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EACH year the Genevois gather to celebrate the Escalade, the night of December 11 1602 when Geneva nearly lost her independence.

The troops of Charles-Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy attacked the city while its inhabitants slept. The assailants placed ladders against the city walls and swarmed silently into the Citadel of the Reformation.

A sentry managed to raise the alarm and the citizens rushed out of their houses half dressed to fight and repulse the enemy from the top of the ramparts.

This is in very broad lines what the Escalade is about, but the symbol of that famous night is a marmite, an iron pot which was thrown out of Madame Royaume's window and killed an aggressor.

Who was Madame Royaume? Catherine Cheydele was born in Lyons where she met Pierre Rayoulue who was a pewterer.

Not long after they were married they had to take refuge in Geneva after the massacre of the Saint Bartholomew.

Pierre had a good job, as

The story behind the Escalade

SWISS Observer reader Mrs Suzanne Allan tells the story of celebration by the Genevois of the Escalade, the night in 1602 when the city of Geneva was so nearly conquered by Charles Emmanuel, the Duke of Savoy. She also reminds readers that this year's Escalade party will be held at the Swiss Embassy on Friday, December 7.



A chocolate replica of the iron pot – broken every year

everything that is now in aluminium or ceramic was then made of pewter. Doubtless he was a very good craftsman as he became responsible for all the hallmarks and the engraved dies

for the coinage.

They had 14 children, not an exceptional number for the time, but with the poor hygienic conditions many died young.

Madame Royaume was lucky

to lose only four. It seems hard but one was resigned to it.

She and her husband must have been in their sixties in 1602.

They were strong women these 17th century Genevoises, not afraid of toiling hard, bringing up their children to work, pray and fight for their city.

There wasn't time for much else, most of them could neither read nor write. They didn't go dancing, it wasn't allowed.

They were at home the night of the Escalade.

Only one as far as we know had a more active part to play. Woken up by a shot, the clinking of armour and shouting in the street, she opened her window.

By torch lights she saw a suspicious shadow below. She grabbed the first thing at hand and threw it.

She did what she could, and would be very surprised that today we still talk of her.

Each year we commemorate that night by breaking a chocolate replica of the iron pot.

Ainsi perirent les ennemis de la République!

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