

# Family History Notes

Summer 2014

## 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 last of six parts.*

### Part 6: Emigration

Europe was again in turmoil between the 1790s and 1820s. The dramatic events of those years – military, political, and economic – were fresh in the memory of the early settlers of New Glarus and their parents.

Napoleon Bonaparte's France, seeking to spread his personal power and some of the ideals of the French Revolution, occupied Switzerland in 1798. The Swiss national government and individual cantons were reorganized. Switzerland became the Helvetic Republic and Canton Glarus, along with a region to the east known as the *Sarganserland*, became the new Canton Linth, with the city of Glarus as its capital. The official language of the old confederation had been German, but now French and Italian were added. There were some benefits for the land of Glarus. Under the new regime there was a rising concern for public education [which became mandatory in 1837], the canton's first newspaper was published, and a plan to clear up the disease-laden marsh at the northern border received national endorsement.



A statue of a Russian soldier now stands before the entrance to the Panixer Pass above the village of Elm.

about 5,000 troops. Many died of starvation or fell to their death on the steep cliffs on the eastern side of the Panixer.

Napoleon exploited Switzerland as a buffer territory when he was opposed by the armies of Austria and Russia. While some Swiss fought for the French, most generally supported the other nations. In 1799, French troops were engaged in two major battles near Zurich. After Russian Field Marshal Alexander Suvorov had driven the French from Italy, he was ordered to move his troops into Switzerland to aid in the fighting. However, he was too late to rescue the bumbling Gen. Alexander Korsakov and in early October Suvorov was forced to retreat through the land of Glarus and over the Panixer Pass above the village of Elm. The maneuver is regarded as one of the most famous retreats in military history. Poorly equipped and nearly starving, Suvorov's army of about 21,000 finally reached Chur in the Rhine River valley having lost

Our Glarner ancestors suffered greatly from both the retreating Russian soldiers and the French who were not far behind. Tiny villages were overwhelmed. Looters stripped the area of food and farm animals, ruining fields and causing deaths. While the Russians trudged over the snow-bound Panixer, one of the largest houses in Elm became Suvorov's temporary headquarters. This was the home of Johann Heinrich Freitag, ancestor of the author of this history. In more recent years the home was restored by a prominent builder, Kaspar Rhyner, and is known today as the *Suvorov Haus*. There is a popular ski-season coffee shop/wine *Stube* in the basement.

Suvorov's route through Canton Glarus is remembered with plaques, statues, hiking trails, and a museum. In parts of Switzerland, he is hailed as a liberator. Some of our ancestors were likely among the several thousand children who were sent away to live with others for an extended period until the devastated Glarner communities could recover. Full Swiss independence was restored in 1815 and Europe then officially recognized Swiss neutrality.

During the French occupation, Glarus lost control of the small district of Werdenberg [along the Rhine River across from Liechtenstein] that it had administered since 1517. For centuries, the *Landesgemeinde* would appoint a new *Landvogt* every three years to supervise and collect taxes in the area. Many of us would find one or more ancestors among those who held the post and lived in Werdenberg Castle, the seat of their authority (see Family History Notes, Fall 2006 for further information).



Family coats of arms of some of the former *Landvögte* from Glarus line a wall in the Great Hall of Werdenberg Castle.

The military maneuvers also brought an end to the first golden age of the textile industry. First there was a shipping blockade of American cotton. Then the English mills, once restricted by the French, dumped their wares on the market. Neighboring countries, smarting over Swiss cooperation with the French, enforced high protective tariffs on Swiss-made goods. To overcome the boycott, the leading companies of Canton Glarus slowly developed markets in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Persia, India, and the Philippines. A staple of the Glarner textile industry was head scarves and shawls, including the *Glarner Foulard* [a French word for a slightly larger version of the Glarner *Tüechli*, or kerchief]. The elaborate batik designs, originating in India and Java and still popular, were done in rich shades of red



*Hänggitürme* [drying "towers"], once used for hanging newly dyed cloth in the open air under the eaves, still dot the Linth River valley. This one is in Ennetbühl. It was believed that open-air drying made the colors brighter.

and yellow. Not only were large amounts of cotton and silk imported, but also the base of natural dyes such as saffron, indigo, and Brazilian redwood. At the same time textile production was increasingly mechanized, with more than 20 spinning and weaving mills in operation by 1822. Many of the home weavers in Canton Glarus did not want to work in factories and lose their independence, but those who did – and they were a majority of the population – tended to do relatively well financially for a while and were less connected to the farms in the summer months. Although the factory work entailed a 12- to 15-hour workday, the jobs also led to the building of better stone row houses for the workers, which included a garden plot outside the villages. While factories combined the various steps of spinning, weaving, bleaching, and printing cloth, the Glarner for the most part stuck to their old method of hand block printing (especially on calico) while other countries started to use roller printing machines. Soon they could not compete and more people were unemployed and hungry. Skilled spinners, weavers, and printers started to leave eastern Switzerland.

Despite the economic turmoil, our ancestors were witnesses to one of the greatest engineering feats of Switzerland – improvement of the Linth River and the building of the Linth Canal. The changes, which enhanced the development of the textile factories, included an 1811 re-routing of the river at Mollis so that it emptied into the *Walensee* rather than into the Maag River. That eliminated annual flooding that was caused by debris buildup where the Linth connected with the Maag. Following that, Hans Conrad Escher designed a canal to connect the *Walensee* with the *Zürichsee* [Lake Zurich], draining the marshes and providing easier trade transportation when the canal was completed in 1822. It was on that canal that the original settlers of New Glarus began their journey in 1845, departing from a landing place called the *Biäsche*. The canal importance soon declined with the advent of the railroads in the 1860s.

Then there was the weather. The years 1813 to 1817 were unusually cold and sometimes referred to as a mini ice age. Alpine glaciers reached much further down the mountains and the cold and wet weather severely limited crops. It was the time of the “year without a summer,” (1816), which was also evident in North America. We now know that the cold period was primarily due to a huge volcanic eruption in the East Indies. Canton Glarus, with its limited amount of arable land, suffered greatly. (See “Family History Notes” Spring 2008 for more on the year without a summer.)

All of the above reasons contributed to an increase in emigration. Russia was a preferred destination before 1830. Then it was the United States. With some emigrants having severe difficulties, especially in South America, the Glarner in their deliberate way decided to provide a method to ensure that their compatriots would have a safe, financially favorable community overseas, with mutual aid and use of the mother tongue helping to reduce homesickness and the possibility of being cheated. That was the purpose of the Emigration Society, which saw its fulfillment in the settlement of New Glarus in 1845.

Between 1845 and 1855, one-twelfth of the population of Canton Glarus emigrated. In most cases the emigrants cashed out their communal rights, which gave them some money to begin their new life abroad.

The early emigrants to Wisconsin had left before the great fire destroyed much of the city of Glarus in 1861. Many important historical records were lost and that event spurred the birth of the *Historischer Verein des Kantons Glarus* [Historical Society of Canton Glarus] to preserve what precious documents remained and enhance the self-identification of Glarner, including those in America.

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### **St. Fridolin of Glenbeulah**

The people of the little village of Glenbeulah, Wisconsin built a Roman Catholic Church in 1865. It was named St. Fridolin after the Irish-born monk. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century Fridolin spread his faith among the



Upper Rhine Alemanni. He established the abbey at Säkingen whose lands included what is now known as Canton Glarus. The origin of the name St. Fridolin in Glenbeulah was not due to Glarner connections, but a result of Irish interests and a Swiss-born bishop. The Irish immigrant settlers of Glenbeulah had wished for their church to be named in honor of St. Patrick. But Milwaukee’s first bishop, Swiss-born John Martin Henni, recognized there were already numerous parishes named St. Patrick. Bishop Henni had an inspired idea. He chose to name the church after St. Fridolin, the Irish-born monk.

## The Old Lead Road – Continued

The last newsletter issue discussed the possibility that Gen. Henry Dodge and his troops did not use the Old Lead Road during the 1832 Black Hawk War as is stated on the Old Lead Road monument. No route corresponding to the Old Lead Road is found on the 1832 Land Survey maps. Rather it was hypothesized they used a road which existed between Hamilton's Diggings (Wiota) and Dougherty's Furnace (near Deviese's/Sugar River Diggings). This road, which is documented on the 1832 maps, passed through the Towns of Adams, Washington and Mt. Pleasant, Green County.

A brief written account of the history of that same time needs to be re-examined. It is the following paragraph taken from a page found in the New Glarus Woods State Park website. The following account, likely highly romanticized, speaks of the Old Lead Road and its use during the Black Hawk War. Specifically, it cites that Jefferson Davis, Zachary Taylor and William Hamilton used the road.

*"What is now New Glarus Woods was the edge of a dense forest, said to be as large as the famed Black Forest in Germany. Tales passed down through generations recall the site as the "loneliest and wildest" part of the entire route from Mineral Point to Milwaukee, "where fierce timber wolves would pursue both driver and oxen." During the Black Hawk War, troops were sent after Chief Black Hawk and his warriors and used the lead trail. Among those troops were Jefferson Davis, Zachary Taylor and William Hamilton. Today the trail is known as County Trunk NN." (dnr.wi.gov)*

William Hamilton, namesake of Hamilton's Diggings, and son of Alexander Hamilton, would likely have used the route from Hamilton's Diggings to Deviese's/Sugar River Diggings as previously theorized for Henry Dodge when Hamilton traveled east in June of 1832.

Jefferson Davis' role in the Black Hawk War has been thoroughly investigated. Despite popular opinion that Davis participated in the Black Hawk War, he was on leave in Mississippi for much of that summer. He remained in Mississippi until at least July 9. The most rapid transportation back to Wisconsin would have put him at Fort Crawford about July 21 or 22 at the earliest. Had he then joined the troops, it is speculated by historians that he could only have participated in the Battle of Bad Axe which occurred on August 2, 1832. It is highly unlikely Davis traveled through this area.

Future President Colonel Zachary Taylor did participate in the Black Hawk War commanding all of the regular troops under Gen. Henry Atkinson. Atkinson's troops were at Fort Atkinson when they received word that Black Hawk may be headed west toward the Mississippi River by way of the Four Lakes (Madison) and Blue Mounds.

Black Hawk and his people had indeed crossed the Madison isthmus but then veered northwest toward the Wisconsin River. There on July 21, 1832 near today's Sauk City they engaged with the troops of Generals Dodge and Henry in the Battle of Wisconsin Heights.

On that same day of July 21, Gen. Atkinson (and presumably Taylor) began a march from Fort Atkinson toward Blue Mounds. On July 22 they forded the Rock River below Lake Koshkonong (possibly at Indianford). The following day, July 23, they marched west and camped 2 miles west of "Davitt's". Historians interpret Davitt's as Deviese's meaning Deviese's Diggings at Exeter. And on July 24, they continued on from Exeter to Blue Mounds.

Again going back to the 1832 Land Survey Maps, there was no Old Lead Road in evidence at that time. And so Taylor's passing through the New Glarus Woods appears unlikely. But there was a trail extending from Exeter toward Blue Mounds. This trail could follow a ridge the entire way. From this ridge near today's junction of Exeter Crossing Road and County D, you can see Blue Mounds in the distance. And so it appears possible that future U. S. President Zachary Taylor was one of Atkinson's troops who passed through the Town of Exeter and along the Primrose Ridge on July 24, 1832 en route to Blue Mounds.

## **Two Giant Stars**

It would be curious to know if Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor had any off-camera discussions about ancestry while filming their 1956 movie "Giant". If so, they may have discovered they were both descendants of immigrants from Canton Bern. Taylor's great-grandfather, Samuel Warmbrodt, was a native of Siselen, Canton Bern. It appears that Elizabeth's great-grandfather Warmbrodt was her only Swiss immigrant ancestor making her one eighth Swiss. Elizabeth likely heard of this great-grandfather from her mother Sarah (Warmbrodt) Taylor. Sarah was in her twenties when her grandfather Samuel Warmbrodt passed away.



Samuel Warmbrodt lived in Madison County, Illinois, an area of significant Swiss immigrant settlement. He fought in the Civil War serving from July of 1861 until mustering out in December of 1865. His occupation was that of farmer and later of rail road laborer. The Warmbrodt ancestry has been traced back to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century when Clede Warmbrodt of Siselen married Barbli (or Bärbli) Winkelmann.

Rock Hudson can claim to be nearly half Swiss. He came into the world as Roy Harold Scherer, Jr. of Winnetka, IL. His birth father, Roy Harold Scherer, Sr. left the family when Rock was just a boy. Rock's mother remarried a man by the name of Fitzgerald, and Roy Scherer, Jr. became Roy Fitzgerald. After serving in WWII, Roy pursued an acting career and he was again renamed -- this time Rock Hudson (after the Rock of Gibraltar and the Hudson River).

Rock's birth father, Roy Scherer, Sr., was a native of Richland County, Illinois, an area which also had a large Swiss immigrant population dating to the 1840s and 1850s. Roy Sr.'s grandfather, Adam Scherer, was recorded in the 1860 census as having been born in "Byrn" (i.e. Bern, Switzerland). But the 1880 census lists Adam Scherer as being German. The Scherer family name can be found widely in both Germany and Switzerland. One online family history site provides information that Adam Scherer was indeed German-born in the village of Rieschweiler in Germany's Rhineland-Palatinate region.

Rock's great-grandfather Adam Scherer, whether Swiss or German, was married to a Swiss immigrant by the name of Elisabeth Dietrich. And Rock's grandmother, Lena (Blatter) Scherer, was the daughter of Swiss immigrant John H. Blatter and Illinois-born Mary A. Jaggi (Jaggi), the daughter of Swiss immigrants Christian Jaggi and Anna Elizabeth Feuz. The Feuz family originated in Beatenberg, Canton Bern, a small village located far about Lake Thun with a picture-postcard view of the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau.

## **1861 Green County Map Online**

One of the earliest maps to show local land ownership, early roads, and wooded areas vs. prairies is the 1861 J. T. Dodge map of Green County, Wisconsin. This map can now be found online, part of the Wisconsin Historical Society's impressive online collection. The online map is very useful in that it has a zoom-in feature which makes the map easier to read the original. Here is the hyperlink:

[1861 Map of Green County, Wisconsin](#)

The Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society has launched an interactive map on their website which, when fully implemented, will pinpoint southwest Dane County country schools (42 rural schools past and present), dozens of cheese factories, churches and cemeteries. By clicking on an icon, a brief history of the site will appear along with both historic and contemporary photographs. The work researching and photographing the sites was done by Mt. Horeb volunteers. Once again, projects such as these continue to show why the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society remains at the fore-front of local historical societies. Here is the hyperlink:

[Mt. Horeb Interactive Map](#)

## History and Heritage By the Book

What are the most important books found in New Glarus regarding our history and heritage? Granted this is a subjective question. And therefore numerous answers may exist depending on who is asked. But it is a fun exercise – perhaps a necessary exercise – to review the possibilities and take stock of our printed legacy.

What may be the oldest book in New Glarus is in the Tritt Collection housed at the Swiss Center of



North America. That book is the 1627 vellum-bound “*Helvetiorum Respublica*” by Josias Simler (aka Josias Simmler). This diminutive book – only 4 inches high and 2 inches wide – was published by Elzevir Press of Leiden, the Netherlands. It was printed in Latin on the subject of Swiss constitutional matters.

Josias Simmler was a theologian from Reformation times. He was the godson of Reformer Heinrich Bullinger. Simmler married Bullinger’s daughter, Elisabeth, and after her death married Ulrich Zwingli’s granddaughter, Magdalena Gwalter. Josias and Magdalena (Gwalter) Simmler were mentioned in the “Family History Notes” Spring 2013 newsletter which discussed Ulrich Zwingli descendants in New Glarus. As Zwingli’s grandson-in-law, Josias Simmler is also a direct ancestor of these same families reported as Zwingli descendants. So for a number of New Glarus families, this 17<sup>th</sup> century book found in New Glarus was written by a direct ancestor.

The books in the Tritt Library constitute the largest Swiss and Swiss-American collection found in the United States. They were donated to the Swiss Center by Donald G. Tritt, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Denison University. Don, who is of Swiss descent, confessed to a “long-held passion to know and to experience Switzerland.” He began collecting books with casual purchases, then progressed to secondhand bookstores and book antiquarians. In more recent times he could scour books sales throughout the world by using the Internet. The Tritt library contains 4000 volumes of books collected by Tritt himself, as well as 4000 volumes which he secured by donations from Swiss-American groups and individuals. The Tritt collection also includes archival materials related to Swiss and Swiss-American topics.

A volume of personal value to Tritt was a book purchased by his late wife Marilyn and given to Don as a Christmas gift. The book is Walter Blumer’s “*Bibliographie der Gesamtkarten der Schweiz – von Anfang bis 1802*”, a compendium of early Swiss maps. Tritt noted Blumer’s volume is “an addition of considerable rarity to the Collection.”

Walter Blumer (1888-1987), a Swiss whose *Heimatort* is Schwanden, Canton Glarus, was an engineer and cartographer known for his very special private collection of maps. Blumer’s map collection was the subject of a 1976 exhibition at the *Freulerpalast* in Näfels. He had bequeathed his collection to his native canton the previous year. Walter Blumer had family connections with New Glarus. Walter’s grandfather, Dr. J. J. Hefti of Schwanden, was a first cousin of the Tschudy brothers -- Johann Jacob, Fritz, Peter Rudolf and Samuel -- who arrived in this area in the early days of the colony. Walter Blumer was also a direct descendant of Johann Heinrich Freitag of Elm, the last Glarner *Landvogt* at Werdenberg.

The Chalet of the Golden Fleece is generally known for its collection of *objets d’art*. But a book of significance found there is the “*Wappenbuch des Landes Glarus*”. This book contains the coat of arms of the families found in Canton Glarus. In addition to the colorful armorial plates of *Wappen* are short histories of the families as well as a brief description of the coats of arms. It is an indispensable volume when researching Canton Glarus family history. Another copy of this book is found in the library/archives of the New Glarus Historical Society.

Does anyone know what may be the oldest New Glarus library book? That volume is not found in the New Glarus Public Library nor was it ever among the books circulated by the public library. This small fiction novel published in 1844 can be found in the collection of the New Glarus Historical Society. The book is originally from the lending library (*Neue Leih-Bibliothek*) of local storekeeper Joshua Wild. The label inside the book (pictured left) indicates Wild lent books for 4 cents per week, 16 cents per month, or 40 cents per three months. Apparently his library books were so valued that he asked for a dollar deposit on each volume. Wild's Civil War-era store was located in the *Hinterstädtli* at or near the corner of Second Street and Second Avenue.



The New Glarus Public Library staff was invited to identify a significant book which they felt held a special place in their library's collection and/or in the hearts and minds of New Glarus patrons. They were unable to identify any such book. A special book found in the New Glarus Public Library has to be Herbert Kubly's first book "An American in Italy" which won the 1956 National Book Award for non-fiction. How many libraries in the United States can boast to having a National Book Award-winning book written by a native son or daughter? (There have been only 64 National Book Award winners for non-fiction since the inception of the awards in 1950.) And a small historical market at the entrance to the library building honors Kubly's literary achievement.

Another book which should be recognized by the New Glarus Public Library is Dr. John A. Schindler's book "How to Live 365 Days a Year". This book, written by another New Glarus native, has sold over one million copies and has been translated into 13 languages. Again, how many small town libraries can boast a best-selling book written by a native?

One unique book in found at the New Glarus Public Library is entitled "*Die Bauernhäuser des Kantons Glarus*" by Jost Hösli. This book, written in German, is part of a series covering the historical architecture found throughout Switzerland. Hösli's volume focused on those significant buildings found in Canton Glarus. The book is liberally interspersed with photographs and drawings. While this book is readily available for purchase, it is a rare book in terms of its library presence. It is found in only 56 libraries worldwide. According to WorldCat, the New Glarus Public Library is only one of three U. S. public libraries which has the book. (The other two public libraries are found in Cleveland and Philadelphia.) Other U. S. copies are found in university collections (including Harvard and Columbia) as well as in the Library of Congress.

One other special book found in the New Glarus Public Library is "The Stone Flood" by Franz Hohler. This is the tale of seven-year-old Katharina Disch of Elm, Canton Glarus, who was left an orphan as a result of Elm's September 11, 1881 landslide. Katharina's parents, siblings and grandmother were all killed that fateful day. One description of this book states, "This novel is a hymn to the loss suffered in that great natural disaster and to the beauty of the landscape from which the violence erupted. The Stone Flood, infused with the atmosphere of turn-of-the-century rural Switzerland, is told from the viewpoint of a child whose innocence of the world is combined with an acute sense of the danger present beneath the beauty of nature."

The original book, “*Die Steinflut*”, was written in German; however the New Glarus Library copy is in English. Making the book even more special is that it was donated by Katharina Disch’s granddaughter, Katharina Freitag-Rhyner of Elm.

Many will find these books of special significance from a local history or family history perspective. The fact that the library staff was unable to boast of any books they felt held a special place likely reflects the reality that fewer and fewer of library staff or patrons have local or family history interests.

### **1964 Aspirations in Switzerland: from a 50 Years Ago Column in the “International New York Times”**

Swiss youngsters when they grow up don’t aspire to become president of their country or play soccer for the local team. One greatest ambition that a Swiss youth can have is to become a driver for one of Switzerland’s postal buses. In this country there is a pre-eminent distinction attached to driving a postal bus. Because this job is considered the most glamorous one in Switzerland, thousands of men apply each year – but only a handful make the grade.

### **Culinary History Question**

Foods of our ancestors have been documented in these pages in past issues. Included have been such relatively rare Glarner culinary delights as Kalberwurst, Anggäzeltä, Schabziger, Tschüchel, and Zokla. But what about the once-ubiquitous Swiss Steak? Does anyone know the origins of this favorite American main dish? If not, you will learn more about this dish in the next issue.

### **Stewardship of the Land: The Freiberg Kärf, Scheidegger Forest, Rettenmund Prairie, and Donald Park**

It was in 1548 that Joachim Bälde, *Landammann* of Canton Glarus (and direct ancestor of many of newsletter readers), decided that hunting needed to be controlled in the mountainous region between the Sernftal and the Linthal. The area known as the *Freiberg Kärf* was set aside as a game preserve – the first such preserve in Europe.

Glarner hunters were not pleased with the loss of this hunting land. But concessions were later made which allowed the hunt for the “wedding chamois” or *Hochzeitsgämsen*. Two chamois were allowed to be killed in the Kärf for each wedding occurring between July 25, the feast day of St. James the Great (aka *Sankt Jakob*), and November 11, the feast day of St. Martin. And so it is not surprising that the



number of weddings increased *zwischen Jakobi and Martini* to allow for chamois to be served at the traditional wedding feast. But as a result of this accommodation over 6000 chamois were killed in the following 100 years. In 1777 the chamois kill was limited to only one wedding *Gämse*. And in 1792 the hunt was stopped entirely and the custom of the wedding chamois ended.

The Freiberg Kärf is home today to numerous animals including chamois, deer and the elusive ibex (*Steinbock*). It is a popular hiking area – often approached from either the *Mettmenalp* above Schwanden or the *Ämpachli* above Elm. The Swiss Alpine Club’s *Leglerhütte* lies in between offering mountain food, lodging and, of course, spectacular mountain views. Along the mountain pathways, the Glarner sculptor Tina Hauser positioned a series of 9 metal sculptures (one is pictured) depicting the chamois and evoking the tradition of the *Hochzeitsgämsen*.

If stewardship of the land is a Swiss trait, it can also be seen here in the area. Specifically, three parks in southwest Dane County have Swiss (Glarner and Berner) family connections. Each of these families resided near Mt. Vernon in the Town of Springdale, Dane County.



**Scheidegger Forest County Park** is a new park in the Dane County park system. What was once a sheriff department shooting range has been transformed into a welcoming natural woodland. Fifty barrels of bullets and 70000 tons of soil were removed during the lead remediation process. The soil was replaced with an estimated 2000 truckloads of fresh topsoil. This 78-acre park came about through the donation of over \$530,000 by Walter R.

Scheidegger (1915-2001), a native of Riley and a Verona High School graduate. He was the son of Berner immigrant cheese maker Walter Scheidegger and his wife Katharina née Blum. Walter's maternal grandfather, Johann Jacob Blum, was a native of Bilten, Canton Glarus and was also a cheese maker near New Glarus.



An online description of this park states,

“Scheidegger Forest . . . offers a mile loop of hiking trails, a reservable shelter, group camp, restroom, and [solar-powered] drinking fountain. The area has been restored . . . to a managed forest of primarily oak and hickory. The shelter, kiosk, and bathroom were all built from wood harvested onsite.”

Scheidegger Forest is located between Verona and Paoli on Range Trail Road.

**Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie State Natural Area** is a 16 acre prairie preserve just west of Black Earth. The following park description is found on its online page: “Situated on a low Driftless Area ridge, Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie features a small, but intact dry-mesic prairie and harbors a rich flora of more than 80 native prairie species.



Many birds use the prairie and surrounding area for nesting including eastern meadowlark, eastern kingbird, indigo bunting, eastern bluebird and the uncommon red-headed woodpecker. The site also provides habitat for a variety of snakes, insects, and butterflies. The area has a history of light grazing and although it was never plowed, old furrow marks on the crest are indicative

of an old tractor pathway. Today, management activities such as brushing, burning, and mowing help maintain the prairie landscape. Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie is owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts and was designated a State Natural Area in 1986.”

The last owners of this prairie land were William and Agnes Rettenmund. William was the grandson of Berner immigrants Carl and Rosa (Erb) Rettenmund who farmed in the Town of Springdale between Riley and



Verona.

William and Agnes Rettenmund valued the prairie and worked to get it preserved, even selling the land at below market value to ensure its preservation. Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie is located on Fesenfeld Road at County F near Black Earth.



**Donald County Park** is a beautiful area just north of Mount Vernon. It is named for the Donald Family who farmed the land which became the park. The Mount Vernon Creek runs through the park. This well-known trout stream flows into the park from the north as a little brook, but emerges from the park on the south a broad stream. A number of large springs located in the park account for the large increase in the stream's volume.

Beside one of the large springs (pictured) was the site of the Foye (or Foy) log cabin named for the family who constructed the structure. The cabin dated from the early 1850s. The Mathias and Susanna (Schmid) Marty family was the last family to occupy the Foye cabin. Charles Gerhards of Verona wrote, “The Marty family had been living in the cabin when it was destroyed by fire. That day they had worked hard planting corn. Mrs. Marty had put three of her oldest children to bed in the loft. A hired man also slept there. Before retiring he dumped ashes from his pipe out the window of the loft, not realizing they would start a fire. Dry straw, which had been banked around the cabin over the winter, caught fire. All got out safely. Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Foye took in the family for two weeks, fixed up the granary for them to live in where [Marty] daughter Rose was born.” Rose (Marty) Genthe was born July 17, 1893 dating the cabin fire to 1893.



Matt Marty was an immigrant from Matt, Canton Glarus, the eldest of 18 children born to Mathias and Elsbeth (Stauffacher) Marti. He married Susie Schmid, a native of Frutigen, Canton Bern. They married in Frutigen and immigrated to America shortly thereafter. Many of their Schmid and Marty sisters and brothers also immigrated to this area. During the course of his life Matt worked as a slate mine worker (*Schieferarbeiter*), in cheese making, and as a farmer. He died of tuberculosis (*Lungenschwindsucht*) in 1915. His wife Susie, a midwife (*Hebamme*), died in 1950 at the age of 88. She was known locally in Mt. Vernon as Grandma Marty.

Matt and Susie had 11 children between 1883 and 1906, including Marie Marty (Mrs. Fred Haldiman) of New Glarus. Marty grandchildren included New Glarus residents Delma (Haldiman) Philipson and Virginia (Marty) Heimann.

Matt Marty, another grandchild of the aforementioned Matt and Susie, has provided leadership and many volunteer hours to work towards the goal of re-constructing a log cabin on this site. Archeological excavations led by state experts revealed a crumbled stone foundation. This foundation has now been professionally re-built using sandstone and a custom-mixed mortar. This firm foundation now awaits a log cabin to be re-built at the picturesque site overlooking the springs.

Donald Park is located along Highway 92 north of Mt Vernon. For horse enthusiasts, there is also an entrance to the park on County G.

Photographs of the Dane County parks accompanying this article were taken in July, 2014.

### **Herman Wittwer – American Family Insurance Founder**

Herman Wittwer (1889-1968), a Monticello native, is remembered as the founder of American Family Insurance – the only Fortune 500 Company located in Madison, WI (Forbes 2013). The book “Under One Roof: The Story of the Extraordinary Growth of American Family Insurance” provides an interesting tidbit of information about Wittwer. The book states that “he [Wittwer] “stumbled” into the insurance business in 1913 when he became an agent in New Glarus. His career as a field man was lackluster. His only boast from those days was that he introduced the Brandy Manhattan to that small Wisconsin town.” Cheers Herman!