

A National Event - Swiss Federal Gymnastic Festival

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EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

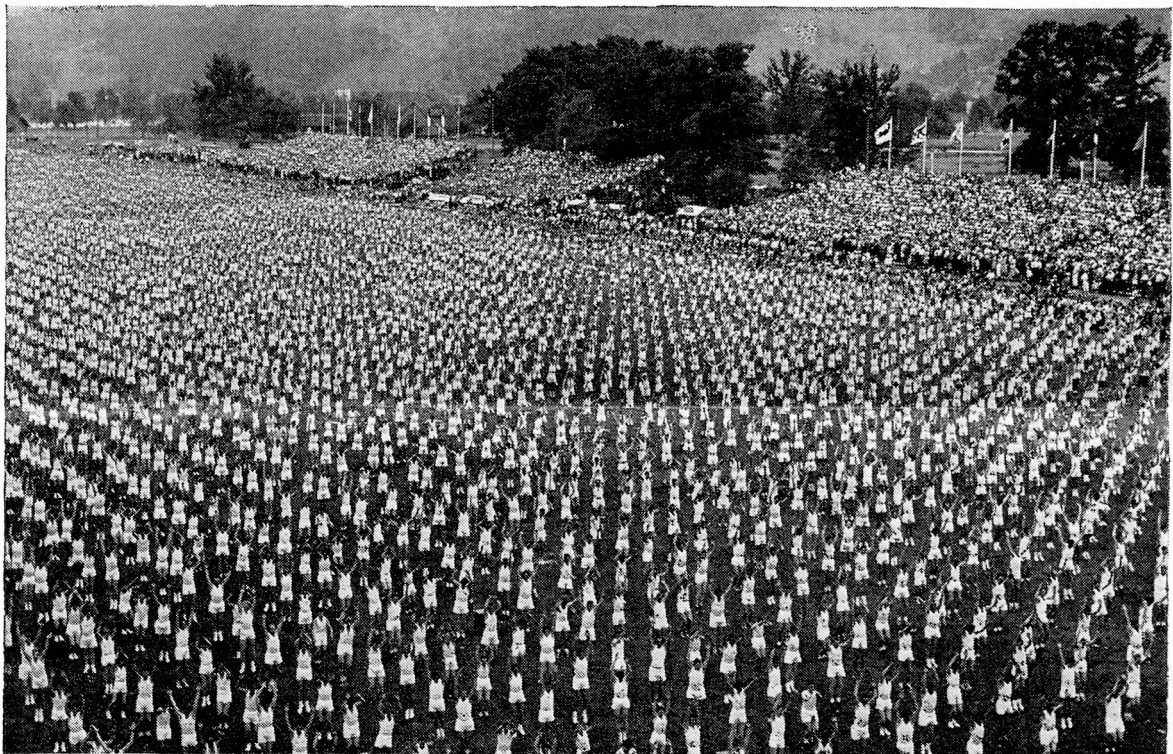
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A NATIONAL EVENT – SWISS FEDERAL GYMNASTIC FESTIVAL



(Photo Bauml)

The Editor of the "Swiss Observer" is used to ploughing through large quantities of material in order to write a report. But never have there been quite so many papers, magazines, articles and reports about a single event as she has had to sift concerning the Federal Gymnastic Festival which was held from 27th to 30th June in Lucerne. The reason for this abundance was the fact that her father, himself a subscriber to the "Swiss Observer", has collected all the available material and even kindly supplied the "Swiss Observer" with the above photograph. Needless to say, he has been a keen gymnast all his life, and the Editor grew up in the tradition of the "Four F's" (Frisch, Froh, Fromm und Frei — Spruce, Joyful, Pious and Free), the motto of the Federal Gymnastic Society.

One of the most precious memories she has of her youth is of when she was allowed to attend the "Federal" (affectionate abbreviation of the full title) in Lucerne in 1928. The family was on holiday on the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons, and on the eve of the Festival big bunches of flowers were collected from the local gardener's, flowers which would be thrown to friends taking part in the pro-

cession the next day. No sleep that night, and she still remembers the seemingly endless boat journey to Lucerne, the excitement of the procession when for two hours many thousands of white clad gymnasts, bands, picturesque groups, filed past tens of thousands of spectators. She recalls her surprise on seeing the hall of gifts where the magnificent prizes were exhibited which successful competitors would be allowed to pick. She remembers the tiring but satisfying trek round the vast grounds watching societies and individuals at work, and above all she has a vivid recollection of the mass display of the gymnasts, the vast field decked out with white figures and the thrill of the flag march during which the flagbearers of some thousand societies carried their banners at the trot to the far end of the field.

The "Federal" only takes place every four years (the last one was held in Basle in 1959), and this year's, the 66th of its kind, beat many previous records.

The first Federal Gymnastic Festival took place in Aarau in 1832, when 60 competitors took part. The first time the contest was held in Lucerne, in 1840, 210 men

competed in the "Lindengarten". By 1874, in Zurich, the figure was 1,000 men, the second time in Lucerne, in 1888, gymnasts totalled 2,054. Forty years later 15,260 men took part when the "Federal" was again held in Lucerne. There was no Federal contest from 1936 until 1947 when 28,000 assembled for the first time after the war.

Membership figures of the ETV (Swiss Federal Gymnastic Society) have gone up and up. Whilst in 1955 the "Federal" in Zurich saw 1,227 societies participate, in Basle in 1959 it was 1,265 groups and 21,574 gymnasts, 1,254 societies registered for this year's festival, a slight drop compared with four years ago, totalling, however, over 31,000 members. If one adds the women who had their Federal Gymnastic Assembly a week earlier, a total of 48,500 gymnasts actively took part in this year's "Federal", not forgetting a few thousand youth members and "Männerturner" (men no longer young). This gives an indication of the virile state of gymnastics in Switzerland, the most popular sport which can truly be called national. Every village has its "Turnverein", and at the "Federal" they compete in eight categories, the smallest a bare 8-11 men, the largest an impressive 80 and more, sometimes half as many again, and twice a society with 160 men has turned up at a "Federal": Berne-Stadt in 1932 in Aarau, Lucerne-Stadt in 1947 in Berne.

The 66 Federal Gymnastic Festivals have been held in twenty towns. Zurich holds the record with eight, Basle and Berne have had seven each. Aarau and St. Gall have been hosts five times each, Chur, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne and Schaffhausen four times each. La Chaux-de-Fonds has seen it three times, Fribourg and Winterthur twice, and it has been held once in each of the following towns: Solothurn, Neuchâtel, Le Locle, Bellinzona, Bienne, Liestal and Lugano.

The Editor's father wrote that his eleventh "Federal" had been the finest he had ever witnessed. He spoke as an expert who treasures many a success from his young days as a competitor and is an Honorary Member of the Swiss Federal Gymnastic Society in recognition of many years of devoted work at local, Cantonal and Federal level (what Ernst Gysin has achieved would fill a book!). He said that this year's individual and corporate performances in Lucerne were of an exceptionally high standard. He described the procession as magnificent, and the final display of 23,000 active gymnasts executed with exemplary discipline as an experience second to none.

At the week-end before the "Federal", 17,000 women gymnasts from all parts of Switzerland assembled in Lucerne for their contest. 570 teams competed in "Korbball" (netball), 451 in volley ball, and in sweltering heat women athletes competed individually and in relay races. It is interesting to note that the individual women gymnasts have no lists of places; they compete just for the fun of it, but they showed excellent results. Unfortunately the good weather did not last, and heavy rain on the last day marred the finish, and the scheduled display by 16,000 women had to be cancelled.

Four days later the prelude to the "Federal" proper took place at the Friedental Cemetery, when the dead were honoured.

On Friday, 28th June, a special train from Basle brought the Federal Flag, which had been kept at the Basle Town Hall since the last festival in 1959. It was welcomed at the boundary of the Canton of Lucerne (Reiden). The official reception took place outside the Lucas Church

in Lucerne, where the Cantonal Government formally welcomed the organisers of the 1959 "Federal".

On Saturday morning the picturesque procession of 12,000 men and women wended its way through the gaily beflagged town. In the large Festival Pavilion excellent entertainment was presented of which the review, with 800 participants, "Luzern, alles aussteigen!" (Lucerne, all change!), was a particular favourite.

Hard work by groups and individuals went on steadily from Thursday to Saturday. In order to get such large numbers of societies through their partly set, partly chosen exercises work had to begin at 6 a.m. The standard was very high and it was evident that much hard work had been put in throughout the year to achieve such good results. The determination to do well was present everywhere. Whilst not every society or gymnast in the individual competitions could win and attain the coveted crown, no one lost, and the spirit was excellent.

In the eight categories many results would be worth mentioning. The highest number of points were achieved by Diepoldsau, a small society from the Canton of St. Gall of about a dozen men. They were followed by Bellinzona, a not much bigger group which lived up to the reputation of the Ticinesi of having the highest number of first places at the "Federals" of the past. Erschwil (Solothurn) and Lugano were placed third and fourth. The individual victors were the following: Peter Jutzeler (Zurich-Wiedikon) received the oak crown of the "Nationalturner" (425 gymnasts, many of them hefty policemen, competed in ten events which included putting the shot, stone lifting, combined high and long jump, free exercises, 100m. sprint and wrestling ("Schwingen"). Of the 27 men in the "Kunstturner Elite" it was Fritz Feuz from Berne-Berna who received the laurel crown for the best work on the apparatus (six double events of Olympic standard). Amongst the hundred competitors in "Class A", Zurich municipal policeman Robert Ronzani came top. Five hundred athletes took part in the Olympic decathlon. A Zurich student, Urs Trautmann, the second Swiss ever to high-jump over 2 metres, achieved victory and received the olive leaf crown. Though reaching 6,775 points he is expected to improve even more and possibly to beat the Swiss record of 7,298 points set up in 1959 by Tschudi. The Federal Gymnastic Festival record is still in the hands of another policeman, Fritz Vogelsang (Basle), who reached 6,876 points eight years ago at the "Federal" in Zurich.

On Sunday afternoon the vast field of the Allmend was ready for the closing ceremony. The weather, which on the whole had been kind, was pleasant. When fanfares announced the beginning, the youth gymnasts released hundreds of coloured balloons. The new banner carrier of the Federal Flag proceeded to the grandstand of honour, followed by pretty maidens in white and the cantonal flags. The federal "Oberturner" Hans Moehr gave the signal for the Federal Flag to be crowned. Green leaf crowns were also attached to the flags of the Swiss Gymnastic Societies from abroad (Brussels, Lyons, Paris), also of the fraternal delegations from other countries, and of the Lucerne societies who had been unable to take part in the contest due to their members being busy on organising tasks.

Next came an original performance by 1,200 boys, followed by an impressive demonstration of loop gymnastics by 800 women in cornflower blue tunics. Next they performed the exercises which had had to be cancelled the previous Sunday owing to rain. Then 3,000 "Männer-

turner" (older men) arrived in three columns and showed convincingly that their gym days were by no means over.

After their displays came the crowning of the victorious societies and individuals. The festival reached its climax with the arrival on the field of 23,000 gymnasts. Soon the big area was covered in white. The Federal "Oberturner", their technical chief, from his lofty command tower conducted the general exercises which were executed so perfectly as if there had been a dress rehearsal — a most imposing spectacle of movement and rhythm.

Amongst the official speakers was the President of the Confederation, Federal Councillor Spuehler, who addressed the giant assembly. He congratulated the gymnasts on their splendid work. "An active gymnast and sportsman", he said, "is also an active citizen." He appealed to them to administer the political heritage in Communes, Cantons and Confederation as assiduously as they had competed in Lucerne.

The exercises were then repeated and the end of an unforgettable "Federal" had arrived. The societies

returned more or less triumphantly, but all happy and satisfied, to their respective towns and villages, where festivities continued.

* * *

A few sidelights on the Lucerne festival: The Swiss Federal Railways transported 60,000 gymnasts and spectators to and from Lucerne, and thanks to excellent organisation and disciplined behaviour of the travellers this undertaking could be carried out without any hitch. The S.B.B. expressed thanks to the public, the organisers, the traffic police and their own staff for enabling such smooth working.

In the Canton of Lucerne, fifty special radio stations were established for traffic control, forty motor vehicles from patrol car to police transport van were in use, six hundred special traffic indicators were put up, and a helicopter watched from the air.

(Based on "Schweizerische Turnzeitung", "Basler Nachrichten", "Luzerner Neueste Nachrichten", A.T.S. and "Der neue Tip".)

IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF BERNE

ECONOMY

A few weeks ago the Swiss Mercantile Society in Berne reached an agreement with commercial and industrial employers which should ensure excellent schooling of young apprentices. The aim is the best possible training, and all considerations of remuneration and the interests of the employers should come second. Shortly before this agreement was reached the Cantonal Association of Commerce and Industry (Bernese Chamber of Commerce) and the Cantonal Organisations of Employers on the one hand and the Swiss Mercantile Society of the Canton of Berne on the other ratified an important agreement on principles of social, political and legal nature. This agreement is considered another paving stone on the path to perfect relationship between employers and staff.

COMMUNICATIONS

The 130 taxis in Berne are to have a new regular rate which will put up the price, and a number of railway lines in the Canton of Berne have been or are being improved. Thirty million francs are Berne's contribution to various technical improvements which will benefit eight railways and shipping lines: Chemins de fer du Jura, Montreux-Oberland-Bahn, United Berne-Worb-Line, Biel-Taeuffelen-Ins-Bahn, Oberaargauerbahnen, Sensetal-Bahn, and the communications on Lakes Thun and Bienne. The melioration project of the Solothurn-Zollikofen-Bern-Bahn alone will cost thirty million francs. In February 1960 the 1,200-metre-long tunnel was started and it is hoped that the complete resetting of the line underneath the new main station will be completed in 1965.

Several of the lines in the Bernese Oberland have also been improved, notably the aerial cableway Wengen-Maennlichen and the Brienz-Rothorn-Bahn. The first part of the Schilthornbahn at Muerren is hoped to be open to traffic in a year's time. The Wengernalp- and Jungfrau-bahn showed a new record of passenger traffic in its jubilee year 1962.

CONFERENCES AND FESTIVALS

The Capital has been host to many associations, national and international, during the past months. The "Pro Helvetia" Foundation had its annual meeting there and its Council reported on the cultural work subsidised

by the Confederation: exhibitions of art and literature, musical and theatrical performances, lectures by prominent Swiss personalities, scholarships and contributions towards educational visits, production and distribution of literature, cultural propaganda by radio and television and many other activities.

The International Association of Geologists met in Berne for their 53rd annual assembly, and a week later the International Council for Visual Information, which comprises 150 personalities from Universities all over the world, held a meeting in the Capital. 350 cheese-makers from the Canton met for their annual gathering early in the spring.

Brienz was the place where a new association was founded, "Mys Schwyzerdeerfli", which has as its aim the conservation of the old part of the village. At their first meeting they also resolved to try and get Brienz to become the seat of the Swiss Open Air Museum.

At the end of April the International Working Party of German Theatres held their spring meeting in Berne. Three days later some 300 delegates of the Swiss Girl Guides' Association met; membership had again increased and counted now 177 groups with 13,591 guides.

A congress on special heating methods was attended by 500 engineers and heating experts from many countries. One of the subjects treated was waste incineration.

An educational course for welfare workers took place in Bienne, and the Swiss Railwaymen's Union, the third largest with its 61,427 members, met at Interlaken late in May. A few days later Interlaken welcomed the Association of workers in commerce, transport and food industry, another powerful member of the Swiss Trade Unions.

Spiez was the venue for the meeting of the Bernese Sanatoria Heiligenschwendi and Saanen, and a working party of the experts on occupational therapy met in Berne on the occasion of their jubilee (10 years). The Korea Association also met in Berne at the end of May for the tenth time. Its members have all belonged to the Neutral Commission in Korea.

Old Boy Scouts met at Kandersteg early in June, and later in the month ALPAR, the Bernese Airways Company, met for their A.G.M. Adelboden was chosen by the Swiss master joiners and cabinet makers for their general meeting.