904

This is an article we found published in the April Helvetia 1945 about L. Mettan who arrived in New Zealand in 1904. It shows just how adventurous and brave Swiss Pioneers had to be in those days to venture across the world to find a new life here.

Probably in the quietest manner imaginable, our greatly esteemed friend and compatriot Mr. L. Mettan, recently celebrated his 75th birthday on his Farm "Helvetia" in riverside, Whangarei. The same day he completed 40 years of sojourn in New Zealand, as he landed on his birthday in Auckland. Few of our fellow-members respect and love Switzerland as much as he does. Every year Mr. Mettan makes by far the largest donation towards the funds of our Society, which are invariably made with genuine expression of pleasure and beneficence. We have been fortunate in obtaining a short description of Mr. Mettan's early travels, which we are happy to publish below.

"My love and respect for Switzerland seems to grow the older I get, and I always look forward with the greatest of pleasure to receive the monthly Helvetia. It is now just 40 years since I left my dear Fatherland, and it seems but yesterday! I remember well when Joseph Werder of Oberwil wrote to me in Montreux how his brother Johann advised him from Taranaki, how well satisfied and pleased he was in this prosperous country of New Zealand. Being young, I gave my boss a month notice and booked my passage. The shipping agent at Zurich gave me an address of an acquaintance of his in Matamata, and having no job to go to, I was rather grateful for his help. At the breakfast table on the "Scharnerd" from Genoa, I met two other compatriots, Messrs. Hans Elsener and Kaspar Staub both from Zug.

We landed on October 9th, 1904 and went straight to the Albert Hotel to meet our agent. We were rather un-nerved when told that we had to go 4 miles out of Matamata, as none of us knew a word of English. However, in repeating the owner's name innumerable, we finally reached our destination. Mr. Staub was refused on the farm, as he never "worked on the land", and Mr. Elsener and myself finally were permitted to work at a munificent wage of 10/- per week, although the standard fee was 20/-. This we accepted on the understanding the employer teach us English; in any case we hardly could do otherwise, knowing no language but our own. However, this promise was never kept, not a word of English, and it soon struck me that the intention on the employer in keeping us ignorant of the language was so that he could keep us indefinitely at 10/- per week. He knew that we had to stay with him at half wages as long as we were unable to speak the language of the country. The position soon became intolerable and we both gave notice and quitted the job.

After working in various other positions, I decided to return to Switzerland with the intention of inducing some of my countrymen to come out to this land of wonderful opportunities, which proved an easy job indeed. Soon I was on the high sea again. This time I travelled by way of South America, with first stop in Buenos Aires. The Argentine Capital

is a great city, with evidently a "fast life", but I had little time to spare and went to Rosario where a very considerable Swiss colony exists. The dairy industries in those parts of the Argentine are very extensive. The mobs of cattle I saw were simply enormous, larger than any in New Zealand or Australia. After visiting Uruguay, we soon reached Rio de Janeiro the Capital of Brazil. This city is not far south from the Equator and I found it the hottest place I ever visited. In London I spent a full week, just arriving at the time of the World Exhibition and the opening of the famous Crystal



Crystal Palace in London - what a marvellous sight for L. Mettan!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Crystal_Palace.PNG

Palace.

When I left Switzerland in 1904, hardly any of my friends believed I would ever come back, particularly so after they received some "wild" looking Maori photographs which I posted home. Some of my good friends firmly believed I would be eaten by cannibals!! You may imagine therefore, the astonishment at my return! I had a few weeks of great entertainment and the festivities were endless. Whilst in London I cashed a draft in English money, and I was handling my sovereigns and banknotes rather freely in shops, inns and public places of my hometown. Soon my compatriots thought I must have come from a rich country, and after hearing of my intention to return to New Zealand, many asked to be taken along. Finally a few joined me and on arrival here we settled in Gisborne where we all worked together for a while, but



Man & Camera, Maori, Trevor Lloyd comic postcard 1907