

# Family History Notes

Fall 2019

## **The Lost Uncle is Found: John F. Geiger and his Curious Life - by James S. Geiger**

In the western suburbs of late 19<sup>th</sup> century St. Louis stood the Dorris Mansion. It was an imposing three story manor with a carriage sweep leading up to a capacious front veranda. A statue of the goddess Flora stood on the front lawn. In the rear sat the carriage house and stables on several acres of land. The mansion had been built by the wealthy General George P. Dorris who was, among other things, a notorious St. Louis gambler. Dorris's daughter, Anna Halderman, had inherited the estate although she and husband (who had served as the first U.S. Envoy to Thailand) had lived elsewhere.

A front page story of November 19, 1888 in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reports the leaseholder of the property was John F. Geiger, a well-known St. Louis liveryman, who was operating the mansion as a roadhouse. He was spending the night in a room at the west end of the mansion, when in the wee hours of the morning, his manager woke him to tell him the house was on fire. Hearing the crash of the veranda Geiger told the manager to escape while Geiger proceeded to spread the alarm to a family in the east end of the building. After breaking through locked doors in the smoke filled hallways, he was able to alert the family. In the end no lives were lost. After further investigation, it turns out this rather heroic John F. Geiger was my long-lost 2nd great uncle – a man virtually unknown to Geiger family descendants.

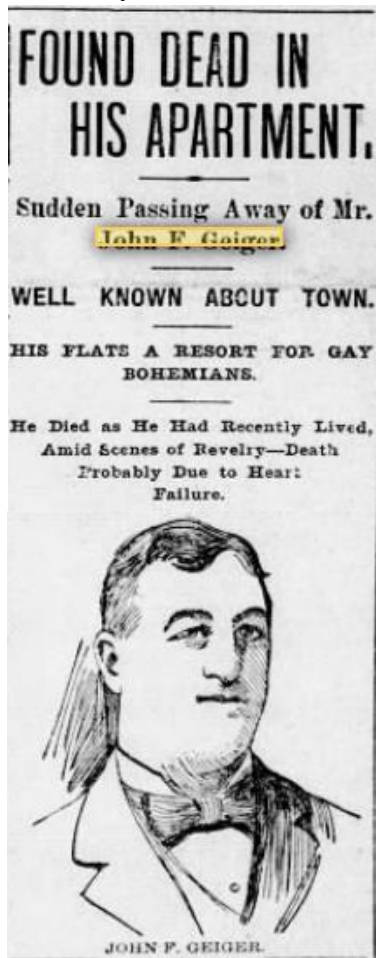


Johannes (John) Geiger was born in New Glarus in 1853 to cobbler Heinrich (Henry) Geiger and his wife Maria née Oswald (see Family History Notes Winter 2011), both Canton Glarus immigrants. In the 1860 census, John is listed with his family at their home at the southeast corner of Second Street and Fifth Avenue. In the census of 1870, John was seventeen and living on the 150 acre farm his father had neatly pieced together just west of the village of New Glarus (present day Lynn and Ben Schwoerer farm).

It, however, would appear that the father's agrarian dream was not the elder son's dream. At some point, presumably after he left his childhood home of New Glarus, he added the middle name Frank which had thrown my genealogical research off course for years. Was John F. Geiger of St. Louis actually the elusive New Glarus native John Geiger? Evidence began pointing to a positive identification. A circa 1895 New Glarus Geiger family group photo had surfaced and John's image matched an artist's sketch found in a St. Louis newspaper at the time of his 1900 death (pictured on next page). There was also a St. Louis newspaper report that he had indeed visited Wisconsin late in 1895, likely prompting the family group photo. The newspaper sketch also led to the identification of the above photo of John F. Geiger. And to seal the deal Geiger's reported age on his Missouri death record corresponds with his New Glarus Swiss Church birth records.

Press reports at the time of his death say Geiger left his home as a teenager, "traveling about the country as a sewing machine agent and repairer". It seems he was a "good talker" and this, along with his natural mechanical abilities, served him well. We find him in the 1877 St. Louis city directory as a salesman with the firm of Fitch & Moore who were city agents for the Wheeler & Wilson Sewing Machine Co.

Missouri marriage records show John F. Geiger and Josephine Josse were married in a Roman Catholic ceremony on December 28, 1878. A newspaper report on the nuptials said he was, "well-known in business circles" and was then a sales manager at Singer Mfg. Co. Their daughter, Maria, was born in September of 1880.



It appears that his sales career in the sewing machine industry was profitable and 1883 records show he had begun the Geiger Livery business. This would continue for 17 years with several branch locations. Press reports estimate he was worth \$100,000 at the onset of the 1893 depression (nearly \$3 million in 2018 adjusted for inflation). By 1895 he was one of the largest liverymen in St. Louis feeding on average 200 horses. Most St. Louis livery stables provided undertaking services and Geiger was no exception. In addition to horses, buggies, and undertaking, Geiger sold medicines, soaps, and real estate at various times.

He was apparently a good story teller. One of his tales related selling medicine in rural Illinois where he was shot at and nearly lynched by an angry mob. Alas, sitting on his own horse with a rope around his neck, he was saved when the posse arrived with the actual criminal!

Many more newspaper stories tell us much about the anomalies of the liveryman's life including various ways of being swindled by con men of all sorts including theft by his own employees gone bad. There were runaways that produced wild rides and the resulting damages. One of my favorites is a piece found in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1891. Following amusing headlines pitting the authorities against the pugilists, the piece reports of an illegal late night seven-round prize fight in one of Geiger's livery barns apparently sanctioned by one of his foremen. Then the reporter describes the fight in colorful detail!

At the end of his life the financial tables had turned for the liveryman yet he continued to manage the Geiger Livery Co. At this time he was separated from his wife and daughter but apparently continued to provide for them. He had become the landlord of the "Geiger Flats" which was occupied by men about town – artists, writers, and theater folk – all of a decidedly Bohemian character. John F. Geiger died unexpectedly at Geiger Flats on March 23, 1900 at the age of 46 – both of his parents still living in New Glarus. His obituary (a portion shown above) appeared "above the fold" on the front page of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. The article on the death of John F. Geiger said, "Of all the men about town, few were better known than Frank Geiger". Another said, "Geiger was the patron of his tenants, and was loved by them all for his universal kindness and generosity".

Pallbearers at his funeral were as eclectic as John Geiger himself. They included the famous master showman Sam Gumpertz, fellow horseman Charlie Honig (who was married to the police chief's daughter), the well-heeled journalist Gaty Pallen (who was known for his high-living that dissipated his first inheritance), long time Clerk of Courts Hugh Pattison who was also a saloon keeper and later proprietor of a hunt club in the Ozarks, and the fashionable Eddie Clifford who was St. Louis's own version of Beau Brummell.

Over the years I have spent a good deal of time trying to find information on ancestors that no longer walk this earth. Most of the time we merely learn the names and dates of these ancestors. In this case one feels like we are beginning to touch the essence of Uncle John Geiger's personality. What fun!

## **Glarner-American Stories from Central and Northern Wisconsin**

Four brief stories follow of Glarner-Americans who reside or resided in the central and northern parts of Wisconsin. These stories are similar in scope to the 100+ biographical sketches found in my book “Glarner-Americans”, published a few years back. The following sketch is from the past while the other three feature Glarner-Americans are living today.

### **Marie Stori's Story**

Menomonie, Wisconsin native Marie Stori (1875-1958) was an acclaimed musician of her day. Marie was best known as a violinist. But she was also a talented soprano, often accompanying herself on her



violin. For many years Marie toured with the Mozart Symphony Club of New York (pictured) performing in countless cities across the United States, Canada and Europe. A hometown newspaper account from 1898 told of “Menomonie’s accomplished musical artiste” and how she had recently performed in Chicago where she “was accorded a most enthusiastic reception”, in St. Louis where she appeared before “delighted audiences” and in New Glarus (!) where she was “received with great favor”.

One story is told of Marie arriving in a Spanish city by train. She disembarked from the train onto a red carpet and received a rapturous welcome from an awaiting throng of people. However it was the Queen of Spain that the group was expecting. The onlookers presumed the elegantly dressed Marie was none other than the Queen!

Marie was the daughter of Menomonie tavern keeper David Stori (originally Störi) and his wife Anna Magdalena, both natives of Canton Glarus. Anna Magdalena Stori née Knobel was the granddaughter of Heinrich Aebli who arrived in New Glarus in 1845 accompanied by his son Heinrich (Henry) Jr. Anna Magdalena was thus a first cousin to New Glarus tavern keeper Henry Aebly (son of Henry Jr.).

### **Glarner-American Heroes: Anthony B. Speich and Zachary Rhyner**

Staff Sergeant Anthony B. Speich’s heroic actions on April 24, 2005 earned him the distinguished Bronze Star with “V” Device (a special designation with the Bronze Star). Speich, a native of Wisconsin Rapids, WI, was serving as a combat advisor and patrol leader in Afghanistan. He was leading 11 coalition forces when he spotted more than 25 enemy fighters. And it was his strategic thinking and leadership which decreased enemy force capabilities and thus saved lives of his own men.

Adapted from the U. S. Marine Corps official website: *The enemy initiated a heavy barrage of direct fire from less than 200 meters away from Speich’s patrol. “All I was thinking about at that point when bullets and rocket-propelled grenades were flying by my head was getting my guys out of Dodge,” recalled Speich. Speich, his corpsman, and the ten Afghani troops, engaged the numerically superior enemy forces without hesitation. Speich led the attack through personal example, accurately engaging the enemy while repeatedly exposing himself to enemy fire in order to direct members of his element to maneuver out of the danger zone, according to the award citation.*



*Hoping to overrun and destroy the coalition patrol, the enemy increased their volume of fire and began to maneuver and flank his position, but Speich voluntarily remained in the enemy kill zone in order to engage the enemy with his rifle. The tide of the fight quickly turned as the enemy position became suppressed under the first of Speich's element. Speich and his element engaged the enemy for 45 minutes, and after the intense firefight, Speich continued to lead the attack by effectively directing mortar fire on the remaining enemy positions. Hoping for complete enemy destruction, Speich then pursued the enemy for an additional four hours, traveling over four kilometers of rugged terrain covered with numerous enemy-fighting positions. Speich's actions, professionalism and courage under intense enemy fire, were crucial to the successful execution of a combined, joint and interagency mission deep into an enemy-dominated border region that resulted in the death of five insurgents and the wounding of fifteen others.*



Anthony Speich (pictured above in 2005) is a descendant of 1880s immigrants Abraham and Anna Maria (Schneider) Speich, natives of Matt and Elm, Canton Glarus, respectively. The immigrant Speichs first settled in the Monroe area, then Oshkosh and ended up in Greenwood, WI where they farmed. Abraham was also the president of the Greenwood Cheese and Butter Co-op founded in 1907.

Master Sergeant Zachary Rhyner (retired) is a native of Medford, WI. Rhyner was awarded the Air Force Cross for his heroic actions in the Battle of the Shok valley in Afghanistan in 2008. Additionally he earned two Purple Hearts, the Bronze Star and the Air Force Combat Action Medal. Later in 2008 he



was awarded the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs Grateful Nation Award, presented by Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (pictured with Rhyner). Rhyner deployed six times, including Iraq, Afghanistan and humanitarian operations in Haiti. Injuries sustained in battle led to his medical retirement in 2015.

Adapted from Rhyner's Wikipedia page: *On 6 April 2008, a 130-man combined assault force, dubbed Commando Wrath, performed an operation in a remote Afghani valley. Zachary Rhyner was just six months out of training and on his first deployment. Their mission was to capture a high-ranking militant group commander. Shortly after landing the assault force was ambushed and pinned down and the assault force was split in two on either side of a river.*

*Rhyner and several Special Forces members were wounded throughout the course of the battle. Rhyner was shot twice in the chest and once in the leg, although his protective vest stopped the two bullets to his chest from causing a mortal injury. Despite being wounded within the first fifteen minutes of the battle, Rhyner continued to direct close air support and airstrikes until the assault force was evacuated seven hours later. Fifty of the airstrikes he called in were within 200m of friendly positions; the term "danger close" is applied when referring to airstrikes within 600m. He was credited with saving the entire 100-man team from being overrun twice. According to the Air Force Cross citation, during the battle Rhyner directed close support and airstrikes totaling 4,570 cannon rounds, nine Hellfire missiles, 162 rockets, a dozen 500-pound bombs, and one 2,000-pound bomb. As a result of the same battle, ten U.S. Army soldiers, nine Special Sources and one Combat Cameraman received the [Silver Star](#), the greatest number of Silver Stars awarded for a single battle since the Vietnam War.*

Zach Rhyner's permanent leg injuries resulted in intense rounds of physical therapy. His situation led to a realization that he should return to school to help others with physical disabilities. Zach, a husband and father of two, recently began Duke University Medical School's Doctor of Physical Therapy program where his personal experiences will allow a unique perspective into the physical and emotional challenges faced by others. He has commented, "You can really change people's lives by enabling them to do incredible things despite their limitations. My injuries are merely an aspect of my identity; their limitations do not define me. I hope to enrich the lives of others afflicted by physical trauma."

Zachary Rhyner is a descendant of Jacob and Barbara (Geiger) Rhyner, both natives of Elm, Canton Glarus and later settlers in the New Elm settlement in Winnebago County, WI. Zach's ancestral grandmother, Rahel (Schneider) Geiger, died in New Glarus in 1868 and was buried in the Pioneer Cemetery. (Rahel was also the grandmother of John Geiger featured on pages 1 and 2.)

### **Bayfield's Two Treasures**

Brodhead native Mary May Stuessy met Jerry Phillips while they were both music majors at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They married, honeymooned in northern Wisconsin, and while



antiquing, fell in love with the village of Bayfield. In 1973 they learned that the massive but neglected Victorian Queen Anne mansion at 310 Rittenhouse Avenue was up for sale and they purchased it as their summer "cottage". To help with expenses, they began renting rooms and offering breakfast to guests. But the Phillips' dream was not to merely rent rooms but to create experiences. An early step toward fulfilling this dream was the construction of a commercial restaurant with Mary as chef and Jerry as baker. Their restaurant at the inn was an immediate success. Under Mary's leadership, the

Rittenhouse kitchen became known for sourcing fresh and local ingredients used in seasonally inspired menus -- long before such culinary practices became a national trend. To improve the inn experience, the "one shared bathroom down the hall" gave way to ensuite bathrooms for each guest room. The Old Rittenhouse Inn (pictured below) had arrived -- Wisconsin's first bed and breakfast inn. With wind in their sails, the Phillips purchased and renovated a second Victorian mansion, Le Chateau (pictured on next page), for additional guest rooms.

As one may surmise, music majors Mary and Jerry are accomplished musicians. Mary is particularly skilled on keyboards -- piano, organ and accordion. Growing up in Brodhead, she often performed as well as accompanied others in local community and church programs. In her early teens, Mary placed first in the State Music Festival with her accordion. Her accordion abilities extended into Swiss folk music. She appeared with Betty (Kneubuehl) Vetterli at various venues including Volksfest in New Glarus.





The Phillips' love of music soon entered the Old Rittenhouse Inn with the multi-tasking chef Mary often playing the piano for guests. In 1977 the Rittenhouse Inn began offering a Wassail Dinner – a feast of holiday foods and a candlelight concert performed by the Rittenhouse Singers accompanied by area musicians all under Jerry's direction. The Rittenhouse Wassail punch is served – a marriage of spiced cider, cranberry juice and bourbon. Their recipe was later featured in both "Epicurious" and "Imbibe" magazines. (For a holiday treat, click on this link for The Rittenhouse [Wassail Punch Recipe](#).)



The Phillips' son Mark and his wife Wendy have stepped into the roles of innkeepers. On the occasion of the Old Rittenhouse Inn's 35th season, Mark wrote the following loving tribute to his mother Mary. "There have been many stars on our staff, but none shines brighter than my mother, Mary Phillips. The Rittenhouse Inn was her baby from the start, and she put every ounce of herself into creating and growing the business. For 18 years, she cooked every single meal served in our dining rooms. She ruled the kitchen with an iron fist and a velvet glove. Everyone loved, respected and confided in her. She was a great leader, and even better listener. Though her days as a chef ended with her stroke [at age 49] in the early 1990s, she remains a force at the Rittenhouse Inn."

Mary and Jerry Phillips have successfully fashioned a life combining their mutual love of music, fine food and antiques all served up in a historic Victorian atmosphere. Jerry has stated that he and Mary did not plan a business but built a dream. The Phillips also helped rekindle an appreciation for Bayfield, its history and its beauty which ultimately led to the Chicago Tribune naming Bayfield the "best little town in the Midwest". Two treasures of Bayfield may be the imposing Rittenhouse Inn and the majestic Le Chateau. But perhaps more likely, Bayfield's real treasures are Mary and Jerry Phillips themselves.

Mary (Stuessy) Phillips was the daughter of Brodhead Mayor Herbert H. Stuessy and his wife June Mitchell. Mary was the granddaughter of New Glarus natives Edwin and Maria (Stuessy) Stuessy. Maria Stuessy's father was the harness maker Salomon Stuessy, whose name can still be seen on the cornice of his First Street harness shop (now the Glarner Stube). Edwin Stuessy was the youngest of six children born to farmer Heinrich Stuessy and Margaretha née Ruegg. Edwin was not yet 2 years old when his father died followed by his mother a few years later. (For more on the tragic story of Heinrich and Margaretha Stuessy see Family History Notes Winter 2009.)

### **Freitag Farm Sesquicentennial**

Descendants of Dietrich and Verena (Elmer) Freitag gathered at the family farm this past summer to celebrate the farm's 150th anniversary under Freitag stewardship.



Dietrich Freitag (1834-1900) was a native of Elm, Canton Glarus. He married Verena Reich in 1861 and they had a son, Johann Ulrich, born the same year. Their marriage proved unsuccessful. After settling his affairs with his wife and young son, Dietrich immigrated to America arriving on March 1, 1864 on the immigrant ship Magdalene. In New Glarus Dietrich met another Elm native, Verena Elmer, and they married in 1866.

The Canton Glarus records commented on a particular aspect of this marriage. It was noted, "*Er reiste dann nach Amerika und heiratete dort vor seiner Scheidung*" or "he [Freitag] then traveled to America and married there before his divorce [from Verena Reich]." The divorce was finalized in 1868.

In 1869, Dietrich and Verena (Elmer) Freitag purchased the farm owned by the 1845 scout Fridolin Streiff and his wife Anna Katharina née Blumer who had already possessed this land for 21 years. The Streiffs had purchased the land in 1848 from George Washington Bain (or Hiram Washington Bane) who had originally purchased the government land in 1844. In 1862, the Streiffs vacated a log cabin home and built the Greek Revival farmhouse (which still stands today), later lived in by the Freitags.

The unoccupied log cabin home was used several years by Nicholas Gerber for the production of Swiss cheese – the first Swiss cheese factory in Green County in 1869. (Gerber had established a Limburger cheese factory the previous year a few miles away at the Albrecht Babler farm.) Cheese making equipment from the Freitag Farm factory can be seen in the collection of the Swiss Historical Village museum in New Glarus.

Dietrich and Verena (Elmer) Freitag had the following 8 children, all of whom married area spouses of virtually 100% Glarner ancestry.

- Verena: married Marcus F. Hoesly of New Glarus whose family operated the Wilhelm Tell Hotel. Marcus and Verena's red brick home at the corner of Third Street and Second Avenue may be remembered as the J. J. Figi/Melvin Streiff home.
- Euphemia: married Niklaus F. Duerst (a first cousin of Werner Elmer below). They farmed near Paoli.
- Barbara: married her second cousin Werner Elmer. They farmed in the Town of Montrose west of Belleville, WI, later farmed by their son Dietrich (Dick) Elmer.
- Niklaus: married Elsbeth Hefty. They continued operation of the home farm built the striking 1906 red brick farmhouse. The Freitag farm passed to their children (all deceased), grandchildren and great-grandchildren now scattered across North America.
- Anna Regula: married Fridolin (Fred K.) Hefty (brother of Elsbeth Hefty above). Fred K. and Anna Regula operated the farm known today as the Hefty-Blum Homestead and operated by their descendants.
- Heinrich Dietrich: married Alma Hoesly of New Glarus (Alma was a first cousin of Marcus F. Hoesly above). "Henry D." and Alma farmed in the Town of Mt. Pleasant.
- Maria Rebecca: married Fred Streiff of New Glarus. Their home on the corner of Second Street and Fifth Avenue has been transformed in recent years into a restaurant – Deininger's and now Kristi's.
- Dietrich: married New Glarus farm girl Alma Babler. "Dick" and Alma farmed in the Town of Exeter.

While there are numerous descendants of Dietrich and Verena (Elmer) Freitag living today, only a handful reside in the New Glarus and Monticello area. And there are a number of Dietrich Freitag descendants in Switzerland – descendants of his son Johann Ulrich Freitag (1861-1947) who remained there with his mother Verena Reich.

### **Update: Schabziger**

*Schabziger* is the unique Canton Glarus green cheese which, according to legend, has been made since the eighth century. It is documented that manufacture of this hard grating cheese has been regulated by procedures established by the *Landsgemeinde* in 1478. There is now a vegetarian version of *Schabziger* made of cashews, salt and *Schabzigerklee*, the herb *Trigonella caerulea*, which provides a distinctive taste and the pale green color.



### **Puempel's Tavern: Connecting the Historical Dots**

Inconspicuous and buried toward the end of Millard Tschudy's "New Glarus, Wisconsin: Mirror of Switzerland" is an interesting historical tidbit overlooked by most. Tschudy reported that a 1911 advertisement in the local newspaper announced that Joseph Puempel had taken over the pub at 18 Sixth Avenue (today's Puempel's Tavern). And there was a 1915 local newspaper item which announced that Jos. Puempel had acquired the Henry Aebly tavern. (Recall that Henry Aebly was pictured in the photo of the "New Glarus Eleven" tavern keepers in the Summer, 2019 newsletter issue.)

But this history is in conflict with what has been advanced in recent years. Puempel's Tavern has been featured in various televised looks at New Glarus (e.g. Discover Wisconsin; Bottoms Up; An American Small Town) and numerous print articles/reports (such as American Heritage Magazine; the New Glarus Historical Survey). The history promoted in all of the above sources states that Puempel's Tavern was built in 1893 by Joseph and Bertha Puempel (often referred to as Joe and Berta) and was operated by the Puempel family (Joseph, Bertha and son Otto and daughter-in-law Hazel) for its entire 99 year existence until purchased by New Glarus native Chuck Bigler.

Some basic facts don't support this recent version of Puempel's history. Foremost is the fact that immigrants Joseph and Bertha Puempel did not arrive in America until about 1899-1901 and that Joseph is listed in the 1905 and 1910 censuses as a mason and not a tavern keeper. Since the history of this New Glarus institution has not been fully documented, the following is an attempt to string together bits and pieces of information related to Puempel's Tavern and Puempel and Aebly family history.

- 1845: Heinrich Aebli and son Heinrich arrived in New Glarus. Heinrich Sr. died in 1846. Son Heinrich (Henry Jr.) owned a farm about 2 miles east of New Glarus in the Town of Exeter (present Al Hefty farm). Henry Jr.'s son Jacob Aebly took over the Aebly farm in the late 1800s.
- 1883: According to an article in the Capital Times newspaper of September 7, 1951, Henry Aebly Jr.'s son Henry (the third) became proprietor of the Wisconsin House at 28 Sixth Avenue, New Glarus, the building immediately west of Puempel's Tavern. It is also believed Henry Aebly owned and/or built the livery at the present site of the Post Office.
- 1893: Henry Aebly built a brick tavern building. Part of the building was rented to Solomon Levitan for his mercantile store. The 1951 Capital Times article then suggested that Aebly remodeled his Wisconsin House in 1895 adding a dining room, dance hall, saloon and 12 upstairs rooms. (I believe this article conflates the Wisconsin House building and the Puempel's Tavern building.)
- 1899-1901: immigration of Austrian-born Joseph Puempel and his Swiss-born wife Bertha. It appears they may have immigrated separately – he in 1899 or 1900 and she in 1901.
- 1900: Henry Aebly was listed as saloon keeper in the census
- 1905 and 1910: Joseph and Bertha Puempel resided in New Glarus. His occupation was recorded as a stone mason.
- 1907: Robert Streiff and Henry Domholdt began at livery business at the presumed Aebly livery.
- 1908: On March 24 -- farmer Jacob Aebly found guilty of inflicting great bodily harm to a cheese maker by the name of Rone Seller (Roni Seiler). The judge had contemplated a prison term for Aebly, but considering his wife and sons, decided on a monetary fine. After this incident, the Jacob Aebly family moved to a farm in the Town of Concord, Dodge County, MN. On March 31, Henry Aebly sold his New Glarus residence and business. On April 1 Henry Aebly and son Henry N. purchased a 507 acre farm in Eau Claire County for an estimated \$30-50K. On July 18, it was reported in the Janesville Gazette that Jacob Marty of Brodhead had purchased the Aebly Block from C. Canfield. Marty was to start a cheese business. The name William Waldron also appears as a possible owner around this time.

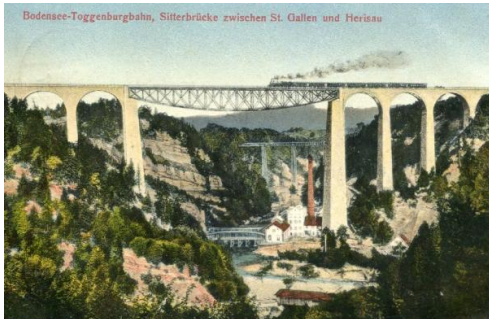


- 1910: Per the census, the tavern was possibly operated by Robert and Anna Julia (Aebli) Linder.
- 1911-1915: Joseph Puempel took over management and ownership of Puempel's Tavern.
- 1917-1918: deaths of Puempel neighbors Rosa (Maerki) Wolf and baker Albert Wolf. The Wolfs orphan son Otto was raised by Joseph and Bertha Puempel and he took their surname.
- 1922: Joseph Puempel was fined \$1000 for liquor violations (Prohibition era). Henry Aebly died in Eau Claire. He was buried in New Glarus. Upon their respective deaths, Henry's wife Maria née Durst, brother Jacob and his wife Anna Barbara née Ott were all buried in the Swiss Church cemetery.
- 1927: Joseph Puempel died.
- Late 1920s and early 1930s: Puempel's Tavern operated as a soft drink parlor and boarding house run by immigrants Gottlieb and Amalia (Dudler) Gmur. In 1931 the Gmurs moved to a farm south of New Glarus, and Bertha and son Otto were expected to take over the operation. Bertha and Otto Puempel traveled to Switzerland in the summer of 1929. Based on the 1930 census, Bertha and Otto appeared to be living with Anna E. Elmer in the former Jacob Ott house at 207 Second Street. Verena Ott, who had died in 1929, was survived by her sister and companion Anna Elmer. Anna, a polio victim in her youth, likely required a caregiver/assisted living which was perhaps the Puempels' role.
- 1935: Otto Puempel married Hazel Schrepfer and they took over Puempel's Tavern operation.
- 1952: Bertha Puempel died.
- 1990-2002: Hazel Puempel died in 1990. Otto retired in 1992 and passed away in 2002. New Glarus native Charles (Chuck) Bigler purchased Puempel's Tavern in the early 1990s.

Any additional information or insights to expand upon this informal history would be appreciated.

### **Grand Viaducts of the Bodensee-Toggenburg Railroad and a Link to Puempel's Tavern**

The Bodensee-Toggenburg (B-T) rail line in northeastern Switzerland began in the years 1910 to 1912



running from Romanshorn on Lake Constance (*Bodensee*) through Cantons St. Gallen and Appenzell to the village of Wattwil. This is a rural area of Switzerland in the foothills of the Alps. Along the way, the B-T line crossed several deep valleys where several stone-arched viaducts were built.

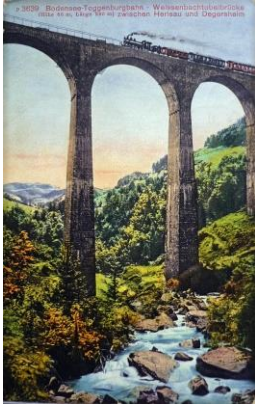
One of these viaducts, the Sitter Viaduct, is still today the highest rail viaduct in Switzerland towering over the Sitter Valley at

324 feet in height and over 1200 feet in length. In addition to the stone piers, the Sitter Viaduct also employed a distinctive steel truss framework known as a *Fischbauch* or “fish belly”. A historic postcard (above) shows a B-T steam train going over the “fish belly”.

After the Sitter is crossed, the rail line enters the village of Herisau. Here a viaduct 971 feet in length and 111 feet high passes over the Glatt Valley, or as it is known in Herisau, the Glatttal (yes 3 t's).

Again, an historic postcard (right) captures a view of a steam train passing over the Glatttal Viaduct. The area's lone peak, the Säntis, looms in the background. A few miles after Herisau is the imposing Weissenbach Viaduct (pictured next page) near Degersheim at 925 feet in length and 210 feet high.





The B-T railway no longer exists as a company, but the trains of Switzerland's Süd-Ost Bahn (the SOB!) and those of the Voralpen-Express continue to use the B-T route, including these three viaducts. A person traveling from Canton Glarus to St. Gallen by way of Uznach and the Ricken Tunnel will pass over these viaducts in SOB or Voralpen trains.

If the Glatttal viaduct looks familiar to New Glarus residents, it is because a mural painted by Albert Struebin in Puempel's tavern features this view of Herisau. Struebin's murals were reportedly painted in 1913, a time when the B-T railroad and its impressive viaducts would have been celebrated Swiss engineering feats.

### **The Stewart Tunnel: On and Under the Hoesly Farm**

The Stewart Tunnel east of New Glarus is a special feature of our area. This tunnel is one of five rail tunnels found on southern Wisconsin recreational "rails-to-trails". Three of these recreational tunnels are found on the Elroy-Sparta Trail, one on the Omaha Trail and the Stewart Tunnel on the Badger State Trail. Another rail tunnel near Tunnel City is still in use by Amtrak passenger service as well as freight trains. The neglected and unused Buncombe Tunnel survives on a long abandoned rail line which ran between Galena, IL and Platteville, WI.

The Stewart Tunnel was construction in 1887-1888 by the Chicago, Madison and Northern Railroad (later the Illinois Central). The curved-quarter mile tunnel was named for James Stewart, the project contractor.

Stewart was killed in a contemporaneous buggy accident. The tunnel name served as a tribute to his memory. While the tunnel is most commonly associated with Belleville and Monticello, the two villages linked by the former rail line, the nearest village is actually



New Glarus. As the crow flies, the Stewart Tunnel is only about 3 miles from New Glarus. The Illinois Central train whistles could be faintly heard in the village as the train approached the tunnel's south portal off in the distance.

Why a tunnel? The ridge above the tunnel is the watershed divide between the Sugar River to the east and the Little Sugar River to the west. This same ridge extends about 25 miles from the Military Ridge near Blue Mounds to the one-time lead mining hamlet of Exeter. The Primrose historian Albert Barton wrote that lead was hauled by oxen teams between Exeter and Blue Mounds on this ridge. There is also a possibility that troops during the Black Hawk war traveled on this same ridge road as they were heading to the Blue Mounds fort from Fort Atkinson via Exeter.

While doing some family research for descendants of Canton Glarus natives Fridolin and Sarah (Trumpy) Hoesly family (originally Hösli and Trümpy), it was discovered that the tunnel and its north and south portals were constructed entirely on and under what was the Hoesly farm. Shown on the following page are portions of two Town of Exeter maps – the 1873 plat book map before the railroad and the 1892 plat book map after the railroad and tunnel were completed. The Hoesly farm is highlighted. It must have been an exciting day on February 1, 1888 when the first Freeport-to-Madison train passed through the tunnel. Walking through the Stewart Tunnel, when still an operating passenger and freight line, was a rite of passage for many area youth.





A comprehensive Stewart Tunnel history was researched and written by Kim Tschudy and can be found by clicking on the following link: [Kim Tschudy's Stewart Tunnel History](#)

### **1887 Railroad Violence**

In 1887, when both the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific rail line (later known as the Milwaukee Road) to New Glarus and the Chicago, Madison and Northern rail line (later known as the Illinois Central) between Freeport, IL and Madison, WI were being constructed, an incident occurred which could have proven deadly. The rail lines crossed in Section 17 of the Town of Mt. Pleasant, southeast of Monticello. The lines then ran parallel through Section 8 before diverging at the one-time Woolen Mill pond in Section 5 (see map at left).



Here is the account from Milwaukee's July 23, 1887 Weekly Wisconsin newspaper:

*"A Dynamite Mine" Albany, Wis., July 20 – Threats have been made that when the track-layers attempted to build the St. Paul Company's New Glarus line across the roadway of the Chicago, Madison Northern Company (Illinois Central) there would be trouble. The first unpleasant incident occurred yesterday. When the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul tracklayers were nearing the crossing of the Chicago, Madison & Northern road near Monticello a mine was discovered on the grade, with a connecting battery placed in an adjoining field. The mine was unearthed, and eight boxes of dynamite containing 480 pounds were exhumed and removed to a place of safety. No further opposition was met with at this point, and the workmen proceeded, not, however, in the best of humor. Who placed the dynamite where it was found is not known.*



## **First Rail Tunnel in America**

The Staple Bend Tunnel near Johnstown, PA is recognized as America's first railway tunnel. The tunnel was built in 1831-1833 for the Allegheny Portage Railroad. The first settlers of New Glarus used the Allegheny Portage Railroad in 1845 on their journey over the sub-continental divide (the Allegheny Mountains) to reach the Ohio River. Ironically just 70 years prior to the construction of the portage railroad and its tunnel, this same Allegheny ridge constituted the "Proclamation Line of 1763" which prohibited any settlement to the west into Native American lands. Obviously, this boundary line did not hold. The portage railroad was used until 1854 when the Pennsylvania Railroad went up and over this same ridge. The Penn railway engineers lessened the Allegheny grade by the use of the famous "horseshoe curve" near Altoona, just a few miles from the Allegheny Portage Railroad which it replaced. Amtrak still uses this historic route over the Alleghenies.

## **Update: The Map Which Predicted the Future**

The circa 1768 map of Canton Glarus (pictured), featured in the Winter 2016 issue of Family History Notes, was billed as the "map which predicted the future". This eighteenth century map had Canton Glarus divided into three tiers. And in 2011 the canton reconfigured and consolidated its 25 villages into 3 governmental units. And these three new units were strangely similar to those found on the historic map.



An update to this story -- the historic tripartite Canton Glarus map has been reproduced, laminated and offered for sale. This modern version of the old map is available from Walmart of all places! Click on this link to view [Walmart's Canton Glarus Map](#).

## **Update: Glarus-South Hotels**

The Elmer Hotel in the village of Elm has closed. This comes as sad news to those many Glarner-Americans who have stayed in the Elmer. The hotel dates from 1853 when Jakob Elmer opened his "Gasthaus Elmer". For the past 50 years the establishment has been operated by the Bässler-Rhyner family. And it is reported that Elm's largest hotel, the Sardona, continues to experience operational difficulties. Elm is an easily accessible day trip for those seeking mountain scenery, hiking and skiing. Improved roads and transportation may have had the unintended consequence of fewer overnight stays.



But as one hotel door closes another hotel with many windows has opened. The new Berghotel Mettmen (pictured left) is located on the remote Mettmen alp high above Schwanden. To access the hotel one must drive or take a bus from Schwanden to the Kies-Mettmen cable car which will then whisk visitors up to the hotel. The Mettmen alp is known for being a gateway to the *Freiberg-Kärpf*, Europe's oldest game reserve, established in 1548 by

Canton Glarus *Landammann* Joachim Bälgi (an ancestor of many newsletter readers). The new hotel is minimalistic in design both inside and out. The exterior's wood paneling sits firmly on a stone base. The interior is similarly unfussy. Each room has expansive floor-to-ceiling windows. The view to the north (photo at right by Ruchi) reveals the villages of Mitlödi, Glarus and Ennenda far below. The hotel is the realization of a dream of Romano and Sara Frei-Elmer. Prior to opening the Berghotel Mettmen, the Romano and Sara operated the SAC's *Leglerhütte* mountain shelter.

