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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

EUGENE V. EPSTEIN

Of the 2157 restaurants in the immediate vicinity of our home near Zurich, more than half are named *Zum Rössli*, or "At the Sign of the Little Horse". This leads many foreigners to the fallacious conclusion that all these eating places are under the same management. One American friend of ours—who noticed the *Rössli* phenomenon—thought of starting a new chain of restaurants in Switzerland called *Zum Howard Johnson's*, with the intention of making life easier for the increasing number of tourists from the United States.

"Anyway", he said, "Switzerland could use a restaurant serving 28 flavors of ice cream—one flavor for each canton."

I reminded him that, as fine as the idea was, there were unfortunately only 25 Swiss cantons. Thus he would either have to reduce the number of flavors or increase the size of Switzerland.

Our friend remained unimpressed, adding that America was far smaller before the Gadsden Purchase and the addition of Alaska and Hawaii as States of the Union. "Foresight", he said, "that's what counts these days, and pity those who don't think ahead. Businesses or countries, they're all the same when you come right down to it!"

Returning to the subject, I assured him that as far as cuisine was concerned, Switzerland was always thinking ahead. Take the example of *fondue*, which everyone thinks of when the first touch of winter creeps across the land. There was a time—not many Swiss winters ago—when *fondue* meant a melted cheese specialty and nothing else. But this has changed with the advent of prosperity for all. Now there are many kinds of *fondue*, cheese and otherwise, dispensed from chafing dishes bubbling away on the table, all designed to confuse the already confused tourist. It is for this reason that the Swiss Department of Public Information, in conjunction with the Emmentaler Division of the Agriculture Department, has decided to conduct a series of round-table discussions on the future and geopolitical importance of the common *fondue*. We had the good fortune to be invited to the opening talk of the series and are pleased to report, on an exclusive basis, the formidable results that were achieved.

Following the stirring opening address by the President of the Swiss Wine and Fondue Growers Association, the working committee devoted itself to the difficult task of determining how *fondue* should be advertised and marketed and how the various types could best be distinguished from one another. This, it was hoped, would avoid the confusion that occurs when a visitor to Switzerland orders a cheese

fondue and receives a *fondue bourguignonne*—cubes of beef cooked in oil—certainly no less tempting, but admittedly rather different in consistency. With such rampant chaos in the fabled land of peace and order, something obviously had to be done. And so it was decided to indicate clearly on every bill of fare in the country the intrinsic differences between cheese *fondue* and *fondue bourguignonne*.

No sooner had this admirable mission been accomplished—with the assistance of voluntary contributions from all over the world—when a rash of new and more fanciful *fondues* began appearing all over Switzerland. Now everything seemed hopeless and the committee faced the almost futile problem of differentiating between cheese *fondue*, *fondue bourguignonne*, *fondue orientale* and *fondue chinoise*, among others. Special letters were sent out to restaurateurs, cautioning them on the dangers of creating havoc with Switzerland's national dish, which should, everyone admitted, be protected under Swiss—if not international—law.

At the same time, a Library of Fondue Technique and Information (known as LOFTI) was established, so that all new varieties could be catalogued, with a specimen of each maintained at the Federal Bureau of Weights and Standards. With this herculean undertaking now a matter of official record, it is finally possible to advise the tourist on what types of *fondue* are available to him. A brief sampling from the voluminous files of the Library of Fondue Technique and Information shows the following varieties as having been registered during the past thirty-one months:

<i>Fondue suédoise</i>	A tantalizing concoction of meatballs cooked in whale oil
<i>Kosher fondue</i>	Old-fashioned kreplach cooked before your eyes in genuine chicken fat
<i>Fondue accidentale</i>	House specialty, sometimes listed as <i>fondue surprise</i>
<i>Fondue irlandaise</i>	New potatoes cooked in boiling water

Many of the *fondue* dishes registered at the library are passing fads, of this there can be no doubt. But, through careful planning plus a high degree of intelligence and hard work, the Swiss people have succeeded in protecting their vested interests in the *fondue* industry. With the help of wise and courageous information services, visitors to Switzerland are now able to eat what they order in all 25 cantons of the country, including Alaska and Hawaii.

SANKT NIKLAUS GEHT DURCHS LAND

Sankt-Niklaus-Tag ist der 6. Dezember. Schon vorher aber erwacht in verschiedenen Teilen unseres Landes das Klausenleben. Und es stellt sich in mannigfaltigsten Formen dar. Oft erscheint Sankt Niklaus in Bischofsgestalt, als Vertreter gleichsam des Bischofs von Myra, des Patrons dieses Tages. Oder er kommt als alter, schenckfreudiger, aber auch mit der Rute strafender Kapuzenmann mit langem, weissem Bart zu den Kindern, um zu belohnen und zu rügen. In Küsnacht am Vierwaldstättersee zieht er bereits am 5. Dezember durchs Dorf, begleitet von einer Schar von Trabantinnen mit eigenartigen, kunstvoll gestalteten und von innen beleuchteten Kopfaufsätzen, den «Iffeln» (Infuln), und gejagt von peitschenknallenden und schellenschwingenden Knaben und Jünglingen. Dieses malerisch anzuschauende «Klausenjagen» ist ein namentlich in der Inner-schweiz seit alters gepflegter Brauch. Klausenumzüge finden, um nur einige wenige von besonderer Prägung zu nennen, an den folgenden Tagen in Freiburg (4. Dezember), in Arth am Zugersee (5. oder 8. Dezember) statt. Mit einem je nach Gegend und Tradition sehr unterschiedli-

chen Samichlaustreiben aber belebt sich dann der eigentliche Sankt-Niklaus-Tag, wobei auch das Tessin, wo der Klaus eher ein seltener Gast ist, mit einem Umzug in Ascona in Erscheinung tritt. Und das Walliser Dorf Sankt Niklaus im Nikolaital unterhalb Zermatts huldigt seinem Schutzheiligen am 6. Dezember mit einem besondern Patronatsfest.

EIN VOLKSFEST IN FLAWIL

Ein Volksfest eigener Art spielt sich im sanktgallischen Flawil ab, wenn am Othmarstag, 16. November, die Schuljugend den «Lägelisnachtumzug» begeht. Vermummt und geschwärzt, mit «Räbeliechtli» versehen, ziehen die Kinder – diesmal werden es um die tausend sein – abends durch das Dorf. Dabei wird es sie in ihrer unbeschwerten Jugendfreude kaum interessieren, dass mit dem «Lägeli» das Weingefäss gemeint ist, das sich nach der Legende damals als unerschöpflich erwies, als die Leiche des heiligen Othmar über den Bodensee geführt wurde.