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The Swiss Observer

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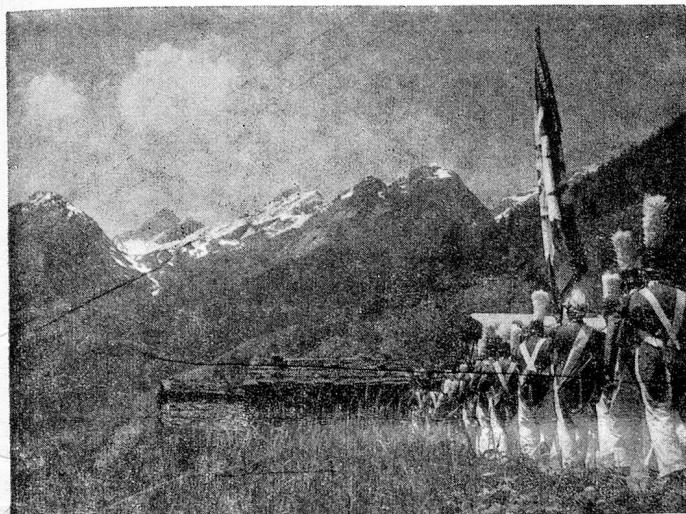
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FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS



SNTO

Loetschen Valley, Switzerland

The Swiss have a great capacity for festivities, and it is said that a thousand festivals of one kind or another in Switzerland in one year is not an exaggerated number. There are festivals of brass music, singing and yodelling, festivals of shooting, wrestling ("Schwingen") and gymnastics; large and small; of local, cantonal and federal dimensions. Some have championship character, some are merely cultural or folkloristic meetings. There are the traditional festivals which have religious connections or are based on historic events or legends. And then there are the festivals to do with seasonal changes, not to forget the carnivals.

This year we have had two federal festivals. The 14th federal small arms festival ("Eidgenössisches Kleinkaliberschützenfest") took place in Berne in July. The 12th federal yodelling festival was held in Lucerne at the end of June. Over 6,500 yodellers, male and female, took part, including experts at tossing the flag and blowing the alphorn.

Several cantonal festivals also took place. President of the Confederation Chaudet took part in the shooting festivals of the Canton of Vaud at Villeneuve. The "Lake District" shooting festival took place in Bienne. The cantonal festival of song of the Cantons Baselstadt and Baselland was held in Basle in June, when some 3,500 singers competed.

Basle was also chosen for the cantonal festival of gymnastics of the two Half-Cantons at the end of June.

A week earlier the women gymnasts gave a particularly fine display of physical fitness. Their impressive mass demonstration ("Allgemeine Uebungen"), in which 1,500 young girls and women displayed skill and graceful movements ended the women's part of the festival, and the men took over the following week-end. Solothurn also saw its cantonal gymnastics festival, which, as is usual in Switzerland, comprised athletics, field and track events, gymnastics on apparatus, individual championships as well as group performances. Eighty-four gymnastic societies took part in this festival which was at the same time the centenary celebration of the cantonal organisation.

An historic festival was that of Sempach, when the citizens of the Canton of Lucerne commemorated the 576th anniversary of the Battle of Sempach. A ceremony at the site of the battle was part of the celebration. At the same time the traditional shooting contest of the Lucerne Non-Commissioned Officers' Association took place at Sempach with a participation of over one thousand competitors.

The townspeople of Solothurn celebrated their "Vorständterchilbi", a popular festival in memory of the victory at the Battle of Dornach in 1499. The story has it that the fit men were called away from celebrating their "Kirchweih", and they were so homesick for it that they rushed back immediately after the battle to continue merry-making. Since then the popular "Chilbi" and the commemoration have been combined, and it took place for the 463rd time this summer.

In Bienne the "Braderie" was held at the beginning of July for the first time after an interruption of a few years. It included a cross-bow and arrow competition and the procession portrayed life from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Originally the "Braderie" was a market which has developed into a festival and its aim is to blend the Swiss alemanic element and the French-Swiss temperament.

The "Braderie" at Pruntrut also took place in July. 30,000 people and eight brass bands took part in the procession. Another historic event, the Battle of Morat in 1476, was commemorated at Morat, in the shape of the traditional shooting contest and children's festival. Quite a number of children's festivals were held in various parts of the country during June and July.

At Disentis, between 11 and 12 on 11th July, the solemn festival of St. Placidus took place, when a number of priceless relics were carried in procession through the town.

This year again a number of midsummer night lake-side festivals have been held, notably in Zurich, Lugano and Zug. At Cham, on the Lake of Zug, there were ballet performances and a fine production of "A Night in Venice" by Johann Strauss. Spectacular fireworks are part of most summer night festivals. The town of Zurich arranged an unusually impressive festival which began at 1 p.m. with a competition of children's balloons — some 45,000 were released. At 4 p.m. seven brass bands began their concerts on both sides of the lake, whilst demonstrations of waterski-ing, parachute jumping, trapeze performances from a helicopter, etc., took place. A novel idea was the scattering of 10,000 iridescent red water lilies in floating saucers. Dancing went on until early morning. The boy scouts had organised the sale of 200,000 lottery tickets and the Swiss Federal Railways reckon that some 50,000 visitors arrived in Zurich by train.

Another type of festival was opened in Locarno on 18th July, the international film festival with a participation of thirty-three countries.

The population of Baden showed its determination to have a festival even when the authorities disassociated themselves from it. Last autumn the new rail tunnel was suitably inaugurated and another official festival will take place in two years' time when the new road tunnel through the Schlossberg will be completed. But the population arranged its own festival to inaugurate the opening of the new "fly-under" which eliminated the level-crossing which had been such an obstacle to traffic.

The last Sunday in July brought — as it does every year — alpine festivals, principally on the pastures of Eastern Switzerland and the Bernese Oberland. There was the "Jakobisonntag" in the Toggenburg and the Martin's Festival near Weggis. In the Canton of Vaud "Mi-Eté" was celebrated with divine services in the morning and open-air dancing in the afternoon.

On 1st August there were National Day Celebrations in all parts of the country.

The "Schweizerische Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft" arranged a simple patriotic act of commemoration on the Rütli Meadow where our forefathers united in 1291. A special celebration took place in the "Hohle Gasse" (Hollow Lane) on the silver anniversary of its restoration. This historic road, where William Tell shot the tyrant Gessler, was open to traffic, and in 1934 an appeal was launched to the youth of Switzerland, who enthusiastically responded and collected nearly £9,000. With additional gifts from organisations and authorities the necessary funds and voluntary labour to construct a by-pass could be got together, and in October 1937 the Hollow Lane was inaugurated in its original state. This jubilee was solemnly remembered on this year's National Day. From each Canton ten schoolchildren brought handfuls of earth and they planted a young oak tree near by. The children read messages in our four national languages. As in 1937, the former Federal Councillor Etter gave the main address.

In Berne the "Jungbürger und Bürgerinnen", the young citizens come of age in 1962 — of whom some 800 marched in the procession — were particularly appealed to by National Councillor Peter Dürrenmatt (Basle) in his speech. A representative of the young citizens then gave an address on the problems facing the younger generation and challenged youth to help solving them in order to keep our democracy young and vital.

In Zurich the procession was particularly picturesque with the colourful costumes of the guilds and corporations. A young recruit read the "Bundesbrief", the Charter of 1291, and the main speaker was Colonel of Brigade Fritz Koenig.

The Geneva celebrations ended with some special divine services in the cathedral and the Basilica of Notre Dame. In Schaffhausen the celebrations started with the laying of a wreath at the soldiers' memorial. The main attraction after the official act was the firework display near the Rhinefall, which was floodlit.

In the Valais the National Day was celebrated in extraordinary heat. The bonfires glowed in the mountains up to a height of 10,000 feet. Because of the severe drought in the Canton of Vaud no fireworks were allowed and the lighting of bonfires was cancelled in many communes. President of the Confederation Chaudet was the chief speaker at Rolle (Lake of Geneva), where over 1,100 young recruits from Bière and Lausanne attended. He stressed once more that it was largely due to the excellent training and preparedness of the Swiss soldier that our country was saved invasion. Federal Councillor Chaudet also gave a patriotic address over the whole Swiss radio and television network.

Wreaths were also laid in Bellinzona in honour of the Swiss who died in the two world wars. The beginning of the shooting festival of the Canton of Ticino was timed for the National Day at Airolo. In St. Gall, at the end of the celebrations at the Klosterhof, the church bells rang and schoolchildren carried torches and lampions to the "Kreuzbleiche" and the "Falkenburg", where they lit the bonfires.

In Basle, too, a large and picturesque procession wended its way through the gaily beflagged town to the St. Jakob's Monument, where a wreath was laid. The "Basler Standesherr", Dr. Eugen Dietschi, gave the main festive address. In Winterthur inmates of old age homes and patients in hospitals were given a special treat in the form of popular songs which groups of singers performed during the day.

Federal Councillor von Moos was the chief speaker at the celebration at Weissbad/Appenzell, where he and his family were on holiday. He referred to the great privilege of self-determination of the Swiss nation. "Are you aware", he said, "when you go to the poll — or also when you fail to go — what an invaluable and irreplaceable treasure this right of self-determination is, but also what responsibilities it carries towards the whole, towards the community, towards the individual? Try to understand and master your difficulties and worries in a truly federal way, without always expecting the solution from the state. Keep at all times the will to stick together, not only in hours of serious decision, but also in the troublesome humdrum of everyday life as it befits a confederate." Federal Councillor von Moos appealed to the youth of the country to carry the torch of freedom lit centuries ago and carried unblemished to the present, into the future with courage, joy and pride.

This was, if not the tenor, at least the underlying theme of most patriotic addresses on 1st August, accompanied by the stirring sound of our lovely church bells, illuminated by the bonfires and expressed in the singing of our new National Hymn, the old Swiss Psalm.

Mariann.
(Based on reports from
ATS and SNTO.)