

Coles' Slaw

Almost everyone who visits Europe has Switzerland on their agenda. Our group of four was no exception. We took the early morning train out of Rome for Milano. There we changed to a Swiss train bound for Zurich, where through the good offices of American Express in Rome we had booked two rooms in a medium-priced hotel.

This meant travelling through the Alps again just at dusk through some of the beautiful scenery in the Italian lake district before climbing into the mountains. From there on it was pitch black and we had no idea what the Swiss countryside looked like until we returned two days later to a small village called Andermatt, high in the mountains.

It was the kind of dream village you see in the Swiss postcards.

Brown Swiss cattle roamed all over fenceless meadows. The village had plenty of hostels and taverns and a large army base where the modern Swiss army trains its conscripts.

Every able-bodied Swiss male must serve his time in the armed forces. It is not unusual to see young men at the railway stations carrying automatic rifles with them, on leave or on the way back to base.

It was a startling reminder that one way the Swiss have kept out of two world wars is to maintain a modern fighting unit to repulse invaders. There are other reasons, too, such as formidable entrances to the country through mountain passes where Swiss guns could create havoc, and the fact there is little but rocks and scenery in many parts of the country.

Climbing to Andermatt meant leaving the main rail line at a small town called Goschen and boarding a cog railway which inched its way up the side of the mountains under snow sheds and over virtually insurmountable rocks.

It was one of those crisp days, about 50 degrees, and the sun shone strongly as we stepped out at Andermatt to be greeted by the thundering roar of artillery practicing in mountain fastnesses. Echoes from the big guns travelled through the spectacular mountain peaks, covered with snow and honeycombed with tunnels for cars and trains.

Chalet-type houses line the narrow streets, all paved and scrupulously clean, despite their use by the cows who, when the whim hits them, swing out on the road and leisurely stroll from one pasture to another.

Every cow has a bell. You can imagine the symphony of sound when all the creatures decide to move at once. Traffic on the streets which also was part of a highway, just had to fall in behind the cattle, who occasionally snoop into roadside cans or peer into open doorways.

We laughed, delighted that the urgent march of civilization could be stopped by Swiss cattle with no pretensions to speed, but one beer truck driver, annoyed at the delay, nudged one of the cows with the front of his truck. The cow jumped and the rest of the herd cleared out of the way.

The exhilarating atmosphere in the mountains is a tonic to one accustomed to less sparkling air. We met one party of Swiss university students returning from a bivouac in the trails through the snow-enshrouded peaks. They sparkled with vitality that kept them warm in the cold although they wore only open-necked shirts and sweaters. Meanwhile, we shivered in sweaters and coats.

They couldn't keep their high spirits to themselves. The first trip to the washroom started a yodelling contest that led into a rousing sing song when they boarded the train for Goschen and then to Zurich.

They must have sung every Swiss song in the books, harmonizing and not the least bit self-conscious.

Charlie Perry couldn't take it any longer. A music-lover, he barged into their half of the car, lined them up and took their picture, engaging an exchange student from the U.S. in conversation.

Mountain trips are a tonic for students and listeners.

Charlie and Grace had just returned from a trip to the higher peaks, taking one of those cable cars that go straight up through the clouds and then drop you in a land of snow and rock. While they enjoyed lunch at a restaurant up eight or ten thousand feet, my wife and I sought more refined quarters in a downtown hotel that overlooked the mountains.

While we waited the waitress suggested we should sample vintage wines from the hotel cellar. Disappointed at not being able to reach the peaks we decided one glass would show we were not abusing Swiss hospitality.

Now I know what St. Paul meant when he told one of his congregations to take a little wine now and then for your stomach's sake and to cure infirmities. However, Paul could not have considered this prescription for those unaccustomed to heights. The wine went straight to my head. I was dizzier than a bat in broad daylight.

Consequently my memories of Switzerland and the Swiss are colored by the bouquet from the grapes. But then again you could say I reached pretty dizzy heights without benefit of cable cars and all that trouble.



Big league material

FIFTEEN YEARS hence some of the novices sampling their first taste of hockey school at the Acton Community Centre may be big league players but as of now they look for any visible means of support such as a chair or a kind word from spectators. One lad in the middle asks a Divine guidance while two others seek refuge in the net. The fellow below, just a little overaged, seeks further instruction before venturing over the blue line.
(J. Jennings Photo)

Mini-Comment

Most councils in the district have registered objections to the proposed two phase Bell Telephone rate increase but we note by committee minutes that the administration committee of Acton Council decided to take no action. Does Council approve of the increase?

Three cheers and a loud Tiger for the Chamber of Commerce and their initiative in setting up a costly Christmas lighting program for the business section. The main streets are the show windows of any community and reflect credit or dismay whatever the case may be in the town at large.

The proper name of Bower Ave. is really Bower St. but we continue to refer to it as Bower Avenue because this is the name most people in town would identify with the Bower. It is the same situation with the School Creek. Acton Council once endorsed the resolution by former Reeve Bert Hinton to call the stream Henderson's Creek after a well known pioneer family but most people still refer to it as the School Creek. Henderson's Creek would confuse them.

We were asked why the Free Press did not take a strong stand either for or against the question on the liquor plebiscite. The answer is, of course, that we feel the electorate is knowledgeable enough about the issues to decide for themselves whether they thought booze should be sold in cocktail lounges and dining rooms. Liquor is already being sold in several places in town under special occasion permits and only those who belong to the club or organization involved can imbibe. It is only fair, we suppose, that the general public should have the same opportunity.

We commend the recent decision of Acton Parks Board to go ahead with construction of three outdoor rinks in Acton at Prospect Park, Sir Donald Mann Park and the high school. Close attention should also be paid to a "no pucks" policy during certain hours as board member Diane Spielvogel has suggested in order to give the children the chance to skate as well as play shinny.

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Should we execute murderers?

We have listened with interest to both sides of the capital punishment debate, precipitated by the upcoming expiration of the temporary suspension of the capital punishment bill.

Those who oppose capital punishment want the temporary suspension to be permanent abolition. Those who support death by hanging, and other means, want capital punishment reintroduced. Both sides to the question are convinced God is on their side.

"Capital punishment is neither a deterrent to criminals nor a protection to society. It may indeed backfire by lessening our reverence for life," a statement issued by United Church officials declares.

In support of the arguments, officials say that murders in United States cities have increased in spite of the death penalty. Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina, states which electrocute murderers, have the highest murder rates in the U.S., Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin, without the death penalty, have the lowest.

Although the statement does not qualify facts with the observation that the former states are in the hot belt, while the latter have more temperate climate, factors which could also influence the incidence of murder, it is on firmer ground when it declares only a small number of murders are planned.

"More than two-thirds of murders happen during compulsive rages, in quarrels with close associates," it says. Again it is a matter of degrees.

It has always been our understanding only those who murdered premeditatedly were executed. Long prison sentences were the lot of those who murdered by impulse.

Asked also was the question: "From which killers should our laws protect us by their deaths? A bank robber who kills may be hanged. A drunken driver who kills may not."

There is an over-simplification, of course. Bank robbers obviously carry weapons to use. Drunken drivers, who kill far more people, than bank robbers, do not drive cars to kill.

Church officials speak out forcefully when they say the death penalty is contrary to the spirit and teachings of

Christ. Although the epistles or gospels do not carry any instances of which we are aware where Christ condemns capital punishment as such. He did say that men should leave vengeance to God.

On the other hand, those who advocate the reimposition of capital punishment point with long fingers at the rising tide of murders which have occurred in Canada since executions were abolished.

Is it coincidence that murders increased when executions went out of style? We doubt it. We believe the minority of murderers who plan deeds increase with thoughts of light punishment.

However, we think the question should be decided by an impartial investigation into the deterrent effects of capital punishment. We don't like the idea of revenge as expounded by those who advocate vengeance.

If it is found capital punishment does have a deterring effect the state had a right and a duty to reimpose death by execution. If it is found otherwise then let us abolish the distasteful business for good.

Free Press Editorial Page

B2 The Acton Free Press, Wednesday, November 29, 1972

Squirrels in the attic and a cat at the door. Winter is on its way.

Yep, the squirrels, after about five years of exile, have managed to chew their way back into the attic, and are happily holding their regular family quarrels, wakes, weddings, bowling games and foot-races right overhead.

There probably aren't more than three or four hundred of them, to judge from the commotion.

And I'm helpless. Once they get in, you might as well wait until spring, when they emerge and you can whack up some tin patches over their entries.

I like to have black squirrels around the place, but not in the place. They're cute and picturesque hopping about on the lawn, picking up acorns in their dainty mitts and swivelling their little bright, beady eyes about as they chew.

But when you can't see them, and all you can do is hear, they're not so cute. The only picture of them I have in winter is of a couple of young buck squirrels gnawing away on the insulation covering my wiring, and chatting:

"Hey, Jack, this is better than that hole in the oak we lived in last winter. Right?"

"Right, George. It was kinda crowded with the 84 of us. And no central heating except our own. And down to an acorn a day by February. This is great. Lots of room for jogging to keep in shape. Lots of heat. And—mummm—I love that electrician's tape."

They remind me of a rat who took over nocturnally in our room in prison camp barracks in the winter of '44-45.

One single, lousy rat had 18 grown men in a state of nightly alarms and excursions.

At first, he'd wake somebody up with his gnawing. It was a cross between the sound of a chain saw and that of a snowmobile.



Bill Smiley

It was a welcome diversion, in the beginning. Sort of company, as though somebody cared. We named him Packy and talked about him rather fondly. For a while.

But then the nerves started to wear thin. There's something nerve-racking about a huge rat chomping away right in your ear, as it seemed.

It got to the point where nobody could go to sleep. We'd lie there, nerves strumming, waiting for Packy's evening performance to begin, each of us clutching a weapon, a boot or a bedboard.

The little devil seemed to know that he had us right where he wanted us. One night he'd start right after lights-out, and suddenly stop, just when we thought we'd located him.

Next night, he'd lie there chuckling—and we'd have sworn we could hear the chuckle—keeping us in suspense until it was almost unbearable. Then he'd give a couple of zooms. And stop.

In a few minutes he'd start again, gnawing steadily and contemptuously. At last, somebody's nerves would break, there'd be the flare of a match and 18 of us would leap out of our bunks, flailing at the spot we were sure he was in.

He never was, and it's a wonder somebody wasn't killed in the confusion. Because we all had a different spot.

Well, that's enough about squirrels and rats. But I know exactly why people use the term "squirrelly" as a synonym for being a bit mental.

The other manifestation of winter I mentioned was our cat. In summer, she's lean and tawny, a tigress prowling her domain, stalking bumblebees and butterflies and birds. And she's outside, day and night. A lovely cat.

As soon as the first wind comes out of the north, she turns into Mr. Hyde. She hangs on the screen door, howling pitifully. She has ruined three screen doors.

Does she want love, affection, admiration? No. She wants in. And once in, she wants grub. I have never kicked an animal, but when that pig of a cat lurches in like a hyena scenting a fresh kill and starts rubbing against my legs when I'm trying to rattle up some breakfast for myself, there's a grave temptation to turf her right into the kitchen sink. She's an unlovely cat. Fat and demanding, like some wives. And she thinks I'm her husband.

Apparently my un-love affair with cats has been mentioned before, because I have here a letter to the Listowel Banner from Rita Dodkin, 11. I'll quote parts.

"Cats are very useful in many different ways than putting them on a calendar. They provide lots of company for old and lonely people who cannot have dogs because they can't give them the right exercise. They pamper and pet their cats because they enjoy it."

"I think this is far from turning them into unwanted, contemptuous parasites as Mr. Smiley said. They look so sweet when they sleep on your best chair. When they rub your legs I think they are trying to show love. Our cats always tried to show love. I used to have one but now I'm getting one next spring."

Rita, you might get one long before next spring.

Back Issues of The Free Press

20 years ago 50 years ago 75 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 11, 1952.

Acton's town hall tower topped this week, piece by piece, as Ajax workmen removed the 70-year-old timbers from the now-wobbly steeple. Repairs were found necessary when condition of the town hall bell for fire alarms was investigated. The tower also houses the electric fire siren. The erection of the town hall and lock-up was quite an important addition to the thriving town of 1881. But it met with storms of disapproval and controversy. Major William Allan proposed a hall, and a good one, on a central site on the front street. He would have it constructed with stores on the first floor, main hall on the second floor, with society halls on the third floor and council chambers and lock-up in the basement. Others' opinions varied however and the end result is as it stands today.

Council plans to cap the tower, sheltering the bell and siren, but the pointed steeple will not be replaced.

Acton has a fine Christmas tree in front of the post office. Doug Manning sparked the effort and merchants and industries cooperated.

Harold Wiles was the winner of an outdoor motor boat and motor at the Firemen's dance Friday in the town hall. "I've been buying tickets for 40 years," Mr. Wiles commented. Linda Braida won the \$10 prize and R. Hepburn of Rockwood the \$5. Fire Chief Fred Dawkins introduced the draw. Music was to the Modernaires from Georgetown.

George Benton's Meat Market opens next Monday in the old stand at the corner of Mill and Elgin St.

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 7, 1922

The municipal elections on Monday, under the new system of an earlier date, resulted in the re-election of the four councillors who were in office last year—Harrison, Holmes, Bell and Theford. It is very manifest that the citizens of Acton are seized of the desirability of securing new industries in addition to the excellent ones already operating here. At the election the bylaw to guarantee the bonds of Thomson Motor Supplies of Toronto to the amount of \$10,000, a favourable vote was cast of four to one for the new enterprise.

Mr. Roy Thomson of Toronto was in town for the vote and assured all those who met him that the Thomson Company will do all in their power to make the enterprise advantageous to Acton.

A bold attempt was made to accomplish a jail delivery at the county jail, Milton, Monday morning when friends of the convicted pickpockets, sentenced to three and a half years in Kingston Penitentiary, endeavored to liberate them. When the turnkey was aroused they made their escape in an automobile. Three hours later the Milton Fair pickpockets were on their way to Kingston.

A member of the new provincial Constable staff has been allotted to Halton county and will enter upon his duties here this week. His headquarters will be at Milton. Cons. A. W. Ripert is the new officer. He is a stalwart, well-informed man and will, no doubt, make himself of much value in the preservation of the peace in the county.

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 2, 1897

Three months ago Thomas Brunt was taken seriously ill and since has been under the doctor's care. The other day his kind-hearted fellow-workmen at the Acton Tanning Co. circulated a subscription and made up a purse of a very respectable amount. Their employers, hearing of this kind action, supplemented the amount by a good donation. Practical sympathy of this kind is Christ-like and highly commendable.

The G.T.R. have just issued a new tariff of passenger rates from all points in Canada to points in Alaska and British Columbia for the benefit of those who are intending to seek their fortunes in the gold fields. The route is by way of Chicago, thence to Seattle and Tacoma, and then by the vessels of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company. The rates from Toronto range from \$101.80 for first class on the Dyea to \$68.80 for second class on the Wrangell. The amount of baggage allowed is 150 pounds.

Those who stood at the head of their classes in the roll of honor include Ruby Clark, Ettie McDonald, Myrtle Matthews, Myrtle Dills, Charlie Matthews, David Foster, Harold Nicklin, Edith Nicklin, Bertie Speight, Ethel Coleman.

A number of new books were put into circulation at the Rockwood public library this week. The committee is becoming noted for their excellent taste in choosing books.

During Dr. Mercer's absence Dr. T. T. Harris of Oakville will have charge of his dental practice and will call at his office over Brown's Drug Store on the second and third Thursdays of each month.