

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: - (1963)

Heft: 1439

Rubrik: Swiss Mercantile Society

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

75 YEARS SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

BY

**A. STAUFFER, PRESIDENT, 1917 & 1918, HONORARY MEMBER,
FORMER EDITOR OF THE "SWISS OBSERVER"**

Anniversaries of seventy-five years and over are of rare occurrence in the Swiss Colony of Great Britain, and few Societies have so far survived the span of "three score years and ten".

On Saturday, 19th October, the Swiss Mercantile Society, which is a section of the Schweiz. Kaufmännischer Verein, will celebrate its 75th anniversary with a dinner at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.I.

Talking of anniversaries in the Colony, it might be an opportune moment to mention that the Société de Secours Mutuels des Suisses à Londres easily tops the list of centenarians, the Society having been founded in the year 1703, and thus this year could celebrate its 260th anniversary. In 1950, the Swiss Club Manchester became a centenarian, and was joined six years later (1956) by the City Swiss Club. The Schweizerbund, although deprived of its former headquarters, is still carrying on and can look back on 84 years, the Unione Ticinese celebrated its 75th birthday in 1949 and is nearing the 100th anniversary.

Although not coming under the heading of Societies, it might be recorded that the Eglise Suisse was founded in 1762, and the Swiss Benevolent Society in 1870.

I understand that a "Festschrift" will be issued, dealing with the past history of the Swiss Mercantile Society, which will be made available to members; for non-members who might not be able to peruse this, I will give a short résumé.

It was on 26th September 1888 that the Society was founded, at the Café Martin Doerr in the vicinity of the Angel (Islington), the founders numbering thirteen.

Almost from the beginning, the educational part of the Society was its main object, and all available funds, though slender, were earmarked for this purpose. Thus, we find that on several occasions during the past years, the Society has been in financial difficulties due to the fact that the educational part became too heavy a burden, swallowing up the modest resources.

On more than one occasion, an amalgamation with the City Swiss Club was studied, and proposals made to that effect, the obvious reason being to let the Sister Society, which was in more affluent circumstances, "carry the baby". These *démarches*, however, were unsuccessful, and an initiative by several members to liquidate the Society met with the same result.

New efforts were made to bring the Society on an even keel, and these in time received their due reward. Support became available from the Swiss Government and Contributing Members for educational purposes, so that at least the last thirty to forty years have been free from financial worries. Through all these years the Employment Department (now defunct) marched hand in hand, though under separate administration.

The greatest strides in the educational sphere of the Society were made in the year 1922, when a commission was appointed to study the question of opening a Day

School. (This question had already been discussed in 1911, but was then dropped.) After long and intense studies, the Day School came into being in the spring of 1923, at Henrietta Street, and met with immediate success, so that three years later new and larger premises had to be found. With the acquisition of Swiss House in Fitzroy Square, the Swiss Mercantile College also came into being. The opening ceremony of Swiss House in 1926 can be considered as a mile-stone in the history of the Swiss Mercantile Society.

In establishing the College the Society assumed heavy liabilities and responsibilities, especially as to finance, and that this great work was carried out without involving losses is due to the foresight, hard work and efficiency of the various committees. If today the College of the Swiss Mercantile Society with its evening classes enjoys a considerable reputation not only in our home country but also in English educational circles, it is due to those who devoted their spare time to a worthy and noble cause. What work, what energy and enthusiasm were needed to establish such a name, only those who shared the work can really know, but it is with pride that they can today look back on an edifice which honours both them and the Society. These people had patiently and stubbornly ploughed their way over ground covered with all kinds of obstacles.

The Swiss Mercantile Society during its 75 years of existence has played a conspicuous role in the life of the Swiss Colony, and its collaboration on many important questions was always welcome and appreciated. One can really and truly say that, on its 75th birthday, the Society enjoys the reputation of being one of the pillars of the colony.

Swiss House was twice bombed during the last war, and on several occasions was "visited" by fire bombs. This war, with its ravages, its miseries and sorrows, has left its scars on this institution, but even in the darkest hour the flag has never been lowered, and with an interminable will the work — often in trying circumstances — has been carried on.

It is, therefore, only right and proper that the forthcoming anniversary should be celebrated in a manner befitting the occasion. The arrangements which are in preparation are manifold. Apart from the Jubilee Dinner at the Dorchester, at which the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker will be the guests of honour, a large contingent of members from the Mother Society will attend the festivities as guests, amongst them National Councillor Ph. Schmid-Ruedin, and Mrs. Schmid, Mr. H. Dellsperger, Sektionschef of B.I.G.A., and Mrs. Dellsperger, Mr. Heinz Büchi, Central President, and Mrs. Büchi, Mr. O. Lang, Finanz Delegierter, and Mrs. Lang, Mr. A. Meier-Ragg, General Secretary, and Mrs. Meier, Mr. R. Maier-Neff, Central Secretary, and Mrs. Maier, Mr. R. Buss, Central Secretary, and Mrs. Buss, Mr. W. Winkler, Central Secretary, and Mrs. Winkler, Mr. R. Pidoux, Central Secretary,

and Mrs. Pidoux, Mr. W. Baumgartner, Präsident der Aufsichtskommission der Stellenvermittlung, and Mrs. Baumgartner.

Further invitations have also been extended to the Mayor and Mayoress of St. Pancras, Mr. J. Hamilton of the Home Office, and Mrs. Hamilton, members of the Swiss Embassy and the Press, representatives of Swiss Societies, the Churches and the College.

A provisional programme for the Swiss visitors has been arranged, with a dinner and luncheon at the Montana Hotel, a visit to the B.B.C., a luncheon at Simpson's in the Strand, an outing by coach to Rye, with a visit to Canterbury Cathedral, a visit to the College, and a luncheon at the Spanish restaurant (Martinez).

Thus, it can be seen that every effort has been made to celebrate this auspicious event in grand manner. It will at the same time be a great reunion of our compatriots in this country, a demonstration of unity, strength and patriotism.

Therefore, I would like to make a fervent and sincere appeal, especially to the older members, to honour the Society by their presence, thus showing the members entrusted with the affairs of the Society their appreciation of all the work which they have rendered, and are rendering, with such ceaseless energy and devotion.

All over the globe there will be compatriots of ours who have, at one time or another, reaped some benefit, as many testimonies received during all these years from former members and pupils, who have reached key positions in their profession, have shown.

It has been the writer's good fortune to attend three anniversaries of the Swiss Mercantile Society, namely, the 50th, 60th and 70th.

From near and far the Society will, no doubt, receive congratulations and good wishes for its 75th Jubilee, but none will be heartier than the one from the writer, who has for nearly 50 years followed with admiration the great work of the

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

SWISS RIFLE ASSOCIATION

We are pleased to report that the team, numbering twelve, of the Swiss Rifle Association, London, which competed at the Federal Shooting Competition in Zurich (July-August), was 4th out of sixteen sections which took part in the "Ehrenwettkampf der Ausland Sektionen", receiving a Silver Laurel wreath and a pewter jug.

Furthermore, the following members who shot in special competitions obtained a "Kranz", which is now substituted by a medal: Messrs. J. C. Wetter, Peter Fischer, Marcel Bucherer, Josef Hess, Francis Magnin and Oscar Grob.

We extend heartiest congratulations to the Swiss Rifle Association and their members on the splendid results obtained.

ST.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will be published on Friday, 27th September. We shall be glad to receive manuscripts and reports not later than 18th September and short news items by 6th September.

DR. MARCO L. SCHROETER, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. †

We deeply regret to inform our readers (as indicated already in the last issue of this paper) that Dr. M. L. Schroeter, a well known and highly respected member of our colony, passed away on the 13th August 1963, after a long and patiently borne illness at the age of 75.

Dr. Schroeter, the son of a Swiss Architect, was born and educated in Zürich. After matriculation he studied medicine. As a young M.D. he was called to this country by the German Hospital in London, which due to the outbreak of the first world war and the consequent leaving of all doctors of German nationality, was extremely short of medical men. Dr. Schroeter qualified as a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and as a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and in a comparatively short time rose from Assistant to Chief Surgeon of the Hospital.

He left the German Hospital seven years later to open his own consulting rooms in the West End of London. He was a skilled and efficient diagnostician. Many are the patients, the writer and his family included, who benefitted by his careful diagnosis, timely and surgical treatment and who owe the deceased a great debt of gratitude.

Dr. Schroeter was for many years the appointed doctor of the staff of the Swiss Bank Corporation and the Swiss Legation.

For some years and until his death he served as member of the Committee and doctor of the Home for Aged Swiss.

Since 1922 and until his death he was a member of the City Swiss Club.

Dr. Schroeter was a lover of classical music and himself an accomplished pianist.

Although having lived in this country for almost half a century, he never gave up Swiss Nationality and to the rest of his days remained a true compatriot, very much attached to his native land.

The deceased leaves a widow, a daughter and a sister to whom we offer our sincerest sympathy in their sad loss.

F.G.S.

ALMANACH PESTALOZZI 1964

We have heard from the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad that they are able to supply the well-known Almanach Pestalozzi for 1964 at a reduced price. This will be Fr.3.35 (instead of Fr.5.—) for the French version, Fr.3.35 (instead of Fr.4.80) for the German, and Fr.1.90 (instead of Fr.2.70) for the Italian edition. It is hoped that the attractive calendars will be ready by mid-October.

Would anybody interested please apply to the Secretariat, at 26 Alpenstrasse, Berne. Payment should be made in Swiss francs. If this is not possible, please apply to the Embassy or Consulate for transfer.