

Family History Notes

Spring 2015

Switzerland During World War II – A Short Story by Hans Wirth

Hans Wirth, a native of Unterstammheim, Canton Zürich, Switzerland wrote the following piece after reading the “Family History Notes” item regarding the Swiss imprisonment of American Airmen – including New Glarus resident George Hartman. The topic of Switzerland during WWII evoked many memories for Wirth and he is sharing them with our newsletter readers. Hans grew up on a farm built by his father and called the Ulmerhof. Their farm was situated near the border of Cantons Zürich and Thurgau a couple of miles west of Unterstammheim. The farm is on a route called the Ulmerweg which dates from Roman times. Unterstammheim and



nearby Oberstammheim are known for the handsome *Riegelbau* style of architecture. Pictured is a town celebration at the Unterstammheim Gemeindehaus – “*eines der schönsten Gemeindehäuser im Kanton.*” Hans is now a resident of Menomonee Falls, WI. Thank you Hans for sharing your history!

I grew up in Switzerland during WWII on a farm

about 7 Km (4 miles) from the Rhine River with Germany on the north side. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, I was just in the first year of high school. At that time Switzerland had a general mobilization of their armed forces. Switzerland completed its mobilization in less than 3 days. When the war started my father was also called in to serve in the military. The first few month of the war was very demanding on me and my siblings. We all had to help our mother with chores on the family farm like milking cows, plowing fields, and a lot of other work. I was the oldest of eight children and only 13 years old. Fortunately, after about three months my father was released from the service to take care of his farm and large family.

Switzerland does not have a standing army, just an army of reserves. Every able body young Swiss man is called for basic training after he reaches the age of 19 years. This basic training lasts about 20 weeks. After basic training each soldier must show up for a three weeks refresher course every year, where he will have to meet a certain marksmanship. At the time of my youth these annual refresher courses lasted until the solder reaches age 65. For the last approximately 40 years the age limit was reduced to 50 years of age.

The reason allowing for a short mobilization period is that every soldier has to keep his army rifle at his home ready for action at all times including a certain amount of ammunition. During WWII the Swiss army had about 800,000 well trained men in uniform. During the first few months of the war we followed the progress on radio and weekly shows in Cinemas. During early summer of 1940 the war started to get more serious for Switzerland and closer to our border. This is when the German High Command made plans to invade France. France had a strong defense line against the German border along the Rhine River north from Basel called the Maginot Line. Switzerland's border was against Germany in the North along the Rhine River. In the East against Austria which belonged to Germany at that time. In the South Switzerland bordered against Italy, which was part of the Axis at that time. In the west Switzerland bordered against France. In the summer of 1940 Germany had about one million men against the Swiss border. We were told that the German Army plans to invade Switzerland from the North and then move west to attack France from Switzerland a border which was not that heavily protected. We were told that the Swiss army would be able to hold back the invasion along the Rhine River for about one week.

I, myself along with other young men were trained to move all the women and children including as much cattle as possible towards the Alps during the invasion delay. This move was all planned using as many farm wagons as possible drawn by horses. Fortunately, we never had to do this, because Germany attacked France from the northwest through Belgium.

I am sure Germany was well aware how well Switzerland was ready to defend itself and how difficult it would be to fight a never ending war in the Alps. Switzerland had sufficient food for many years stored for a large portion of its population in the Alps.

The fear of a potential invasion from Germany however, remained for several years while Germany continuously added more territory to the Reich.

Fortunately, we survived the war without much damage. Certainly there were food rations all during the war, because Switzerland does not have sufficient farm land to feed its population,



because about 3/5th of the country are high mountains. Living on a farm as I did, did not cause any hardship in that regard during the time of WWII in Europe.

We experienced a few bombings of some cities near the Rhine River. The largest damage to buildings was caused in the city of Schaffhausen on the Rhine River on April 1, 1944. There were 40 dead and a large amount of injuries. A smaller city Stein am Rhine about 12 miles east of Schaffhausen was bombed in February of 1945, with 21 dead (pictured left). The city of Zurich which is about 40 miles south of the Rhine River was also bombed in 1945, so was the city of Basel on the Rhine River. All these bombings were blamed on pilot error where the pilot thought that they were bombing German cities.

I would like to make a few comments to the information taken from the Family History Notes from the fall of 2014 published earlier and sent to me by Loni Oliver. The Wauwilermoos prison mentioned by George Hartman one of the American Airmen sure had a reputation of a place to avoid at all costs. This was the place where soldiers were placed after they were captured trying to escape Switzerland to join the war again. This camp also housed criminals, I was told. The American Airmen I personally met during 1943 to 1945 had a fairly good life in Switzerland. Soldiers interned in Switzerland from the USA, Canada and England were free to travel within a restricted area where they lived. Interned soldiers from Germany, France, Italy and Austria were placed into camps because it would have been easy for them to return to their homeland.

As far as I remember the Americans always had lots of money and a lot of Swiss girls. Actually it seemed to us at that time that the Swiss girls liked the sharp tailored uniforms of the Americans. The uniforms of the Swiss soldiers were drab green/gray poorly cut and tailored. Many of the Americans had room and board in private homes; others lived in smaller hotels or inns. There were even some who lived on farms and helped out with chores because the Swiss men were away in the Army.

As far as the B-17 bombers which landed in Switzerland are concerned, most of them were held in Dübendorf which was the airport for the City of Zurich and also the major military airport. According to statistics there were about 250 American bombers that made it to Switzerland during the war. About 50 of them were badly damaged and some of the crash-landed in fields.

The pilots were told to head for Switzerland if there was no chance for them to make it back to England. Since there were about 10 crew members per bomber including the pilots, would amount to at least 2,500 airmen interned in Switzerland. But I believe there were more Americans, because some escaped from war prison camps from the countries belonging to the Third Reich.

One of the B-17 bombers landed in a farm field about 4 miles south of our farm. I got on my bicycle and raced towards the landing site because we had seen the plane fly very low from the Rhine River just north of us. By the time I got there the Swiss military already convinced the flight crew that they were in neutral Switzerland. We were not allowed to go near the plane and had to stay on the road. That's my story on this subject.

The Prisoner Bonivard, the Castle of Chillon, and the House of Savoy

*And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd -
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.*

Excerpt from Lord Byron's "Sonnet on Chillon"

The article in the Fall 2014 "Family History Notes" newsletter issue about the American prisoners held at Switzerland's Wauwilermoos Prison also brings to mind the most famous all Swiss prisoners, François Bonivard (1493-1570). Bonivard was held prisoner in Switzerland's iconic Chillon Castle and was immortalized by Lord Byron in his poems "The Prisoner of Chillon" and "Sonnet on Chillon".

Bonivard was loyal to his home town of Geneva and thus antagonistic to the Count of Savoy who was attempting to control the Geneva region. Bonivard's political activism eventually got him imprisoned in the Savoy's Castle of Chillon. The castle's vaulted underground prison – that “damp vault's dayless gloom” – was Bonivard's home from 1530 to 1536. Lord Byron visited Chillon in 1816 with his friend Percy Bysshe Shelley. Inspired by the tale of the prisoner Bonivard, Lord Byron composed the sonnet and narrative poem.

The Castle of Chillon (pictured) is said to be Switzerland's most visited historic site. It was



built at a strategic point on one of the important north/south routes between the Holy Roman Empire north of the Alps and Rome to the south. At a point just south of today's Montreux, the mountains spill into Lake Geneva (Lac Lemman) leaving only a narrow and easily controllable passage perfectly suited for the collection of tolls. The fortification was built on a small island adjacent to this narrow defile. The lake itself served as a natural moat. The castle became a summer home for the Counts of Savoy.

Around the mid-1250s, the castle was greatly improved by powerful Count Peter II Count of Savoy to the imposing form we see yet today. Peter II also built London's Savoy Palace.

In the century prior to the formation of the Swiss Confederation in 1291, there were four noble families controlling most of what is now Switzerland. These four dynasties were the Houses of Savoy, Habsburg, Kyburg and Zähringen. The Savoy lands were situated in the area of today's southwestern Switzerland and adjoining areas of France and Italy. During the 13th century both the Zähringen and the Kyburg dynasties died out. Ultimately the House of Habsburg was the beneficiary inheriting vast Zähringen and Kyburg lands. By the 15th and 16th centuries the Savoy control of what is today southwestern Switzerland waned and control was eventually secured by the Canton of Bern. But the French-speaking Vaudois people disliked the German-speaking Berners and Vaud became its own canton in 1803.

The family of Peter II Count of Savoy included many distinguished members. The most interesting members can be found on the accompanying Savoy family tree (see p. 10). This tree begins with Thomas I Count of Savoy and his wife Margaret of Geneva. This couple and their son Thomas II are direct ancestors of many Glarners by way of the Hohensax gateway. Thomas II married Beatrice Fieschi, a member of a powerful Ligurian family. Beatrice's uncle was Pope Innocent IV and her brother was Pope Adrian V. A brother of Thomas II and Peter II Counts of Savoy was Boniface of Savoy who served for over 20 years as Archbishop of Canterbury.

And these Savoy brothers – Peter, Thomas and Boniface – had a sister, Beatrice, who has become known in history as the mother of four medieval queen consorts. Each of her four daughters lived to adulthood and each married a king. These daughters were Margaret, Queen of France, married to King Louis IX, commonly known as St. Louis; Eleanor, Queen of England, married to King Henry III; Sanchia, Queen of Germany married to Richard of Cornwall, King of the Germans; and Beatrice, Queen of Sicily, wife of King Charles I.

The House of Savoy Today (adapted from Wikipedia) – Ouch!

The leadership of the House of Savoy today is contested by two cousins – Vittorio Emanuele, Prince of Naples, who used to claim the title of King of Italy, and Prince Amedeo, Duke of Aosta, who still claims the title of Duke of Savoy. Their rivalry has not always been peaceful. On May 21, 2004, following a dinner held by King Juan Carlos I of Spain on the eve of the wedding of his son Prince Felipe, Vittorio Emanuele punched Amedeo twice in the face!

As the Cannon Roars . . .

The question was posed in the last issue about the name and motto of the New Glarus High School newspaper. Ann Marie Ott was first to correctly identify the “Old Guard” as the



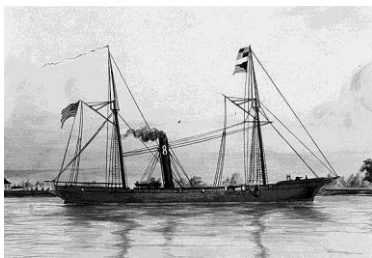
newspaper’s name and “As the Cannon Roars, the Press will Roll” as its motto. And the inspiration for the name and motto came from the Civil War cannon (more accurately referred to as a 20 pound Parrott rifle) which stood in front of the red brick school building for decades. The historic photo at left shows the cannon on the east side of the school in front of the main entrance. Two piles of cannon balls flank the weapon -- although the Parrot rifle fired projectile shells and not round cannon balls. The cannon was moved to the north side of the school at some point following the

1930s school addition when the main entrance was relocated to the north side.

The cannon, now mounted on a replica carriage, resides at the Swiss Historical Village museum in New Glarus. A history of the cannon was documented in a report presented to the New Glarus Historical Society several years ago. Unfortunately this document has apparently been misplaced or lost in the Society’s archives.

The New Glarus Parrot rifle was a muzzle-loading artillery weapon which served as one of two Parrot rifles on the U. S. S. Katahdin during the Civil War. Its rifled barrel improved accuracy for the bullet-shaped shell. The gunboat Katahdin (pictured) was launched out of Bath, ME in 1861 and commissioned into Navy service the following year at the Boston Naval Yard.

The Katahdin was part of a Union fleet under the command of David Farragut (of “damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead fame). Farragut’s aim was to sail up the Mississippi River and take control of New Orleans and the lower Mississippi. The fleet,

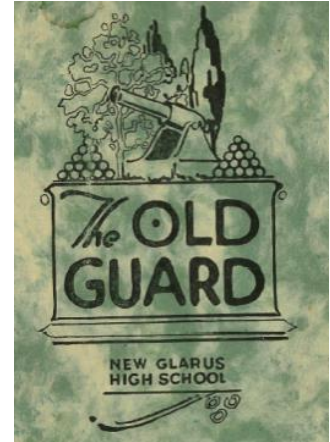


including the Katahdin, fired upon the Forts Jackson and St. Philip which guarded the Mississippi near its mouth. Shelling occurred over several days in April of 1862 with the Union fleet eventually sailing past the two forts. Farragut took command of occupied New Orleans and was promoted to Admiral of the Navy in July. His mission now took him to the area around Vicksburg and the Katahdin served reconnaissance missions and protected

convoys which supplied the Union troops around Vicksburg. As a Union gunboat, the Katahdin continued to police the lower Mississippi and later the Texas gulf coast. The Civil War ended in April of 1865 and the U. S. S. Katahdin was decommissioned in July.

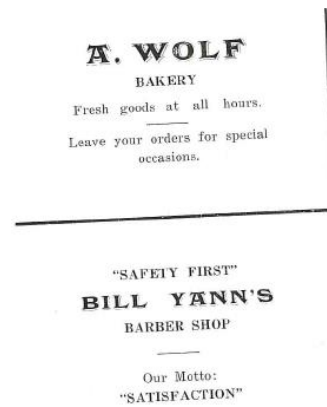
... The Press will Roll

Inspired by the cannon, the Old Guard became name to the New Glarus High School newspaper. The school district online archives include issues of “The Old Guard” school newspaper with various issues dating from 1922 to 1941. The school district archive also has numerous issues of the high school annual, their oldest dating from 1917, with a big gap until 1942 when the annual was called “The Review”. The first annual in the school’s online collection which was named “The Glarian” is from 1946.



This 1917 annual was also named “The Old Guard” (pictured). And the annual cover included an image of a cannon and two piles of cannon balls. The New Glarus High School Class of 1917 boasted six graduates – Kathryn Babler, Alice Freitag, Clara Held, Melvin Engler, Wilbert Klassy and Charles Tollefson. Classmates Kathryn Babler and Charles Tollefson married in 1920 and were the grandparents of Chuck and Bill Bigler of New Glarus.

One of the interesting aspects of the 1917 “Old Guard” annual as well as the “Old Guard” newspaper issues are the community advertisements found in the back. Pictured are two adjacent ads from the 1917 annual. These two businesses were Albert Wolf’s bakery and Bill Yann’s barbershop.



Albert Wolf ran a bakery in an 1850s building which stood the corner of First Street and Sixth Avenue -- Maple Leaf corner today. In the mid nineteen-teens Wolf’s bakery occupied the building which continues to serve as our bakery. In 1917 Albert probably felt on top of the world with a wife, young son Otto, and a bakery business in a new building. But within months Albert’s wife, Rosa née Maerki, died at age 24 of tuberculosis and the following year Albert himself succumbed at age 31 during the influenza epidemic. The Wolf’s orphan son Otto was adopted by neighbors Josef and Berta Puempel – and was afterwards known as Otto Puempel.

Barber William R. (Bill) Yann was a native of the Highland, Illinois area and was likely drawn to New Glarus through associations with the Pet Milk Company (which was founded in Highland). Bill and his wife Iola née Feutz had twin daughters, Iona and Iola, born in New Glarus in 1915. Both the Yann (originally Jann) and the Feutz families had Swiss roots. Around 1920 the Yann family left New Glarus for a new home in Miami, Florida.

Bill Yann’s daughter Iola married Samuel Lenoir and they had a son named William B. (Bill) Lenoir. Bill Lenoir, named for Grandfather Bill Yann, was born in Miami in 1939. He graduated from MIT with a degree in Electrical Engineering. In 1967 he was chosen by NASA to become a scientist-astronaut in the support of numerous space programs. What must have been the highlight of Bill Lenoir’s career was serving on the crew of a Space Shuttle Columbia mission in 1982, spending over 5 days in space. Astronaut Bill Lenoir died in 2010.

Lee Hoiby – Musical Genius

An early first telephone switchboard in New Glarus, operated by Carl and Amanda (Daley) Hoiby, was located on the second floor of the Salomon Stuessy building (today's Glarner Stube). The Hoibys were of Norwegian stock from the nearby Town of Perry. Carl's parents, Halvor and Kari Hoiby, had a log home west of Daleyville which was destroyed by the 1878 tornado. Amanda Hoiby's family, the Daleys (originally Dahle), had emigrated from Norway and gave their name to the ridge-top village of Daleyville.

Carl and Amanda resided in New Glarus from 1903 until 1919 when they moved to Madison. The Hoibys had two children Cora and Henry. Cora was a graduate of the New Glarus High School Class of 1919 and has the honor of being the first female graduate of New Glarus High School to also graduate from University of Wisconsin. (Meyer Katz was the first male graduate of NGHS (also Class of 1919) to also graduate from the UW – see "Family History Notes" Summer, 2011.) Cora was employed by the State for more than 30 years where she supervised the State student loans program. Over her 30 years, Cora gave out millions of dollars to more than 15,000 university students. When the department began in 1930 an annual student loan was \$240 (which is about \$3400 today).

Cora's brother Henry Hoiby was born in New Glarus. Henry and his wife had one son, Lee Henry Hoiby, born in Madison in 1926. Lee Hoiby was a musical prodigy and went on to become a renowned American composer. At the time of his death in 2011 it was written "Lee Hoiby's gift for musical fantasy was a constant throughout a long life of boundless creative output. His rich catalog of works encompasses operas, oratorios, choral works, concerti, chamber works, song cycles and more than 100 songs, many of them championed by such singers as Leontyne Price, Frederica von Stade, and Marilyn Horne, among many others."



In 1989 Lee Hoiby took a television script from the cooking program of iconic chef Julia Child. He added his music to create a musical monologue. Playing Julia Child was another American icon, Jean Stapleton. Hoiby's work was called "Bon Appetit!" and it opened at the Terrace Theatre in the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. Stapleton commented at the time, "Everyone laughs as soon as you mention the idea of setting Julia Child to music." Pictured are Jean Stapleton and Lee Hoiby in 1989. Lee Hoiby's "Bon Appetit!" went on to a successful Off Broadway run.

Lost Limburger (adapted from "The Monroe Weekly Times" February 25, 1907)

A box of Green County Limburger cheese is lost in southern Texas. It happened this way. A local dealer received an order for a box of the famous Green County product from a party located in a city in the southern part of Texas. The cheese was promptly forwarded but the purchaser was slow in making the remittance covering the shipment. The cheese dealer drew on the purchaser and the draft was returned to day with this notation, "Cheese cannot be located; draft returned." Being Limburger it is bound to be located in time.

Elsbeth (Lizzie) Hefty Legler Luond

Like the tombstone of Susan Disch (see Family History Notes - Summer 2013), the handsome tombstone of Elizabeth Legler has an unfinished death date. But unlike Susan, who is buried in the Swiss Reformed Cemetery with her family, Elizabeth was not buried next to her husband.

Elsbeth Hefty (known as Elizabeth and Lizzie) was born in Nebraska, the daughter of Mathias and Elsbeth (Zimmermann) Hefty. Both parents, Mathias and Elsbeth, were natives of Canton Glarus. Mathias had immigrated to the New Glarus area with his twin brother Johann Melchior Hefty and their mother Barbara née Schindler. They farmed as bachelor brothers near New Glarus. According to Hefty family lore, the mother Barbara energetically sought out Glarner wives for the brothers. She was successful – finding Elsbeth Zimmermann and Katharina Baumgartner, two young textile workers in Canton Glarus who were willing to take on these two bachelor brothers in America. By the mid-1870s both Hefty brothers were married and starting families in Nebraska.



At some point around the turn of the last century Mathias and his wife Elsbeth née Zimmermann returned to New Glarus from Nebraska. Mathias was employed here as a street sprinkler. In 1905 their daughter Lizzie married Gottfried Johann Legler of New Glarus. Gottfried Johann (also seen as G. John, John G. and John) was the son, grandson and great-grandson of three generations of original settlers of New Glarus all named Fridolin Legler. Gottfried and Lizzie farmed in Legler Valley and had two sons, Fred and Melvin, before Gottfried died in 1912 at only 32.

In 1918 Lizzie married Swiss immigrant Joe Luond (originally Lüönd) a native of Canton Schwyz. They farmed in Legler Valley before moving to California. The Luonds had two daughters, Viola born in New Glarus and Kathryn born in California.

The Luond family moved to a village named Holtville in California's Imperial Valley. This area boasted a large settlement of Swiss immigrants who arrived in the early 1900s. But having Swiss residents was perhaps Holtville's only similarity to their homeland. For the Imperial Valley is wickedly hot and parched. And it lies below sea level. Think of the dissimilarity from Switzerland's lush pastures, green forests and towering snow-covered Alps! Holtville became a close-knit agricultural community of dairy farms begun by those Swiss immigrants. Water was diverted from the Colorado River and the area became a rich agricultural island in the desert. The Imperial Valley Swiss Club has been in existence for decades. Their 94th annual Schwingfest was held in 2014.

Lizzie Luond died in California in 1973. As previously noted she is not buried in New Glarus Swiss Reformed Cemetery. Then where is she buried? She was interred at the Pierce Brothers Valhalla Memorial Park in North Hollywood, CA. Among those resting in this same cemetery are scores of early Hollywood entertainment figures including Oliver Hardy, Bea Benaderet, Lita Grey (Charlie Chaplin's second wife), Cliff Edwards aka Ukulele Ike, and famed rodeo star and film stuntman Yakima Canutt.

“Glarners in America” – A New Book

New Glarus, founded in 1845, is far from being the only destination for Canton Glarus, Switzerland immigrants bound for America. Canton Glarus people, known as Glarners, have been living in America from as early as the mid-1700s. Over the years these Glarner immigrants could be found in most all corners of America. There were Glarner immigrants who settled on the eastern seaboard, along the Gulf of Mexico, in the Republic of Texas and in early California when it belonged to Mexico. And of course these descendants are scattered even more broadly. Although those immigrants from Glarus were only a minuscule percentage of the total immigrant population of our country, there are many notable contributions made by these Glarner people and their descendants during our country’s development.

It has been a project of mine for the past decade to collect these tales and now at last a book will be published which will document these stories. The book is entitled “Glarners in America – Stories of Immigrants and their Descendants from Canton Glarus, Switzerland”. About 100 short biographical sketches will explain how these people with Canton Glarus roots played a role, whether big or small, in the development of our country. The book, published in collaboration with the Canton Glarus Historical Society, is presented in English and German due to interest on both sides of the Atlantic.

Some examples may provide the wide-ranging scope of these immigrant stories. Reverend Abraham Blumer (silhouette at right) was the minister of Allentown, Pennsylvania’s Zion’s Reformed Church at the time of the American Revolution. Our country’s historic Liberty Bell was hidden beneath the floorboards in Rev. Blumer’s church, saving the bell’s capture from those British troops advancing on Philadelphia. Heinrich Lienhard was employed at California’s remote Sutter’s Fort in 1848, and was witness to the earliest days of the gold rush. In the Civil War, Lt. Col. Martin Tschudy, already a third generation Glarner-American, was killed at Gettysburg defending the Union at the very epicenter of Pickett’s Charge. And shortly after the war ended, Caspar Knobel and fellow comrades captured a fleeing Jefferson Davis.



Represented in the various books chapters are entrepreneurs and philanthropists, scientists and educators, and artists and authors all of whom have Glarner roots. Not all of the biographical sketches are from days long past. It was surprising to discover that the Presidential yacht U. S. S. Sequoia (on which JFK celebrated his last birthday) was designed and built by John Trumpy. And the recent National Park Service’s Superintendent of the Statue of Liberty and nearby Ellis Island – our iconic monuments to liberty, freedom and immigration – was David Luchsinger (left), a fourth-generation Glarner-American!

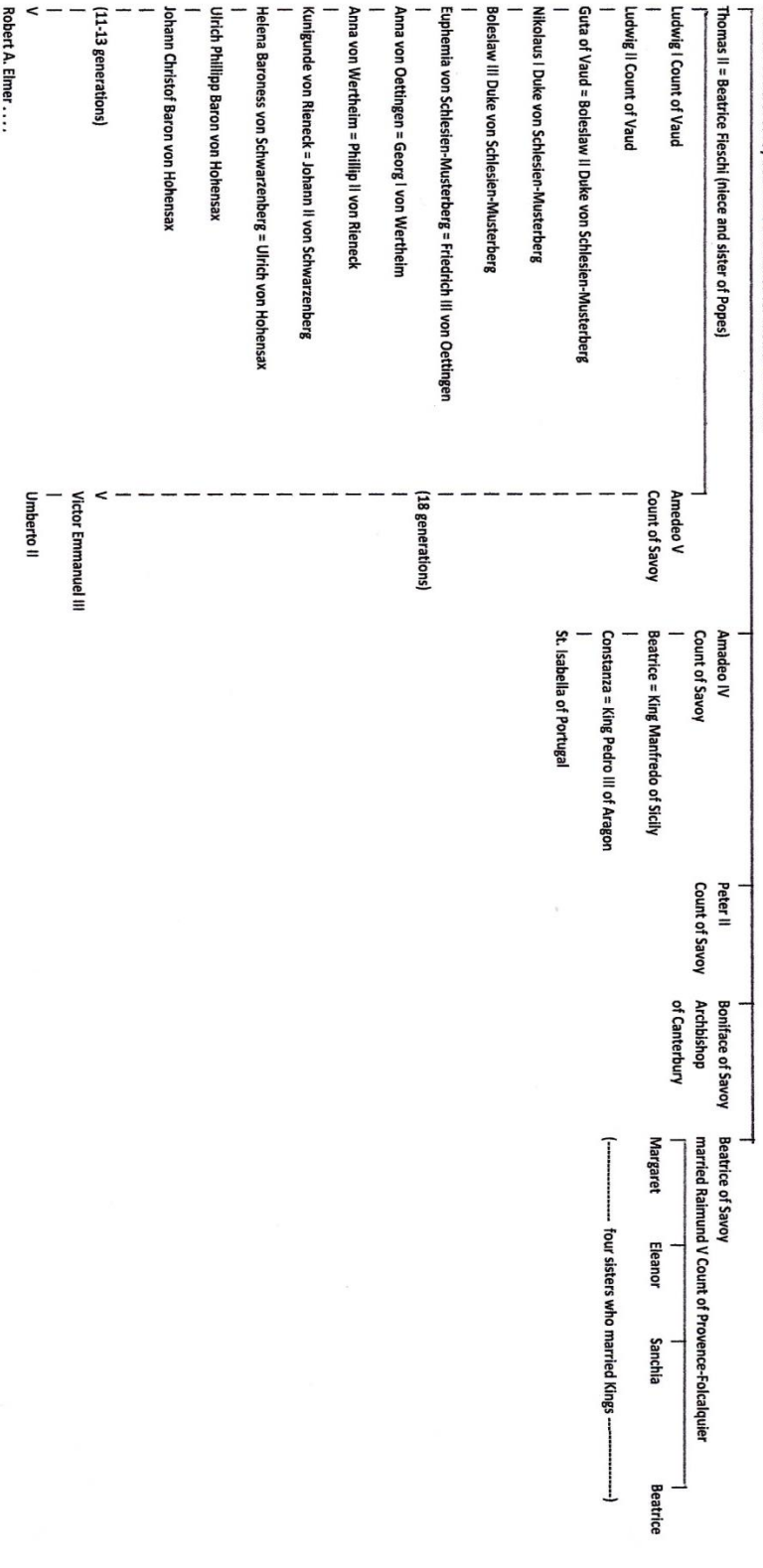


The book “Glarners in America” will go on sale in Canton Glarus on May 30, 2015. Schwanden’s “*Verein für Geschichte und Kultur um Schwanden*” (the Schwanden Historic and Culture organization) will be hosting an exhibit in their *Rysläuferhuus* historic site highlighting a wide variety of Glarner-Americans featured in the book. Books will be available in this country sometime over the summer with details to follow in the summer “Family History Notes”.

House of Savoy

Selective Members and Selective Descendants

Thomas I Count of Savoy born 1178 and named for Thomas of Becket.



... as well as countess New Glarus and Canton Glarus descendants stemming from Baron Johann Christof von Hohensax, our Gateway ancestor and link to medieval nobility.

Last Kings of Italy Links to Kings and a Saint

Peter II rebuilt the Chillon Castle and built the Savoy Palace in London.

Margaret married King Louis IX of France Eleanor married King Henry III of England Sanchia married Richard of Cornwall, King of the Germans Beatrice married King Charles I of Sicily

(----- four sisters who married Kings -----)