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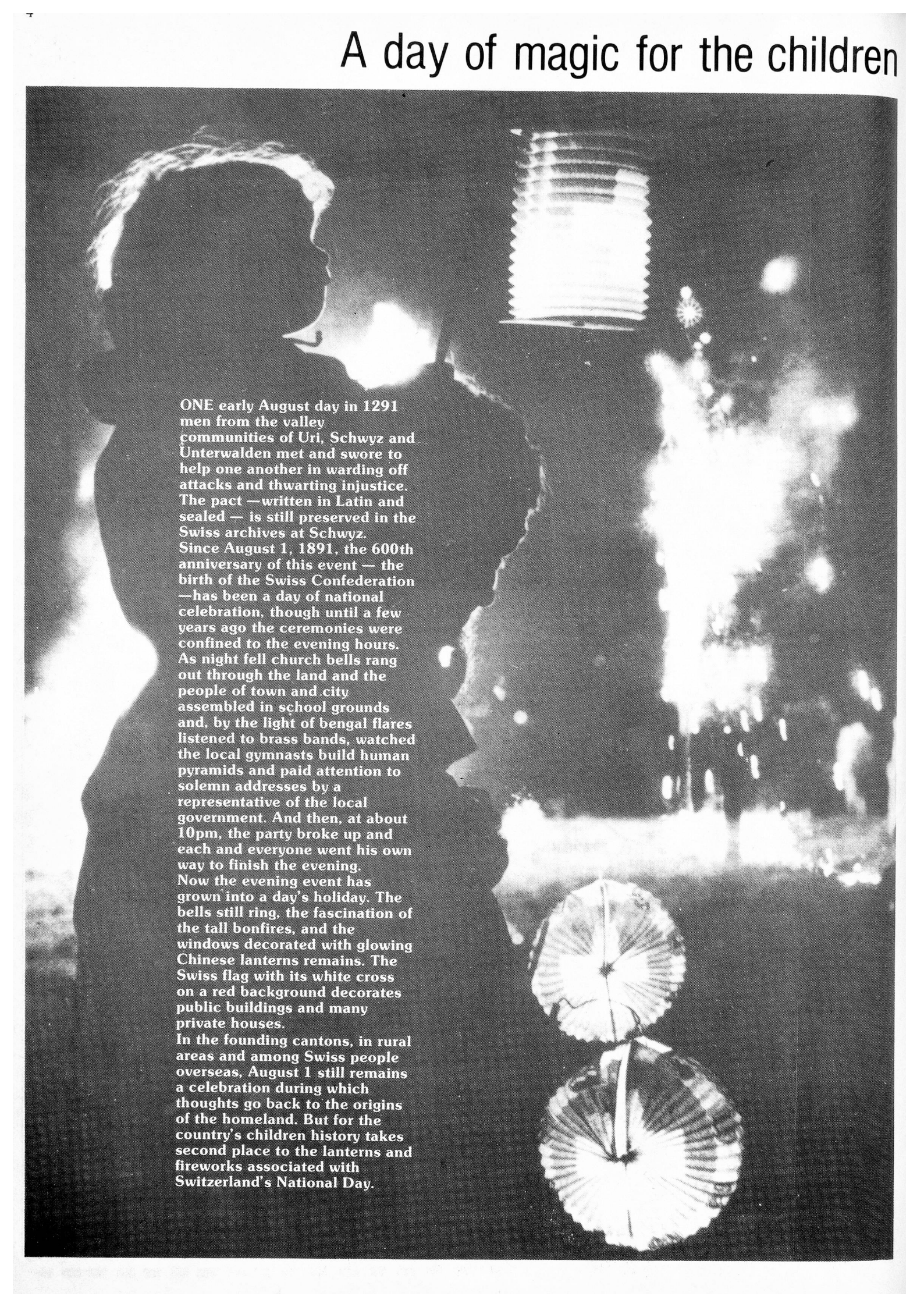
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A day of magic for the children



ONE early August day in 1291 men from the valley communities of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden met and swore to help one another in warding off attacks and thwarting injustice. The pact — written in Latin and sealed — is still preserved in the Swiss archives at Schwyz. Since August 1, 1891, the 600th anniversary of this event — the birth of the Swiss Confederation — has been a day of national celebration, though until a few years ago the ceremonies were confined to the evening hours. As night fell church bells rang out through the land and the people of town and city assembled in school grounds and, by the light of bengal flares listened to brass bands, watched the local gymnasts build human pyramids and paid attention to solemn addresses by a representative of the local government. And then, at about 10pm, the party broke up and each and everyone went his own way to finish the evening. Now the evening event has grown into a day's holiday. The bells still ring, the fascination of the tall bonfires, and the windows decorated with glowing Chinese lanterns remains. The Swiss flag with its white cross on a red background decorates public buildings and many private houses. In the founding cantons, in rural areas and among Swiss people overseas, August 1 still remains a celebration during which thoughts go back to the origins of the homeland. But for the country's children history takes second place to the lanterns and fireworks associated with Switzerland's National Day.

... of taking stock for the nation

The President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Georges-André Chevallaz, writes to all Swiss living abroad on the occasion of the Swiss National Day 1980:

Dear compatriots abroad,

This 1st of August anniversary — commemorating the joint alliance sworn in the year 1291 by the three founding cantons of Switzerland, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden — affords the President of the Swiss Confederation the welcome opportunity of addressing Swiss citizens abroad and also the many foreign friends of Switzerland.

It is true to say that the commemoration of historic anniversaries may create certain problems. The danger, firstly, to reflect upon the past only in a heroic and glorious perspective. And then the danger of identifying ourselves too readily with our ancestors of the distant past, so that we tend to forget the problems posed by the present.

The 1st of August is not an historic alibi. It is a reminder of what the first Swiss citizens had to accomplish, what succeeding generations had to preserve and perfect, and what we today have to pursue with perseverance if we are to ensure our small country's continued existence, freedom and credibility in a troubled and turbulent world.

In this respect a brief examination of our conscience would not be out of place. The positive aspects are numerous — for more than a century and a half we have been fortunate in enjoying peace and independence amid the upsets and upheavals which have afflicted Europe; more than a century of domestic calm and of social relations marked by loyalty and reasoning, which have served to safeguard Switzerland from serious labour conflicts and strife. All this has enabled us to develop a high degree of social security and to achieve a balanced, even if not perfect, distribution of wealth.

For some five years now we have been free of the uncontrolled spiral of economic and industrial growth — a growth which actually exceeded our capabilities and our needs. Having survived the subsequent recession, we regained a more reasonable rhythm and rate of growth which has since enabled us to maintain a high national product and assure virtually full employment among our entire work force, including some 600,000 foreign workers.

But this situation — which compares very favourably with other European countries and the rest of the world — should not be allowed to lull us into a false sense of security. This seemingly sunny picture is not without its shadows.



The flags fly high on August 1

President calls for personal commitment

Nevertheless we would certainly not agree with those outside our country who, envious and irritated because of their own impotence and inability or those from within who, for the pleasure of protesting or who for ideological reasons attempt to discredit our homeland and tarnish its image.

The prosperity enjoyed by our industrial enterprises at international level is serving economic development worldwide and aiding newborn nations and the underprivileged far more effectively than any eloquent declarations or solemn resolutions.

But our weaknesses are quite noticeable, too. We are inclined to indulge in the illusion that we alone have the right answers. We are showing far too little interest in greater European solidarity. Our aid to the Third World is undoubtedly making progress — but it is still not enough. The high level of indifference in civic matters can, no doubt, be explained by diminishing political controversy — yet it hardly contributes to the credibility of direct democracy and

certainly gives us no cause to be conceited.

The celebration of August 1st, with its parades and fireworks, does not offer — as I have already said — an historic alibi. It is a clear reminder of what we have to do to ensure that Switzerland may preserve its independence, peace and prosperity, and its solidarity with the underprivileged — whether they are among us or overseas.

This requires from each and every one of us, in Switzerland and abroad, a stronger will to work together, and greater understanding for our linguistic, cultural and religious differences and our diverse economic conditions; a personal commitment, by citizen and soldier, in the service of our community and its freedoms; but also more attention to the tasks of our small but strong and prosperous nation in the service of others.

Dear compatriots abroad — on behalf of the Federal Council, I send you greetings and good wishes from Switzerland on this our National Day 1980.