

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1974)

Heft: 1694

Artikel: A declaration of love to a home for old people

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688122>

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Features

A declaration of love to a home for old people

In 1924 the Swiss community in Marseilles acquired a piece of property with an imposing farm, thanks to the generosity of some well-to-do Swiss families. Three years later, the history began of the «Foyer Helvétique», home for old Swiss people at the outskirts of the borough of St. Marguerite. At present, the home is lived in by some 20 old compatriots who spend their last years there at moderate cost. It is not surprising that the Home management is glad to cover the most urgent needs for upkeep and administration from funds supplied by the Benevolent Society of the local Swiss community, for the modest contributions paid by the inmates and a small annual subsidy from the Confederation are hardly sufficient to run the place.

During the production of a short film of the «Foyer Helvétique», the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad realised only too well that the past 50 years had left their marks on the extensive park surrounding it. For this reason, the Executive of the

old mansion-like house and the Commission of the Swiss Abroad accepted a proposal of the Secretariat in Berne to empower its Youth Service to start a campaign for the renovation of the Home. In April of this year, young volunteers, material and above all money had to be found. But already a few days after the first radio appeal, over 120 applications were received from young Swiss at home who were willing to work in renovating the «Foyer» without pay. Unfortunately, money came in but slowly, and even at the beginning of May, it was by no means certain that the «Project Marseilles» could be realised. A further appeal on the wireless and letters to the editors of the larger dailies brought in over Fr. 40 000.—, and the project could be started in earnest. The composition of the team had been planned well in advance, and by 30th June, the workers were off.

Twenty youngsters travelled to Marseille in lorries put at their disposal free of charge by Ford's. The same night, they were able to pitch their tents in the beautiful park which was to be the home of the volunteers for about 12 days. Already six hours later, the work had begun in earnest. Local tradesmen arrived to take orders for materials. The large façade of the house had to be washed, repaired and painted with three coats. The park was tackled by three young people who proved successful hobby gardeners. The boiler house had to be put right and afforded plenty of work to the masons for a whole week. And how busy were the plumber and above all the electrician! The latter found it difficult to get on with his programme, for he was constantly interrupted by shorts and other

emergencies. The most arduous task was the smoothing down, filling in, sizing and painting of all shutters, windows and outside doors. This job gave plenty of work all the time to six or seven people. Other work was not neglected either, such as the installation of a lavatory and a fireplace. In addition, the old garden furniture was replaced with new goods, emergency lights were fixed in the staircase, and a washing-up machine was installed.

In over 2100 working hours, young people from inside Switzerland renovated the «Foyer Helvétique» and thus showed their solidarity with old compatriots abroad. Over Fr. 27 000.— are left over from the «Project Marseilles», and this money will be used next year by the same team to renovate the rooms of the Home.

Youth Service of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad.

