

Family History Notes

Summer 2013

History of the people of Canton Glarus

By Duane H. Freitag

Since many of our Swiss ancestors immigrated from Canton Glarus, one can get a feel for both our genetic makeup and hereditary aspects of our psyche by looking at the span of history of the canton. This is the second of six parts.

Part 2: The Dark Ages

The early Middle Ages, also known as the Dark Ages, lasted from about 400 to 1000 C.E. It was during this era that the feudal system developed, with relations between the weak and the strong based on personal allegiance to a network of noble families and religious institutions. Everything was related to Christian concepts of an orderly universe and you respected the privileges of those above and below you. Power constantly shifted among kings, dukes, and church officials. The majority of people, in what became Canton Glarus and elsewhere, were peasants. However, not all were feudal serfs. Many in Glarus actually were free tenants who gave the nobility or church a share of their crops or animals as rent. A few were *ministerialen*, vassals of the church but of a higher standing.

It was also during this era that a Germanic tribe known as the Burgundians settled in western Switzerland, intermixing with the Alemanni there and having Geneva as their center. To the northwest,



The Burgkapelle sits atop a mound in Glarus that might once have been the site of a small fortress used by the stewards of Glarus.

the Germanic tribe known as the Franks gained power under Clovis. After he consolidated his authority as king over most of what is modern-day France, he turned his attention toward conquering the Alemanni territory. Somewhere between 495 and 506 he defeated the Alemanni. Rhaetia, including Glarus, then became part of his empire.

After the death of Clovis in 511, his territories were divided and three weak kingdoms emerged. At first the Alemanni were granted considerable independence, but eventually their dukes disappeared from power. Administrative areas, known as a *gau*, remained, with the Glarus region

first a part of a large Alemanni *Thurgau* and later a new division called *Zurichgau*.

While western Switzerland embraced Christianity, most of the Alemanni in eastern Switzerland remained pagans until around the year 600. At that point Irish monks were roaming northern Europe with a mission of conversion and building monasteries. Among them were Gallus and Columban, who worked in the Zurich and Lake Constance area. Columban went on to Italy and Gallus stayed in eastern Switzerland, founding the now-famous monastery in St. Gallen (a city and canton named for him, directly north of Glarus). The monastery, with Othmar as its first abbot, became a major center of learning and culture. Even today its library remains as one of the richest from medieval times. The monasteries and cloisters – secluded areas generally within a monastery – were havens for many from the violence of the times. Some people made large gifts to the church in an effort to assure their place in heaven and to avoid regular tithes. Such gifts generally could not be challenged by civil authorities. Where monasteries were in control, more land was settled and cleared for cultivation.

During this period a monastery was founded at Säckingen, an island in the Rhine River east of Basel. Tradition says it was started by the Irish monk Fridolin, after St. Hilarius showed him the island in a dream. While the Säckingen abbey had both monks and nuns, only the nuns' convent became an important institution. Its land holdings were spread over an extensive area, including the Black Forest region of Germany.

It was during this Dark Age period that Glarus came under control of the abbey at Säckingen [today's Bad Säckingen in Germany]. There is no documented evidence of when or how it happened. However, a legend emerged much later in the 13th Century and involved Fridolin, the founder of the abbey. He purportedly converted a man named Urso, who had large land holdings in Glarus. When Urso died he left his lands to the abbey. That gift was challenged by his brother, Landolf, and the issue was put before a court at Rankweil [a city along the Rhine River in present-day Austria]. Fridolin allegedly brought Urso's decaying remains before the court to confirm the gift and so terrified Landolf that the brother not only relented but gave his lands as well. That is why Fridolin is often depicted with a skeleton or decomposing corpse. One of the few places that you can see that story depicted in New Glarus is on the "Fridolin's Walking Stick" sculpture along Highway 69 that was a gift from the people of Canton Glarus in 1995. The land transfer probably happened in the middle of the 8th Century – long after the time of Fridolin. While it involved only about a quarter of the canton, it included much of the usable valley land and some of the alps [the high grazing land, not the mountain peaks].



Fridolin appears in court with the skeleton of Urso in this panel on a monument in Bad Säckingen, Germany, near the Fridolinsmünster, a church housing what may be Fridolin's remains.

During the early period of Säckingen control, the abbess appointed a *meier* or steward to manage her holdings in Glarus. In keeping with the feudal system, it probably was a hereditary title. It is not known who most of those stewards were, but for many years it was believed that the position was held by a family that eventually took the name Tschudi. However, that was based on the now-discredited claims of Swiss historian Ägidius Tschudi (aka Gilg Tschudi), who wrote that he traced the fief to 870 with one Johannes of Glarus. Research published in 1938 showed that Tschudi had misinterpreted old records and made up much of his story. Although no archeological evidence has been found, it is believed that a fortress once stood on the mound that is the site of St. Michael's chapel in the city of Glarus, hence its name *Burgkapelle* (fortress chapel), and that it was probably used by the stewards of Glarus.

There are few records from this era, but a later accounting reveals how the abbess was required to visit Glarus every four years, collecting her tithes and other levies from our ancestors and settling various disputes. In other years, the steward took care of those matters. The items that were gathered – sheep, cows, fish, cheese (including *Schabziger*), butter, wool, cloth, and small amounts of money – were then slowly taken all the way to Säckingen, with various officials and workers taking a share along the way. When the goods finally arrived at the convent, they comprised a much smaller amount.

While centralized governments were developing in some of the few cities in Switzerland, the more rural areas relied on the *Landesgemeinde* for major decisions and alliances and even criminal convictions. Based on the old Alemanni tradition, the regional public assembly emerged in the 10th Century. Everyone age 14 and older (later 16) could participate. In Ägidius Tschudi's zeal to claim nobility for his family and describe Glarus as under control of feudal aristocrats, he ignored the reality of this democracy in which the people picked their leader or *Landammann*. The leader had to be of free birth and be well respected. Usually he was from the old-line free families, sometimes referred to as the "judges," who could be impartial because they were rich enough in their own right. Canton Glarus is one of only two regions in Switzerland that still holds an annual *Landesgemeinde*.

Next: Family names emerge

Original 1845 Immigrants Settled in Black River Falls

Terese Allen is a Wisconsin culinary historian. Her various books tell of the culinary traditions found throughout our state. Menus and recipes past and present highlight various culinary specialties found throughout Wisconsin. In one obscure reference in her book "The Flavors of Wisconsin" she cites "*Barbara Elmer ran the only public boardinghouse in Black River Falls in the late 1840s, where she fed about thirty men, most of whom were connected with the lumber industry. Salt pork and good, homemade bread was the staple diet, sometimes varied with bean soup and venison.*"

A Jackson County history also states "*In 1846, the lumber commerce of Black River [Falls] in Jackson County was estimated at from four to six millions of feet. . . At that time, the white women about the [Black River] Falls were limited to Mrs. Jacob Spaulding, Mrs. Hiram Yeatman, Mrs. Joseph Stickney, Mrs. Joseph Clancy and Mrs. Henry Elmer, or "Barbara," as she was more familiarly known in those days.*"

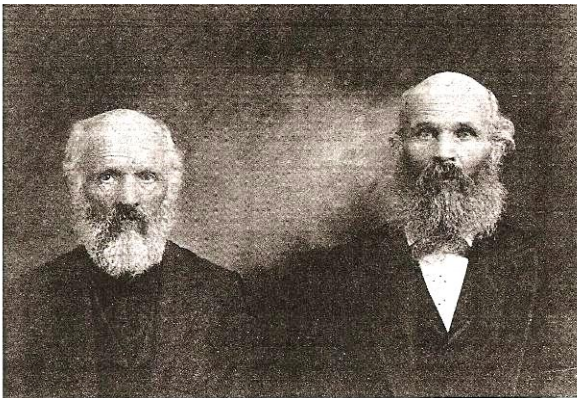
"At this time, the improvements at the Falls consisted of a frame boarding-house, 18 x 26, with a tolerable high roof, under which, upon a double loose floor there generally slept of a night from thirty to forty men, mostly "spoon-fashion." Mrs. Elmer, or "Barbara", did the cooking, and her bill of fare was made up of bread and fried pork for breakfast and supper, with bread and pork boiled for dinner."

Was Barbara Elmer, the 1840s boardinghouse cook of Black River Falls, of Glarner background? New Glarus was settled in 1845 followed by New Elm in 1846. Did Barbara immigrate with one of these groups? There was a Heinrich and Barbara (Jakober) Elmer, and sons Heinrich and Fridolin, who were among the New Glarus immigrants of 1845. But Glarus records and subsequent histories tell of their departure from the colonist group in Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia). Apparently this Elmer family was lost to history and the Canton Glarus authorities declared the Elmers missing (*verschollen erklärt*) in 1929.

However, data from the U. S. census of 1850 confirms that these Elmers were in fact among the early residents of Black River Falls. This 1850 Wisconsin Census for Crawford County lists this Swiss-born family of four (incorrectly entered as Elmore), along with a young daughter named Mary born in Wisconsin. The Elmers and their descendants continued living in the Black River Falls area for decades, although it is not known if there are direct descendants living there today. And yes, Black River Falls was part of Crawford County in 1850 prior to the formation of Jackson County in 1853.

The Spalti Brothers

Two others Glarner immigrants who immigrated in 1845 with the original New Glarus colonists were the brothers Joachim Spälti (1828-1909) and Heinrich Spälti (1825-1909). The brothers were the sons of Fridolin and Elisabeth (Weber) Spälti of Netstal, Canton Glarus. By March of 1845 the young brothers Spalti (as the surname is spelled in America) had lost both of their parents. On April 16, 1845 when Heinrich was just 20 years old and Joachim still a teenager, they left their home bound for America. They joined the emigrant group who became the original New Glarus colonists. However instead of remaining with the New Glarus-bound group, the Spalti brothers decided to leave the group and strike out on their own. Heinrich (Henry in America) and Joachim left the group in St. Louis, Missouri and went up the river to Ottumwa, Iowa. Their first winter was spent in a cave-like hole dug in the ground, sleeping on straw and eating parched corn. They worked for \$4 a month, half of which was received in farm products. Henry was lured to the 1849 California gold rush. He did better than most forty-niners, having earned \$16,000 (nearly \$400,000 today) in two years. A gold nugget, found lodged in Henry's boot, was made into a stickpin for his wife Sarah.



Henry returned to Iowa. Together with his brother Joachim they became engaged in both the operation of a store as well as substantial farming interests. Through hard work they prospered and were later considered the wealthiest people in Pleasantville, Marion County, Iowa. But Henry was not all business. He loved gardening and specialized in carnations. He was skilled at grafting trees and had his own orchard. He planted potatoes. During the winters, the choice apples and large potatoes were shared with the needy, leaving the lesser quality produce for his family. Joachim was a collector and at his death a treasure trove was found to contain rare coins, swords, and other antique relics.

The sons of Henry and Joachim continued to be merchants. They also continued the ownership of the Spalti farmlands. Henry's sons Henry, John and Joshua Spalti opened a mercantile store in Oakland, Iowa and later started a bank. The Spalti store began in a space with dimensions of 43 by 95 feet. The store eventually grew into a space covering a third of an acre. Two of the Spalti brothers built grand homes in Oakland, one with a walk-in safe and floor to ceiling bookcases which constituted Oakland's first library. The two houses were even connected by an underground tunnel.

Henry's son Fridolin, a merchant and banker in Pleasantville, Iowa, lived to the age of 95 and blessed with a fine memory served as a historical resource for the younger generations. Horace Spalti, a son of Joachim, became the head of a furniture manufacturing company in Dallas, Texas. The Spalti and Myers furniture, while no longer manufactured, is still sold today by antique dealers.

Henry and Joachim Spalti (above photo courtesy of Spalti descendant Marcia Schmitz) both died in 1909 – Henry at age 84 and Joachim at age 81. They did not reside in a Swiss settlement like New Glarus and their descendents did not marry Swiss spouses, yet their Swiss heritage is spoken of and cherished yet today by their descendents.

Albert Einstein's Mentor

In a recent Swiss poll identifying the most important Swiss person ever – *die grösste Schweizer Legende* – the Swiss public has chosen Albert Einstein, Roger Federer and Wilhelm Tell as the top three legends. Einstein was born in Germany, moved to Switzerland in 1895 for schooling, became a Swiss citizen, but later moved to Germany and then America where he died an American citizen in 1955. Einstein's famous theory of special relativity was developed while living in Bern.

The November, 2012 issue of the Swiss-American Historical Society "Review" contains the article entitled "Albert Einstein in Switzerland – The Education of the Most Famous Swiss American". The article mentions young Albert's professor, Jost Winteler, when Einstein attended the *Kantonsschule* in Aarau, Canton Aargau, in 1895-96.

Jost Winteler was a history and philosophy teacher at the *Kantonsschule*. Winteler and his wife Pauline



boarded students and living under their roof in 1895/96 was Albert Einstein. Einstein soon became part of the Winteler family living more as a family member than a boarder. He called the Winteler's *Papa und Mamerl* (mommy) and was indulged like a favorite son. Einstein even became romantically involved with Winteler daughter Marie. However their relationship was not meant to be permanent. While living in Zurich, Einstein met Mileva Maric and she proved to be his choice of wife.

But Albert's sister Maja married Jost Winteler's son Paul in 1910. And Albert Einstein's good friend and fellow scientist, Michele Besso, married Winteler daughter Anna. So through these close connections Albert maintained a lifelong link with the Winteler family. Pictured is Albert Einstein (left) with sister Maja and her husband Paul Winteler.

Jost Winteler (pictured below) was a native of Filzbach, Canton Glarus, the son of Mathias and Anna Barbara (Dürscher) Winteler. He received a degree from the University of Zurich and a degree in Philosophy from the University of Jena (Germany). Dr. Winteler's wife Pauline née Eckardt was a native of Jena. They became the parents of four boys and three girls, including Paul (who married Maja Einstein), Marie (who for a period of time was the love of Albert Einstein's life), and Anna (who married close Einstein friend, Michele Besso).



One document sums up the close affection between the Einsteins and the Wintelers. The following is a letter dated December 30, 1895 from Albert's father, Hermann Einstein, to Jost Winteler: *Esteemed Herr Professor! Your kind Christmas greetings made me and my family very happy, and I beg you to accept my heartfelt thanks for them and for the detailed report about Albert. It is a great relief to know that my son is under such loving care which is not only concerned with his physical well-being but also promotes his intellectual and inner life in such noble fashion. At this young age the heart is most receptive to a good model and I am convinced that your good influence will leave a lasting effect. I am of course exceedingly pleased with your opinion about Albert, even though I am aware that your words bespeak great benevolence. I am taking the liberty of returning the enclosed school report; to be sure, not all of its parts fulfill my wishes and expectations, but along with Albert I got used a long time ago to finding not-so-good grades along with very good ones, and I am therefore not disconsolate about them. Please allow me to send my very best wishes for the New Year to you and your esteemed family on this occasion, and accept the most cordial greetings from your respectful and devoted Hermann Einstein*

It is curious to realize that Albert Einstein, undoubtedly one the most brilliant minds our world has known, had “not-so-good grades” in the *Kantonsschule* in Aarau!

The Kalberwurst War

The front page of the April 5, 1969 the “Janesville Gazette” ran articles regarding such topics as an artificial heart transplant, Vietnam War protests, and the cancellation of the Smothers Brothers television show by CBS. In the lower left corner was an article proclaiming that a government ruling was causing a controversy around kalberwurst, the venerable veal sausage unique to New Glarus and old Glarus.

Indeed, the State had declared war on our beloved Glarner sausage. The State, or more specifically the State Department of Agriculture, insisted that kalberwurst should not be sold as formulated. It contained too much moisture and not enough meat. The Department hinted of consumer deception – milk and bread used in place of meat. The fact that the age-old recipe has long included milk and bread/crackers did not appear to sway the bureaucrats. They suggested that kalberwurst change its recipe from around 30% milk down to about 3%. Unless this was done, kalberwurst would have to be considered a meat “pudding”. The Janesville newspaper proclaimed that this was the “wurst idea we’ve heard”.

Willy Ruef, New Glarus sausage maker, stood his ground in 1969 saying he could live with a new name but that he would not change the traditional recipe. Ruef commented, "I'd change the name before I'd change the sausage . . . how can you change a [product] that is hundreds of years old?"

Those who have studied the culinary history of kalberwurst say it is unclear when and where the milk and bread were incorporated into the sausage recipe. Some suggest that a meatier sausage was “stretched” with milk and bread during the hunger years of the early 19th century. Others suggest that bread soaked in milk, called a panade, was used even earlier. Culinary programs today such as “America’s Test Kitchen” recommend using a panade to achieve moist and tender meatballs and meatloaf. So why not use milk and bread in veal sausage?

Dr. E. D. Baker with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture relented on the “pudding” appellation and also agreed the recipe would not need to be changed. But he continued to suggest that kalberwurst not be sold as a sausage because its high amount of milk placed it outside of state and federal sausage standards. Baker now suggested it be called a “non-specific” meat food. Someone suggested that it was not kalberwurst which should undergo a name change but rather the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture which should be renamed the Department of Bureaucratic Meddling.

The Swiss government also took aim at kalberwurst. But their intent was to give the Glarner specialty federal protection. They recognized the addition of milk, bread and spices such as nutmeg, is what made the product so unique (and delicious). In Switzerland today Glarner kalberwurst (often spelled *Chalberwurst* in Glarus) can only be made in the traditional way and only in Canton Glarus.

Kalberwurst on the Weissenberg in view of the Argenboden

It is virtually impossible to find a restaurant in Canton Glarus which does not serve the traditional kalberwurst dinner on the first Sunday in May – *Landsgemeinde* Sunday. It is a strictly maintained tradition that the kalberwurst be eaten with a butter and onion sauce, mashed potatoes (*Kartoffelstock* aka *Härdöpfelstock*), and cooked plums (*Zwetschgen*). The Glarner kalberwurst is locally made such as by the Hösli Brothers meat market in Glarus or the Menzi meat market in Mitlödi. This kalberwurst meal is reminiscent of a Sunday meal in New Glarus. But rather than one large New Glarus sausage link which is then cut into individual portions, the Glarner kalberwurst is made in single serving links – akin to an oversized bratwurst. Their butter and onion sauce is creamy with translucent onions, unlike a browned onion sauce which might be found here in Wisconsin. I remember *muäs* accompanying our kalberwurst, but typically it was homemade applesauce rather than stewed plums. (Photo is courtesy of Duane Freitag showing his *Landsgemeinde* meal of kalberwurst, mashed potatoes and stewed plums.)

On a recent trip to Canton Glarus, the day of the *Landsgemeinde* was sunny and clear. I skipped the festivities in Glarus and took to the mountains. I first hiked from Elm to Matt along the “*Suwarow-Weg*” path arriving in Matt is just under an hour. At Matt’s Gasthaus Elmer the waitress was busy putting placards on each table announcing their kalberwurst special.



After a coffee at the Elmer, I took a small gondola which whisked me from Matt’s village center to the Weissenberg terrace situated high above the valley floor. This locale is said to be the sunniest corner of the canton. Here a few farms belonging to families by the name of Marti and Stauffacher are surrounded by a dozen or two vacation homes scattered about. The Berggasthaus Edelwyss, a restaurant run by Heiri and Alice Marti-Tischhauser, is an easy 10 minute stroll from the upper cable car station. The restaurant offers an open air balcony with a fantastic view of the mountains above Elm and Matt. I enjoyed a local beer – an Adler Bräu – on their balcony followed by their kalberwurst served with the traditional accompaniments.

The Weissenberg terrace offers a view of the Glarner Alps not entirely visible from Elm and Matt. The villages, situated on the valley floor, are surrounded by steep mountainsides which often preclude view of the peaks. Looking across to the opposite side of the Krauch valley a dozen cascades were flowing down from the melting winter snow. I also spotted a small patch of open mountainside surrounded by a thick covering of pine. A trail could be seen snaking its way up the mountain to this open area and what appeared to be a small hut or barn. According to a panoramic map next to my table this open area is locally known as the Argenboden. I immediately recognized this name from Elmer family lore. Uncle Manuel Elmer wrote about the Argenboden in his books “Rudy’s Hill” and “Just Folks”. The Argenboden was owned by ancestor Conrad Elmer. And it was the loss of this valued summer grazing land in 1836 which plunged this family into financial problems (see “Family History Notes” Winter, 2009).

And these financial difficulties prompted most of Conrad's many children to emigrate from Matt to America. To look at this piece of horizontally-challenged property, one wonders how this land could have been so valued. Fifty years later Conrad Elmer's son, Green County immigrant John Ulrich Elmer, suggested to his own children that the Argenboden be purchased and brought back into the Elmer family. John Ulrich's children, who now called America home, thought a better idea would be to use that money to purchase flat farmland in Iowa where four times the number of cattle could be grazed and without the arduous task of leading the cattle up the mountainside each spring and down again in the fall. But the Iowa farmland scenery, beautiful as it may be, would never compare with the spectacular Glarner Alps.

Incidentally both Dr. Elmer's books, "Rudy's Hill" and "Just Folks", are available online at the Monticello Area Historical Society website. Thanks once again to the MAHS for taking the initiative to make this local history available.

The Oldest Glarner

If you ask someone in Canton Glarus "Who is the oldest Glarner?" you will get a surprising answer. The answer to that question is not a person but a thing. The wind phenomenon known as the *Föhn* is also called "*der älteste Glarner*" – the oldest Glarner. The *Föhn* is a weather condition found in the Alps. According to Wikipedia, "the *Föhn* is a type of dry down-slope wind that occurs in the lee (downwind side) of a mountain range. It is a rain shadow wind that results from the subsequent adiabatic warming of air that has dropped most of its moisture on windward slopes. As a consequence of the different adiabatic lapse rates of moist and dry air, the air on the leeward slopes becomes warmer than equivalent elevations on the windward slopes. *Föhn* winds can raise temperatures by as much as 54F in just a matter of hours. Central Europe enjoys a warmer climate due to the *Föhn*, as moist winds off the Mediterranean Sea blow over the Alps."

Diccon Bewes, in his entertaining and informative book "Swiss Watching" says of the alpine wind, it is "one weather feature that the Swiss love to claim as their own and will happily chat about: the *Föhn*, pronounced roughly like Inspector Clouseau saying "phone"." He further states "the *Föhn* [is] an ill wind for the Swiss, blamed for causing migraines, suicide and generally unsettling everyone." The Glarner have a sound basis for considering this an ill wind for it was the warm and dry *Föhn* winds which fanned the flames in Glarus' great fire of 1861 as well as playing a destructive role in numerous earlier fires. The north-south orientation of the Linth Valley makes for what is known as a *Föhntal* (foehn valley) in which the winds can become particularly strong and dangerous.



Another *Föhntal* is the Reuss River valley leading from the Gotthard Pass into Lake Uri. Friedrich Schiller sets the opening scene in his drama "Wilhelm Tell" here on Lake Uri. Wilhelm Tell performs his first act of courage as he ferries a desperate man across the lake despite the fact that "*der Föhn ist los*" -- the south wind is up. And again in Act 4 Scene 1, Tell describes how he escaped from Gessler's bondage during a severe storm which had come down from the Gotthard's gorges (i.e. the Reuss valley). The illustration is a well-known Swiss painting depicting the

"*Tellsprung*" when Wilhelm Tell leaps to safety from Gessler's boat during a *Föhnsturm* on Lake Uri.

Amusingly, folks in Canton Uri refer to the *Föhn* as "*der älteste Urner*". And Bewes also points out that the German word for hair dryer is "*Föhn*". So perhaps it can be correctly assumed that the unique alpine wind can be considered Switzerland's oldest hair dryer!

The Oldest Glarner in New Glarus

Who or what is the oldest Glarner in New Glarus? The oldest Glarner may be the gentleman found in the oil painting hanging above the fireplace in the Chalet of the Golden Fleece. The Chalet painting has an identification. In the upper right and corner is the name “*Herr Oberst Melchior Hefti von Glaris*” – Colonel Melchior Hefti of Glarus. Who was Hefti? Apparently he was a military man of some standing. The fact that he had an oil painting made of him in fine military attire would suggest an important personage. But scrutinizing old records did not reveal even a hint as to who Hefti was. How could such a supposedly important person leave a portrait yet no historical record as to his deeds?



The answer to “Hefti’s” identity came from Rolf Kamm, President of the *Historischer Verein des Kantons Glarus*. Kamm came to the conclusion there was no such Melchior Hefti in Glarus history. He concluded that this man was actually Johann Melchior Hässi. The Hässi family played important roles in 16th and 17th century Glarus, serving in such positions as Landammann, Pannerherr and in the military service of foreign powers. They were a Roman Catholic family with origins in the village of Glarus.

An oil painting in the collection of the Freulerpalast (the cantonal museum of Glarus) proved Kamm’s conclusion that Melchior Hefti was actually Melchior Hässi. Their portrait of Hässi dates from 1644 and attributed to an artist by the name of Carette. The New Glarus painting is apparently a copy of this painting and on which the surname Hefti, rather than Hässi, was mistakenly painted. The name Hefti appears nearly identical to Hessi (an older form of Hässi) when written in old German script.



Information from the *Freulerpalast* indicates that Johann Melchior Hässi served in service of the French in the years 1651 to 1654 during the reign of France’s Sun King Louis XVI. Hässi died in 1654. The Chalet’s portrait is pictured upper left and the *Freulerpalast*’s portrait is immediately above.

A Social Evening at the Chalet

Adapted from the “Monroe Evening Times” of March 2, 1948: Ralph and Bonnie Mueller of Spring Green entertained friends at the “Chalet of the Golden Fleece,” home of Edwin Barlow, Saturday evening. Present were Misses Eloise Marshall and Jocelyn Saether of Blanchardville, Arthur Elmer, Robert Strickler, Kenneth Hoesly, Messrs. and Mmes. Arthur and Hazel Zweifel, Wilbert and Grace Lienhardt, Millard and Virginia Tschudy, Gerald and Ann Disch, Eugene and Helen Stuessy and Quinton and Jean Ott.

History Detective Answer

A question was posed in the last newsletter issue about which U.S. President’s father had operated a cheese factory. The answer is President Calvin Coolidge’s father, John Coolidge, who began the Plymouth Cheese Factory in Plymouth, VT in 1890. The factory operated until 1934 when milk shortages during the depression forced the factory to close. President Coolidge’s son, John, reopened the factory in 1962. The cheese factory was later sold to the State of Vermont and operates today within the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site. The senior John Coolidge started his farm factory at a time when there was an explosion of small, local factories here in Wisconsin. By 1900 Wisconsin boasted over 1200 such cheese factories.

It may also be fun to reflect on historic presidential cheeses. In 1802 a gift was made to President Thomas Jefferson from the people of Cheshire, MA. The gift was a massive wheel (1234 pounds) of cheese made from the milk of all the cows (said to be 900) of the Cheshire community. The cheese was taken the 500 miles from Massachusetts to Washington, D. C. by sleigh arriving on January 1, 1802. Records note that the same cheese was still being served for White House July 4th celebrations the following year.



apparently the cheese left a lingering legacy.

The Jefferson Cheese served as the inspiration for the Jackson Cheese of 1837 (illustrated at left). President Andrew Jackson was the recipient of a mammoth piece of cheddar cheese from a New York State supporter. This was weighed in at 1400 pound (other sources say it was over two tons). President Jackson found it difficult for all of the cheese to get consumed. In order to rid the White House of the increasingly pungent cheese, he hit on the idea of holding a public reception at the White House featuring free cheese. Festive guests attacked the cheese with gusto and in just two hours the cheese was gone. But

According to an account of the day, Jackson's successor President Martin Van Buren, "had a hard task to get rid of the smell of cheese, and in the room where it was cut, he had to air the carpet for many days; to take away the curtains and to paint and white-wash before he could get the victory over it."



Back to President Coolidge. In August of 1928, when Coolidge was vacationing near Superior, Wisconsin, a delegation of big cheeses from Green County, presented a 147 pound wheel of Swiss cheese to the President. Among the delegation were John Geigel and Emory Odell, both of Monroe. This presidential cheese was made by August Schmid at the Jenny factory near Clarno. The stoic "Silent Cal" even managed to work up a grin for the camera as he posed with a wedge of Green County gold.

Let's hope Coolidge wasn't offended by the small wheel of Swiss cheese given to him considering the size of the cheeses presented to Presidents Jefferson and Jackson!

Disch Families of New Glarus and Beyond

One of the local family names whose ancestry stems from the village of Elm, Canton Glarus is the Disch family. According to the *Familiennamenbuch der Schweiz*, prior to the year 1800 the Disch families held citizenship in only three Swiss villages -- Elm, Canton Glarus and Disentis and Schiers, villages in Canton Graubunden. The Disch surname is thought to be either Rhaetian derivation of the Roman name Dionysis or a German derivation of the name Mathias. The family crest features three golden spears on a blue field.



It has been theorized that the early Disch families were among the Walser families who settled in Canton Glarus. The Walsers were a people who left the Valais area of Switzerland in the middle ages and migrated to various remote areas high in the Alps. The Dischs likely came by way of Canton Graubunden – just over the mountains from Elm.

There are two primary Disch lines. The earlier line is that of Joss Disch (#1 in the Elm family records) and his wife Salome Bäbler. The second line is that of Heinrich Disch (#7 in the Elm family records) and his wife Maria Güge or Giege. Both families lived in the early 1600s. Their exact relationship is not recorded however it is felt they were of some unspecified kinship. There were several Disch branches that settled in New Glarus and the area. They were all from Elm or had Elm origins. All were descended from either the aforementioned Joss Disch or Heinrich Disch mentioned.

The Disch families began appearing in New Glarus from Elm in 1853. On board the immigrant ship "Rosalie" were Martin and Katharina (Zentner) Disch and baby daughter Barbara. On the same ship were Peter and Regula (Schindler) Disch and their five young children. During the transatlantic crossing Regula Disch gave birth to a sixth child, daughter Regula Henrietta. A month later Johannes and Susanna (Schräpfer) Disch, their two infants and newborn baby Sabina took passage on the ship "Zurich".

By 1860 the Martin Dischs and Johannes Dischs farmed in the Town of New Glarus while the Peter Dischs lived in the village where Peter was employed as a carpenter. He was known as “*Schreiner Peter*” due to his occupation. The Peter Dischs lived in small house approximately where the New Glarus EMS building is located. Kim Tschudy, in his book on Green County, includes a photograph of a structure which was once the home of Abraham and Peter (Jr.) Disch (sons of immigrant Peter Disch). This was likely the Peter Disch family home as it resembles the Disch home as drawn on the 1861 sketch of New Glarus. Peter was said to have constructed the first wooden lanterns for New Glarus residents.

Each of these three families received money from the Canton and their home village of Elm for their travel to America. The Martin Dischs received 420 francs, the Johannes Disch received 700 francs and the Peter Dischs received nearly 1100 francs.

These first three immigrant Disch families have many descendants in New Glarus today; however those named Disch are less common. There is no one locally named Disch who is descended from the Peter and Regula Disch family. Jim (Doc) Disch is a descendant of Martin and Katharina Disch. Rolland Disch and Keith Disch descend from the Johannes and Susanna Disch family.



Pictured is the Peter and Anna (Hauser) Disch family.

Peter was the son of immigrants Johannes and Susanna (Schräpfer) Disch. Left to right seated: Lena (Mrs. Selmar Thompson), mother Anna (Hauser) Disch, father Peter Disch, Hilda (Mrs. Fred A. Hoesly). Left to right back: Caspar R., Raymond, Peter Jr. and John H. Disch.

Immigrant Martin Disch’s had a brother, Johann Pankratius, who settled in Monroe and employed as a baker. Their sister Anna Katharina Disch married Louis Weber, also residents of Monroe. Martin Disch’s nephews also arrived in the area. They were Heinrich married to Barbara Babler and Balthasar married to Maria Blumer. Descendants of Heinrich and Barbara Disch include Silvan Disch and the late Chester Disch.

Martin Disch also had two cousins who immigrated to our area. They were Balthasar Disch married to Anna Fontena and Balthasar’s sister Maria Elisabeth Disch (Mrs. Johannes Elmer and later Mrs.

Johannes Marty). Again, there are many area descendants of these people however none appear to have the name Disch. The New Glarus Historical Society has a fine photograph of Maria Elisabeth in their collection.



More Disch families arrived in the 1880-90 era. Mrs. Kaspar Disch (born Katharina Rhyner) was left a widow with several children in 1880.

Katharina and her children survived the great avalanche of 1881 in Elm, however they lost many extended Disch family members. Katharina, and all of her children immigrated to New Glarus with the exception of son Jacob Disch who remained in Switzerland. Willis, Larry and Dorene Disch are direct descendants of Kaspar and Katharina Disch.

In 1903 Jacob Disch (the son remaining in Switzerland) started a company in Othmarsingen, Canton Aargau which manufactured candies, cookies and waffles. The various Disch products were well known in Switzerland. In more recent years, the Disch Company was taken over by Nestlé and later by Ricola. The company still operates today focusing on pharmaceutical confections such as throat lozenges and diet aids.



Another Kaspar Disch and his wife Maria Anna Genal were also among those 1880s immigrants. The late Edwin O. Disch of Brooklyn was a grandson.

John Disch and wife Emerita (or Bertha) Zuest farmed in Mt. Pleasant. The late Gilbert Disch of Monticello was a descendant of John and Emerita. A grandson of John and Emerita, Raymond Disch, is likely the same Raymond Disch of Wisconsin who served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade fighting against Franco and the Spanish Nationalists. There were 2800 Americans (many Communist Party members and Socialists) who fought and 700 of whom died.

The photo shows the headstone for immigrants Johannes and Susanna (Schröpfer) Disch. Also buried here was their daughter, Susanna known as Susie. Susie was the only one of the 8 Disch children not to marry. In August of 1900 she had a bit of local notoriety when she was a witness to the attempted New Glarus Bank robbery. She had seen four men in the vicinity of the blacksmith shop near the bank shortly before an explosion was heard. The bank's vault remained locked despite the blast and no money was found missing. Susie had a tragic end in 1922 when she suffered a skull fracture due to a fall down the stairs at her home. Her demise was even recorded in the records of Canton Glarus where it was noted that she died "*infolge Sturz ab einer hohen Treppe in New Glarus*" – as a result of a fall from a high staircase. The year of Susie's death has never been carved on the Disch headstone.



The Norwegian Dischs

A number of Disch males from Elm immigrated to Norway in the 19th century for employment. Many of them wed Norwegian wives and soon there were Disch children with the names Randi and Valborg, Nils and Trygve.

Disch Scoundrels

It is occasionally mentioned that Canton Glarus took advantage of the immigration movement to rid its communities of some undesirable citizens. Johann Ulrich Disch and Andreas Disch were such scoundrels. Johann Ulrich was described as a notorious thief. He had been imprisoned and escaped. When cantonal authorities heard that Disch had arrived in America they breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Andreas Disch also had ongoing problems with the law and spent time behind bars eight times. Andreas, his wife and children immigrated in 1853 sailing on the ship Rosalie. The canton and community of Elm paid for their expenses. The family settled in Galena, Illinois. Andreas and his son Andreas, Jr. both served with the Company A of the Illinois 96th in the Civil War. Andreas, Jr., age 19, was killed in 1864 at Lovejoy's Station, Georgia. Andreas Sr. survived the war and returned to Galena. He and his wife, Anna Margaretha Kundert, are buried in Galena's Greenwood Cemetery.

Glarus Süd

Prior to 2011, the village of Elm, Canton Glarus, was one of 25 community political entities



(*Gemeinden*) in the Canton. The *Gemeindefusion* reduced these 25 communities to just three. Elm is now part of Glarus-Süd (South). The other two *Gemeinden* are Glarus and Glarus-Nord (North). The *Gemeinde* of Glarus-Süd is now the largest community (in terms of size) in all of Switzerland. The flag of Elm is shown left and that of Glarus-Süd is shown right. See "Family History Notes" Spring, 2010 for more information.

