



"Helvetia"

SOCIETY FOR COLLECTORS OF SWITZERLAND

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Editor, Harlan F. Stone, 48 Division Ave.
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SIMPSONS TO SPEAK AT OCTOBER MEETING

Jacques and Millicent Simpson of Brooklyn, N.Y., husband and wife who operate the Helvetic Stamp Company, will show and discuss current Swiss philatelic literature and speak on market conditions respectively at our Oct. 21 meeting. Mr. Simpson also writes a quarterly newsletter which includes original articles by him and others, reviews of new books and catalogs on Swiss philately and special offers. The meeting will begin at 8 p.m. at the Fair Lawn Arts Center, 12-56 River Road, Fair Lawn, N.J. Guests are welcome.

COLLECTORS CLUB OF N.Y. WANTS SWISS PROGRAM

The Collectors Club of New York has invited the Helvetia Society to present a "Switzerland" program next year at one of its regular meetings. President Harlan Stone, after consulting the society's other officers, has accepted the invitation and is seeking a date in May. Vice President Ron Lowden, our program chairman, will start organizing the program, which will include a display and brief talks, as soon as the Collectors Club provides more details on the format.

NEWS BRIEFS

The society voted at its September meeting to provide a new trophy for winners of the best club display at the annual BEPEX. This plaque will replace the one that we retired last year after winning first three years in a row.

The American Philatelic Society has taken no action yet on our society's application to become an A.P.S. chapter.

Editor Harlan Stone suggests a third possibility for the name of the society's new publication: Helvetia Postillion. Do any other members have suggestions?

The display of Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) covers by Edith Faulstich at our September meeting included some of the rarest in existence. She showed examples of Extra Courier (special delivery), central government, cantonal and military mail.

The recently organized American Academy of Philately, which has plans to build a national philatelic center, has asked our society to join. Details will be given at the October meeting.

THE HELVETIA SOCIETY
A Story of Philatelic Brotherhood
By Harlan F. Stone

I

If one were to sum up the Helvetia Society for Collectors of Switzerland when it flourished in its more youthful, head-long days, one might say, as one of its past editors did, "It always favored social gatherings in addition to stamp activities in order to weave the membership into closer brotherhood, for which it gained a considerable reputation."

The brotherhood, especially during the 1940's, took several forms: annual dinners to the accompaniment of yodeling concerts, exchanges of small gifts, and the banter of the masters of ceremony; Swiss onion pies served at the conclusions of meetings held in members' homes; and personal news in the society's monthly publication about weddings, accidents and summer trips back to Switzerland.

The stamp activities, however, took no back page. The membership included the country's leading Swiss philatelists, collectors capable of expertising any copy of Switzerland's early cantonal stamps, discovering printing errors on semi-postal stamps and writing up original research on Swiss pioneer flights.

The Helvetia Society organized on February 28, 1938, in Philadelphia at the home of Gustave A. von Gross, who later became curator of the former National Philatelic Museum in that city. The two other collectors who had helped him nurture the idea of a club were Jacques Kilcher of Atlantic City, N. J., and Henry Salisbury of Brooklyn, N. Y. The nine founders also included three members of the Buser family, which has played a prominent part in the society's history down to the present: Edward "Pops" Buser Sr., Eddie Buser, Jr., and his wife, Sophie, all once New York stamp dealers. Mr. Kilcher, elected president, served four years. Their roster of customers provided the names for recruiting members.

A velvet skull cap embroidered with the Swiss shield and the famous Edelweiss mountain flower became the society's unofficial emblem. According to one of the first rules, a member had to pay a fine if he forgot to wear his cap to a meeting. The colorful caps made Helvetians conspicuous at philatelic banquets along the East Coast during the following decades.

Perhaps the single most important factor in the sure, quick growth of the society was the appointment of Mr. von Gross as editor of the Helvetia Bulletin, a monthly publication that began appearing almost immediately. For ten years, through 1947, Mr. von Gross rolled from his typewriter one article after another on all phases of Swiss stamps and history, and spaced them in the Bulletin with business reports, social notes and gentle chidings. In short, he almost wrote, edited and published the Bulletin for a decade by himself. In 1942 he also became the society's president, a position he held for six years, again through 1947.

This is not to say no contributors came forward to help Mr. von Gross fill the Bulletin. There were a few, unfortunately only a few, but the consistency with which their by-lines appeared in the Bulletin during the editorships of Mr. von Gross and his successors made the contributions of these writers to the society's life blood most conspicuous. They were, in the beginning, Mr. Salisbury

averaging 10 or 11 issues a year

who wrote about the classic cantonal stamps, and George W. Caldwell in Pennsylvania who wrote about everything from hotel post stamps to proofs and essays. Later came Dr. Max Kronstein of New York, a researcher particularly of first flights, and Nick Augustin of Milwaukee, a devotee of early postal history. Still later appeared Mrs. Buser, whose articles covered mainly the 19th and early 20th century stamps, and Mrs. Edith M. Faulstich of Yonkers, N. Y., whose specialty of pre-stamp covers didn't prevent her from delving into numerous modern byways as well. The most prolific author turned out to be Mr. Caldwell, who contributed not only to the Bulletin until the end of its life, but to more than half a dozen other philatelic journals until his death in 1967.

During the early years the society's members entered club exhibits in the BEPEX (Bergen County, N. J.), ATEX (Atlantic City), STAMPEX (Newark, N. J.) and SEPAD (Southeastern Pennsylvania and Delaware) exhibitions and walked off with a consecutive string of first prizes. For the Garfield-Perry Stamp Club's 58th annual exhibition in Cleveland in 1948, they compiled a 60-page noncompetitive exhibit including every Swiss stamp issued. But their most famous display undoubtedly occurred in 1949 when the former National Philatelic Museum in Philadelphia held an all-Swiss exhibit for a month. A total of 28 members of the society provided all the material, enough to fill 2,544 pages in 159 frames. But just as exciting perhaps was the 1947 CIPEX (Centennial International Philatelic Exhibition) in New York, when about a dozen members served on the different arrangement committees, and the Swiss government's exhibit mounted on a moving conveyer belt delighted the crowds. X

The remarkable displays of the Helvetians attracted attention. In 1941 "Calling All Stamp Collectors," a radio program, interviewed several society members. Stamps magazine devoted ~~at least~~ ^{early} five issues to Swiss philatelic articles written by the members during the 1940's. Harry Lindquist, the magazine's publisher, interviewed some of the members on his "Saturday Morning Stamp Club" radio program in 1948. The Collectors Club of New York invited the society to present four club programs on Swiss philately ~~during the years 1941 to 1950.~~

in 1941, 1943, 1944 and 1950.

The increasing publicity attracted enough new members to enable the society to start forming branches centered around enthusiastic groups of Helvetians living in different states. The Northern New Jersey Branch appeared first in 1946, followed by the Philadelphia Branch in 1947. A spurt of activity in 1949 brought forth the New York, Albany and Detroit Branches. The high mark occurred in 1950 with the formation of the Chicago (Mid-West) Branch. The society's annual meetings and dinners, held in different New York and New Jersey restaurants and private clubs, became the focal point of the society's brotherhood. Distant members who managed to show up were showered with attention. The society also called occasional special "national" meetings in conjunction with large Eastern exhibitions that were likely to attract members from several states.

Meanwhile, Jack Brupbacher of New Jersey became president of the society in 1948 and, following the precedent set by Mr. von Gross, also inherited the position of editor of the Bulletin. He gamely agreed to take on the second position even though he was only a hunt-and-peck typist. He held both posts for three years. Mrs. Buser took over as president-editor in 1951. A 13-part series of articles on all the major early issues of Swiss stamps, written especially for beginning collectors, was one of her most noteworthy accomplishments during the

two years she led the society. It was during her second year that the membership reached its high point of 162 active members. But also in 1952 the society lost its Albany Branch, which disbanded when its handful of collectors ran out of Swiss material to show one another and formed a more general club to bring in collectors of other countries. Henry Gieffers of New Jersey, Mrs. Buser's successor as president and editor, served during 1953 and 1954. Original articles from the members proved to be particularly scarce during this period, and he reprinted some that had appeared in the Bulletin in the early years. In 1955 the Chicago Branch fell inactive because of its lack of a regular place to meet.

The society's last national president and editor was Mrs. Faulstich who brought professional writing talents to bear on the Bulletin in 1955 and 1956. She added illustrations, advertisements and more pages. In the spirit of brotherhood, her first pictures showed, not stamps, but society members in convivial groups at an annual meeting. During her first year the society signed up 41 new members, reversing a three-year downward trend, and almost reached the level of membership it had attained in 1952. Rising costs, however, forced Mrs. Faulstich to discontinue the illustrations and limit the Bulletin to an average of eight pages a month in 1956.

Like all the presidents-editors before her, Mrs. Faulstich found the work demanding and time-consuming. And when, like her predecessors, she turned down another nomination, there was no one else willing to lead the society. The Helvetians adjourned their January, 1957, annual meeting without a president, and that action left them with no editor as well. The Bulletin disappeared and with it the society's most important link among its widely-spread members.

Although the society had issued only 405 membership cards during its 19 years, it had created a philatelic role for itself much larger than its physical size. The reasons were several: the pride of Swiss Americans in the artistic stamps of their politically creative homeland, the dedication of collectors in studying some of the world's most famous early adhesives, and the pleasure of friends in wearing a velvet skull cap as a mark of philatelic brotherhood. In the Helvetia Society there were many cases where individual members were all three of these types combined.

But the Helvetia Society didn't completely disintegrate. The Northern New Jersey Branch, the most active throughout, continued under its local officers to hold monthly meetings for a while, until it lost its meeting place. Even then the spirit of brotherhood remained strong, and the members hung on to an annual Christmas party. Their yearly discussions of future plans at these social gatherings finally developed with the election late in 1966 of George H. Wettach as president and the resumption in 1967 of monthly meetings. After Mr. Wettach served two years, the society elected Harlan F. Stone, the only teenage member of the old society, to succeed him. Since its rebirth the society has won the plaque for the best club exhibit at BEPEX three years in a row and retired it. Mr. Stone, following the tradition of previous presidents, has also assumed the duties of editor and is writing a monthly newsletter for the society's two dozen members, who come not only from all over northern New Jersey, but from Philadelphia and New York for the meetings in Fair Lawn, N. J. At the meetings the older members sometimes regale the younger ones with stories of the old society. The velvet skull caps have started to reappear. The officers are starting to plan bigger things.