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To cook cheese the Swiss way

The cheese-makers of the Bernese Oberland may be justly proud of the little-known, yet remarkable achievements of their forefathers. At the courts of Madame Bonaparte in France, of the King of Wurtemberg and above all in Russia, they were pioneers in cheese-making in the 19th century; they used the Swiss recipes which have become internationally acknowledged.

Paul-Anton Nielson, an American of Swiss descent, who is a graduate of the University of Berne, has researched this hitherto little-known chapter of our cultural history and organized an exhibition which ran at the National Library in Berne last March. The story of the cheese-makers of the Bernese Oberland abroad began in 1814 when Johannes

The family of Emil Rieder-Klossner (1880–1930) from Erlenbach in the Simmental, outside their cheese-making establishment which they operated in Maloe-Wesno (Norgorod region) – 1912.
(Photo: Nielson)



Princess Maria Aleksandrovna Mescerskaja with her five sons on their summer estate of Dugino (Smolensk region) in 1902. Outside right: Karl Friedrich Müller (1871–1915), «Court Cheese-maker» of the Family.
(Photo: Ruti Pressebild)

Müller and a hitherto unnamed companion accepted the invitation by a Russian Prince Ivan Sergeevic Mescerskij (1775–1851) to go to Lotosino (Tver region). There he started a model dairy and cheese-making centre and thus created a tradition which ex-

tended to the Russian aristocracy throughout the country. The undertaking flourished, and the Prince began to employ more Bernese cheese-makers. They were all related to Müller either direct or by marriage, and he more or less acted as an agent between Russia and his relatives in the Bernese Oberland.

The parents and friends of the Prince were delighted with this happy development and tried in turn to get one of the relatives of this Oberland cheese-maker to work for them. And thus began a long and significant emigration to Russia.

Wealthy aristocratic families and landowners looked for expert and reliable men by putting advertisements in the «Bernische Blätter für Landwirtschaft». The qualifications needed were, in one sentence, «to be able to cook cheese according to Swiss recipe and custom.»

No fewer than 25 cheese-makers from the Bernese Oberland were employed by aristocrats, landowners and officers in Russia up to 1850.

In the second half of the last century, these emigrants achieved considerable fame. They were relatives of various Bernese families, like Ammeter, Eymann, Dubach, Karlen, Klossner, Kunz, Lörtscher, Mani, Müller, Reber, Stucki, Wittwer and others.

Some of them became rich, bought land and founded their own dairies and cheese-making centres. Others began to trade and specialized in dairy produce.

Some returned to Switzerland in 1917 when the political changes in Russia began to affect them. Not a few, though, remained in Russia which had become the homeland of several generations of

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these Bernese cheese-makers, and they adapted themselves to the new living conditions in the new country.

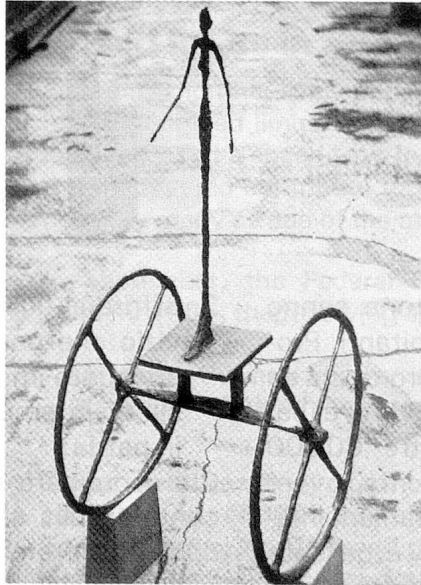
In many families, Swiss customs and traditions have been observed and passed on. Other cheese-makers and their daughters adapted themselves – through marriage for instance – to the life and traditions of Russian families and lost their ties with the homeland partly or wholly.

Some of their descendants still today operate cheese-making centres and dairies. The majority, however, has discarded the familiar traditions and integrated in the Russian society of today with different occupations. So, for instance, Ivan Aleksandrovic Witwer (a grandson of the cheese-maker Johannes Wittwer, born 1821) who is Professor of History at Moscow University and was awarded the Stalin Prize.

I. Franzoni

Question 12:

This castle is in the Engadine; it houses a museum for typical regional furniture. What is its name? (Photo: Keystone)



Question 13:

Give the name of the Grisons artist who died in 1966 and who was famous for his filiform sculptures? (Photo: Revue Neuchâteloise)



Question 14:

What was the name of the Swiss general who led the army in the mobilisation of 1870? (Photo: Editions Attinger)



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