

Editorial

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At the Society AGM last month (June) a member raised an interesting and I think, very pertinent and valid question. He asked, that in view of the Society's sound financial position, does the Society have a policy of guidelines pertaining to the use of these funds? I spoke up and assured the questioner that indeed the Society had such guidelines. I proceeded to give a short discourse on how and why our Society was founded, but because of the amount of business to put through an AGM, my discourse had to be somewhat short and concise. So, since that day, this matter had been on my mind and I have concluded this may be a very opportune time to write a short record of the history of our Society, as my Editorial for this issue. I feel it will benefit our younger members, as I feel almost none but a few of us who have lived in NZ for over 60 years remember the reasons for the existence of our Society!

If you look at the front page of your 'Helvetia',

bottom right-hand corner, you will see 'our' news magazine has existed for nearly 72 years!! That's right, longer than most of our members!! How did it begin? Who started it? Fortunately for me and Helvetia and my old-age, I was always a bit of a 'nosey-parker' with a penchant for history and geography. So, during my first 15 years in NZ, I asked a lot of questions of the old Swiss at that time. They told me of the hard times most of them went through during the serious economic Depressions in the 1920's and early 30's. But particularly hard-hit were several cases of young Swiss couples, not many years in NZ, but now with several children, and their young husband, father and breadwinner suffered a serious accident or illness and unable to work for a long time. And most employers had no employee accident insurance, no ACC or Government social security or family benefits... nothing! One family member had to work, or all starved! It was these tragic cases and a few others

with different circumstances, which galvanised a few of the more prominent Swiss settlers into unified action! A couple of the leaders of the group travelled around the two main Swiss colonies at the time, the Waikato areas and the Taranaki province. In each of these areas they called together several small meetings, with the help of local prominent Swiss settlers. At each of these meetings, their plan to form a 'Swiss Benevolent Society in NZ' received an enthusiastic and in most cases unanimous support of all present, I was told. They already had strong support from the small Swiss community in Auckland, as well as the Consular-General in Wellington, who promised he would try to get them a little bit of help from Bern!

In Bern, (seat of the Swiss Federal Government) there already existed an organisation set up mainly, I believe, to help small groups of Swiss settlers throughout the world to set up local support groups for their members exactly along the lines envisaged by our group of pioneering 'social support apostles' (for want of a better description). This organisation was called the 'Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft' (New Helvetic Society) or NHG for short! I'm sure most of our older readers will remember those names. This organisation, although mainly autonomous, had a government-appointed person on their Management Board because a large part of the funds for their grants to 'overseas' Swiss colonists came from the Federal Government, as I understand it. Meanwhile our hardy little band of Swisskiwis, after several meetings, had set their 'Swiss Benevolent Society of New Zealand Inc.' with its' printed 'Objects & Rules'. I will just quote for you two or three of the main clauses today, as I will need to write a part 2 to this article, as this story is far too long for one issue! The clauses are not in numerical order.

a) To provide for the moral and financial support of Swiss citizens living in NZ in urgent and deserving cases of need, in particular for the needy families of living or deceased Swiss citizens, provide a decent burial and resting place for those who die without adequate means, and generally provide financial, moral or social assistance where the committee thinks fit.

b) To assist Swiss immigrants to learn the NZ way of life.

c) To publish a regular issue of a bulletin of the Society.

And so was born 'Helvetia', back in 1934, a little 12 page booklet, about 16cm x 21cm. All you Oldies like me remember it? It was the same for 30 or more years!! Then its' format changed, by and by!

Cheerio from Paul.

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