

*The following memoir by John Luchsinger (1839-1922) was written February 28, 1921, the year before his death. This brief account was found inside a book purchased at a used book sale and given to the New Glarus Historical Society during the 1978 season, where it has since been held in its Archives. The Luchsinger paper was retyped and annotated by Robert A. Elmer in 2020 from the type-written original. Luchsinger, an early immigrant from Canton Glarus, was a multi-faceted man who successfully pursued the American dream.*

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## What America Has Meant to Me

By John Luchsinger

Ever since its discovery, America has been the land of promise to which the oppressed and the poor of all European nations looked with wishful eyes and hopeful hearts. They saw in America a home clean of unjust distinctions and privilege classes, a land large enough and broad enough to give every honest soul a fair chance to live and to become the equal before God and man, of his fellow men. America to them meant a land where birth and rank count nothing and only honest thought and work is demanded to make one the equal of every other of his fellow men. In the century just passed, millions of every condition in life have come to this land of promise and freedom. Those who have come have helped make the nation strong enough to give all who come, welcome, protection, freedom and opportunity.



To many countries emigration had become a necessity. Switzerland was one of the most in need, because of its limited size with its sterile mountains. It was impossible to increase the production of food sufficient for the ever-increasing population. When wars depopulated other countries, and did not touch Switzerland, her overflow of humanity wandered into and settled in those lands laid waste by war. France, Germany, Russia and Austria made them welcome, but America, in spite of the terrors of former sea voyages<sup>1</sup>, was ever the preference of the Swiss emigrant, because America was a land of freedom. Of the countless number who have come to this land not one in a thousand has repented and returned.

In 1845 at Glarus, Switzerland, lived my father, John Luchsinger, and mother Barbara Wild, with their six children of whom I was the youngest, age 5.<sup>2 3</sup> My father was of one of the oldest families.<sup>4</sup> He was the owner of a small tract of land, and a stone cutter and mason by trade. He

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<sup>1</sup> Luchsinger references the extreme challenges encountered in the typically 6 to 10 week-long journey across the Atlantic by sailing ship. The conditions on the immigrant ships were crowded with poor quality food and water. Toilets were non-existent and disease was common. Steamship passage lessened the crossing time to 10 to 12 days, but conditions in the steerage class often remained inadequate and unsanitary.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Luchsinger, 1810-1862, of Schwanden, Canton Glarus (#321 in Kubly-Müller) and wife Barbara Wild, 1809-1868. Their oldest six children – Niklaus, Ursula, Sybilla, Samuel, Johannes and Barbara -- were born in Schwanden. Daughter Katharina was born in Syracuse, NY and youngest child Friedrich (Fred) in Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>3</sup> John Luchsinger was the fifth of six Swiss-born Luchsinger children. His sister Barbara was actually the sixth.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Luchsinger is an old Canton Glarus family name. A Wernher von Luchsingen was mentioned in a 1274 document. The Wild family of Canton Glarus dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the arrival of Claus Wilhelm (later Wild) of Wildhaus, Canton St. Gallen, and his wife Anna Zwingli, the niece of Reformer Ulrich Zwingli.

was comfortably situated according to the modest life of the time. The anxious thought of father and especially of mother was, as to the future of the little ones. There was no chance for a reasonable living for all of them on our little estate. The parents realized that all would be forced to go from home, to work in distant lands among strange people. They determined to sacrifice their own comfortable living to insure the further welfare of their little ones. They had heard of America from friends who had gone there and who were doing well. They determined to leave the old home and dear friends to find new ones in the land where the future of their children would be safer. They sold their home and goods.<sup>5</sup> My only recollection of leaving is that before daylight on one winter morning we were awakened and dressed and carried to a big covered sleigh loaded with baggage and trunks. A crowd of neighbors and friends wished us farewell. Of the trip to the seaport [Le] Havre, I know that it was made by wagon. After thirty days stormy voyage, New York and America was reached.

Father settled at Philadelphia first, because his brother, who had gone some years before, lived there.<sup>6</sup> I remember but little of any change except that when I came to school I could not understand what the good teacher asked me. I learned to speak English with little trouble because of my age. I went to Jefferson Grammar School until 12 year old, later to night school, while working in a factory ten hours a day. We lived in the city until 1856.<sup>7</sup> After many hardships and disappointments my parents determined to go west and secure homes for themselves and the four youngest of the now eight children, in New Glarus, Wisconsin, on hilly unbroken farm of two hundred acres; built a log house and barn; split rails for fencing; broke land with oxen and hauled product to Madison, twenty-six miles distant with the same team<sup>8</sup> In 1859 the neighbors joined in erecting a stone school house a mile from our home.<sup>9</sup> I was elected District Clerk.

We had all the pleasures as well as the hardships of a settler's life. Only those who lived then know how near and dear neighbors were to each other. It made no difference where they came from, Irish north and east of us, Canadian French west, and the Swiss settlement New Glarus four miles south, where there was a Reformed congregation and a log church to which we rode Sunday behind our ox team.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On March 2, 1845 the Luchsingers announced their intent to emigrate. The sale of their home, barn and land was to occur on March 9, 1845. The Luchsinger's announcement to emigrate preceded those of the nearby Abraham Schindler and Mathias Schmid families (original 1845 settlers of New Glarus) by 2 and over 5 weeks, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> The Luchsinger family first spent time in Syracuse, NY as evidenced by the birth of daughter Katharina in that city. The Syracuse area, located on the Erie Canal route, was a settlement site of many Schwanden immigrants. There is no evidence in Kubly-Müller that Johannes Luchsinger's older brother Niklaus had immigrated to Philadelphia. This reference is more likely referring to his son Niklaus Jr. who had gone to Philadelphia in 1845.

<sup>7</sup> A 1901 biographical sketch of John Luchsinger mentioned that during the time the family lived in Philadelphia, his father had spent 4 years mining in California (presumably for gold) and was said to be "fairly prosperous".

<sup>8</sup> The Luchsinger land was located at the northeastern-most corner of Section One in the Town of New Glarus. The 1860 Wisconsin Domesday book shows the Luchsinger owning 200 acres.

<sup>9</sup> The Spring Valley school located in Section one in the Town of New Glarus.

<sup>10</sup> Luchsinger mentions the log church, however in 1858, only two years after his family's arrival in New Glarus, a stone church was built to replace the log structure. The log building continued to be used as the school.

Father died in 1862. After the death of my mother in 1868, I married, and a year later bought, on credit, the farm of 180 acres of the Canadian neighbor.<sup>11 12 13</sup> My brother kept the old home on which we had built, in my father's time, a stone house and barn.<sup>14</sup>

A year later I was chosen a supervisor of the town, and the next year chairman. I had, while only eighteen, happened upon an outdoor political meeting hardly comprehending its purpose. A crowd of rowdies disturbed the speakers and broke up the meeting. My political affiliation from that time on was with the Republicans, for they at this particular time were the ones abused.

I was a successful farmer and soon paid off the debt on the farm. I was one of the first to make Swiss cheese (learned from my mother) in Wisconsin, and later helped build one of the first cheese factories in this now great dairy section.<sup>15 16</sup>

I never attended any political caucus or convention until one day in 1872, the post master (Fridolin Egger) at New Glarus made himself known as a Republican and said a county convention was called at Monroe. He urged me to attend with him as otherwise no one would represent the town. I went, and to my fright rather than pleasure, was selected as a candidate for the Assembly. I had not time to make any canvas or campaign, perhaps could not get up the courage, but was elected nevertheless. I served and was re-elected four times. Later I was chosen county Treasurer. I studied law during my four years as Treasurer; was admitted to the bar after a successful examination, and have practiced law ever since. In 1887 I became a stockholder in the Citizens' Bank then Vice President, now President. I served as a member of the Monroe Board of Education for many years. In 1918 and 1919 I served as County Judge of Green County by appointment of the Governor.<sup>17</sup>

With my wife, Elsbeth Kundert, we have raised nine good children to manhood and womanhood of whom six are living.<sup>18</sup> We have grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The new world has been good to me and mine. We have cause for deep gratitude to our unselfish parents who left home and friends to make sure for us an equal opportunity in America.

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<sup>11</sup> Father Johannes and mother Barbara were buried in the Pioneer Cemetery located on the south side of the Swiss Reformed church in downtown New Glarus. While the original tombstones have long been removed, two flat in-ground markers replaced the original markers and can be found there today. Johannes' original marker has survived and can be seen at the Swiss Historical Village in New Glarus.

<sup>12</sup> John Luchsinger married Elsbeth Kundert (1848-1927) on August 8, 1868. Elsbeth was the daughter of Johann Heinrich Kundert and wife Elsbeth née Kundert, both natives of Rüti, Canton Glarus.

<sup>13</sup> The Canadian neighbor was Theodore Greenwood né Boisvert who was born near Trois Rivières, Quebec. Greenwood's wife was Norwegian immigrant Boletta, believed to be Boel Hendriksdatter who had arrived in 1839.

<sup>14</sup> Youngest brother Friedrich (Fred) Luchsinger remained on the home farm but later moved to Belleville, WI. The Luchsinger stone farmhouse still remains. It is located on Argue Road near the (now closed) Argue-ment Golf Course.

<sup>15</sup> Prior to the advent of the large dairy herds and the cheese factory system of making cheese, cheese making was the domain of many farm women who made cheese in their homes.

<sup>16</sup> Likely referring to the nonextant Spring Valley Cheese Factory located in Section 2 in the Town of New Glarus.

<sup>17</sup> Luchsinger was appointed Judge of the Green County Probate Court by Governor Emanuel L. Philipp succeeding Judge John M. Becker who was convicted of violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

<sup>18</sup> The nine children of John and Elsbeth (Kundert) Luchsinger were John, Henry, Samuel, William, Elsbeth, Barbara, Frank, George and Edna. The parents were pre-deceased by sons Henry, Samuel and William. John Luchsinger died in 1922 followed five years later by his wife Elsbeth. They are buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Monroe, WI.

# Luchsinger

Schuldez. ihrer Eltern und Kinder	Geboren		Getauft	
	J.	Mon.	J.	Mon.
A. <u>Johannes Luchsinger v. Schwanden</u> <i>Philippus Rytter's Sohn</i>	1810	31. July		
B. <u>Barbara Wild</u> <i>Dominal-Weipfils Braut</i>	1809	29. Nov.		
<i>Kindes mit Vinland f. d. S.</i>				
1. Niklaus	1832	12. Febr.	1832	15. July
2. Ursula	1834	28. Jan.	1834	2. Febr.
3. Sybilla	1835	23. Sept.	1835	27. Sept.
4. Samuel	1837	25. Nov.	1837	26. Dec.
5. Johannes	1839	29. Jan.	1839	30. Jan.
6. Barbara	1842	17. Jan.	1842	23. Jan.
7. Katharina	1845	23. Juni.		
8. Friedrich	1847	15. März.		

Shown here is New Glarus Swiss Reformed Church Register for the Johannes and Barbara (Wild) Luchsinger family. Son John Luchsinger is the fifth child listed.

In 1900 the eight Luchsinger children were geographically dispersed across America – more so than most immigrant Glarner families. The two oldest daughters Ursula (Mrs. George Dittmann) and Sybilla (Mrs. John Ritter), now widows, were living in Philadelphia, PA. Their brother Niklaus was living nearby in Vineland, NJ. Living in New Glarus, WI was Katharina (Mrs. Mathias Stuessy). Fred was living in Belleville, WI. And John and Barbara (the widow of Jacob Burgy) were living in Monroe, WI. Living in San Jose, CA was brother Samuel Luchsinger.

# Johannes.

Conjunct	Calculated	Gestorben	an	der	Bedienung	Bemerkungen
J.	Mon.	J.	Mon.	J.	Mon.	
1826	Apr.	1832	10. Apr.	1862	22. März	51. J. 19. Nov. in Vinland f. d. S.
1825	Apr.			1868	29. Dec.	57. J. 5. 23. Nov. in Monroe f. d. S.
1848	Apr.	18				cop. mit
1850	Apr.	1856	Ma			cop. mit Georg Dittman
1851	Apr.	1856	Dec.			cop. mit John Ritter
1852	Apr.					cop. mit Samuel Stuessy
1855	Apr.	1868	13. Aug.			cop. mit Elisabeth Herrick
1858	Apr.	1858	1. July			cop. mit Jacob Burgy f. d. S.
1862	Apr.	1863	12. Nov.	1898	21. Nov.	53. J. 24. cop. mit Math. Stuessy f. d. S.
1863	Apr.	1869	25. Nov.			cop. mit Magd. Dittm. f. d. S.

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