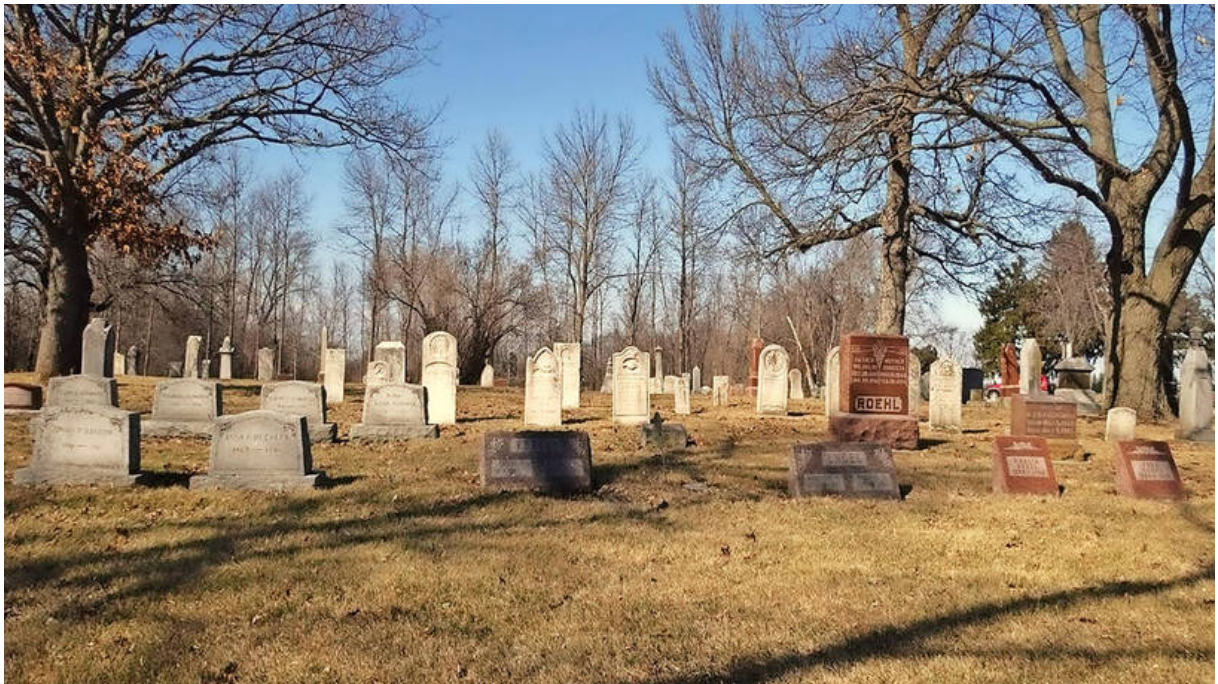


The Elmers came to America before the Glarners did

Today, New Glarus in the green US state of Wisconsin is best known. But the people of Glarus, who emigrated in the 1840s, founded other places. A search for traces on the Internet. Part 1

By Fridolin Rast (translated into English by Patrick Wild)



New Glarus in Green County in Wisconsin has today about 2200 inhabitants and was founded in 1845 by emigrants from Glarus. The journey of about 150 Glarner, the purchase of the land in the south of the US state in the Midwest and the history of the village, are exciting. But Glarus emigrant families did not only settle there.

New Bilten follows New Glarus

Not far away, a dozen families have founded New Bilten. Here, too, Fridolin Streiff played an important role. Together with Nicolas Dürst he was the ambassador for the land search in the USA and the land purchase in New Glarus.

Bob Elmer, himself an emigrant descendant, writes about New Bilten on the website glarusfamilytree.com. According to this, Fridolin Streiff was commissioned in 1847 to buy land for Bilten emigrants arriving in New Glarus, 17 parcels of land of 40 acres each, or just over 16 acres. They were located about five miles or eight kilometers south of New Glarus. The Biltner named the place after their home. However, New Bilten never grew into a village - and fell into oblivion.

The Elmers are faster

Today, New Elm is also almost forgotten, although it was a lively little Swiss settlement for many years, according to Bob Elmer. Today, he says, all that remains are two small country cemeteries and the former church, now used as a private residence.

Actually a too modest story, because a small group of emigrants from Elm left their home village in the Sernftal in 1845 even a few weeks before the founders of New Glarus. The Elmers traveled via the Great Lakes to the Midwest, arriving in Milwaukee in June 1845. They apparently wintered there before purchasing farmland in 1846 at Black Wolf in Winnebago County, two hours northeast of New Glarus by car today. According to accounts, a few of the Elmers met Niklaus Duerst and Fridolin Streiff in Milwaukee just before they purchased the land for New Glarus.

In New Elm, the Elmers and other immigrants from Germany and Switzerland built a church in 1850, but it burned down in 1857 and had to be rebuilt. It was not until 1914, almost 70 years after New Elm was built, that English services were held for the first time instead of German.

Glarus settlements in the USA



"Property in a Wilderness"

A letter written by Niklaus Elmer in about 1880 gives an idea of how difficult the start was for the people of New Elm. True, scouts John U. Elmer and Fred Marti liked it so much in Brighton, later called Black Wolf, that they convinced their group to buy land there. In 1848 another group arrived, with Oswald Geiger (he died only 20 years later), Beat Rhyner (1833-1899), Albrecht Elmer, Peter Elmer, John Zentner senior, John Pfeiffer (he in turn lived from 1819 to 1910) and others.

These bold pioneers had obtained their land in a wilderness of mighty trees and without roads, schools or churches, several miles from the nearest settlement. They built log cabins and cleared forest. The growing village of Oshkosh, seven miles to the north, soon became a good customer for lumber, and one of the remarkable pictures of those early days was the long line of ox teams loaded with lumber on the road from the Swiss settlement to Oshkosh.

According to Niklaus Elmer, the railroad company that built the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad through the town bought thousands of fathoms of lumber from the settlers. This brought them prosperity, allowing them to replace their log cabins with solid frame houses and barns. Roads, schoolhouses and churches were built, and the ox teams gradually gave way to horse-drawn vehicles.

Their prosperity was a reward for their great industriousness and frugality, Elmer continued, and the Swiss were now (i.e., 1880) praised as the best farmers in Winnebago County. It seemed worth mentioning to him that as early as 1846 a school district had been established and a log schoolhouse built where Miss Eliza Case taught the following winter. Likewise, he told of the first birth, the first death, and the first marriage in New Elm. And specifically mentioned Henry Schneider, the most successful and highly experienced contractor in the town of Oshkosh. Letter writer Elmer lists not only a number of private homes and "blocks," but also St. Peter's Church, the jail, the city brewery in Green Bay, and the iron bridge in Oshkosh over the Fox River.

The founders of New Schwandens bring St. Fridolin to the USA

From the 1840s onwards, people from Glarus emigrated to the USA again and again. Ten years after New Glarus, New Schwanden is founded, the pioneers are called Blesi, Zopfi, Hösli, Schmid, Tschudi. Emigration from Glarus. Part 2.

by Fridolin Rast



Old Schwanden family name: Paul Zopfi and his family have their picture taken on their homestead Elm Creek (Ulmenbach) in New Schwanden.

In 1855 emigrants from Schwanden and the surrounding area founded the settlement of New Schwanden. They arrived in the Midwest of the USA ten years after the founding of New Glarus in Wisconsin - and had to buy their land already about 450 kilometers further northwest in the neighboring state of Minnesota.

Here, near the capital city of St. Paul, they were practically direct neighbors of the indigenous Winnebago Indians. These still lived in the vast forests westward of Peter Blesi's land, as emigrant descendant Wayne C. Blesi reports on the website swissfamilytree.com. He has researched the history of New Schwanden, and Thomas Schätti of Good Old Schwanden summarized it several years ago for Gukum, the Schwanden Historical and Cultural Society.

Gloves fed with hay

Wayne Blesi reports that Peter Blesi wanted to fetch winter fodder for the cattle with the sledge from a hay store - one can imagine how this one had piled up so-called Tristen in Glarus style. And noticed that hay was missing. He followed the snowshoe tracks and confronted the Indians with their misdeed. They paid him for the hay with venison and deerskin.

From the smoky-smelling leather, Sadie Mary Blesi, née Signor (1893-2003), sewed her children mittens with woolen inner gloves, Wayne Blesi recounts. Which first belonged to her father-in-law Henry Peter Blesi (1859-1927) and then to his eldest son Harry Herman Blesi (1889-1960).

Go West

New Schwanden consisted of a few farms spread over four towns. According to Schätti, it was never an independent community or town, but formed its own parish, St. Fridolin's Evangelical German Church New Schwanden, for almost 90 years.

Of the Schwanden emigrants, Schätti reports that Peter and Margereta Blesi-Zimmermann, newly married, left for America with his brothers and sisters and other families on August 25, 1853. The group arrived in New Orleans on January 15, 1854, after a 50-day crossing, and traveled by river steamers on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to Chicago in Illinois and Milwaukee in Wisconsin.

In and around New Glarus, most of the land was settled or too expensive for the new immigrants, so they worked as day laborers to earn the money to continue northwest to Minnesota. They arrived in what later became New Schwanden in April 1854. Here they continued to work as day laborers, as Schätti reports: "On weekends they went to the plots they had marked, cut wood for their houses, and did the first work to be able to farm the land."

The Sabziger (Sap Sago) must not be missed

Then, in mid-February 1855, the Neuschwander finally moved into the area. Using a team of oxen that had cost them \$150, they crossed the frozen Mississippi River onto their land. There they built simple log cabins, and March 25, 1855, is the date of their entry, from which they began to reclaim their land.

Peter Blesi wanted to build his log cabin first before his wife joined him from St. Anthony Falls. But on their journey, the carriage overturned and she broke an arm. "Since there was no doctor in the area, her arm didn't exactly grow together," Schätti reports. The settlers produced two types of cheese for sale: a yellowish block cheese and a greenish one, often called "Sap Sago," which is the North American version of Glarus Schabzigers. Schätti speculates, "Perhaps the Glarus settlers had also brought the Zigerklee with them to their new homeland."

The beginning of the end

In the years that followed, more Glarner came to New Schwanden, and during the American Civil War quite a few of them were drafted; Melchior Blesi died of typhoid fever and is buried in Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1880 there were 209 people living in Hennepin County, most of them in New Schwanden. In 1915, there were as many as about 300. But beginning in the 1940s, the population steadily declined, and most descendants of Glarus pioneers moved away. St. Fridolin's

Church was demolished in 1954, and the Hennepin County Park administration began buying up the land of the New Schwanden settlers at that time.

Today, New Schwanden no longer exists; only a memorial plaque and St. Fridolin's Cemetery remain as reminders. The largest part is a nature park. But the people of Glarus have not disappeared from the face of the earth. Thomas Schätti estimates that even 150 years after its founding, there are still more Blesi in the telephone directory of Hennepin County, where New Schwanden was located, than in the canton of Glarus and about as many as in all of Switzerland.

Source:

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