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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

on THURSDAY, 1st of AUGUST 1958
at WIMBLEDON TOWN HALL

At a time when the fate of mankind — perhaps for generations to come — is in the balance, the Swiss community in London has assembled with patriotic fervour to commemorate the 667th anniversary of the birth of our country, and to pay homage to those men who centuries ago, on the sacred spot of the Rütli, vowed to stand steadfastly together in distress and danger, in joy and sorrow.

This historic event, which is known as the "Rütli Schwur", is being kept as a day of remembrance and thankfulness not only in our country, but by all of our compatriots the wide world over. Still, there is no peace in this troubled world of ours; suspicion, hate, misunderstandings and wars are preventing us from enjoying the short span of life which is allotted to us. With heavy and uneasy hearts we are looking into the future, and anxiously we cast our eyes heavenwards, praying and hoping that a ray of sunshine will pierce the dark clouds, shedding its light, and sending a message of peace and goodwill to mankind.

* * *

As last year, the Swiss community this year again held its 1st of August celebration at the Wimbledon Town Hall, which on this occasion was decorated with the cantonal escutcheons, a large Swiss flag and the Union Jack. I noted with pleasure that this time the two national emblems had undergone a cleaning process and looked spick and span.

Shortly before the programme started, the Swiss Ambassador, accompanied by Madame Daeniker and his collaborators at the Embassy with their families, the Deputy Mayor of Wimbledon (Councillor A. E. Ayres) and Mrs. Ayres, Mr. F. Streit (President of the 1st of August committee) and Mrs. Streit, took their seats in the first row of the balcony, the three ladies being presented with bouquets. The hall, which can accommodate about 1,300 persons, was filled to capacity.

The audience was to a great extent composed of the younger generation, many of whom are only staying in this country for a short while, and it was perhaps the first time that they had had the opportunity of celebrating our national day on foreign soil. One could, however, have wished that more of the resident Swiss could have made it convenient to come along.

The programme started, after some delay, with an opening March by the Swiss Accordion Club which, owing to the late arrival of some of its members, numbered exactly two men. Their performance, which was acknowledged with applause, was followed by a prayer by the Rev. H. Spoerri.

Then the Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Armin Daeniker, who received a cordial reception from the entire audience, rose from his seat on the platform to which he had meanwhile moved, to give the customary patriotic address. He spoke in each of the three national languages. Owing to lack of space we reproduce here only the address given in English. He said :

"Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

"I am glad to greet you all, compatriots and English friends, and particularly to extend a hearty welcome to the Deputy Mayor of Wimbledon and Mrs. A. E. Ayres. May we ask him to convey to His Worship the Mayor and Council of this world-famous Borough our gratitude for having again granted to us their hospitality for our National Day Ceremony.

"The great number of compatriots here assembled shows once more that we all wish to make this gathering a powerful manifestation of our unity of will and of our common faith in the destiny of the Mother Country. We know that on this evening, at home and all over the world, Swiss communities are meeting, gaily or thoughtfully, yet in a common elation to commemorate the birthday of the Confederation.

"Numerous speeches will recall to them the heroic challenge made by our ancestors when defying a hostile world with an alliance that relied entirely on its own strength; their bravery on many battlefields when defending their homes and liberties against the most powerful armies of their times; the wisdom and sagacity of our forefathers in preserving in an unbroken line their political structure and refraining from the lust of conquest whenever it proved a danger to their unity; their tolerance in religious and cultural matters which is often cited as a model for the peaceful co-existence amongst peoples of different races and creeds; last not least, those national virtues of thrift and industrious diligence which laid the foundations to our present prosperity and economic expansion.

"When we focus our attention on the political scene of to-day, we witness the struggle of new and old small nations striving to maintain their independence. We see the great powers in harness taking sides for reasons often quite extraneous to the causes and aspirations of these countries. Are we then not reminded of many situations of our own history and the reasons which made it so successful? Unity in purpose and will, reliance on our own forces, mutual tolerance in order to overcome internal differences, have made our strength. In our times — not less cunning, malignant and perilous than those when the first federal pact was made — vigilance is still the price for liberty.

"In his 1st of August message, the President of the Swiss Confederation has sent you the greetings of the home country. The Swiss people at home wish to confirm to you, on this day, that we all belong to one and the same nation; with pride and gratitude they are conscious that through your work and individual achievements you do honour to our country's reputation. Recent enactments by the Swiss Parliament have been proof of a growing interest in the Swiss abroad. These are no longer as numerous as before the last war, when every tenth Swiss lived far from home. Let us then close our ranks and follow and foster the example of our early pioneers; let everyone, for the sake of solidarity, give his or her contribution towards the life of the Swiss community wherever he may live.

"Last but not least, I would like to remind you that the badges which to-day we wear so proudly as a symbol of our common allegiance, serve for the benefit of needy mothers. These badges are the symbol of our attachment to the Mother Country, our respect for motherhood and hence our faith in the future. Let us cherish them for what they represent: the intimate source of our moral strength and our ultimate confidence in this earthly life."

Loud applause followed the Ambassador's oration, and then came the reading — this year in Italian — of the Swiss Pact, by Mr. P. Jacomelli, President of the Union Ticinese.

From year to year it becomes more difficult to recruit local talent to take part in the programme — which is to be regretted, as one would wish, apart from accordion playing and yodelling to hear some music of a different kind, as for instance, last year, when Miss Hazel Schmid introduced herself as a capable Lieder singer.

To supplement the programme a Swiss sound and coloured film was shown, its features taking the audience to the German, French and Italian speaking parts of our country. Many of the lovely views, especially from the mountain regions, were much applauded.

The film, although it was, as a matter of fact, a propaganda film for a British motor-car manufacturing concern, was much enjoyed. Perhaps another time the organisers can find a different film, if possible one with a story attached to it.

The Swiss Accordion Club having now received reinforcement made a second appearance with Master Jean Michel Gandon as soloist. He is no stranger to the Colony, and each time we hear him we like him better. His sympathetic clear voice and his rendering of yodelling songs, with accompaniment of his father, was vociferously cheered, and the audience asked for "more and more". The accordionists played "Ländlers" and polkas with their usual efficiency.

The next item on the programme brought the "Corale" of the Unione Ticinese on to the stage. They, too, are old and faithful friends of the Swiss community. What would we do without them! Attired in the decorative costumes of their canton, they rendered a number of folk-songs belonging to the sunny canton of Ticino, songs which brought back to many of us happy memories of this little gem beyond the Gotthard. Each item, sung melodiously and with enthusiasm, was acknowledged with almost riotous applause.

Then the entire audience sang, upstanding, two verses of the "Schweizerpsalm", "Trittst im Morgenrot daher, seh' ich dich im Strahlenmeer".

The first part of the programme was concluded with a short address by the President of the 1st of August committee, Mr. F. Streit, who read out two telegrams which had been received, one from Dr. Th. Holenstein, President of the Swiss Confederation, con-

veying the greetings of the Federal Council, and one from Mr. E. Hofstetter, Swiss Consul at Balloch, sending patriotic greetings on behalf of the Swiss societies in Scotland. These messages were much appreciated by the company. He warmly thanked the various artistes who had taken part in the programme, not forgetting those of our compatriots who by their generosity have made it possible for this celebration to take place.

Mr. Streit voiced his pleasure that once again the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker had honoured the national celebration with their presence, and that the Deputy Mayor of Wimbledon had joined us on this festive occasion.

The second part of the evening was entirely reserved for dancing. Hundreds of happy couples, young and old, joined in and vigorously turned and twisted to the sounds of the energetic dance band. Judging by their happy faces and shining eyes they seemed to have enjoyed "every bit of it".

At 1 a.m. the National Anthem was played, and another of our National Day celebrations came to its close. It was an enjoyable and successful evening for which the organisers, especially Messrs. F. Streit, A. Gandon, P. Jacomelli, and Miss S. Morosi (the untiring Hon. Secretary of the 1st of August committee), are to be congratulated.

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SWISSAIR'S OPERATIONS IN FIRST HALF OF 1958.

Swissair's traffic results for the first six months of 1958 show a 35 per cent increase in offered capacity over the same period a year previously. Tonne-kilometres offered totalled 97,400,755 compared with 72,414,187. Revenue tonne-kilometres performed rose by 25 per cent, from 45,058,060 to 56,111,256; of this, passenger transport accounted for 34,922,964 tkm (22 per cent up on 1957), air freight for 9,216,664 tkm (36 per cent up) and mail for 3,036,451 tkm (31 per cent up).

Distance flown rose to 15,900,655 kilometres from 12,964,825 in the first half of 1957.

The average load factor on the scheduled services was 57.6 per cent, against 62.2 per cent a year earlier.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, August 29th 1958. We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: X. Speckert, F. B. Tschudy, Mrs. H. C. Cownie, C. Pulfer, Jules Ammann, J. D. Bernoulli, G. Godet, R. de Watteville, J. Clement, E. Eha, G. Bruschweiler, James Sieber.

The Editor will be abroad until September 1st, 1958.

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