

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1957)
Heft: 1302

Artikel: Swiss National Day celebration
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691385>

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1957

on THURSDAY, 1st of AUGUST, 1957
at the WIMBLEDON TOWN HALL

Brilliant sunshine and a cloudless sky heralded the 666th anniversary celebration of our country's Independence.

One could wish that an equally clear and cloudless sky would spread over the political horizon of the world, so that mankind could enjoy the short span of life which is allotted to us without constant fear and alarm for the future.

There are many anniversaries celebrated amongst Swiss at home and abroad, but I am sure none is so consistently and with so much feeling kept as is the birthday of our country.

Wherever Swiss do dwell they forgather on that day to be in spirit with the land which is so dear to all of us.

It might be an opportune moment to recall the origin of the 1st of August celebration. It took an *official* character for the first time in 1891, when on the 600th anniversary a general chiming of bells was heard throughout Switzerland at eight in the evening.

Seven years later a petition was presented to the Municipal Council of Berne to the effect that the ringing of bells should be repeated every year on the 1st of August. The request was passed on by the Council to the cantonal authorities and by the latter to the Federal Council. The cantons were finally consulted and eighteen of them were in favour from the beginning.

On 22nd July, 1899, the cantons were invited by the Federal Council to bring about a general ringing of bells from 8.30 to 8.45 p.m., and five years later this time was fixed half an hour earlier. At the same time it was suggested that flags and pennants should be flown from public buildings.

In 1911 the offices of the Federal administration were for the first time closed at 5 p.m.; since then early closing on the 1st of August has become general.

A petition presented to the Government in 1916 with the view of turning the 1st of August into a public holiday failed to find favour with the two Houses of Parliament. It was held that solemn chimes calling for a few moments of meditation after a day's toilsome work was more dignified than a whole day of festivities and jollifications.

Bonfires never formed part of the official commemoration; they are a remnant of ancient folklore. Since 1910 collections (by the sale of badges, etc.) for the benefit of some Swiss institutions of general utility have formed a popular feature of the 1st of August. (The receipt of this year's collection is earmarked for cancer research work.)

The London Swiss Colony for the first time *officially* celebrated our National Day in 1939. Before this date it was left to the various Societies and Institutions to keep this day. Since then — with the exception of some of the last war years, as it was held that a large gathering involved too many risks owing to bombing attacks on London — every year the Swiss Colony forgathered in a large "Landsgemeinde".

* * *

This year's celebration was a great success; between 1,200 and 1,300 of our compatriots filled the large and pleasant Wimbledon Town Hall to its full capacity.

At the back of the stage a large Swiss banner, flanked by the Union Jack, was prominently displayed, whilst along the balconies the cantonal escutcheons were in view.

Shortly before the start of the programme the Swiss Ambassador accompanied by Madame Daeniker, His Worship the Mayor of Wimbledon and Mrs. Reid, the President of the 1st of August Committee and Mrs. Streit, and members of the Swiss Embassy with their ladies, took their seats. They were joined by Professor Keller, an old friend of the Colony and a former President of the "Direktorium" of the Swiss National Bank. The three principal ladies were presented with beautiful bouquets.

The younger generation was — as last year — in preponderance. Many of the resident Swiss are at this time on holiday, which no doubt accounted for the relatively small number of older members of the Swiss community being present; however, I think that still a good many of the "old guard" should have taken the trouble of coming along, and thus by their attendance shown their attachment — at least for once in a year — to our homeland.

On former occasions the organising committee, in order to present an appropriate programme, had to invite performers from our homeland. Whilst their collaboration was generally appreciated the costs involved proved to be too heavy. Consequently it was decided to try this time to present a programme supplied entirely from local talent. It was not an easy task considering that year by year the Colony is getting smaller and smaller, but I am happy to say that the organisers succeeded in their endeavours.

The evening started with community singing with our friend Mr. E. P. Dick at the organ. There was — at least at the beginning — a certain reluctance and shyness to join wholeheartedly in the singing. None of this shyness was, however, apparent later on when

refreshments were obtainable at the various counters — there, elbows were much in evidence! Whilst the ancient Swiss used to fight with halberdiers and such weapons, our new generation substitutes pushing and shoving; true enough it is less dangerous, but none the less not very agreeable and far from dignified.

After the community singing the Rev. A. Lanfranchi offered a prayer in Italian.

As is customary the head of our Colony then delivered a patriotic address. The Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, on rising received a cordial reception by the entire audience; he said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and compatriots,

I am glad to be able to welcome such a large gathering of compatriots and to convey to you all the greetings of the Swiss government on the occasion of the anniversary of the foundation of the Swiss Confederation, to greet the many residents who each year faithfully attend this patriotic meeting and also those who perhaps have newly arrived in this country and have for the first time joined the colony in order to take part in this auspicious celebration. It is a particular pleasure for me to welcome His Worship the Mayor and Mayoress of Wimbledon amongst us and to thank them for having so generously opened the gates of the Town Hall of this world-famous Borough to the Swiss community. At the same time I wish to express on behalf of this assembly our sincerest thanks to M. Streit, the President, and the Members of the First of August Committee, for having again organised this patriotic gathering with their usual diligence and great devotion, and also the Corale of the Unione Ticinese, the Accordion Club and the other artists who will add to the success of this evening with their contributions.

“It is for the first time that I have the honour to address you as the Swiss Ambassador to the Court of St. James. I share however the view, only recently expressed by the American President, that any citizen who is travelling abroad should be considered an Ambassador of goodwill for his country. Anyone who takes out a passport — he suggested — should be admonished to show respect for foreign laws and customs, courtesy and regard for other ways of life, and should act in speech and manner in a way fitting to mould the reputation of his country.

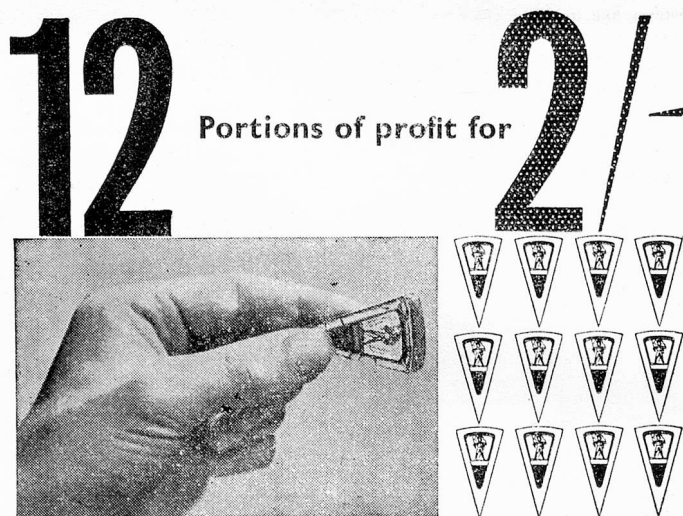
“Indeed, I think that at this solemn hour we should first of all remember with feelings of sincere gratitude the many benefits which our colony obtains through the generous hospitality of Great Britain, champion among all Nations for civic liberties and the rule of law. This great Nation has always granted establishment and trade under the most liberal conditions to many generations of our countrymen who have settled on its soil or in any of its overseas territories during the last two centuries.

“There are two recent events in the life of our colony which I would like to mention to-day: last November, the City Swiss Club has celebrated, under the Chairmanship of our unforgettable friend, Charles Gysin, the centenary of its existence and, in January, a Swiss Hostel for Girls was founded with the generous support of the whole colony and many circles at home. Both events, I think, witness the particular spirit which has always permeated our community: a vivid sense for its own traditions, which go back to the beginning of the 18th century, and an

open understanding for the needs of all its members, coupled with a ready willingness for solidary action in the common interest.

“Let us remember then that the Pact of 1291, which we have come to celebrate, has in its own way been an act of faith in the principle of solidary action. Our ancestors of the three cantons were certainly not conscious that by putting their seals on this historical document, they laid the foundation for the Swiss Confederation we know to-day. It was not their intention to strive for political independence, not even to vindicate any new rights or liberties. But they met under a common anxiety to preserve their ancient rights and very material economic interests. It was their aim to forge a common front for solidary action by promising each other full aid and assistance in any emergency and by relying on their common resources to resist any undue interference from malicious neighbours. In an unbroken line of continued corporate existence, this capital principle has unswervingly been upheld and it is to this consistent policy that our modern State owes its union and origin.

“To-day we all proudly wear the same badge as the many hundred-thousands who, at this solemn hour, are gathered in our cities and valleys, on the mountain heights and in every corner of the world. This badge is more than a mark of common allegiance. It is a symbol for another solidary action, the proceeds of the sale of these badges being intended for the sick and disabled. Any community will prove its



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strength by the care given to the economically weak and particularly the physically disabled. It was in this same spirit that almost a hundred years ago the Red Cross movement was launched from Switzerland and ever since then the inverted colours of the Swiss flag have been the symbol of solidary action in the interest of humanity."

"Liebe Landsleute,

Wenn heute anlässlich der 666-jährigen Wiederkehr des Gründungsdatums der Eidgenossenschaft unsere Landsleute hier, in der Heimat und über die weite Welt zerstreut, sich festlich versammeln, dürfte nichts so sehr zur Erhebung der Gemüter beitragen wie das Gefühl einer uns allen umspannenden Einheit. Unser Vaterland ist aus tiefgehenden Verschiedenheiten zu dieser Einheit gewachsen. Verschiedenheiten zwischen Stadt und Land, in der Sprache und der Religion; gemeinsam war uns nur die geschichtliche Erfahrung, die durch alle Fährnisse der geschichtlichen Entwicklung stets erneuerte Bejahung des gemeinsamen Bandes. So sind wir im Grunde eine politische Nation, die gänzlich auf dem Willen aller beruht. Doch dieses Wachstum in der geschichtlichen Erfahrung hätte sich nicht bewährt, wenn wir uns nicht die politischen Einrichtungen geschaffen hätten, die unserem Charakter entsprechen. Wir sind ein Kleinstaat geblieben, dem es nicht darum zu tun war, eine äussere Machtstellung zu erringen, sondern vielmehr dass die grösstmögliche Zahl seiner Angehörigen Bürger im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes sind. Diesem Ideal zuliebe haben wir frühe schon, in

vorsichtiger Abschätzung der eigenen Kräfte, auf Eroberungen und Gebietserweiterungen verzichtet und im Schutze unserer Neutralität jene Harmonie im Zusammenleben verschiedener Sprachstämme und Konfessionen geschaffen, die so oft als unsere Mission in der Welt gepriesen wird.

"Man hat in dieser Zeit beispielloser Prosperität manche Anzeichen finden wollen, dass der Gemeinschaftssinn, der Bürgersinn, nicht mehr derselbe sei wie früher; in manchen Abstimmungen der letzten Zeit hat man die Tendenz verspürt, vom Staate grössere Sicherheit zu verlangen ohne ihm gleichzeitig die Mittel an die Hand zu geben, welche er zur Erfüllung seiner Aufgaben nötig hat. So sehr die Geschichte uns zu einer optimistischen Grundeinstellung ermutigen sollte, gefällt sich der Schweizer im Pessimismus gerade dann, wenn er am wenigsten Grund zum Klagen hätte; er würde es schwerlich vertragen, wenn ihm gesagt wird, dass es ihm noch nie besser ergangen sei; denn er denkt unwillkürlich daran, dass die Zeiten auch wieder schlechter werden könnten und sucht dem vorzubauen.

"Schon Gottfried Keller hatte in einer ähnlichen Zeit der wirtschaftlichen Expansion gegen die Gefahren, die daraus unserer Demokratie erwachsen, seine warnende Stimme erhoben und die Auswüchse des politischen Lebens jener Epoche gegeisselt. Wie zeitbedingt scheinen uns heute seine politischen Sorgen gewesen zu sein! Wir Auslandsschweizer wissen und dürfen darauf vertrauen, dass aus dem Schatz viel hundert jähriger Erfahrung immer wieder die Kräfte emporwachsen, an denen sich unser staatliches Leben erneuern wird."

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"Chers compatriotes,

Il y a quelques années, un éminent écrivain politique a consacré un livre à la Suisse. Ce livre porte comme épigraphe les mots de La Rochefoucauld: 'C'est une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul'. Que voulait-il exprimer par ces mots? Certes, André Siegfried est un ami sincère de notre pays; loin de lui la pensée de nous qualifier sages ou bornés au point de nous considérer frappés de folie. Au contraire trouvait-il que le continent a plus que jamais besoin de ce petit pays, grand par la place qu'il tient dans le monde. Bien que touché par le séisme de la guerre, notre patrimoine est resté intact; nous n'avons pas subi une révolution sociale comme nos voisins, qui nous trouvent tels que nous l'étions autrefois, 'attachés à une normalité complètement anormale au milieu de ce triste continent'. Ainsi, nous avons maintenu les valeurs solides qui furent celles d'un monde qui a été ébranlé par deux guerres successives. Sous ce climat d'hélicisme commun à nous tous, nous jugeons le monde selon notre mesure. Cette sagesse qui veut que toute nouvelle action soit basée sur l'expérience et des valeurs prouvées, n'a-t-elle pas été le meilleur des guides au cours de notre histoire?

"Car, cette sagesse ne nous a pas empêché de choisir notre propre chemin, souvent bien différent de celui des peuples autour de nous, et de le poursuivre avec courage et constance. Que pensait-on, jadis, des trois communautés primitives, qui, confiantes dans la force que leur a donnée l'action solidaire, ont victorieusement défendu leur indépendance contre l'Empereur, et toute une puissante armée de chevaliers, partis en campagne pour écraser leur liberté? Que

pensait-on, à l'aube des temps nouveaux, de ce peuple guerrier qui, à l'apogée de sa gloire militaire, a soudainement renoncé à une politique d'expansion, d'alliances et de conquêtes pour se retrancher derrière une nouvelle maxime, celle de la neutralité? Et au 19ème siècle, à l'époque de l'ascendance du nationalisme en Europe, n'avons-nous pas montré au monde que trois peuples de langues différentes peuvent vivre en parfaite harmonie sous les institutions politiques qu'ils ont librement choisies? Aujourd'hui encore, nous nous refusons de nous associer à maintes organisations internationales afin de garder notre pleine liberté d'action sans égard à ce que font les autres; une politique qui, certes, a rehaussé notre prestige dans le monde mais ne nous empêche point de participer à des oeuvres solidaires. Cette sagesse, cette persistance de vouloir rester ce que nous sommes, ne fait-elle pas notre force, n'est-elle pas la plus précieuse garantie de notre intégrité?"

"Cari Ticinesi,

Rivolgendomi ultimamente — last but not least — ai nostri confederati di lingua italiana, io non potrei far meglio che di citare un passaggio di un discorso del loro più grande concittadino, il Consigliere federale Giuseppe Motta; parlando in 1924 ai ginnasti ticinesi si è pronunciato così sulla missione del Ticino nel seno della patria comune:

"Solo Cantone di lingua italiana il Ticino ha, nella Confederazione, una funzione sua particolare di cui ogni svizzero comprende l'importanza. E' suo altissimo vanto, maggiore forse d'ogni altro, che col diventarne membro autonomo, esso abbia innestato sul venerabile tronco della antica Confederazione l'idea nuova, da cui la Svizzera moderna trae una delle sue caratteristiche più importanti di tendere ad una sintesi politica mediante i valori e le virtù di tre civiltà. Ciò che il Ticino ha di più notevole è il suo carattere etnico e ciò che esso produce di più prezioso è il suo abitante, sveglio di ingegno, tenace di volontà, sobrio di vita, integro di costume. Prova ne sia la nostra rigogliosa colonia all'estero la quale, svolgendo la sua attività in condizioni favorevoli d'ambiente, è in gran numero pervenuto a un'agiatezza invidiabile pur conservando fino alla terza e alla quarta generazione inalterabile il culto dell'antica patria."

Loud applause acknowledged the Ambassador's address. When calm was restored the audience sang upstanding the "Schweizerpsalm" "Trittst im Morgenrot daher".

This was followed by the reading of the Swiss Pact, a custom which is kept up at home and in all Swiss Colonies abroad. On some former occasions this solemn document was read by one of our compatriots dressed in medieval costume, and it is to be regretted that somehow this was not kept up; it was a most impressive moment at last year's celebration.

Then appeared on the stage Hazel Schmid, soprano, the first of our "local talent". She sang Schubert's "Hirt auf den Felsen", accompanied by Leonard Setright, clarinet obbligato, and Michael Pilkington, piano.

This young and gifted singer is at the commencement of her professional career, she possesses a voice of easy delivery, warmth and clarity in tone and phrasing; all these fine attributes she put to the service of the music. In Leonard Setright and

Michael Pilkington she found very able accompanists. It is much regretted that an *encore* was not forthcoming in spite of fervent appeals, the reason being apparently to avoid delaying the programme unduly. The lovely bouquet presented to her was richly deserved. By her appearance in the programme Hazel Schmid made her *début* in the Swiss Colony. She created by her fine performance, which received such warm applause, the wish that we should hear her on many future occasions.

The "Corale" of the Unione Ticinese, conducted by Mr. L. Bruni, who appeared next, are old and reliable friends; they need but little introduction, for year in and year out they generously put their services at the disposal of the Colony.

Hailing from that little southern corner of our country where songs and laughter are such pleasant features, they appropriately rendered a number of *canzonette* eulogizing this gem which is a part of the Confederation. By their melodious and vivacious singing they captured all hearts, and each item was acknowledged with almost riotous applause. A further attraction of the "Corale" consists in the fact that they are dressed in the becoming costume of their native canton.

The second "local talent" making his *début* at a 1st of August celebration was Master Jean Michel Gandon, who, accompanied on the piano by Mr. E. P. Dick, sang — dressed in a smart "Mälcherchüttli" — that lovely song "Le Petit Chevrier" by Gustave



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Doret. He possesses a sweet melodious voice and sings with much feeling. He must have found the large hall and audience a little trying, but he soon overcame an initial nervousness and in his *encore* (a yodelling song) his voice gained in volume. His sympathetic performance earned him great applause which he acknowledged with a charming little bow.

Then Mr. A. Gandon, father of the previously mentioned artiste, and leader of the Swiss Accordion Club, played with his colleagues a number of "Polkas" and "Laendlers" which seemed to be much appreciated — judging from the "blood curdling" shrieks emanating from various parts of the audience. By their exuberant playing they made everyone itch to dance. Master Gandon, with the accompaniment of the accordionists, sang and "Echo" yodel very competently.

The first part of the programme was concluded by a short address by Mr. F. Streit, President of the 1st of August committee, who expressed pleasure at seeing such a large gathering in spite of the holiday season. He warmly thanked the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker for having again honoured the celebration by their presence, wishing them "Gueti Erholig" for their approaching vacation.

Mr. Streit voiced his and the committee's appreciation to the various artistes who had taken part in the programme singling out Hazel Schmid, Master Gandon and Mr. E. P. Dick. He addressed the members of the "Corale" of the Union Ticinese in their own language, and also referred to the presence of His Worship the Mayor of Wimbledon and Mrs. Reid, who had honoured the company by their presence.

The President concluded his address by reading out a telegram of good wishes received from the Swiss Club in Guernsey, and by thanking his colleagues on the committee for their collaboration, as well as the many donors, both private and from Swiss firms, for the generous financial support which enabled the organisers again to arrange this patriotic celebration.

This concluded the first part of the programme, and without further delay dancing started to the music first of the Swiss Accordion Club, and later of Harry Vardon's band.

Hundreds of happy couples, young and old, joined in the dancing; it was a scene of merriment and jollification which was a pleasure to watch. Conspicuous amongst the revellers was Mr. A. Bossert, for many years a resident in this country and now living in Switzerland, who, in spite of his 76 years, was "hopping and rollicking" like a youngster. To give the dancers a respite from their arduous labours, the "Corale" as well as Master Gandon appeared again.

At 1 a.m. the National Anthem was played, and once again our National Day Celebration came to a close.

It was a most successful evening, not marred by any unpleasant incident, and I cannot conclude this report without, on behalf of all those who took part, thanking most sincerely those who have worked so hard in making this year's celebration the success it was; special appreciation should be extended, first of all, to the President of the 1st of August committee, Mr. F. Streit, and Mr. A. Gandon, Mr. P. Jacomelli, and to Miss S. Morosi, the hardworking Secretary.

ST.

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