

# Family History Notes

Spring, 2005

*The objective of this special supplement to the regular newsletter is to relate a mix of family history, genealogy tips, and bits and pieces of local and Swiss history. These stories may also serve to highlight and acquaint Society members with various documents, photographs and artifacts in our collections.*

This family history newsletter will start out with a photo from the Society's collection – that of Joshua and Barbara (Speich) Wild in front of their home circa 1872. The Wild family is well known by area residents because so many local people are descendents of this couple. The Wild children were Katharina Eichelkraut, Barbara Streiff, Maria Kundert, John Wild, and Elsbeth Hoesly. Wild family items in our



museum and archive collections include Joshua Wild's diary, a book from Wild's lending library (years before our public library), his handmade drafting tools, pieces of china from the Wild's home, daughter Katharina's hair weaving, and the Eichelkraut, Streiff and Hoesly Family Bibles. Joshua Wild's tombstone is in our museum cemetery. The Wild family genealogy goes back to Klaus Wilhelm (later Wild) who married Anna Zwingli, sister of the reformer Ulrich Zwingli.

The Wild home which originally stood approximately across from the old town hall, was moved in the early 1900's to present location on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

## Exploring Early Census Data and Ethnicity Trends using On-line Databases

*In one of our newsletters last year, we discussed searching free on-line databases subscribed to by the South Central Library System. The following is an example of the type of information local historians can easily find using HeritageQuest®. In fact gathering the following information regarding local population and ethnicity took less than 10 minutes. In the past this same research may have taken hours to compile.*

*In the 1860 census for the Town of New Glarus there were 254 heads of households listed, of which:*

- 183 (72%) were born in Switzerland*
- 27 (11%) were born in Norway*
- 15 (5%) were born in various eastern states*
- 13 (5%) were born in England, Scotland or Ireland*
- 9 (4%) were born in Wisconsin*
- 7 (3%) were born in Germany, Austria or France*

## Dischs in Norway

In another 2004 newsletter was the story of Astrid Nyhus, a Norwegian woman who inquired whether we had any information regarding her great-grandfather, Johann Heinrich Disch. This Mr. Disch had left Switzerland for Norway and later emigrated (presumably) to the U.S. While we were not able to locate her great-grandfather, we did stay in touch with her. A couple of months later, a Ralph Disch of Texas wrote asking if we knew of any Norwegian Dischs. He had an incomplete jumble of Norwegian and Swiss family data. We put him in touch with Ms. Nyhus and with her information Ralph's family tree is now making sense. And it turns out that Ralph and Astrid's great-grandfathers were brothers. Unfortunately Ms. Nyhus has yet to locate where her great-grandfather Disch migrated, but the trail is now focusing on Quebec! These Norwegian Dischs are all related to the Martin Disch branch that arrived in New Glarus in 1853.

## Did You KnowThat . . .

*. . . Thomas Mann (1875-1955) German novelist and 1929 Nobel Prize winner for literature has Glarner roots? His grandmother was born Elisabeth Marti and she in turn was the granddaughter of Peter and Elisabeth (Elmer) Marti of Glarus.*

## Which Peter Jenny?

*In the early decades of the New Glarus settlement, there were three Peter Jennys who were active in civic affairs. Published histories mention Peter Jenny, but which one? The first was Peter Jenny of Wart (1815-1880). Peter was married to Barbara Elmer, and in the Swiss convention of identification (which is still used there) he was known as Peter Jenny-Elmer. This Peter Jenny was an acknowledged leader of the community in the early days, and may be noted in histories and censuses as Peter Jenny Elmer or Peter J. Elmer. He died in 1880 and even his tombstone says Peter Jenni Elmer providing no clue that Jenny was really his surname.*

*But worse is the tombstone in our museum's cemetery which says Peter Jnni (sic). This is the marker of the second Peter Jenny (1811-1858) of Sool. This Peter was married to Sara Freuler and was said to be an early church leader. Their daughter, Verena Jenny, married Anton Ott, and all of the local Otts are descendents of this Peter Jenny.*

*The third Peter Jenny (1829-1918) was an early teacher in the local school. He taught during the period when the log church was used as both church and school. This Peter Jenny was married to Amalia Heitz and they moved to the Monroe area where he died in 1918.*

*In 2004, the Historical Society had a family history inquiry from a San Francisco area architect by the name of – you guessed it – Peter Jenny! This Peter Jenny is a descendent of yet another Jenny branch that lived in the Monroe area.*

## New Glarus & New Elm & New Bilten & New Schwanden

It all started here in 1845 with the founding of **New Glarus**. But unknown to many is the fact that a small group of emigrants left the village of Elm, Canton Glarus a few weeks before the New Glarus-bound group. These Elm folk arrived in Milwaukee in June of 1845 having traveled to the Midwest via the Great Lakes route. (In fact while in Milwaukee, some of these Elm people spoke with Niklaus Dürst and Fridolin Streiff just prior to the New Glarus land purchase.) The Elm group remained in the Milwaukee area through winter of '45-46 and then in 1846 purchased farmland in the Town of Black Wolf, Winnebago County (just south of Oshkosh). For many years **New Elm** remained a small and vibrant Swiss settlement but is remembered today primarily by two small country cemeteries and the former New Elm country church (now a private home).

In 1847, Fridolin Streiff was given the task of purchasing a number of 40 acre plots for a group of emigrants who would be arriving from Bilten, Canton Glarus. About 15 families arrived in the summer of 1847 and the land which Streiff purchased was known as **New Bilten**. This land was located about halfway between New Glarus and Monticello, roughly along Hefty Road. Because of villages forming in New Glarus and Monticello, there was no reason for yet another village to form, and New Bilten remained a farming area. A copy of a faded, hand-drawn map of New Bilten was recently received from fellow historians in Switzerland.

**New Schwanden** was founded in the mid-1850's just north of Minneapolis near Champlin, MN on the Mississippi River. It was a community of Glarners – primarily Zopfi and Blesi families along with the occasional Tschudi – from the village of Schwanden. Like New Elm, it is mostly remembered today by a cemetery and a marker at the site of the church. An organization in Schwanden is highlighting the story of New Schwanden in a special 2005 exhibit (see poster above). In our archives collection, we have brief histories of the New Elm and New Schwanden settlements, cemetery lists from New Elm, the St. Fridolin Cemetery listing from New Schwanden, and a listing of the New Bilten emigrants of 1847.



☼ *Life is lived forward, but understood backwards. – Connect with the past!* ☼