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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

THE SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1969

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

It is with particular pleasure that we present to you this 100th Annual Report.

When the Swiss Church in London was founded in 1762, its leaders soon found that manifold were the needs of the Swiss people in London and for over a hundred years they coped with the problems of their needy compatriots. As time went by, however, the strain became too much, not least on their financial resources.

Thus, on the 1st January, 1870, the Fonds de Secours pour les Suisse, Pauvres à Londres, now called the Swiss Benevolent Society, was founded. Its aim was the raising of funds and their distribution. It was not, however, until 1932 that a permanent Secretariat was created. Over the years, the activities of the Society have been many but all were essentially designed to offer help and advice to those compatriots who, through age, illness or other causes could not cope with their problems any longer.

In 1936, the Home for Aged Swiss was founded at 31, Conway Street but due to the war, the pensioners had to be moved to the country. Since 1941, these premises have been occupied by the Society and some rooms are let to Swiss people of modest means.

With the creation of the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Great Britain in 1949, the care of the young Swiss girls arriving in large numbers ceased to be the responsibility of our Society.

A decisive factor in our history was the extremely generous Aurèle Sandoz Legacy which we received in 1953. With these funds, we were able to acquire the premises at 9-11, Bel-

size Grove which now house the Swiss Hostel for Girls. Whilst the running of the Hostel is the concern of a Limited Company, the Freehold Property belongs exclusively to our Society and its income is used to help our traditional work of assistance to the aged, sick and needy compatriots in and around London.

During the last year, our activities have been varied and apart from the financial help which has gone up considerably, we have had to help to solve all sorts of problems. In the course of the year, we have been in touch with 308 people (104 men, 166 women and 38 children) and dealt with 2,798 applications. Four hundred and eighty-two interviews were granted, 94 of which were visits in hospitals and pensioners' homes. As many of the elderly find the journey to Conway Street too difficult, we feel that these visits are an essential part of our work and the Secretary has endeavoured to make as many as possible. However, distances in London are such that it is rarely possible to combine more than two calls at the most. Therefore, we are very grateful to those Swiss people who make it their duty to keep in touch with compatriots living in their areas and who are able to call us in if any problem of a specialised nature arises.

The number of pensioners has gone down by one to 58 and their ages vary between 62 and 92 years.

Young people continue to need a helping hand on occasions when either by misfortune or through lack of foresight they find themselves in temporary difficulties.

For the first time, we have sent out our Christmas Parcels without any used clothing. They were certainly smaller, but they looked more festive and Mesdames Raulin and Kaluza spent many hours carefully planning

and preparing them before our team of faithful helpers moved in to do the actual packing. The Réunion de Couture and the Frauenverein had again supplied a large number of beautiful new garments and our thanks go to the ladies who have helped making them. Also, a number of Swiss firms let us have samples of their goods which made most welcome and appreciated additions to our parcels. Just under a hundred of them went out, benefitting 135 people. Apart from Mesdames Kaluza and Raulin, we thank Mrs. Burri, Miss Rüttimann and Mrs. Thomas who were instrumental in the preparation and distribution. Through their efforts, all the parcels in the Greater London Area were again delivered personally and these visits mean a lot, especially to those pensioners who see very few visitors during the year.

A great amount of time and effort went into the various building jobs that had to be tackled at Conway Street and at the Swiss Hostel. At Belsize Grove, apart from the necessary repairs which were substantial, the central heating system was extended throughout the buildings.

At Conway Street, the boiler of the central heating had to be replaced as it could no longer supply sufficient heat. At the same time, a shower unit was installed, in view of our plans to open some rooms as temporary accommodation for young Swiss boys who for some reason or other, find themselves without a roof over their heads. The building and decoration work is now all complete and the first tenant has moved in to everybody's satisfaction.

The Committee has continued to meet regularly to consider requests for relief and other relevant matters.

Our grateful thanks go to our Honorary President, His Excellency the Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur René Keller, for the interest and support he has shown us in the course of the year. The First Secretary, M. C. H. Brüggemann and the Consul, M. F. Adams alternately represented the Embassy at our Executive Meetings.

In conclusion, we should like to thank all those who, in one way or another, have helped us to carry out our work, the Swiss Federal and Cantonal Authorities, the Swiss Embassy in London, the Swiss Churches, the Swiss Societies, the Swiss Observer, our Honorary Auditors and the many individual subscribers and friends to all of whom we are greatly indebted and last but not least the British Authorities for their kind hospitality and assistance.

On behalf of the Executive Committee,
X. SPECKERT,
President.

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