

Escalade Geneva 1602 - Escalade London 1962

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1963)**

Heft 1423

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686169>

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ESCALADE GENEVA 1602—ESCALADE LONDON 1962

On the evening of 11th December 1602 the Governor of Savoy d'Albigny assembled his troops for an assault on Geneva. Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, had resolved to conquer the Genevese and had given the task to the Governor. The Savoyards, 18,000 strong, opposed the small citizen army of 2,000. The enemy troops assembled near the bridge of Etrembières with much equipment and ladders to scale the walls. At midnight a detachment of several hundred men gathered at the foot of the ramparts under the Corraterie. Soon three hundred men had climbed the walls and were waiting for the order to attack. The plan, well conceived and seemingly easy to execute, could not be carried out, however, as a Geneva watchman, Sergeant Bousezel, was able to give the alarm.

Once discovered, the Savoyards hastened their operations, hoping to succeed before the citizens had realised their danger. But the Genevese attacked the Savoyards furiously. The Savoyards tried to use the ladders to get into the town, but one after another was destroyed. Only one remained. Tradition tells that La Mère Royaume, the wife of a coin minter, threw a bot of boiling soup over the head of a Savoyard as he was ascending the ladder. That gesture became a symbol.

Thus the Savoyards' plans were foiled and Geneva was saved. Two days later the citizens paid a last tribute to the seventeen victims. Afterwards they composed the song which became the Geneva National Hymn.

Cé qu'à l'aino, le Maître dé bataille
Que se moqué et se ri dé canaille.
A bein fai vi pé on de sando nay
Qu'il étivé patron dé Genevois.

Y sont vegnu le doze de dessambro
Per onna nay asse naire que d'ancro;
Y étivé l'an mil si san et dou
Qu'y véniron parla on pou troi tou.

Dedian sa man il y tin la victoire,
A lui solet en demure la gloire;
A to zamai son sain Nom sei begni;
Amen, amen, ainsi, ainsi soit-y?

* * *

On 8th December 1962 the "Daily Telegraph" carried an article, "The Soup that saved a City". In it John A. Steel recounted the legend of La Mère Royaume and tells how every sweetshop in Geneva is selling chocolate "marmites" filled with marzipan vegetables during Escalade time, how young men duel with wooden swords in the street and how Genevese celebrate the Escalade with a special meal. This consists of a traditional rice soup and turkey, followed by "gâteau de Milan", a creamy puff pastry flan. The recipe of the Escalade soup was published in the "Daily Telegraph" with Mr. Steel's article.

In Geneva, this year's Escalade was celebrated in very unfriendly weather. The traditional procession was nevertheless watched by masses of Geneva citizens and there was the customary bonfire outside the Cathedral of St. Pierre.

In London, the Genevois assembled for their customary Escalade dinner at the Montana Hotel on 11th December. Mr. Bleiker was in the chair and the forty-odd members and friends of the Cercle Genevois sat down to an excellent, if not traditional, dinner. The tables were gaily decorated with candles and ribbons in the Geneva colours and paper models of ladders. The Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker attended the dinner. Other members of the Embassy included Monsieur and Madame de Stoutz, Monsieur Revilliod and Monsieur Roch, all Geneva citizens.

In his speech, the Ambassador referred to the courageous Swiss woman La Mère Royaume and he said he would not be surprised if in another fifty years we would have a woman Federal Councillor!

The Chairman welcomed guests and members and recalled the late Mr. R. de Cintra, a devoted Geneva citizen and leader of the London Cercle Genevois, who had died last year. Monsieur Roch then showed some lantern slides of Geneva and recounted the historical happenings of 1602. The party sang the two songs, the one mentioned above and the "Chanson de l'Escalade".

A collection was taken in favour of the Swiss Children's Annual Christmas Party on 5th January, and then the traditional ceremony of breaking the pot took place. The chairman knocked the model "marmite" to pieces, saying "Ainsi périssent les ennemis de la République!" And with this an interesting and friendly gathering came to a close.

Mariann.

THREE DISTINGUISHED SWISS IN LONDON

On Wednesday, 9th January, Friedrich Duerrenmatt's play, "The Physicists", had its British première at the Aldwych Theatre in London. The author is here for the occasion. As coincidence will have it, his well-known namesake, Peter Duerrenmatt, is in England at the same time. He is the editor-in-chief of the "Basler Nachrichten" and an historian and writer of repute. With him is Olivier Reverdin, editor of the "Journal de Genève" and a special friend of the Swiss abroad. Both are National Councillors and have come here as guests of the British Government for a ten-day stay. They are visiting various political and cultural centres in London and Oxford. They will follow up various contacts and will be received by Lord Hailsham. There will be talks about EFTA and Common Market Problems at the Foreign Office and elsewhere.

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