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SWITZERLAND'S SURPRISING CASTLE

By Robert Tyrrell

Each of Switzerland's 50 castles open to the public has its own particular fascination, but Schoss Hallwil (some 30 km. west of Zürich) is unique for a number of reasons. It is also exceptionally good value for the visitor as there is so much to see.

One of the country's oldest strongholds, it was originally built in the 11th century, though most of the surviving structure dates from later periods. The first thing to strike the visitor is the castle's extraordinary location. Instead of perching strategically on top of a hill it lies in a depression and is built upon two small islands in a lake formed by the River Aa. Thus the two; halves of the castle are surrounded by a natural, flowing moat. The are connected by a drawbridge.

Since the year 1113 Schloss Hallwil has been connected with the Swiss patrician family of that name and it is still administered by the Hallwil Trust. The graves of five members of the family may be seen in what is now a car park and several others are interred within the building.

During several centuries the Republic of Switzerland and Imperial Austria were enemies, yet despite this fact, generations of the Hallwil family volunteered for military service under the Hapsburg crown, from the early 14th century until as late as 1899. So close was the connection that it resulted in the formation of an Austrian branch of the family with its own *Palais Hallwil* in Vienna. In the mid-18th century this gave rise to a Romeo-and-Juliet-like romance, involving the castle's best-known *châtelaine*, Countess Franziska Romana von Hallwil.

She was born in Vienna in 1758, the fourteenth and last child of a widowed mother (von Suttner) who had married the girl's father, Count Franz Anton von Hallwil who reached the rank of Field Marshal in the Austrian army. Franziska's bosom companion was her step-sister, Leopoldine von Suttner, although the latter was 15 years older. Franziska grew up to be a beautiful and intelligent but spoilt girl and her parents looked forward to a rosy future for their youngest child who would probably marry an Austrian aristocrat.

But Fate had other ideas. When the child was only 16 a visitor arrived at the Palais Hallwil in Vienna. He was her Swiss cousin, Abraham Johann von Hallwil, the owner of Schloss Hallwil in Switzerland. He had got to hear of the hospitality of the Austrian branch of his family and of his cousin's beauty. He had also had the idea that her dowry might help him rebuild his ancient castle, which was in need of repair.

The two cousins immediately fell in love. Despite the fact that Leopoldine

was assigned to chaperon them, Franziska became pregnant by her Swiss cousin. A terrible family row ensued, and Abraham Johann was sent packing back to Switzerland. The two cousins wanted to marry, but this was impossible in those days as he was Protestant and she was Catholic.

It seemed a terrible impasse. But the ever-resourceful Leopoldine had an answer. Secretly and under an assumed name, she bought a coach and made arrangements for Franziska and herself to flee to Switzerland. In February, 1755, Franziska's father fell ill and the two girls made the excuse to attend evening Mass. In fact, they boarded the coach and sped off to Switzerland, drawn by four post horses.

They travelled seven days and nights to avoid pursuit and met the bridegroom on the outskirts of Berne. It was a happy reunion for the lovers but due to the religious difference no Bernese priest could be found to marry them. Eventually they found a French cleric, just over the border at Pierrefontaine, who consented to perform the ceremony and in February, 1775 the Austro-Swiss cousins were finally united. Their first son was born later the same year.

However, the Austrian branch of the family did not accept this *fait accompli* without a fight. Under the Empress Maria Theresia's strict moral laws this elope ment was technically kidnapping and rape. Angry diplomatic letters flew back and forth between the Bernese and Viennese governments and both ambassadors got hot under their starched white collars.

Finally, the Austrians gave up chasing the lovers and the Berne government said that, if Franziska became Protestant she might settle in Switzerland. She did this and, at last the cousin lovers' future seemed set fair. And so it was for a short time.

Franziska settled in at Schloss Hallwil, learnt the local dialect and dressed in Swiss national costume. Her husband busied himself with the improvement of the castle buildings. They had a brief four years of happiness, during which time two more sons were born. But the lovers' salad days were short. Fate struck again. In 1779 Abraham Johann returned from a European journey to find his mother seriously ill at Schloss Hallwil. This so depressed him that he went into a decline and actually died the day before her on 17th November the same year.

Franziska, still only 21 years old, now faced the bleak prospect of bringing up three boys and managing a large estate. That she did so, albeit with the help of loyal friends, including the famous Pestalozzi, is a tribute to her strength of character.

Amazingly, Franziska never married again. For most of her widowhood she lived out her life at Schloss Hallwil and

survived two of her three sons, all of whose wives she never liked.

So much for this strange story. Now for the things to be seen in the castle: first, many of the rooms may be visited and these are furnished and decorated in 18th century style. Next, there is a full-size reproduction of a hand-made cigar workshop such as existed in the local village of Seengen until machinery took over.

Then comes a room devoted to musical-boxes, a particularly Swiss craft. These "fore-runners of our modern hi-fi equipment" came in all shapes and sizes and were often disguised as something quite different — a book or a cigar-box, for example. Tape-recorded music from Bach to Strauss tinkles away pleasantly in the background.

In the days of horse transport the village blacksmith was a most important member of the community, undertaking any job from shoeing horses to mending a carriage axle. A room in one of the outbuildings houses a full-scale reconstruction of a local smithy. It is complete with anvils and hammers, a huge bellows and hand-tools dating from the 18th century up to Victorian times.

Finally, for those who are interested in pre-history, there is a remarkable display called The Stone-Age Workshop.

Schloss Hallwil is full of atmosphere and it would be hard to find another castle in Europe with so many diverse interests to attract the visitor.

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Many group members are also staging special gastronomy weeks during 1977.

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