

Family History Notes

Spring, 2009

World War II Heroes and Horrors

Family history stories often extend beyond the borders of local history. The descendants of early New Glarus residents are spread out near and far. And their stories, while not quite local history, are nonetheless part of the fabric of our family history.

Three men with area family history connections – LeRoy A. Scoville, Frederick T. Bruni, and Robert C. Kubly – were part of the “Janesville 99” and are remembered nearly 70 years after the horrors which they bravely endured in the South Pacific during World War II. The “Janesville 99” are described in the following taken from “Wisconsin Stories”:

“They started their military careers as the ninety-nine men of the Tank Company of the 32nd Division of the Wisconsin National Guard. Activated for duty prior to American entry into World War II, they became Company A of the 192nd Tank Battalion. In the fall of 1941, they were sent to the Philippine Islands and were present when Japanese forces invaded on December 8, 1941 (the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor). They took part in the valiant but unsuccessful American defense of the islands and surrendered to the Japanese in April, 1942. Along with 75,000 other American and Filipino troops they were subjected to the atrocities of the seventy-five mile trek to prison camp known as the Bataan Death March. The survivors endured the thirst, starvation and disease at the camp as well as the brutality of their captors for over two years. In the fall of 1944, threatened with the return of the Americans led by General Douglas MacArthur, the Japanese herded the surviving prisoners into ships for transfer to other camps. Onboard the “hell ships” food and water were inadequate and space was so tight the prisoners could neither sit nor lie down. The voyage north took weeks, with at least one of the unmarked prison transports carrying ten of the Janesville 99 torpedoed and sunk by the U.S. Navy. Upon arrival in Japan, the prisoners went back into camp, where more of them died of malnutrition, disease and brutal treatment. Upon Japan’s surrender in August, 1945, the thirty-five survivors of the Janesville 99 were liberated and soon returned home. The cruelty of their treatment was rivaled only by the heroism they summoned forth to survive and resume life again.”

LeRoy Arnold Scoville of Evansville, WI was the great-grandson of Jost and Verena (Zopfi) Zweifel of New Glarus. Scoville joined the Wisconsin National Guard in 1940 and was called to federal service within two months. Just prior to the attack on Clark



Airbase by the Japanese on December 8, 1941, Scoville was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant. He was a defender of Bataan, but with the surrender in 1942 Scoville became a prisoner of war and was part of the Bataan Death March. LeRoy was credited with saving the life of Lewis Wallisch (still living in 2007 and the last surviving member of the original “Janesville 99”). In 1945, Scoville was put on the “hell ship” Enoura Maru and taken to Formosa. On January 6, 1945 the coal hold was emptied and filled with nearly 500 POWs. On January 9, the Japanese ship came under attack by the American bombers unaware of the prisoners. The hold was hit and over half of the prisoners were killed. LeRoy was severely wounded in the leg and foot and died of his wounds on January 24. His only possession at his death, an aluminum bracelet, was passed to a buddy who presented it to LeRoy’s parents after the war. Except for a son who died as an infant, LeRoy was their only child.

Frederick Tobias Bruni of Monroe, WI was a first cousin of Jacob Bruni and Bertha (Bruni) Hefty of New Glarus. He was also the great-grandson of early New Glarus residents David and Elsbeth (Figi) Wild. In 1921 Bruni enlisted in the Wisconsin National Guard and was promoted to Captain of the Headquarters Company of the 192nd upon his arrival in the Philippines. He was under fire on December 8, 1941 when Clark Airbase was attacked. And for the next four months, Bruni and his troops were under near constant Japanese bombing and strafing. On April 8, 1942, it was Captain Bruni who informed his sergeants with a cracking voice of the plans to surrender. Bruni’s life was ended by the Japanese at Palawan Island in December of 1944. To prevent the prisoners of war being liberated by the advancing Allied troops, the Japanese on Palawan Island forced the remaining 150 prisoners into trenches and burned them using barrels of gasoline. Only 11 men escaped the slaughter that day by the Japanese. Back in Janesville in early 1945, Bruni’s wife Hazel received some POW postcards sent by her husband. She did not learn until later that he had already been murdered.



Robert Conrad Kubly survived the Bataan Death March, the “hell ships”, and his Japanese imprisonment. He was the grandson of Abraham and Maria (Bäbler) Kubli who farmed in the Town of Mt. Pleasant. And Kubly’s father, Conrad V. Kubly, was employed for a time in New Glarus at the Pet Milk factory, then known as the Helvetia Milk Condensing Company. Robert Kubly enlisted in 1940 and like the others was part of the efforts to defend Bataan. He was held in Camp O’Donnell, Cabanatuan #1 and Bililbid POW camps in the Philippines, and later in Japan at the Osaka Main Camp and Nagoya #9. Kubly was taken to Japan on the “hell ship” Tottori Maru where about 2000 prisoners were so crowded together they could barely move. Filth and starvation were the hallmarks of the voyage. It was reported that the ship came under attack of a U.S. submarine unaware of the prisoners. Many prisoners died en route to Japan. All told, Kubly was a prisoner of the Japanese for 3 ½ years. Mercifully, he and the other prisoners were finally liberated in September of 1945. He returned to America, married and lived in California where he died in 2004 at the age of 91.

Grave Matters

A new trend in online genealogical information has been the explosion of cemetery data. Little by little, transcribed cemetery information has been entered in various websites. More recently, photographs of individual gravestones have been added. One such site is called Find A Grave. By entering a person's name, their burial information may appear, sometimes including a photograph of the gravestone, and occasionally brief biographical information. Photos of local gravestones as well as markers from remote cemeteries across the country may be found at these websites. One interesting photo found at Find A Grave is the gravestone of Wm. Tell Jordi who died in the 1890 in the mining town of Silver Cliff, CO. Wm. Tell Jordi was the son of Swiss native John Jordi.



Photographs of the New Glarus cemeteries have been taken by Larry Kopet of Oconomowoc, WI. Since 2004 (when Larry's wife Linda had challenged him to get off the couch and find a hobby) he has taken over 250,000 photographs of Wisconsin gravestones in 1500 cemeteries.

Linda loads the photos onto the USGenWeb site. To the right is the photograph taken by Kopet of the John and Dorothea (Speich) Legler marker found in the EUB cemetery west of New Glarus.



Aebly and Trumpy Families in New Glarus

The first Canton Glarus immigrants to settle in New Glarus after the original group arrived on September 8, 1845. Heinrich Aebli (Aebly in New Glarus) and his sons Heinrich (Henry) and Jacob, and Jost Trümpe (Trumpy in New Glarus) and his son Heinrich (Henry) arrived and each family purchased 20 acre land parcels of the colony land. These people were from the Ennenda and Ennetbüchli area just across the Linth River from the village of Glarus. Henry Trumpy later recalled that their first night in New Glarus was spent in a communal straw shed which collapsed on them during a rainstorm. By November of 1845, the Aebly and Trumpy families had built a 20 foot by 30 foot log cabin. Sadly, both Heinrich Aebli and Jost Trümpe died in 1846. In 1847, son Henry Aebly married Maria Becker (also from Ennenda) marking the first marriage in New Glarus. And in 1849, Henry Trumpy also married an Ennenda girl, Elsbeth Aebly. Both families farmed east of New Glarus. The Trumpy farm was located just over the hill to the east and the Aeblys farmed in the Town of Exeter. In 1866, the Trumpys moved to Shueyville in the Town of Clarno where they farmed and operated the Shueyville saw and grist mill. Henry Trumpy died on August 14, 1915 – the day before the dedication of the Pioneer Monument on which the Trumpy and Aebly names are inscribed.

Henry and Maria (Becker) Aebly had six children – Salomon (married Sabina Disch) who was killed by lightning in 1881; Henry (married Maria Duerst) was an innkeeper and saloonkeeper operating the Wisconsin House hotel and the tavern known today as Puempel's; Anna Maria (married Nicolas Duerst); Anna Magdalena (married Thomas Kundert); Elsbeth (married Johann Heinrich Duerst); and Jacob (married Anna Barbara Ott). Local Aebly descendants include Roger Arn, Elaine, (Elmer) Funseth, Darlene (Yaeger) Yaun, and the late Nordean Hoesly and Darlene (Hoesly) Voegeli. As noted the Henry and Elsbeth (Aebli) Trumpy family re-established themselves in Shueyville, and many of the descendants of their 10 children are found in the Monroe area. Tom Marty of New Glarus is a Trumpy descendent.

In addition to the first Aebli and Trumpy families mentioned above, other Aebli/Aebly and Trumpy families also found their way to New Glarus and Green County. Around 1868 Jost Aebli of Ennenda arrived and lived with his uncle and aunt the Henry Trumpys of Shueyville. Jost married Catherine Thomas and they farmed in the Town of Clarno. Recently a descendent of Jost by the name of Jory Aebly received international media coverage. In February, 2009 Aebly was shot point-blank in the head during a Cleveland, OH robbery. Neurosurgeons said Aebly had "non-survivable" brain injuries. Death was imminent and the hospital chaplain gave him the last rites. The priest also gave Jory the last of twelve rosaries which had given to the chaplain years earlier by the late Pope John Paul II. Aebly miraculously recovered. It is thought the Vatican may evaluate the case to provide the support needed to elevate John Paul II to sainthood. In 1881, Jost's brother Melchior Aebli and his wife Barbara née Jenny immigrated to Green County. Larry Klassy is a descendent. 1908 immigrants from Ennenda were Heinrich and Columbina (Altmann) Aebli who farmed in the Town of Jordan. Ernst Aebli of Ennenda immigrated in 1903. He returned to Canton Glarus to marry Anna Hefti and they both came to American in 1908. Their children include Margaret (Aebly) Hofer and the late Fred Aebly of New Glarus.



Jacob Trumpy, a native of Ennenda, arrived here in 1915 with his parents. He married Rose Zentner and they were the parents of Helen (Trumpy) Freitag of New Glarus. Another Jacob Trumpy, the son of immigrants Johann Thomas and Barbara (Trumpy) Trumpy was a Monroe cigar maker from around the turn of the last century. Anna Barbara Trumpy arrived here in the early 1900s and married Fred Disch in 1912. Barbara and Fred Disch are remembered for being long-time and faithful cast members of the Wilhelm Tell drama. And a 1903 immigrant from Bergen, Norway was Sverre Trumpy who became an engineer

with the Gisholt Machine Company in Madison, WI. Although Norwegian, Sverre's Trumpy ancestry was Glarner.

Aebly and Kundert

In 1945 an Associated Press news item was widely circulated in newspapers across America relating the visit of two American GIs to Canton Glarus. The war had just ended when Gilbert Aebly and Raymond Kundert were on furlough and took the opportunity to visit their Glarner grandmothers. Gilbert's grandmother was Anna Maria Aebli-Marti and Ray's grandmother was Anna Zimmermann-Becker. By 1952 both grandmothers had passed away. The article pointed out the pure *Glarnerdeutsch* spoken by the men and their use of long-lost expressions known only to the grandmothers' generation. By the 1990s both GIs had passed away -- Gilbert Aebly in 1992 and Ray Kundert in 1996.

Freitags in New Glarus

In Canton Glarus the surname Freitag is commonly associated with the village of Elm. There in Elm *Stammvater* Waltert Freitag established the family line back in the early 17th Century. The Freitags became prominent citizens of Elm, but like most families various Freitag families ventured to American to begin new chapters in their lives. All the Freitags in Green County were from Elm and were related to each other – closely or distantly – having the common ancestor, Waltert Freitag.

Johann Jacob and Maria (Schiesser) Freitag arrived here in the 1860s after farming near Milwaukee for a number of years. They emigrated in 1845 with the New Elm group which left Canton Glarus shortly before the New Glarus colonists. Johann Jacob's nephew, Jacob Freitag immigrated in 1853, married Sara Blumer and then served in the 9th Wisconsin in the Civil War. Another Johann Jacob Freitag (and another nephew of Johann Jacob Freitag-Schiesser) lived here briefly with his wife Anna née Kubli before they moved on to the Renwick, IA settlement. All of these Freitag branches are descendants of the Werdenberg *Landvogt* Rudolf Freitag and his son *Landvogt* Johann Heinrich Freitag (see Fall 2006 Family History Notes for more information on the Werdenberg *Landvogts*). Descendants of these people include Historical Society members Duane Freitag and Lola Newell.

Samuel and Verena (Schneider) Freitag were early farmers near the present location of the EUB cemetery. Samuel died in 1862 at the age of 45 while his wife Verena was pregnant with their youngest child. This child, born after her father's death, was Verena Freitag who married Jacob Voegeli of the Voegeli farm. Alice Freitag, longtime piano teacher and organist of the Swiss Church was a granddaughter of Samuel and Verena Freitag. New Glarus Historical Society members Priscilla (Freitag) Croft and John Freitag are also descendants.

Brothers Dietrich and Jacob Freitag immigrated in 1864 and 1877 respectively. Dietrich married Verena Elmer and Jacob married Verena Ruegg (the niece of Verena Elmer). Dietrich and Verena purchased the Fridolin Streiff farm (Fridolin Streiff the 1845 scout) between New Glarus and Monticello. The cheese factory pictured at right was built on the farm of Dietrich Freitag – the first Swiss cheese factory in Green County. Original cheese making equipment displayed in the museum's replica cheese factory is from the Freitag factory as well as equipment from the collection of the late Carl Marty, Sr. and also from the Nic Kubly factory. Jacob and Verena (Ruegg) Freitag farmed on the Ruegg-Freitag farm south of New Glarus Woods. They were the parents of J. U. Freitag, long-time President of the New Glarus Historical Society and the grandparents of Orso Duerst, whose wife Margaret also served as Society President.



Viola (Freitag) Stuessy, who ran Stuessy's Meats and Grocery Store with her husband Fred, was the granddaughter of Kaspar Freitag a Madison baker from 1865 to 1875. Kaspar returned to Elm where he married Maria Bähler. Other Freitags from Elm lived elsewhere in Green County, Milwaukee, Fold du Lac, the New Elm settlement near Oshkosh and as mentioned in the Renwick, IA area. The name Freitag is sometimes pronounced "Friday" in New Glarus, since its literal translation from German is "Friday". And indeed some of the Freitag branches spell their name Friday. It is said the name Freitag and our word Friday have their origin in the Old English word *Frigedæg* which is associated with the goddesses Frigg or Freyja.

Ancestral Homes in Elm: Freitag, Zentner and Elmer Families

In addition to being surrounded by magnificent natural beauty, the village of Elm is recognized for its historical character. Its centuries-old church and many of its fine homes have been painstakingly restored. In 1981, Switzerland's prestigious Wakker Prize was bestowed on Elm in recognition for its preservation efforts.

One of Elm's oldest homes is known as the *älteres Fritigenhaus* or "old Freitag house" located a kilometer or two south of the village center in an area known as Steinibach. This home was built around 1691 most likely for Rudolf Freitag (1632-1701) the son of the Freitag progenitor, Waltert. Next door to the "older Freitag house" is the *jüngeres Fritigenhaus* or "younger Freitag house" which was built nearly a century later in 1784. This home was built for Rudolf's great-grandson Kaspar Freitag (1745-1830). In 1799, Kaspar Freitag also built one of Elm's largest homes known today as the *Zentnerhaus*. The *Zentnerhaus*, located across the street from Elm's church, is actually a *Doppelhaus* (i.e. duplex) – two symmetrical apartments each occupying half of the chalet. Kaspar Freitag's grandson, Kaspar Zentner (1811-1887), a respected Elm community leader and historian, lived in the house and it has subsequently been known as the *Zentnerhaus*. In both of Kaspar Freitag's homes, there are still clues as to the identity of the builder. The initials "KF" can still be seen in decorative ironwork near the doors. (Drawing of the Freitag houses in Steinibach by Hansruedi Streiff. Older Freitag house (1691) in middle; younger Freitag house (1784) at right. Hausstock peak at left in the distance.)



Across the street from the *Zentnerhaus* is Elm's *Pfarrhaus* (parsonage). This 1807 home was built for Kaspar Freitag's son Walter Freitag (1772-1840). At some point of its life, this wooden chalet was covered with drab stucco.

In 1975, Elm was in the midst of its historical renaissance and the *Pfarrhaus* was renovated, the stucco removed revealing the original wooden patina.

(continued on back)

Situated below the “older and younger” Freitag homes in Steinibach is the *Elmerhaus Hinterauen* another *Doppelhaus*. This home from 1801 was built for the brothers Jacob and Mathias Elmer. The brothers married Verena and Sara Freitag, daughters of the aforementioned Kaspar Freitag. This *Doppelhaus* is configured somewhat differently from the usual side-by-side duplexes. It is split in half so that each of the two living units are back-to-back. One of Elms most distinctive and historic homes is the massive *Suwarowhaus* which dates from the late 1600s. It became the home of the Werdenberg *Landvogt* Rudolf Freitag (1704-1772) and later the home of his sons *Landvogt* Johann Heinrich Freitag (1735-1799) and Johann Jacob Freitag (1759-1849). The Russian General Suvarov stayed in this home when he and his troops passed through Elm in their retreat from the French in 1799. The *Suwarowhaus* was thoroughly renovated in the 1970s by Glarner *Landammann* Kaspar Rhyner of Elm.

These historic Freitag homes are significant contributors to the historic aura which Elm possesses. But these chalets are not museum relics; they are homes and part of the fabric of Elm life today. And they serve as lessons that historic preservation must encompass the entirety of a community and its surrounding area.

Pankraz and Blasius – Unique Names from Elm

Pankraz Freitag (born 1952), a native of Elm, is one of two Canton Glarus representatives to the *Ständerat* (the upper house of the Swiss Federal Assembly) in Bern. He bears the unusual given name (or *Rufname*) Pankraz, which is uniquely found in the village of Elm. The name Pankraz (also seen as Pancratius, Pankrazius, Pancratz, and various other similar versions) is an ancient name from early Christian times. St. Pancras was a Roman beheaded around the year 300 A. D. as a consequence of his conversion to Christianity. The name is also found in England. St. Pancras is an old area of London and home to St. Pancras Station – formerly a dowdy railway station, now completely renovated and the fashionable terminus of the Eurostar rail service to the continent.

The name Pankraz appeared in Elm, Canton Glarus in 1681 when Pankraz Elmer was born. This infant came by his name from his maternal grandfather, Pankraz von Capretz, a resident of Ilanz, Graubünden. (Ilanz is located in the *Vorderrheintal*, over the Panixer Pass from Elm.) First and second born sons in Canton Glarus were typically named after their two grandfathers. Therefore Pankraz Elmer was named for his grandfather, and several of Pankraz Elmer’s own grandsons were named after him. All of the men named Pankraz (or its variations) are descended from Pankraz von Capretz of Ilanz.

This unusual name has found its way to New Glarus about 4 times. Pancratius Elmer (1815-1889) and Pancratius Elmer (1841-1915) were Elm natives and early New Glarus residents – the former was the grandfather of H. Otto Elmer and the latter was the grandfather of Flossie (Elmer) Hefty and J. Ivan Elmer. Then there were two cousins both by the name of Pancratius Hefty known here as Gus and Gustave. Gus Hefty (1899-1987) and Gustave Hefty (1893-1946) were both immigrants from Elm and lived in the New Glarus area. Pankraz Reiner (originally Rhyner) was an Elm native who lived with his wife and family in Madison. He served in the Civil War and died in 1864 after being wounded at Petersburg, VA.

Another obscure name found in Elm is the name Blasius. Blasius (Blaise in English) is the name of an Armenian saint from late Roman times. St. Blaise is invoked by Roman Catholics in the traditional blessing of throats. The earliest known man by the name of Blasius in Elm was Blasius Zentner (born ~1520-1540) and it appears all Elm men bearing the name Blasius are descended from him. In the New Glarus area there were at least three men by the name of Blasius – Blasius Rhyner (born 1863) married to Sophia Zeller, his nephew Blasius Rhyner (1885-1914) married to Rosalena Zimmerman, and Blasius Elmer (1872-1936). The Glarner surname Blesi (found in Schwanden and New Schwanden) is derived from the Christian name Blasius.

A Parlor Organ in the Log Church

The log church at the Swiss Historical Village is a replica of New Glarus’ first Swiss Reformed Church constructed in 1849. The original log house of worship was used until the completion of the stone church in 1858. Standing in the front corner of the replica log church is a Victorian pump or reed parlor organ made by the Story and Clark firm of Chicago. The organ is out of place in this log church setting based upon its estimated date of manufacture (about 40-50 years after the original log church was no longer used as a church) and its intended use in a parlor, not a church. However, since it is still an operating organ, it has been placed in the church to provide organ music at the annual church service as well as on tours.

The organ originally belonged to Fridolin (Fred) and Anna (Krieg) Figi. The Figis were a local couple who married in 1892. They farmed for many years in the Town of York and later moved to New Glarus. They had only one son, Johann Mathias, who died in 1911. Fred Figi was the son of Mathias Figi and his second wife Salome (or Salomea) Baumgartner. Mathias Figi was a native of Betschwanden, Canton Glarus and was married in New Glarus to Anna Baumgartner, a native of Engi, Canton Glarus. They had two children when Anna died. Mathias then married Anna’s younger sister Salome and they had 11 children – Fred Figi being the seventh child of this second marriage. Of the 13 Figi children from both marriages, 11 grew to adulthood and their Figi or Figy descendants include Hubert Elmer, Millard Tschudy, Wayne Duerst and Donna (Reuter) Rupnow.

Anna Josepha Krieg was born in Switzerland, the daughter of Jacob Michael Plazidius Krieg of Lachen, Canton Schwyz and his wife Franziska Gisler, a native of Canton Uri. Anna had two brothers, Jacob and August. Jacob Krieg married Elsbeth Duerst. Krieg Valley north of New Glarus is named for this family. Jacob and Elsbeth Krieg descendants include Jake Schmoker, Dwight Truttman, Viola (Werndli) Ubert, Olga (Voegeli) Hess, and Ruth Ann (Voegeli) Pauli. August Krieg married Eliza Steiner and they resided near Leoville, Saskatchewan.

Anna Figi died in 1938 and her husband Fred lived nearly 30 more years dying in 1965. Hearing a traditional hymn played on the Figi organ is an inspirational experience and the aged instrument remains a treasure in the collection of our Historical Society.