

New Glarus celebrates its 150th anniversary

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NEW GLARUS CELEBRATES ITS 150TH ANNIVERSARY.

A small town in Wisconsin (USA) maintains strong ties to its Swiss namesake. This tiny town (pop. 1900) is probably unknown to most Americans, yet ask any Swiss about the whereabouts of this village, and chances are he or she can tell you exactly where it is with a strong dash of pride. The town, just 40 Km southwest of Madison, has been able to maintain its Swiss ties and even the Swiss German language over the past century and a half.

"America's Little Switzerland" as New Glarus has been warmly christened, was settled in 1845 and is honouring its 150th birthday this summer with festivities illustrating the close bonds which continue to flourish between the New and "Old" Glarus.

FROM GLARUS TO NEW GLARUS

It was partially the industrialisation of the canton of Glarus which led to the first overseas exodus to the "New World". During the 19th century Glarus, today with a population of some 39,000, experienced several changes in its economy as it moved from an agricultural and farming centre to one dependent upon the developing textile sector.

The process started when the first spinning and weaving machines from England were introduced to the canton in the 1770's. By 1846, 13 mills were in operation. While several new jobs were created with this modernisation, others were lost. Bad harvests, coupled with a prolonged crisis in the textile industry in the 1840's leaving a large segment of skilled and semi-skilled artisans out of work, created the conditions for the ensuing emigration.

The scarcity of work and hard times of that decade led the Glarner government to join the wave of emigration which had already captured much of Europe. The Glarus Emigration Society

(GAV) was founded, aided by the cantonal government, and the first scouts were sent to secure land in the New World. After travelling through several Eastern and Midwestern states, these men chose an area called Little Sugar River Valley in Northern Green County to become their new home. With its abundance of water, fertile soil, timber resources and prairie, the scouts were confident that this site would be suitable for the new settlement. And with funding from the Glarus Emigration Society, some 1,200 acres of land were purchased.

THE 124-DAY TREK

Following word of the acquisition, 193 men, women and children left the canton on April 16, 1845, to arrive at their destination on August 17, 124 days and 12,000 Km later. In fact, of the 193 pioneers who had left their homeland, only 118 survived the difficult voyage which took them from Switzerland down the Rhine to Neuwiedep in the Netherland, across the Atlantic to Baltimore, on to St. Louis and finally north to Wisconsin.

Early days in the new community were tough. The immigrants were mainly artisans who had developed skills in the textile industry they had left behind. Their knowledge of agriculture, so needed in American farmlands, was minimal. Yet the Swiss character of efficiency and tenacity must have set the foundation for survival. Upon arrival, log cabins and a general purpose shelter were built, food, building materials, house and farm utensils and animals were purchased with monies from the GAV. After only four years the community was sustaining itself, primarily through the harvesting of wheat. Although the hilly terrain was not quite suitable for the growing of this grain, wheat remained the primary crop of New Glarus for some 20 years.

"SWISS CHEESE"

During these two decades, dairy production took on increasing importance as the wheat farming went through some periods of instability. At the same time New Glarus was becoming an enclave for Swiss coming from all parts of Switzerland besides Glarus and the population increased steadily over the years. It took the arrival of families of Bernese origin, some from the Emmentaler region itself, to turn dairy farming into a burgeoning cheese-making industry.

Of particular significance was the arrival of Niklaus Gerber, a native Emmentaler and a cheesemaker by profession. He had apprenticed in the Dutch town of Limburg and in Booneville, New York where he learned about the manufacturing of Limburger and American Cheddar cheese, the

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leading cheeses sold in America in the 19th century. Gerber set up the first Limburger cheese factory in New Glarus in 1868 and the first "Swiss" (or Emmentaler) cheese unit in 1869. And although the citizens of Wisconsin were no newcomers to the cheese industry (by 1870 there were 60 factories and a production of 10 million pounds of cheese annually), New Glarus ultimately became recognised as the manufacturers of one of the finest cheese varieties in the country. By the 1880's, the cheese industry there was thriving, and the production of "Swiss" Cheese, Cheddar and Limburger became the mainstay of the New Glarus economy.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

A turn of events came in 1919 when the Helvetia Milk Company commenced with the production of condensed milk at its New Glarus plant, provoking the sudden closure of 19 of the 22 cheesemaking factories in the town. According to historians, this changeover seems to have had little effect on the farmers and whether their milk went into the making of cheese or another dairy product. The rapid shift has been attributed to the considerably higher prices paid for the milk by the condensed milk manufacturers. The move apparently served the dairy farmer well. By 1920, total farm income on the average New Glarus farm was the highest in the entire state, exceeding the income of the next closest community by 26%.

Today with a population of only some 1,900, the economy of New Glarus revolves around farming and tourism and the culture has become a mix of Swiss and US traditions. The town features a Swiss Historical Village, and typical "Swiss" chalets - though the chalet design is not a style found in Glarus, where not a chalet exists - reflecting instead the architecture found in the Bernese mountains. Other enduring traditions are the New Glarus Männerchor, Swiss culinary specialities, and "The Little Switzerland Festival", which fea-



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tures Swiss folk dancing, yodelling, singing, the blowing of alphorns, accordion playing and flag throwing. Crafts such as wood working and Scherenschnitt are also still mastered.

FROM MAY THROUGH OCTOBER

All this is a part of the sesquicentennial celebrations of New Glarus, which commenced in May and which will end in October. One part of the event, organised largely by the Glarus-based "Friends of New Glarus", will comprise old and new. Along with the traditional presentation and activities, evoking images typically Swiss - such as Heidi and William Tell - there will be displays of works by nine contemporary artists from Glarus, organised by the Art Society of Glarus, as well as the exhibition "Textile Industry in Glarus from the past to the future". The canton of Glarus has also commissioned a present to be handed over to the birthday child. A young artist, 30 year old Tina Hauser, won the competition with her sculpture of Fridolin's talking stick, Fridolin being the Catholic Saint from Ireland who first converted the valley of Glarus. The 3 meter high statue is being sculpted from Alpine stone and will be shipped overseas for the unveiling.

"Old" Glarus will also be having simultaneous celebrations recognizing the birthday of its "little sister" and the efforts taken by the forefathers (and mothers) who courageously took to sea to set up another Glarus so far away in distance, yet so close in the heart.

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TORNADO OVER SWITZERLAND

Switzerland has its own winds such as the "Foehn" in the Alps and "La Bise" in Geneva, but it never had anything like tornadoes, hurricanes, whirlwinds, twisters, typhoons or cyclones. But with the climatic changes worldwide, Switzerland has experienced its first major twisters which recently created havoc in Baselland.

The climatic conditions in Switzerland demand that houses are being built in much stronger material than in New Zealand for instance and roofs must be able to withstand tons of snow during winter. So for a building to be damaged the way this one was, requires a more than usually strong whirlwind because it practically lifted the whole roof off this apartment block and threw it into the garden. Things are obviously no longer what they used to be.

MULTILINGUAL BIVIO

The village of Bivio at the northern side of the Julier Pass leading to the Engadin is quite unique in the world.

Although it has only 260 inhabitants, three languages are officially in use there: Italian, Romansch (Rätoromanisch) and German, of which Italian and German are written languages. But the inhabitants actually communicated with one another in eight different languages, counting the 3 mentioned above plus the local Italian dialect and several German Swiss dialects as well as some English.

Strolling through the village, you will notice a sign in Italian saying "Diventa capo muratore" (become a French polisher), another in Romansch with "Tschangs alla tschinta" (dogs on leash) and a third in German with "Zimmer" (rooms to let). Workmen talk to one another in their unique Italian dialect, the Postmistress speaks to you in perfect "Schwyzerdütsch" while ski-lift operators address you in "Berndütsch" or in English according to your preference.

Bivio is the only "Italian" village north of the Engadin and north of the Alps. Officially it is situated in the Romansch part of Switzerland and its name in that language is "Beiva" (Stalla in German). This peculiar situation comes from the fact that for many centuries, its main connection was via the Septimer Pass with the Bergell and upper Italy. Trade and cultural contacts were closer with these regions than with the region of

Oberhalbstein to the north. And so Bivio became and remained until now an "Italian" village in the middle of a German and Romansch speaking region.

It was only with the opening of the Julier Pass road that Bivio came in closer contact with the Oberhalbstein to the north and the Engadin to the south. And so Italian is still the main language being taught in school although all inhabitants, by necessity, can read, write and understand several other languages as well.

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