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IT HAPPENED IN THE VALAIS

Early next October, the Valais will celebrate its 150th anniversary of entry into the Confederation. Various events are being planned, and a monument was unveiled in Sion on 15th June commemorating the historic date. An exhibition of works by about fifty contemporary Valais artists was opened in Sion.

The great centenary celebrated in the Valais this year, was the first ascent of the Matterhorn. The section "Monte Rosa" of the Swiss Alpine Club also celebrates its centenary this summer. And the brewery of Sion is another centenarian.

The last volume on the results of the federal census of 1st December 1960, was published in March; it deals with the Valais. During the previous ten years, the population of the Canton increased by 11.7% to 177,783. Of the 169 Valais Communes, 46 registered a loss of inhabitants up to 10%, 16 up to 20% and 9 over 20%. Bister's population went down by over 36% to 46 inhabitants. In 8 Communes, the increase in the population amounted to over 30%, Bourg-St.-Pierre 130.8% (524 inhabitants), Zermatt 95.8% (2,731) and Sion 47.2% (16,051). Most of the 12 Communes which count under 100 inhabitants are in the Goms.

At the time of the census, 525 out of every 1,000 inhabitants lived in their Commune of origin, 322 in another Valais Commune, 96 came from other Cantons, and out of the 10,185 foreigners (5.7%), 7,929 were Italians as against 3,596 in 1950. Much the same percentage of the population as ten years earlier is still Roman Catholic — 59.9%. The French mother tongue has gone down from 65 to 61.7%, the German has remained much the same, whereas Italian has gone up from 1.6 to 4.4%.

The Commune of Vernamiège has the youngest Commune Councillor in Switzerland — he came of age only a few months before his election. The new President of the Valais Government is Marius Lampert.

The accounts for 1964 showed a deficit of 16½ million francs, with revenue at 217,681,562 francs. The Finance Department published some figures regarding the income in the cantonal economy. Industry has the largest share with 120 mio., agriculture with 77.2 mio., public works 74.8 mio., public services 71.9 mio., trade 66.9 mio., commerce 58.3 mio., capital yield 45.1 mio., tourism 32.4 mio., etc.

3.5 million francs are estimated for the cost of the Rhone correction in the Valle de Conches. 8 million francs have been granted for agricultural and other training colleges at Châteauneuf, Martigny, Monthey and Brigue.

The airfield at Sion is to be reorganised, and nearly 10 million francs have been voted for a waste water and purification plant in Sitten.

Tourist figures showed a considerable increase in 1964, and Zermatt is to have a swimming pool on Sunnegga. A new bus route has been opened between Sion and Ovronnaz. Tourbillon, the Sion Castle ruin, is to be renovated, and there is an amusement park for children at Sierre.

The village of Albinen, at an altitude of 4,251 ft., has up to now been connected to Leukerbad only by means of wooden ladders. Today it can be reached by postal coach in only 20 minutes from Leuk. The peaceful village enjoys a wonderful view over the Rhone Valley and the high peaks of the Valais Alps, but it is well off the beaten tourist track, since its sunny ski slopes at the foot of the

Torrenthorn are not well known. The village is now awaiting the first hardy young "explorers" to discover its charms. In order to make this splendid region available to more people, both for ski-ing and summer hiking, and to create a source of income for the local population, a ski-lift has been opened this year and accommodation has been prepared for groups of young people numbering up to 140.

It is sixty years since the Simplon Tunnel was first broken through and twelve months since the opening of the St. Bernard road tunnel. 388,600 vehicles passed through the latter during the first year. The Valais Government has voiced disappointment that the Rawil road which is to connect the Valais with the Canton of Berne, has not yet been started. The refineries of Collombey-Muraz have erected their own thermo-electric power station.

The question of a Valais-Vaudois technical college is being studied, and a Valais Chamber of Agriculture is to be formed. An instruction, training and holiday centre at Fiesch is to be created. The Valais students have united in a special federation with the aim of looking after their interests and solving various problems.

Over 58 million kilos of fruit and vegetables were produced in the Valais in 1964, which is only 4 million under the record total of 1958. This includes 174 tons of asparagus and 1,381 tons of strawberries, 5,076 tons of apricots and 9,515 tons of tomatoes. The grape harvest was satisfactory, and the 1964 vintage wines are considered "balanced and mild".

The alpine rescue pilot Fernand Martignoni received the French golden badge of honour "Vieille Tiges", which is awarded to pilots of special merits to aviation. He was presented with it in hospital where he was recovering from a crash by helicopter in the Vallée des Drances.

After the great honour which the Valais was shown by having one of its citizens, Mgr. Journets, created Cardinal, the German-speaking Roman Catholics have now been given the Church of St. Theodul in Sion (sixteenth century) for their use. On 29th June, the new "House of Church and Youth" at Sapinhaut-sur-Saxon was opened, a centre of the Valais Protestants.

(News by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

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