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The New Glarus Jubilaeum

by Herbert Kubly

When a delegation of Glarners fly to America with the Yodelklub Glarnisch late in August for the 125th anniversary of New Glarus, it will be a heart-warming brothers-across-the-sea jubilee for Glarners on both sides of the ocean. New Glarners are frequent visitors to Kt. Glarus and in the past ten years at least four organized groups of New Glarners have visited their ancestral home. The special charter flight of Glarners to Wisconsin this summer will be the first westward flight of Glarners. For this occasion New Glarners have waited a long time.

The air travelers from Glarus will make in ten hours a journey that in 1845 took a long-suffering four months. The story of the colonization of New Glarus is well enough known so that I need not give it in detail. A summary will review the long tale.

Poverty in the homeland was the cause of the immigration. In the year 1844 food was scarce in the overpopulated Canton and there was wide unemployment. On March 20, of that year, a meeting was held in the restaurant Schwarzer Adler, in Glarus, the purpose of which was to organize an emigration society to found a New Glarus in America. The cantonal government approved an appropriation of 1500 florins for the purpose of sending two explorers to America to locate a suitable tract of land for the colony. The two men selected were Judge Nicholas Duerst, 48, and Fridolin Streiff, a 29-year old blacksmith. Their instructions were to choose a locality as similar in climate and landscape to Glarus as possible, and a soil suitable for raising livestock, vegetables, fruit and grains. Money was raised for the purchase of land, and in March, 1845, the two scouts embarked for America by sailing ship. They landed in New York in May, met a guide and interpreter in Pennsylvania named Joshua Frey, and continued with him to Chicago.

By stagecoach, on horseback and foot, the three men explored most of Missouri and Illinois but in neither state could they find available land which pleased them. In the middle of June they moved up into Wisconsin Territory (Wisconsin did not become a state until 1848) and here at last

they found available land that was attractive to them. They purchased 1,200 acres of field land plus eighty acres of forest. When that was done, Joshua Frey returned to Pennsylvania and Streiff and Duerst began to build huts for the colonists who were already on their way to America.

The Glarners had set out on April 16, 1845, at Biasche, on a Linth Canal barge for Zurich. The weather was cold and wet, and in Zurich arrangements were made for the women and children to continue to Basel by covered wagons. On April 19, the colonists left Swiss soil, most of them forever, when they boarded a Rhine steamer for Rotterdam, a trip which took them eleven days. On May 13, they embarked on a sailing vessel, called "The Superb", for the new world. The hardships of their voyage recalled the pilgrims' agonies on the Mayflower more than two centuries before. The vessel was overcrowded, the food — salt pork and biscuits — was almost inedible and an epidemic of dysentery afflicted the travellers. One woman and three children died and were buried at sea.

After forty-nine days at sea they landed on June 30 at Baltimore. There two men named Stuessi and Kundert, who had run out of money, dropped from the group with their families and accepted immediate employment. From Baltimore the colonists traveled by railroad to Harrisburg and by canal boat to Pittsburgh. On the boat one of the colonists, Matthias Duerst, wrote in his diary: "We passed through a delightful region, smiling with productiveness and plenty log houses alternating with fine mansions, and women in good clothes and bonnets milking cows. But this is about all the work they do so far as I saw, for we perceived even in the log houses that they sat in rocking chairs, clothed with bonnets and shawls, with arms crossed, sitting like noble ladies."

From Pittsburgh the colonists traveled down the Ohio River by boat to St. Louis, where they arrived on July 23. There was no word from Streiff and Duerst, so two scouts, Paulus Grob and Matthias Duerst, were sent ahead to locate the explorers. On August 6, Grob and Matthias Duerst reached Mineral Point, in Wisconsin, where they learned that Nicholas Duerst and Fridolin Streiff had purchased land for the colonists some thirty-five miles further east on the Little Sugar River. Two days later Matthias Duerst wrote in his diary:

"The feelings that arose in us I cannot describe. To us came tears of joy. We went into the hut that Duerst and Streiff had made. We had supper; Judge Duerst baked the bread. We walked a short distance over our land — it is beautiful beyond expectation. Excellent timber, good soil,

fine springs and a river filled with fish. Water sufficient to drive a mill, wild grapes in abundance, much game, deer, prairie chickens and hares.”

The colonists followed by Mississippi River boat to Galena, Illinois, and from there, the men on foot and women and children in hired wagons, they made the last part of their four-months' journey.

On August 15, 108 Glarners of the original band arrived at their journey's end. They were seven more than the Mayflower pilgrims, the largest organized group of immigrants ever to arrive in America.

The 1,280 acres of land which Streiff and Duerst had purchased was divided among the colonists by the drawing of lots. Cabins were built. The first winter was one of severe hardship with the colony surviving by fishing, hunting and by an additional subsistence remittance of \$ 1,000 from Switzerland. The entire emigration project, including this final remittance, had cost a total of \$ 5,600.

In the spring of 1846, the settlers experimented with crops. Potatoes, beans, wheat and tobacco were planted. A cow was bought for each family. News of the colony returned to Switzerland and in 1847, twelve families from Bilten arrived and formed a branch colony five miles south of New Glarus, which they also named Bilten. Immigrants began to come to New Glarus not only from Kt. Glarus but from all over Switzerland. A school was opened in 1847, and the first doctor, Samuel Blumer, arrived from Glarus in 1848. A church was built in 1849 and its first minister, the Rev. William Streissguth, was sent from Switzerland.

Life continued hard. Epidemics of scarlet fever and cholera took many lives. Floods destroyed crops. The colonists staked their futures in the growing of wheat. The Crimean War in Europe, and later the American Civil War, drove up the prices of wheat and the New Glarners prospered. Several of the immigrants kept diaries and one of them, Joshua Wild, wrote in January, 1853: “Thirty men went to Monroe on foot to get their citizenship papers. Every-one was happy and we were even happier when the county clerk poured a bushel of apples on a sheet. All the men grabbed one immediately for it was the first apples we'd had in years. The men carefully placed the seeds in their handkerchiefs and took them home and planted them. The trees which grew up were called 'citizenship trees'.”

That the New Glarners became at once good Americans there was no doubt. When the Civil War broke out one hundred New Glarners enlisted in the Union Army.

With the end of the war the wheat market collapsed, and cinch bugs destroyed the crop. Rather than face economic ruin, the resourceful-Swiss-Americans remembered the cheese-making skills of their homeland and turned to dairying. In 1873 the first limburger factory opened in New Glarus. The product found an immediate market in the cities of the East. Cheese factories sprang up at every crossroad. By 1880 New Glarus was producing 752,000 pounds of cheese a year. Today cheese has given way in part to the sale of fresh milk for city consumption, but dairying remains the center of New Glarus' economy and the source of its prosperity.

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The Swiss visitors this year will be astonished by what they find in New Glarus. Despite the fact that few of the early New Glarners ever returned to Switzerland, the descendants of the original settlers have maintained a nostalgic dedication to their ancestral homeland. The second language — after English — is Neu Glarnerdeutsch — a curious patois of the nineteenth century Glarner dialect greatly influenced by the dialects of Berne and other cantons, and by *verschweizeret* English words. The architecture of the village is Swiss, suggesting most of all the picturesque Bernese Oberland style. Streets are named Schwanden, Diesbach and Ennenda and cantonal shields are displayed on light posts. Swiss foods are served in homes and restaurants and Swiss holidays — August 1 and Chilbi — are celebrated. Fifty young people take instructions in yodeling and the New Glarus Yodelers, known from television and phonograph records — are famous throughout America. Schiller's patriotic drama, *Wilhelm Tell*, is produced each autumn on my farm (which naturally is known as *Wilhelm Tell Farm*) to audiences of 5,000 persons, and the Swiss classic, Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*, is produced each June. Swiss folklore has become a way of life and with the resulting increase in tourist business, an important part of the New Glarus economy. To the visitor from Switzerland one thing will seem quite clear — the "Swiss Center" of America is not on New York's Fifth Avenue, but in New Glarus, Wisconsin.

*

My own ancestors, the Kublis and Elmers from Elm, the Otts from Nidfurn and the Hoesli's from Diesbach, followed the original colonists and came to New Glarus in 1849 and 1851. In 1951, exactly one hundred years after my great-grandfather, Oswald Kubli, left Elm, I was the first of his

descendants to return to Switzerland. In Zurich a stranger in the street recognized me as a "Glarner" from my accent. On a bright June Sunday I made my first visit to Elm and it was an experience I shall never forget.

I seemed to be coming home to a place I had been before. In no place in Switzerland was I able to speak and understand the language so clearly. People I met in the streets resembled my uncles and cousins back in New Glarus. They had the same craggy faces, the same taciturn, reserved, slightly suspicious manner. I found Kubli cousins and I went into the fields with them and helped to make hay, just as I would have on my own farm in New Glarus. (Also in Glarus I found some Ott cousins.) I have been to Elm many times since then. Most recently, during a year's residence in Switzerland, I was frequently in Elm, which more than any other place in Switzerland seems my home. This is altogether natural. The records in the Landesarchiv in Glarus show that I am still a hereditary citizen of Elm; my name is recorded there as Herbert Oswald Kubli von Elm. There is no doubt that Elm will remain for the rest of my life a home of my heart. It is a kind of mystique which Dr. Jung would describe as "race" or "blood" memory.

My most cherished memory of Elm goes back to a beautiful Sunday last June when the governor of my state, Warren Knowles, drove up the Sernftal with me and brought the greetings of the Swiss of Wisconsin to the citizens of Elm. As he and I listened to the Elm band playing the difficult strains of *The Star Spangled Banner*, and as we watched the Swiss and American flags fluttering side by side against the background of the Zwölfhorn, it seemed that the whole Swiss and American duality of my life was coming together in a meaningful unity, and my eyes filled with tears.

The host at the banquet that day was my good friend, Elm's Baumeister Chäp Rhyner, who is my sixth cousin on the Elmer side of the family and a seventh cousin on the Kubli side. With him I have made my most pleasant journies in Switzerland. Though Chäp and I are products of different cultures and of worlds 5,000 miles apart, our communication has been intuitive and remarkable. Though we speak the same dialect, there is more to it than that. We share the same humor, sentiment, view of the world and a certain restlessness, and these things are our common Elm heritage. One of the strong bonds between us is our common love for Elm. It is because of this that Chäp Rhyner works as a builder to restore Elm to its

original beauty, to preserve its character and independence and to restore to its people a prosperous rural economy which will cause it to endure.

What is happening in Elm is not unlike what has been happening in recent decades in New Glarus. In the industrial economies which both America and Switzerland are increasingly becoming, the preservation of a rural culture becomes increasingly difficult. But I do not doubt that New Glarus, like Elm, will survive.

The climax of the jubilaem in New Glarus in August will be the dedication of the Hall of History in New Glarus's "Historical Village" — a replica of the first settlement built by the colonists in the 1840's. The new Museum was constructed on the basis of a project plan submitted by architects Jakob Zweifel, Willi Marti, Heinrich Strickler of Zürich and Glarus, and by their collaborator architect Walter Bachmann; it was then built according to final plans worked out by architect Wayne Dürst, New Glarus. The Yodelklub Glärnisch will sing and Landammann Fridolin Stucki will share the dedication honors with Wisconsin's Governor Knowles. Present expectations are that 500 Swiss will be in New Glarus in August, many of them from Glarus. On such an occasion the enduring bond between "old" and "New" Glarus will be established forever as a link between Switzerland and America.