

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: - (1974)

Heft: 1684

Artikel: From "Angel of the air" to "Flying Hostess"

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686513>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 22.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

and at Bergun (as from next summer). The holiday apartment register of the "Schweizerische Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft" (Swiss Co-operative Society) at Brandschenkenstrasse 36, CH-3001 Zurich, has the largest choice of holiday apartments (5,000 in 800 places in Switzerland). Lists of vacant apartments, chalets and private rooms are also obtainable from tourist offices at resorts.

Young people should consult the list of Swiss Youth Hostels of "Jugi-Tours", CH-8958 Spreitenbach. The SNTO has reissued a 1974 "Motel list" intended for motorists. People wanting to stay in Alpine huts should apply to the tourist association "Naturfreunde" (Birmensdorferstrasse 67, CH-8036 Zurich) which is also open to non-members. SNTO's new map "Camping Holidays in

Switzerland" indicates the location of camping sites. Two new SNTO brochures: "Children's Homes and Institutions in Switzerland" (with about 80 addresses in all parts of Switzerland) and "Holiday Language Courses and Centres in Switzerland for 1974" offer useful holiday information for children and young people.

FROM "ANGEL OF THE AIR" TO "FLYING HOSTESS" 40 Years of Swissair Hostesses

"The Americanisation of our air transport industry is making rapid progress. The new American high-speed aircraft pioneeringly introduced by Swissair have now been joined by the stewardess (or hostess, as she is called in the USA). This is a blonde, curly-haired young lady with long eye-lashes whose job it is to assist and comfort passengers on board the "Condor" between Zurich and Berlin, ministering to their greater and lesser needs. The angel in question wears a fabulously cute blue trouser-skirt and an extremely natty student's cap. Journalists who were privileged to be present on the demonstration flight Zurich - Basle - Geneva - Berne - Zurich are full of enthusiasm for Swissair's latest achievement."

This rapturous commentary was

going the rounds of the Swiss press in 1934. The "angel in the fabulously cute trouser-skirt" was Nelly Diener, Europe's first stewardess, who pampered Swissair's passengers on the Zurich - Stuttgart - Leipzig - Berlin route. She performed her task on board the (at that time) ultra-modern Curtiss Condor.

Compared with present-day comfort, of course, this aeroplane was positively spartan: for lack of a proper kitchen, Nelly Diener served her fifteen guests out of a wicker basket, which contained not only sandwiches and drinks but also the first-aid kit. Passengers had to pay for their food and drink and weren't by any means stingy with tips for the stewardess. The "flying angel's" main task was to talk to the guests, and to calm and reassure those who felt measly during

turbulent weather.

But Swissair was growing rapidly and soon found it couldn't manage with only a single stewardess. (It was not until later that the ladies became known as hostesses). The striking success achieved by Nelly Diener called for an expansion of this new service. And so it came about that, when Swissair purchased four DC-2s with seats for 14 passengers, four new stewardesses were engaged, one for each aircraft.

Johanna Bigler-Vögeli, one of these four "flying angels", recalls that at that stage the stewardesses were no longer wearing trouser-skirts, but white aprons which made them look like nurses.

All the while, Swissair continued to push the boundaries of aviation further back, following one pioneering

FLY TO SWITZERLAND

Inclusive arrangements to **Zurich**

depart London 23rd May 1974 for £32
return London 26th May 1974

Inclusive arrangements from £39.50 return to
Basle • Berne • Geneva • Zurich

Direct Jet Flights from London
on Scheduled Services all year round
Plus a Special Charter Programme
all through the Summer and Autumn

Contact: **PLANNED ECONOMY TRAVEL LTD.**
Murray House
3-5 Vandon Street, London, S.W.1.
(off Victoria Street)

Telephone: 01-222-2013

Wir sprechen deutsch, nous parlons français

Specialists in economy travel to Switzerland,
Europe, and all destinations world-wide.

programmes offered in conjunction with Letouriste

ATOL 395B



achievement with another. Johanna Bigler: "I was the first woman to cross the English Channel in the air, on 1st April, 1935. On our return we were received like heroes".

There can be no doubt that Swissair's first stewardesses were among the most photographed women in our country, objects of general admiration. Every stewardess had her own "log book" in which enthusiastic passengers recorded their hymns of praise.

Flying at that time, unlike today, was still an exclusive pleasure which only a few could afford. Before the war, stewardesses on flights to Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin or London had ample time to get into conversation with their guests or even to play a game of cards. At the same time, the "flying hostesses" were constantly being put to the test by technical problems. Now and again, for example, the heating system on board would stop working and when this happened at altitudes of several thousand feet it could get uncomfortably cold.

"We wrapped the guests in blankets and massaged the legs of shivering ladies. In order to keep the passengers in a good mood we distributed free alcohol. After all, we wanted to do everything possible to ensure that, in spite of the breakdown, they would go on flying with Swissair."

And they did! During those years the average seat load factor was a proud 80 per cent.

After the difficult war years Swissair set up a new milestone by purchasing four DC-4s. These aircraft, with a capacity of 55 passengers, rendered transatlantic flights possible for the first time and made completely new demands on the cabin personnel. Entrance examinations and eight-week training courses were introduced with a view to recruiting the best-suited girls.

In 1946 Swissair took on not only nine stewardesses but also, breaking new ground in a big way, a steward. The latter, moreover, in an incomprehensible act of discrimination against the ladies, was exempted from attending the training course. (This pioneer's successors, though, were not spared the rigours of a thorough programme of instruction).

The stewardesses' white apron disappeared in favour of a blue uniform, which has been adapted again and again

over the years in order to keep up with the latest fashion.

Things changed on board, too. Aircraft equipped with kitchens made it possible for the first time to serve hot meals, to begin with in the First Class, where a great deal of china and silver cutlery was needed, later also in the Tourist Class. The so-called "lunch box", which contained cold food and could be bought for Fr.3.80, held the field in the Tourist Class until as late as the fifties. But then it was decided to include the culinary delights available on board in the price of the ticket, so that the complicated business of selling meals became superfluous.

In 1955 there were already 165 hostesses and 34 stewards pampering the international clientele of this fast expanding airline. The female cabin personnel went about their task in stylish uniforms created by the French fashion designer René Hubert. Increased demands on the air hostess's profession

resulted in ever more detailed training programmes.

In 1965 Swissair employed 418 air hostesses and 195 stewards; today, with those giants of the air, the Boeing 747B and DC-10, in service, the number has risen to 950 hostesses and 450 stewards!

JOHANNA BIGLER-VOEGELI

Air hostess with Swissair 1935-38

"They called us 'angels of the air,'" recalls Johanna Bigler-Vögeli. "We were thought of as courageous pioneers and were among the most frequently photographed women in the country".

At that time, almost forty years ago, she was still single and working as one of Swissair's first stewardesses. The daughter of a miller and farmer from the Emmental, she was not exactly predestined for a career as an air hostess.

"Friends and relations frowned when I said I wanted to try for the unusual job", laughs Frau Bigler, today



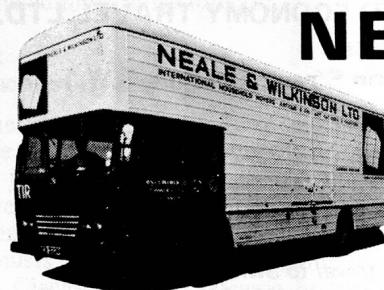
Mrs. Bigler-Vögeli today.

NEALE & WILKINSON LTD.

Member of the Constantine Group

**REGULAR ROAD SERVICE TO SWITZERLAND
AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

78 BROADWAY, STRATFORD, LONDON E15 1NG
TELEPHONE: 01-519 3232 Telex: 897666
CABLES: 'EVERWHERE' LONDON E15



Members of Eurovan

the wife of a dentist in Konolfingen". Only my future husband and my father encouraged me to go ahead." Some 200 bold young Swiss girls applied for the four posts advertised, and those who got on to the short list had to write a curriculum vitae and pass what was termed a "test flight". "They packed four of us into a very small aircraft", relates Frau Bigler, "with Ernst Nyffenegger at the controls. He hoicked us steeply upwards, then kept on pulling the aeroplane about roughly or let it pancake unexpectedly. The point of all this was to find out whether we were up to the tasks ahead of us."

The miller's daughter from the Emmental passed the test with flying colours and immediately rose to the responsible position of chief stewardess.

Three other candidates also won their laurels in 1935 and the four of them sufficed for the time being to meet Swissair's requirements for female crew members. Training the four "flying angels" proved to be an utterly simple matter. Shortly before the first flight they were presented with a big wicker basket containing china, napkins, drinks, sandwiches and a few medicines. The DC-2, in those days extolled as a "wide-body aircraft", had 14 passenger seats and no kitchen. A single stewardess (it was only later that they became known as hostesses) attended to the guests' welfare by selling sandwiches and drinks.

Johanna Vögeli worked for three years on flights to Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris and London, until her future husband presented her with an ultimatum: "It's either me or Swissair". She decided in favour of marriage and has now been living in Konolfingen for over thirty years. But she still enjoys thumbing through her "log book", in which satisfied passengers wrote down their hymns of praise to Johanna Vögeli. For example:

*"The pilot knows his way,
But what is that to me?
The stewardess's hand so fair –
Nought fairer can there be."*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CITY SWISS CLUB

This may be an exception confirming the rule, but for the past four years, the Annual General Meetings of the City Swiss Club have been among its liveliest and most entertaining yearly events.

This year was no exception as far as pleasure and conviviality were concerned. Members filled a horse-shoe table in the basement Stanhope suite where they had met on so many previous occasions. Dinner was not cheap (£3.60) but excellent and an assortment of Swiss wines (not cheap either) was at hand to accompany and enhance Mr. Kaufeler's cooking.

The President, Mr. Ernst E.

Tangemann, introduced the proceedings of the evening and reported a number of apologies for absence, coming in particular from the Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer, who at the last moment had been compelled to carry out some "homework" for Berne. But he welcomed Dr. Jürg Iselin, Minister Plenipotentiary.

The Secretary, Mr. L. A. Simon, read the minutes of the last meeting (he was spared those of the last AGM by general consensus). He reported the apologies for absence "on business" of Father Bossard, the Swiss Catholic Chaplain. The Secretary's unexpected reference to "business" gave rise to a loud burst of laughter. Mr. Simon reported no new members for the Meeting.

Mr. Tangemann then read his report. He viewed the past year with satisfaction and noted that attendances had been fair at the Club's monthly meetings with the exception of the Card Evenings. He referred to a very successful 108th Dinner and Dance, to a talk by the President of the Board of Directors of the Union Bank of Switzerland which had been attended by a distinguished audience.

The Treasurer, Mr. Franz Fraefel, surveyed the Accounts. They didn't present any salient features apart from the tremendous fall of the Club House Fund of which nearly £2,300 had been knocked off by the recent fall in share prices. As a meagre compensation, Mr. Fraefel noted a slight increase in the interest of the Fund. Club expenses had remained stationary apart from stationery, which had registered a marked increase representing an expenditure of about £2 per member. It was decided therefore to switch to more rudimentary ways of sending notices to members, such as photostat machines, instead of the printers that had been used hitherto. The Secretary later said that he had obtained quotes for two different kinds of production.

The accounts were stated as correct by Mr. Othar Brunner, one of the Auditors. Subscriptions for 1974-75 were kept at the same level, that is at £3.

Dr. Iselin was invited to serve as President pro tem. Following an introduction sprinkled with characteristic Basler humour, Dr. Iselin set about obtaining the re-election of the Committee, the Trustees, the Auditors and the Press Reporter. All existing officers were re-elected unanimously. The only newcomer, to the committee, was Mr. W. Eschle, who succeeds Mr. Eddy Tobler as organiser of the Annual Ball and Tombola. We were informed that Mr. Tobler would be leaving Britain for New Zealand. Several members took the opportunity to praise his contribution to the City Swiss Club.

Donations was the only matter that gave rise to some discussion, but much less so than at the three previous AGMs. As expected, a member considered that the £140 proposed as donations to the Swiss Benevolent Society and the three

NEWS FROM THE COLONY

Swiss parishes of London were not enough since the grand total was inferior to the proceeds of the 1973 Tombola and Banquet and interest from the Charity Fund Account. There was in fact an excess income of £80.52 which this member claimed should be distributed. Three figures were advanced: £140, £150, and £160. Among those that favoured a rise in donations, one said that it was pointless, given the circumstances, to build up capital, and that it was better therefore to give away our charity resources as they came. The other camp claimed that the four beneficiaries were entitled to a certain continuity in the donations sent to them. This continuity could not be guaranteed if the annual figure was based on the exceptionally high proceeds of one annual Tombola. It was better to stay on the safe side. This attitude was shared by the great majority of the attendance, as was proved by a show of hands.

The President reported that total membership had increased from 211 to 213 during the past year. There were 147 active members and the rest were honorary members, passive members and foreign members. Three deaths had been deplored, those of Mr. Frank Conrad, R. de Watteville, and Paul Lehrian. A moment of silence was observed in memory of these former members.

ANGLO-SWISS SOCIETY

The Anglo-Swiss Society held a well-attended dinner at the Portman Hotel, Portman Square, on Thursday, 25th April. This was a première since the usual venue had been the Dorchester Hotel.

An excellent meal was offered by the Portman, part of Intercontinental Group of Hotels and managed by a Swiss, Mr. Michel Favre. It consisted of Pâté Maison en Croûte Sauce Cumberland, Rôtis de Porc à la Normande, Pommes Parmentier, Broccolis au Beurre Noisette; Tarte aux Pommes à la Mode; Café. The Suite where this food was being tasted differed by its modernity and stark appearance from the Orchid Suite which had seen so many Anglo-Swiss functions.

In the absence of Lord Selkirk, the Society's President, who was recovering from an illness, the gathering was