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Launching of the M.V. "Carona"

A launching of a ship is at any time a great and significant event, but when the ship proudly hoists the Swiss Flag and the emblem of a Swiss Shipping Company, then it becomes almost a national event.

On Tuesday, November 30th, 1948, the first ship built in this country for the "Schweizerische Reederei A.G.", of Basle, was launched at the North Sea Port of West Hartlepool near the Scottish border, in the presence of the Swiss Minister and Madame Henry de Torrenté and a number of distinguished guests.

Sixteen months ago, I had the privilege to witness the launching of another Swiss ship, built by Messrs. William Gray & Co. Ltd., of West Hartlepool, for the "Suisse Atlantique, S.A.", Lausanne, bearing the illustrious name of "General Guisan," — thus perpetuating the name of the Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army during the last war — and which now sails on the high seas.

It was a grand moment when Madame Guisan, who was accompanied by the General, "broke the bottle" which began the vessel's journey down the slipway.

The launching of the M.V. "Carona," named after the lovely little village situated on the hill-side above Melide overlooking Lake Lugano, was no less imposing.

Slowly but surely our country is joining the ranks of seafaring nations, and the joke of the "Swiss Navy," which for centuries has been made at our expense, should now pass into oblivion; and yet we are still teased, "What is the use of having a navy" they say, "If you have no sea?" To which we may retort, as I mentioned in this paper previously, "What is the use of having a Ministry of Food, and no food?" —

It might be an opportune occasion to refer to the history of the "Schweizerische Reederei, A.G. (Swiss Shipping Company Ltd.)

The Company was formed in Berne on the 12th February, 1919, under the name of "Schweizer Schleppschiffahrtsgenossenschaft."

The purpose of the Company was to undertake Rhine Transports for Swiss account in Swiss craft, as this had previously been undertaken by non-Swiss companies.

The Founder and First President of the Company was Mr. Paul Speiser and the Capital was subscribed by the Swiss Federal Railways, Swiss Cantons, Utility and Industrial Undertakings and some private individuals.

The first tug was named "Schweiz," which was bought from a German ship-building yard and placed in service between Duisburg and Strasbourg on the 1st November, 1919.

1921. The first Swiss-built barges came into service.

1922. The first turbine tug "Zurich" was put into service. Mr. N. Jaquet, now Managing Director, joined the Company.

1923. In this year three more vessels were added to the fleet and trials were made on the Hueninger

Canal, which had not been used since the middle of the 19th century.

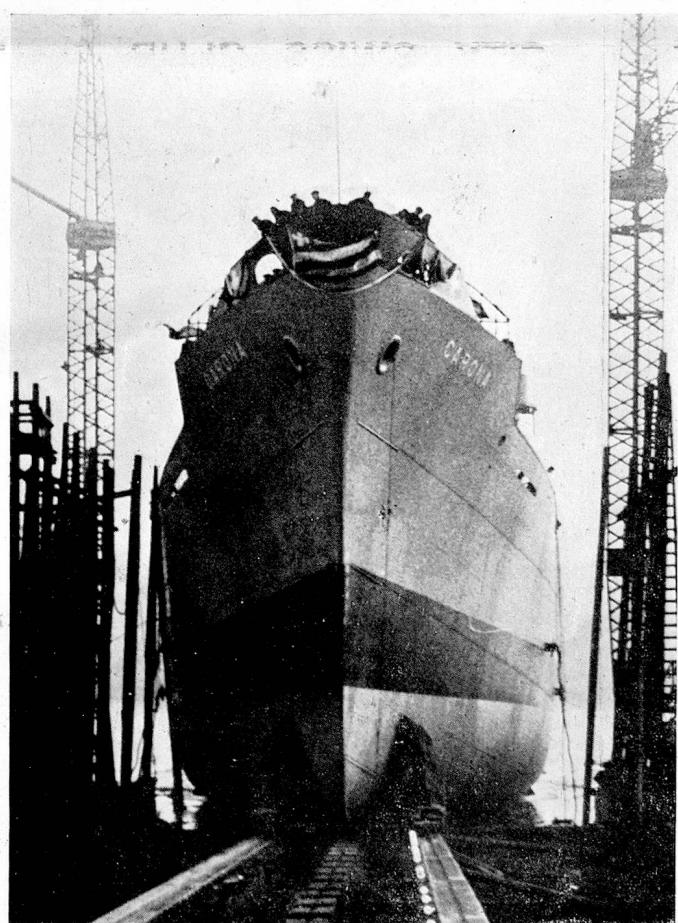
1924. The Dutch-Swiss Shipping Company was founded in Rotterdam. Fifteen vessels were added to the fleet. Mr. F. Degen, now Financial Director, joined the Company.

1925. Reconstruction of the Hueninger Lock of the Rhine-Rhone Canal was completed. This came into use the following year, thus opening a route by water all the way from the North Sea to Basle.

1926-1938. This covered a period of rapid expansion. By the end of 1938 the total number of vessels amounted to 161, with a total tonnage of 98,000 tons. 1935 witnessed the regrettable death of Prof. Dr. Paul Speiser, the Founder and Honorary President. In 1938 the Company's name was changed to —

Schweizerische Reederei A.G.
Swiss Shipping Company Ltd.
Compagnie Suisse de Navigation S.A.
Societa Svizzera di Navigazione S.A.

During these years considerable extensions took place by acquiring existing companies abroad or forming fresh ones.



M.V. "CARONA."

1939. At the outbreak of war in September, all traffic on the Rhine came to a stop, but later the whole fleet was exclusively employed for the carriage of Swiss traffic from Rotterdam and Antwerp. Further extensions took place and in November a subsidiary company was formed in London under the name of — Swiss Shipping Agency (Agence Maritime Helvetic) Limited. During the course of the year the vessel "*Leventina*" was taken over and converted for use as a training ship. The first proposals were made to the Swiss Government to introduce the Swiss flag on the High Seas, but these were turned down. The tug "*Uri*," 3,600 h.p., and able to tow barges up to a total capacity of approximately 12,000 tons, came into service.

1940. The whole organisation was devoted exclusively to Swiss National requirements. A large quantity of English coal was shipped to Switzerland *via* Rouen. Renewed requests were made for the approval of the Swiss flag on the High Seas. The first sea-going ships, s.s. "*Calanda*" (abt. 7,470 tons d.w.) and s.s. "*Maloja*" (abt. 2,650 tons d.w.), were purchased and registered under the Panamanian flag.

1940-1945. Two of the Company's coasters under the Dutch flag, m.v. "*Albula*" (lost in 1940 off E.C. Scotland) and m.v. "*Bernina*," were employed in the coasting trade around the U.K. under the London Company's management.

1941. The Swiss Federal Government decided to introduce the Swiss flag on the High Seas, the Company's s.s. "*Calanda*" being the first ship to do so.

1942. The third sea-going vessel, s.s. "*Albula*" (abt. 2,030 tons d.w.), was bought. The Company also took over the management of the s.s. "*Caritas I*," which was used exclusively by the International Red

Cross, as well as that of the s.s. "*Lugano*" belonging to Messrs. Nautilus S.A.

1943. A second Red Cross vessel, s.s. "*Caritas II*," came under the Company's management and all the other ships were also used for Red Cross work. On the 7th September, s.s. "*Maloja*" was sunk off Corsica as a result of aerial attack during the battle occasioned by the escape of the Italian Navy to Allied ports.

1944. Owing to War conditions, the whole fleet of Rhine craft was withdrawn as far as possible to Basle during August and traffic on the Rhine came to a standstill. s.s. "*Albula*" was sunk in Marseilles harbour just prior to the arrival there of Allied forces. A third Red Cross ship, s.s. "*Henri Dunant*," was taken under management.

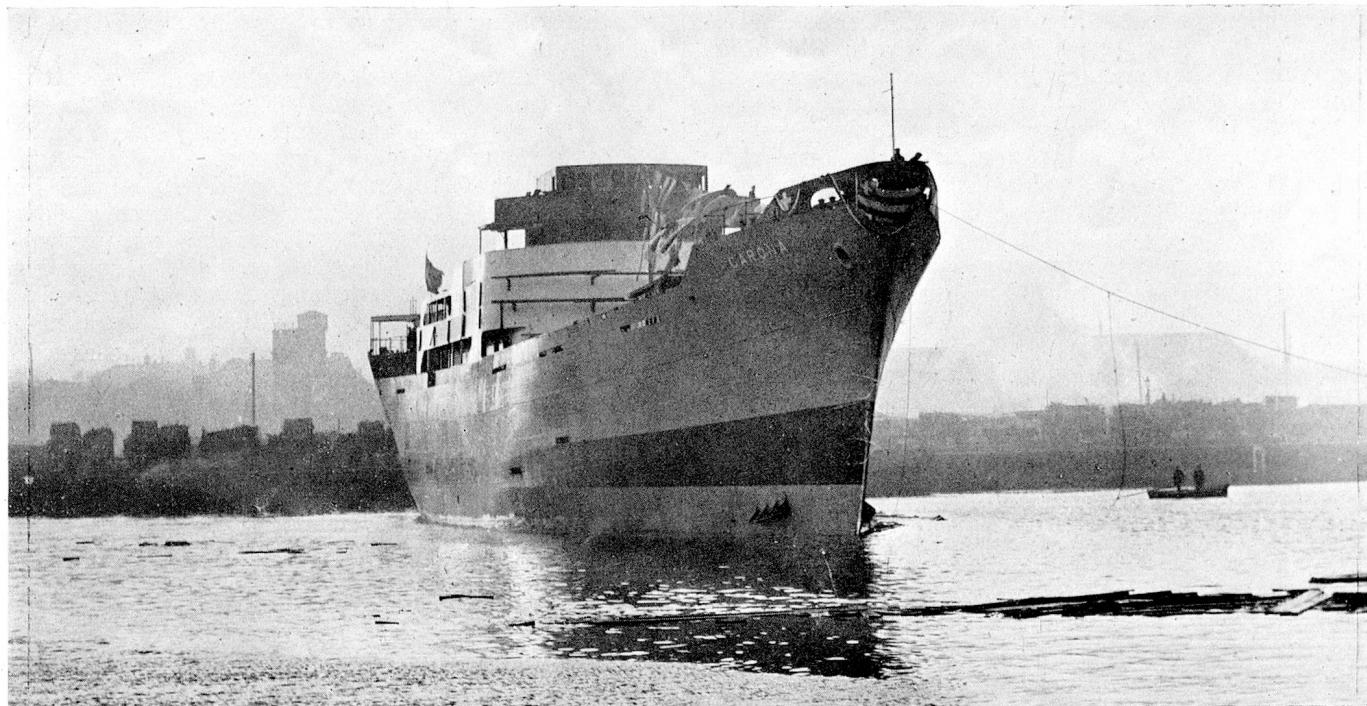
1945-1946. During the course of 1945 all the Rhine bridges were destroyed, but notwithstanding this, it was possible to recommence the Rotterdam service as far as Strasbourg. In co-operation with the French Government much progress was made in the clearance of the stretch between Strasbourg and Basle, which enabled the service up to Basle to be reopened in 1946. This enabled the complete fleet to be put into service again.

1946. Mr. B. Sarasin was elected Chairman of the Administrative Council of the Company in May of this year.

1947. s.s. "*Cristallina*" (abt. 8,100 tons d.w.) was purchased from the Swiss Government and orders were placed for the construction of two vessels (abt. 3,000 tons d.w. each) in the U.K. "*Schwyz*" put into service. This vessel is a sister-ship to the tug "*Uri*." The policy of the Company is to name all their



Left to right: Sir William Gray, Bt., Madame H. de Torrenté, Lady Gray, The Swiss Minister.



M.V. "CARONA" after the Launching.

vessels after Swiss localities, mountains, valleys and rivers.

Our readers might also be interested to learn a few particulars about the newly constructed ship.

The vessel is of shelter deck type with dimensions — length B.P. 300' 0", breadth moulded 46' 10", depth moulded to shelter deck 27' 6" and will carry about 3,000 tons on a draft of 18' 9", it has four holds and four hatches. One 20 ton derrick and two 7½ ton derricks are fitted at No. 2 hold, two 7½ ton derricks at No. 3 hold and two 5 ton derricks at Nos. 1 and 4 holds. 5 ton electric winches are fitted at Nos. 2 and 3 holds and 3 ton electric winches at Nos. 1 and 4 holds. Refrigerating cargo space is provided in the tween deck.

The captain, passengers, officers and engineers are accommodated in the bridge house. Wheelhouse, chart room, radio office and pilot's rooms are arranged on the navigating bridge, with captain and officers' rooms and officers' and engineers' smoke room on the boat deck.

Passenger accommodation is arranged on the promenade deck with officers' and engineers' mess room, engineers' rooms and caterers' accommodation on the shelter deck. Crew are accommodated aft. Accommodation is arranged for 12 passengers in two berth rooms on port and starboard sides. Private bathrooms are provided adjacent to two rooms. Passengers dining saloon, lounge and verandahs are fitted at the fore end. Crew are berthed in one berth room and recreation room is provided.

Messrs. Sulzer Bros. Ltd., Winterthur will supply the main engine, together with attendant auxiliaries. The engine will be of Sulzer Marine Diesel Type 5.TD.56, having five cylinders 560 m.m. diameter by 1000 m.m. stroke and developing 2140 B.H.P. at 165 revs per minute continuously. Three 106 K.W. generators and one 15 K.W. generator will also be supplied by Messrs. Sulzer.

The speed in service will be 12½ knots.

The port of registry for all Swiss ships is Basle. They are entered in the register of Swiss ships kept by the Office for Maritime Navigation in Basle, which superintends the whole of Swiss shipping.

* * *

On the day previous to the launching, I left London, early in the morning from Kings Cross Station, together with a large contingent of guests, in a thick fog, which had then lasted already for a few days; a second party consisting of the Swiss Minister and his collaborators followed the same afternoon.

It was a dreary, cold and unfriendly morning, and only the hope, that, once leaving the Metropolis, the fog might disperse, and the sun send its warm greetings, kept the company in a pleasant mood.

Unfortunately, this hope was not realised, and the entire journey to Darlington, where cars awaited the party to take them a further hour's journey to West Hartlepool was accomplished in an unpenetrable fog.

On arrival at the Grand Hotel tea was served, and the guests were welcomed by Mr. F. C. Pyman, Managing-Director of Messrs. Wm. Gray & Co. Ltd.

The names of the guests attending this auspicious occasion were:—

Monsieur and Madame Henry de Torrenté, Monsieur and Madame V. Umbrecht, Secretary of Legation, Monsieur C. M. Weibel, Secretary of Legation, Monsieur E. M. Bircher, Secretary of Legation, Mr. J. Huber, Swiss Consul, Manchester, Mr. and Mrs. B. Sarasin, President, Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., Basle, Mr. R. Wittmer, Member of the Administrative Council of the Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., Basle, Mr. F. Degen, Financial Director, Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., Basle, Dr. h.c. A. Ryniker, Director, Maritime Office Swiss Confederation, Basle, Mr. W. J. Borrowman, Sulzer Bros., Winterthur, Mr. R. Ringier, Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., Basle, Mr. E. Vernum, Marine

Superintendent, Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., Basle, Mr. C. V. Druitt, Managing Director, Swiss Shipping Agency Ltd., London, Mr. and Mrs. R. Hangartner, Director, Swiss Shipping Agency Ltd., London, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Hill, Director, Swiss Shipping Agency Ltd., London, Mr. A. C. Hardy, Journal of Commerce, Mr. Th. Haller, Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, Mr. H. H. Fisher, Exchange Telegraph Co., Dr. A. Kunzli, London Correspondent, "National Zeitung," Dr. H. W. Egli, London Correspondent, "Neue Zurcher Zeitung," Dr. E. Meyer, London Correspondent "Arbeiterzeitung," Mr. A. Stauffer, Editor, Swiss Observer, Mr. J. D. Prince, "Lloyd's List and Shipping Gazette," Mr. A. Harvart, "Fairplay," Mr. E. G. Warne, "The Motor Ship," Mr. C. Cowley, "Northern Daily Mail."

On Monday, the visitors were invited to a cocktail party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Pyman and from their daughter I heard that she had recently spent a holiday at "Bümpliz" of all places, and her complimentary remarks about my native town of Berne were most flattering.

Tuesday Morning.

A dismal morning, still fog and more fog, in the distance the incessant and monotonous sounds of the fog horns could be heard. The prospects of a launching under clear skies became less and less promising.

Soon after breakfast, a fleet of cars conveyed the guests to Durham, the capital of the county, where the famous Norman Cathedral, which was built 1093-1133, was visited.

The party was received at the great North door by the Dean, the Very Rev. C. A. Alington, who, in a very interesting address traced the history of this ancient Norman Church. After an extended tour through the vast building, the return journey was started. On leaving the Cathedral, bright sunshine greeted us, and hopes ran high for the afternoon's launching ceremony, but hardly had we left the town, when once again a thick fog developed with visibility restricted to a few yards only.

There remained little hope now, that the sun would make an appearance again, in fact, when the cars, after luncheon, conveyed us to the Dockyard everything looked extremely bleak.

Arriving at the foot of the launching platform, Madame de Torrenté was presented with a beautiful bouquet of flowers; the company then ascended the platform, which was gaily decorated with Swiss flags and bunting, first the Minister and Madame de Torrenté, accompanied by Sir William and Lady Gray, Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Pyman, and then the other official guests and high officials of the company.

A strong wind coming from the North Sea suddenly swept over the Dockyard, it was bitterly cold; but as if by a magic wand the fog lifted, and there appeared a lovely winter sky. The M.V. "Carona" on her day of baptism received after all the blessing of the sun, indeed a good omen for the future of this ship.

The Swiss flag proudly waved to and fro at the stern of the ship bathed in golden sunshine.

Last preparations were made, the microphone was put into position (the launching ceremony was relayed to Switzerland). Hundreds of workmen, and town people accompanied by their wives and children had in the meantime assembled to witness this event, Press

photographers got busy taking pictures of the chief actors.

Then a sudden hush descended over the multitude, the noise of the machines and steam hammers in the vicinity ceased, Madame de Torrenté, accompanied by Sir William Gray, stepped forward and in a clear voice christened the ship and broke the traditional bottle of champagne — which was covered with ribbons in our national colours — against the bows, pressed the release button, and the ship, amidst the sounding of sirens and the cheers from a vast crowd, gracefully and majestically glided down the slipway into the water.

Sir William, who led the three cheers of the "Success to Carona" was heartily joined by the large gathering on the launching platform. It was an unforgettable moment, which will remain for a long time in the memory of those who had the opportunity to be present.

Messages to Switzerland, on this conspicuous occasion were spoken into the microphone by the Swiss Minister, Mr. B. Sarasin, President Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., and Mr. F. Degen, Director of the Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., Basle. (The broadcast was later in the evening heard in the news from Radio Beromünster, and our compatriot, Mr. Th. Haller, who was in charge of it, is heartily to be congratulated on the result achieved.)

The M.V. "Carona" floating gracefully on the sea is now awaiting the fitting out with her engines.

An extensive and most interesting visit was then paid to the Shipyard, where ships in various stages of construction could be seen in the docks. On the conclusion of the tour, Champagne was served in the Hall of the main building and the toast to the M.V. "Carona" was proposed by Sir William Gray and heartily responded to by the entire company.

The first act in the christening ceremony was thus concluded and the guests were taken back to the Hotel where the second act was to take place in the form of a Banquet.

The Banquet arranged and attended by about sixty people was a very enjoyable affair, it was, in fact, more a family party than an official function. The tables were ornamented with little Swiss and English flags, and the flowers had been artistically arranged by Miss Avril Pyman giving the Hall a festive appearance.

When coffee was served, the toasts to H.M. the King and Switzerland, were proposed by Sir William Gray, who was in the Chair.

The toast "Success to M.V. Carona" was given by Sir William, who extended a hearty welcome to the large number of guests and especially to the President and Directors of the "Schweizerische Reederei A.G., Basle" and the Swiss Shipping Agency Ltd., in London, thanking them for their orders, and expressing the hope that they may have the pleasure of building many more ships to sail under the Swiss flag. The speaker in his address referred to the bonds of friendship between the two countries, a friendship which was built up through good sportsmanship and mutual respect.

"In the "Carona", Sir William said, "the Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., has a real asset, and by building a fleet, Switzerland will be able in times of need, to feed her people and keep her independence.

He congratulated the members of the Board on their policy of foresight, expressing the hope that their ships would proudly carry the Swiss Flag to many foreign lands." (Applause.)

The toast "Success to M.V. Carona" was responded to with great enthusiasm.

During a short interval, the Chairman presented to Madame de Torrenté, whom he called the Fairy Godmother of the "Carona," a memento of the occasion, consisting of a diamond brooch; a similar presentation was made to Madame Sarasin.

Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, the Swiss Minister, replying to the toast said, that the launching of the new ship was, both to himself and his wife, as well as to his colleagues and compatriots present a great experience.

In referring to the naming of the vessel, after a little village on the southern slopes of Monte San Salvatore, whose inhabitants, consisting of simple folk, have stood the test of ages, he said: "One could wish for nothing better than that this spirit of loving care and earnest endeavour, which are so evident in the village, should also shelter and enfold this ship."

The Minister continued by expressing on his own and his countrymen's behalf best wishes for the new vessel's future saying that the "Carona" was a valuable acquisition to the Swiss Maritime fleet. "Our ships," he mentioned, "have a heavy duty to perform, they must ensure our basic food and raw materials. It is never Switzerland's intention to reach anything like self-sufficiency in overseas connections. We have neither the men, nor the facilities, nor the capital to do that, but our independence, our very existence, as well as our ability to render service to others — depend on

our having some measure of control on ocean transportation."

In conclusion, Monsieur de Torrenté, expressed to Sir William and his fellow workers his sincere thanks for this fine product of British Shipbuilding, saying: "It will be some time yet, before this ship can start its service. Like an apprentice, however, she has taken her first step and we are proud that some of our own firms have contributed to her technical equipment. For the rest of her finishing stages, we confidently leave her in your skilled hands. I only hope she may soon be followed by a sister ship and that they will both be worthy of their builders as well as their owners."

(Long applause.)

The next speaker was Mr. F. C. Pyman, Managing-Director of Messrs. Wm. Gray & Co. Ltd., who, very wittily referred to his long association with our country, dating back to nearly forty years.

He congratulated the Board of the Swiss Shipping Co. Ltd., on their policy in respect to ocean going boats, mentioning that negotiations with the people in Basle were always cordial and pleasant.

The last speaker was Mr. B. Sarasin, President of the "Schweizerische Reederei, A.G.", Basle, who, in perfect English, expressed his sincere thanks for the warm welcome which was extended to him and his colleagues. "What our English friends have done for us, surpasses all expectations," he said amidst applause.

The speaker gave a short and interesting *exposé* of the company's history, stating that, as far back as 1936 a new and expansive policy was inaugurated.

Mr. Sarasin said, that there must have slumbered a spirit of seamanship already in the early stages of Swiss history, giving as an example the words uttered



Guests on the Launching Platform.

by Gessler, the Austrian Governor, to William Tell, when trying to embark in stormy weather from the shores of the "Vierwaldstätter See":

"Here comes Tell he knows how to steer a ship
He shall tell me whether the trip may be risked
When need is on, everything may be risked
The brave man thinks of himself last."

"The spirit of the brave man," the speaker continued, "is in fact very British; we owe our independence to Great Britain, and we Swiss are deeply grateful for all your country has done for us."

Mr. Sarasin, terminated his excellent oration with the plea that the age-long friendship between the two countries might last and become even more closer. (*Long applause.*)

And thus a memorable day, during which a further milestone in the yet early history of Swiss ocean-going ships has been passed, came to a successful close, a day which will leave behind nothing but pleasant memories.

Before concluding this narrative, expressions of thanks should be tendered to the Directors of William Gray & Co. Ltd., and the Swiss Shipping Agency, Ltd., in London, especially to Messrs. C. V. Druitt and J. B. Hill, who so efficiently arranged this trip up North, including Mr. R. W. Whales, private secretary to Sir William, who made the visitors feel at home at West Hartlepool.

And now "Best of Luck and Happy Sailing" to the

M. V. "C A R O N A."

ST.

SENDUNG STUDIO BASEL.

Das Studio Basel hat dem Unterzeichneten, Vertreter des Schweizerischen Landessenders Beromünster, dreissig Minuten Sendezeit eingeräumt für eine Sendung über "Sorgen und Anliegen der Schweizerkolonie von London." Da ich die Sendung auf möglichst breiter Basis aufbauen möchte, bitte ich alle, die sich dafür interessieren, mir in möglichst wenigen Worten zu schreiben, was nach ihrer Meinung "einmal gesagt werden sollte." Dies ist der einzige Weg um ein wahrheitsgetreues Bild über die Stimmung innerhalb der Kolonie zu erhalten. Zuschriften können leider nicht beantwortet werden — höchstens in Einzelfällen, wo es sich um besonders interessante Anregungen handelt. Theodor Haller, 44, Princes Park Avenue, London, N.W.11. Tel: SPE 7074.

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