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Some anniversaries occuring about now

General view of the village of Guarda in the Engadin area of Kt. Graubünden. This beautiful old village has rejuvenated itself through the hard work of its people. Photo by courtesy of SNTO.

Wil

The small Swiss town of Wil in the Canton of St. Gall has 15,000 inhabitants and is an important regional centre at the end of the Constance-Wil railway of the Middle Thurgau. Its epithet is that of "Aebtestadt", the town of the Abbots, and with it Wil has an unique distinction in the whole of Switzerland. This year, the villa qui dicitur Wila *celebrated the 750th anniversary of the bestowal of this special honour. The town was first mentioned in 754, and there is evidence of an early place of worship still in existence today:* ze sant Peter vor der stat. *And there is proof of the estate under the immunity of the Monastery of St. Gall, of the property of the lords of Toggenberg and of the market commune of the free property owners. The Toggenbergers are looked upon as founders of the town, probably in the second half of the 12th century. Almost everything worth seeing goes back to the period when Wil was "residence town" of the Abbots.*

Rheineck

Another town in the Canton of St. Gall, which celebrated an important anniversary this year, is Rheineck. Seven hundred years ago, Rudolf of Hapsburg elevated the town to a free imperial city. By that act, the town was relieved of the feudal sovereign and came straight under the Kaiser *and the* Reich. *The actual development as a city did not begin until after 1300. From 1490 to 1798, Rheineck was the seat of a federal*

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Landvogt. *Until the railway was opened in 1857, the town was an important port. From there, the whole Rhine Valley right up to Sargans was supplied with salt. For several centuries, Rheineck was also the terminal station for the raft traffic from Chur. Rafts were a cheap and simple method of transport for goods and wood from the Grisons and Italy. Around 1710, every year some 7,000 rafts arrived with about 125,000 tree-trunks. When the railway was built and especially with the correction of the Rhine in 1900, the importance of Rheineck as a port declined rapidly.*

Guarda

This little isolated mountain village in the Grisons has not celebrated any jubilee, but suddenly it got into the limelight, for it was awarded the highest prize of the Swiss Heimatschutz, *the Henri-Louis-Wakker Prize (Sw.Fr. 10,000). This was a legacy by a Geneva banker and is awarded to Swiss Communes which excel in cultivating their local beauty. This most beautiful of Rhaeto-Romanic villages (Lower Engadine) was burnt down by the Austrian soldiers in 1623. But the inhabitants built a second Guarda on the ruins of the old village. At that time it was well-to-do, and many houses still bear witness to the riches of the Guarda citizens. But since the new road in the valley was constructed in the last century, Guarda became isolated and grew poor. Thus the unique village was spared the ravages of the technical era, but dry rot, decay and mold did their worst, and for a second time, though slowly, the village began to die.*

But a citizen of Guarda, Ulrich Koenz, planned the "resurrection" of the once stately village. The whole population made great sacrifices, they worked voluntarily, and after tremendous communal efforts, the village was regenerated and rose like Phoenix from the ashes. Today, it is one of the most beautiful villages in Switzerland, a real showpiece.

MM (from "Bodenseehefte")

A beautiful corner of Wil in Canton St. Gall. Photo by courtesy of SNTO.

Wil in Canton St. Gall has a population of some 15,000 souls. The town recently celebrated the 750th anniversary of the bestowal of the title "the town of the abbots". Photo by courtesy of SNTO.