

# It happened in the Canton of Valais

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1964)**

Heft 1456

PDF erstellt am: **07.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693903>

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Colony, Switzerland and abroad, historic reflections and well-deserved tributes to the founder and the Editor (who had then accomplished thirty years of editorship) made up a large part of the issue.

If we mark the forty-fifth anniversary with nothing more than a few words, it is not from lack of gratitude or want of respect. Nobody is more conscious than I of what we owe to the men who have made the S.O. what it is. Since I took over the editorship I am even more aware of their achievements. I feel that any special celebration would involve a pat on my own back which I hardly deserve after a mere two years of trying to cope with a difficult task. And, even more importantly, any extra expense to produce an enlarged issue would not be justified as long as the financial position of the S.O. is as precarious as at the moment.

But I am an optimist and believe that our friends will once again rally and give their support unstintingly and even more generously than hitherto. A faithful reader recently sent a cheque for £10 by way of a birthday gift, asking me to publish his anonymous present as a challenge to be taken up by others. If I do his bidding now it is not as Editor, but as a reader of thirty-two years' standing, convinced of the important and useful function of the "Swiss Observer" as the Colony's paper.

"Ideals are precious things to be nurtured and cherished by care and understanding" (Geoffrey Tier). With my care and your understanding I am confident the "Swiss Observer" will continue successfully on the road to the Golden Jubilee, its quality improved, its finances strengthened and its reputation unimpaired. That will be a time to celebrate.

*Mariann.*

## IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF VALAIS

On 11th May, the Cantonal Parliament of the Valais met for the ordinary spring session in Sion. After the traditional Mass at the Cathedral of the town, the 130 Councillors assembled in the Council Chamber. Grossrat Alfred Escher, the son of the late Federal Councillor, was elected President of the Council; the new Vice-President is Councillor Aloys Copt. The new President of the Cantonal Government is Councillor of State Oscar Schnyder, (Vice-President: Mr. Marius Lampert).

The cantonal accounts for 1963 showed a deficit of well over 3½ million francs which brought the state debt to 115 million francs. The budget for 1964 expects a deficit of Fr.10,765,000.—.

Credits granted or proposed include 6 million francs towards the road of the Great St. Bernard, 7½ million francs for improvements in the two communes of Bagnes and Ayent, 13.5 million francs for the renovation of the Kollegium at Brigue, which was 300 years old last year, 16½ million francs for new school and hospital buildings. Over Fr.300,000.— were granted towards helping the typhoid victims of Zermatt. Incidentally, the electorate of Zermatt voted a five-million grant for sanitary and water purification installations. The citizens of Zermatt rejected by 200 to 82 a proposed scheme to erect an electricity plant at "Blatten" to be worked in conjunction with the "Grande Dixence", a project which would have cost 20 million francs. A new solution will now have to be found. A demand for a credit of 3 million francs to cover the deficit expected on the winter Olympic Games to be held in the Valais in 1968 was rejected by the electorate in December. At the same poll, the new Bill regarding the fire police was rejected as well as a proposal for an electronic computer for the cantonal administration.

The above-mentioned credits for the "Kollegium" and various school building projects were accepted by the electorate in mid-March. In the French-speaking part of the Valais, however, practically all communes rejected the proposal. The Federal Tribunal in Lausanne was approached by the minorities, and its findings caused great surprise: as several projects had been taken together and a global credit of 30 million francs had been asked for, it was considered that the individual citizen was unable to express his will clearly, and the polling was therefore ruled invalid. In this connection, readers may recall the article on "Administration in Switzerland" in the issue of 10th April, in which Dr. A. Roetheli explained the functions of the Federal Tribunal.

The latest project before the Valais Parliament is that of the Rawil Tunnel which would connect the Canton with Berne. The Valais has now a special office for town and country planning. Two projects are at present being studied, regional planning of the Goms and the Lower Valais from St. Maurice to the Lake of Geneva.

At present, the Canton counts 185 industrial undertakings employing about 11,000 workers. 18% are foreigners. Great efforts are being made to develop industrialisation.

A number of important installations were inaugurated last year. It began with the new oil refineries of Collombey-Muraz last summer. A few weeks later, the new cantonal sports centre at Ovronnaz was opened. At the end of August, the enlarged power plant of the Lizerne and the Morge rivers was inaugurated. The 51-million project was built in six years and differs from the usual type of hydro-electric power plants in as much as it has neither a dam nor an artificial lake.

The power plant of Entremont at the foot of the entrance of the St. Bernard road tunnel was inaugurated early in September. A few weeks later, the refineries of Collombey-Muraz started production. The pipeline leads from Genoa over a distance of 400 km., 58 of which are on Swiss soil, through the Aosta Valley, the new St. Bernard Tunnel, via Martigny to Collombey. Up to three million tons of crude oil can be dealt with per annum, and 400 people are employed.

Several projects to utilize water power are being studied, both for the upper and the lower Valais.

News of disaster has come from the Valais almost every month. First, there were the four mountaineers, two Germans and two Swiss, who lost their lives on the Matterhorn. At the end of December, there was a mountain slide between Fully and Saillon, causing a great deal of damage. In January, there was a big fire which destroyed several homes and barns in the little village of Mollens, and a fortnight later, a building firm at Ardon near Sion went up in flames. In February, there was another fire at Salgesch, and in March there was an under-water landslide at St. Gingolph, which destroyed the landing stage. In a mountaineering accident on the Dent d'Hérens, helicopters were used to transport the victims. Incidentally, aircraft equipped with water tanks are to be used in the fighting of forest fires. At the end of March, there was another landslide on the road from Trois-Torrents to Morgins. At the same time, several avalanches

caused a number of deaths. Due to bad weather conditions, no aircraft could be used on rescue operations. In April, there was another forest fire which destroyed a large part of the "Pfyn-Wald" near Sierre, including the area which serves the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich as experimental ground for forestry. 150 men were engaged in fighting the fire. More avalanches descended in April in the Saastal.

The Valais was chosen by several organisations for holding meetings and rallies. Last summer it was the A.G.M. of the Swiss Federation of Invalids at Saas-Fee, a few weeks later a seminar on teaching methods for 500 members from other parts of Switzerland and abroad, and the following week a seminar on traffic discipline, both held in Sion. A thousand delegates of the Beekeepers' Association met at Saas-Fee early in September (in snow!), and the International Hotel Keepers' Association met at Zermatt. Over one hundred delegates from all parts of the world attended. A short while later, the fourth Compitoir opened at Martigny, and at the same time, three hundred grammar school teachers met in Sitten. The Swiss "Wine Academy" held a meeting at Sierre early in October. The six Valais Bishops who had attended the Vatican Council took part in a forum in Sion in December at which several hundred people took part. Federal Councillor Bonvin addressed the gathering on the role of the laymen and public authority in the Church.

In January it was the International Newspaper Publishers who met at Zermatt. The "golden pen of freedom" was awarded to a journalist who had successfully fought for the freedom of the press; the recipient this year was the Kongolese journalist Gabriel Makoso. The Swiss Conference of Bishops held their Annual Meeting at Saint-Maurice on 18th February. Early in May, over 1,200 delegates took part in an international congress in Sion. The organisation they represented was the "Office International des Oeuvres de Formation Civique et d'Action Doctrinale selon le Droit Naturel et Chrétien".

Epiphany and Carnival brought their own festivities, and an exhibition was opened at Martigny, showing the famous art treasures of the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard, as well as exhibits depicting life in the Valais from the Romans to the present. The exhibition will be open for the whole summer.

The All Saints' Chapel on Valéria near Sion, dating back to 1325, is being restored. The Castle ruin of le Tourbillon will also be improved. These historic buildings of Sedunum (Latin for Sion) attract thousands of tourists who swell the numbers of the 18,000 inhabitants considerably in daytime. The main square of the town is the Planta. There were two large hotels, one was demolished to make room for a store, and the other one, the de la Planta, has suffered the same fate. But in spite of many modern buildings, the town is full of picturesque parts which have survived the eight occasions in its turbulent history when Sion was burnt down.

It is in Sion, too, that the oldest "citizenship" of the Valais celebrated her hundredth birthday at the end of March; Madame Alexandrine Gay who had nine children.

The final item concerns wine. 33 million litres were cellared in 1963, 15% less than in the previous year. 26 million litres are white, 7 million red. The famous Fendant accounts for 19, the Johannisberg 6 and the Pinot Noir for 4.7 million litres. Cheers!

(Based on news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

## THE BERNESE "DANCE OF DEATH"

During the last two years at performances for which every seat was sold out, 50,000 spectators were privileged to enjoy the wonderful experience which the greatest Bernese artist of a former age, Niklaus Manuel (1458—1530), who was at once an artist and a painter, gave to succeeding generations in his "Dance of Death", which is a constant reminder of the transience of our mortal life. The Square with its old buildings and its beautiful Cathedral (whose unique portal provides the background for all dance sequences) combines the witnesses of the period in which Niklaus Manuel wrote the series of death dances with the message of the play which is still so topical today. The "Last Judgment" which embellishes the portal of the Cathedral and is one of the sights of the federal capital, dates from the same period.

The Bernese Festival Association, which in 1962 revived the tradition of open-air performances on the Cathedral Square, once interrupted by the second world war, and achieved a remarkable success with Niklaus Manuel's "Dance of Death", will give these performances again in the summer of 1964. A large stand on the Cathedral Square with a seating capacity for 1,800 persons will afford all the spectators an uninterrupted view of the play.

The text of the play, which is entirely faithful to the spirit and intention of the artist, was written by Dr. Emil Wächter, the music being composed by Heinrich Sutermeister. The services of Harald Kreutzberg were secured for the choreography and his appearance in the play itself greatly contributes to its enrichment. Numerous well-known professional and amateur actors are participating under the artistic management of Adolf Spalinger. The 600 participants also include the Berne municipal orchestra, the Berne women's choir, the Berne choral society, the children's choir of the conservatoire and the Kreutzberg school of dancing.

The gala opening performance, which has been fixed for 26th June 1964, will be followed by performances on 27th, 28th and 29th June, also on 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th and 10th July.

The performances begin at 8.30 p.m. and end at about 10.30 p.m. The tickets cost 6, 9 and 12 francs.

Applications for tickets should be addressed to the organiser: "Verein Berner Festspiele" (Bernese Festival Association), Schauplatzgasse 33, Berne.

(Berne Tourist Office.)

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