

# The canton of Glarus

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## The Canton of Glarus

*The author*, Prof. Dr. Georg Thuerer, was born at Tamins (Grisons) in 1908. He grew up in the Land of Glarus. His thesis describes «The Culture of the Old Land of Glarus». From 1940 to 1978 he was Ordinary Professor of German Language and Literature, as well as of Swiss History at the Graduate Institute of Economics and Social Sciences in St. Gall. His chief scientific work is the «History of St. Gall» (1953/72). The publication in honour of his 70th birthday, «Erker», comprises «Speeches and Essays on the Culture of Eastern Switzerland» and offers a catalogue of his poetic, historic and civic works for which he was awarded the Culture Prize of the town of St. Gall (1966) and that of Glarus in 1978.

### *Nature preshapes the State*

Amongst the Swiss Cantons, there are a few whose boundaries could almost be recognized on a map in relief. We think of the giant compound of the Valais, of the valley State of Uri or the rocky area of Glarus. The Zurich chronicler Johannes Stumpf depicts this rocky protection admirably «The Land of Glarus is guarded on three sides with terribly impressive, even high and mighty mountains which act as invincible city walls». Only towards the North is there a gateway which could be blocked by a barricade. The self-contained landscape is such that every drop of water which runs off Glarus ground is collected by the river Linth in the valley. The yokes of the passes in the East and the South rest on the watershed, and it is only in the West that the Cantons of Uri (Klausen) and Schwyz (Pragel) reach above the pass height.

Most of the mountains of Glarus (Toedi, Glaernisch, Wiggis and Schilt) consist of limestone. In the East, we find the red sernifit and in the North some conglomerate rock. The bottom of the valley rises only slightly from the Lake of Walenstadt towards the capital Glarus. Yet the smallest village

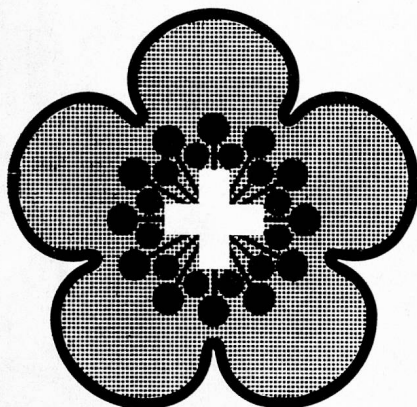
right at the back of the main valley, Linthal, lies only 682 m above sea-level; the Toedi (3620 m) rises to nearly 3000 meters behind it. The impressive rockfaces rising steeply from the bottom of the valley give the landscape a majestic character. Along the Linth, the villages are strung like pearls on a rope. There are only two inhabited side-valleys, the Sernf – or Small Valley to the East and the Kloental to the West, as well as the settlements on the two terraces, the holiday and sports resort of Braunwald (South) and the Kerenzerberg (North).

### *Of the People and its Language*

The people of Glarus are small in number. In 1977, its population was estimated at 35 700. Thus it is one of two Cantons – the other is its neighbour Uri – which send more Councillors of State to Berne than National Councillors; two of the former, one only of the latter. The proportion of foreigners with 16% is rather high. This is explained by the fact that a large number of inhabitants work in industry. For over a thousand years, German has been the main language in the Canton. Previously, Rhaeto-Romansh was spoken on the Upper Linth, and many names still remind us of this. The name of Glarus (Clarona) is derived from the Latin *clarus* which, in Romanesque languages, means a light spot in the dark wooded countryside. There is no doubt that the primitive Rhaeto-Romansh population was not expelled, but germanized. This is shown in the fact that there is only one fair-haired, blue-eyed person to a dozen people with dark hair and eyes.

In the language, however, the Alemans who immigrated around the 7th century, prevailed com-

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# Features



The Klausen Pass which connects the Cantons of Uri and Glarus.



«Landsgemeinde» in Glarus, capital of the Canton, on the first Sunday in May.

pletely. Their singing mountain dialect is one of the most original idioms in Switzerland. It has kept many forms of the *Mittelhochdeutsch*. Thus in *Glarnertütsch* one says: «*De neu Buu staht fry*», and not as in the Pre-Alps and the Midlands: «*De neu Bau staht frey*». The Glarus idiom is also the official language as it is accepted in the *Landrat* as well as at the *Landsgemeinde*, the open-air parliament. The dialect poetry and prose, too, deserve to be seen or rather heard.

## *A Short Stroll through a Long History*

The Land of Glarus cannot look back on an informative primitive history, documented by many discoveries from Roman times. Above the Western Lake of Walenstadt, there was a passage from the Lake of Zurich to the passes of the Grisons, along which there were three Roman watch-towers and forts dating back to the early Roman dominion of Rhaetia.

And at the mouth of the Walensee, there was a Gallo-Roman temple, probably consecrated to Mercury. According to recent excavations, it looks as if Christendom had a place of worship in Glarus already in the 6th century. Whether St. Fridolin whose figure is preserved in seal, crest and banner of the Canton, was active as religious messenger can neither be confirmed by texts and other evidence, nor denied. He is considered founder of the Convent of Saeckingen, which owned considerable areas of land in Glarus, administered by a steward. This office was taken away by the despotic King Rudolf of Hapsburg, and since he was already Governor of Glarus, the danger existed that the whole population, including the free citizens, would be incorporated in House of Hapsburg.

It was this worry which led the people of Glarus to the side of the first Swiss Cantons; they, too, had to fight the Hapsburg overlords

and their coveting. In June 1352, the three original Cantons, together with Zurich, made an eternal alliance with Glarus. Naturally, there were set-backs, but in the year of 1387, the Glarus people assembled for their first *Landsgemeinde*, and the statute accepted at that time contained the fundamental principles of democracy: «Whatever will befall the people of this Land, what most of them want, shall be and remain, and thus the minority will follow the majority.» This co-operative principle had to be defended in mortal combat against its enemy, the principle of might and power. At the battle of Naefels, the people's army of Glarus resisted with such force that the Austrian enemy, more than ten times their own strength, had to flee the country. Since that bloodbath on 9th April 1388, the Free State of Glarus, was considered one of the strong pillars of the Confederation. In the Old War of Zurich, Glarus fought in the camp of the people

  
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# Features



## SWITZERLAND

St. Fridolin, Patron Saint of Glarus, as he appears on the cantonal coat-of-arms.

of Schwyz, and in the Burgundian Wars, in the Swabian War and in the Campaigns of Milan, Glarus fought staunchly at the side of the Confederates.

In the time of the Reformation, most of the Glarus people followed the Evangelical teaching. This is probably due to the fact that Master Ulrich Zwingli had been Vicar of Glarus from 1506–1516; in addition, spiritual and economic relations with Zurich had always been strong. And it was there that Zwingli had been active as Reformer since 1519. If the Catholic faith could survive at all in the Canton, it was due to a large extent to its resolute defender and Swiss chronicler Gilg Tschudi, *Landammann* of Glarus. Discord and tension between the two denominations, however, were so strong that the administration was divided in 1683, and that could only be made good again in 1836. The granting of offices was often connected rather despicably with favours that could be bought. And in the election of the prefects, even the subjects had to feel this adversely.

Apart from the communal federal prefectures, Glarus had its own dependency in the earldom of Werdenberg; together with Schwyz, Glarus reigned over Uznach, Gaster and Gams.

During the French occupation, neither the people of Glarus nor the other *Urschweizer* could stem the attack from the West. The subject territories which were against the idea of people's rule and the free spirit of the time, were dissolved in 1798. That was to be acclaimed, but it was regrettable that there was no more room for the *Landsgemeinde* in the United Helvetic State. The Cantons were no more than administrative districts. Glarus became seat of the administration in the new Canton Linth, and it suffered greatly, so for instance when General Suworov marched from the Pragelpass to the Klausenpass. Napoleon realized that this Helvetic Order was unnatural and re-instated the Old States. A new sense of federal co-operation arose. One of the fruits of this new relationship was the Linth project which, according to the plans of the Zurich engineer Hans Conrad Escher, led to the drying up of the swamp between the two lakes of Walenstadt and Zurich.

### *The State – the Landsgemeinde as Symbol*

«The Landsgemeinde is the assembly of all citizens of the Land entitled to vote and as such is the sovereign authority of the Canton.» It assembles in the open air on the first fine Sunday in the month of May, in the age-old form of the «Ring» in the capital Glarus. It is chaired by the *Landammann* who holds the Sword of the Land – he is the head of the government of seven members. Women, too, have been entitled to vote for a number of years. The open-air assembly quite often lasts over three hours due to lively discussions on subjects of impor-

tance. It must be said, of course, that matters to be dealt with have always been well prepared beforehand by the Cantonal Parliament, the *Landrat*, in which four Parties are represented.

Even if only some 2% of the Swiss population live in a *Landsgemeinde* Canton today, our direct democracy would be unthinkable without the example of a pure people's reign: it is here that the conviction grew that one could trust the people with discussion and decision on political co-operation.

### *On the Economic Life*

The Land of Glarus lies in the High Alps. Of its 684 square kilometers, 28% is covered by peaks, rock, unproductive fields, scree and water. If one deducts the steep mountain forests and the alpine pastures only usable from June to September, from the 72% of productive land, very little remains for settling, in fact only a narrow area in the Valley of the Linth. Originally, practically the whole of the people belonged to the farming population.

From the 15th to the 19th century, many superfluous young men joined the foreign mercenary services. Only a few of them returned well-to-do, such as Colonel Kas-

A pleasant walk above Schwanden in Glarus.



# Features

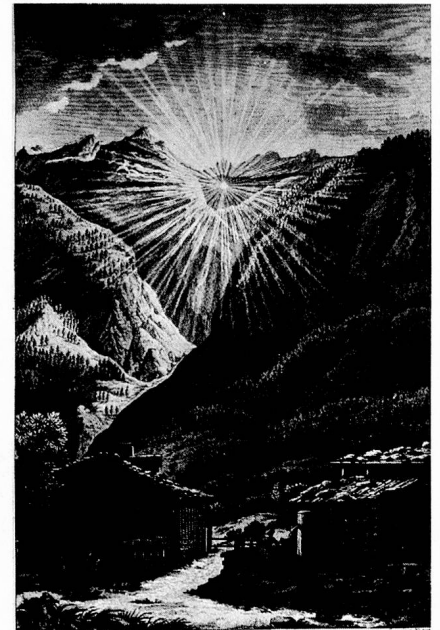
par Freuler who built his splendid palace. As long as the homeland did not offer sufficient chances for occupation, it was impossible to suppress enlistment in foreign armies.

Only when industry came, was there a chance of stopping mercenary service. There were the craftsmen still, the table makers, who framed with walnut wood the fine slate from the local mines. The Glarus table tops were loaded on rafts near Ziegelbruecke and travelled right down to the German and Netherland seaports. The basic textile industry developed from the cottage industry of the spinning women. Pfarrer Andreas Heidegger enticed women from the Zurich Uplands to Glarus in 1714, and they taught the women and daughters the art of spinning cotton by hand. Traders delivered the cotton to the homes and fetched the finished yarn which was later worked by handweavers. The era of work by hand came to an end when the first industrial revolution in England brought mechanical production. This led to an economic crisis, and many unemployed decided to emigrate, as for instance to the settlement of New-Glaris in the American State of Wisconsin (1845).

The Glarus textile industry reached its fullest development with the cotton printing works founded in 1740. By 1864 they employed no fewer than 6250 people at 4200 printing tables. And it was in exactly that year that, thanks to the devoted endeavour of a doctor, Fridolin Schuler, the Glarner *Landsgemeinde* accepted the first law in Europe on the protection of the workers. Ethical working principles and a sense of adventure made the Valley of the Linth to one of the richest alpine valleys. Ever new products were put on the market, such as electrical apparatuses of the «Therma» concern, asbestos machines and products made from synthetic materials. At



The road from Elm to the Panix Pass along the Lake of Haexen.



MARTIN-LOCHTROU S. MARTIN.  
Village naturel dans un Rocher percé par lequel le soleil éclaire en hiver et en Septembre le Village de Elm au Canton de Glarus.

The village of Elm in the Canton of Glarus.

first, it was the water which produced the power for the works that wanted «to have their wheels at the Linth», and then it was steam produced from imported coal, and later still electric power produced in the country itself, and then finally it was oil.

### *A Look at Glarus Culture*

However industrious the Glarus people may be – they call it «*gwerbig und gwirbig*» – they do not neglect the sense of the beautiful, the fine and the everlasting. Splendid churches adorn several villages such as Betschwanden, Elm and Obstalden. The world-renowned architect, Johann Ulrich Grubenmann, built the churches of Muehlehorn, Mollis, Mitloedi and Schwanden. The parish church of Naefels is a stately edifice from the Late Baroque period, and there are signs of Baroque also in the Evangelical church at Netstal. The centre of Glarus was destroyed by fire in 1861, the largest conflagration in Swiss history; an architect from

Niederurnen, Bernhard Simon, created a generously conceived new centre. Apart from the Freuler Palace at Naefels, one finds fine aristocratic mansions at Bilton, Mollis and Elm. Their steep gables rise high above the flat span roofs of the peasant houses. These used to be covered in shingles weighed down by stones, and later in slates. The so-called «*Brüggli*» allows access to the front door protected from the winds.

The roll of honour of artists of great repute does not show many names, nor that of composers. The best-known song of the Glarus is the «*Beresina Lied*» sung by Thomas Legler before the battle of the Beresina, and both words and tune originated in Germany. Cultural life, however, in the capital Glarus is far richer than one might expect from a town of 6000 inhabitants, specially with regard to music and singing. In Glarus, too, is the new Cantonal School, opened in 1977, the highest and most beautifully conceived educational establishment. The Art Gal-

# Features

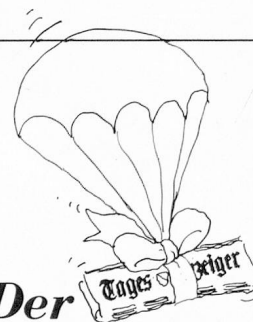


In Obersee (1000 m.o.s.) over Näfels. Behind left the Brünnelstock.

lery and the Natural History Collection house great treasures, and the Museum of the Land of Glarus in the Freuler Palace at Naefels, where alpine farming and colour printing have their special rooms, well holds its own when compared with other collections of similar size. Poetry, especially in Glarus dialect, is impressive and characteristic of the people. The rank of scientists of Glarus families is large, and they work at institutes and universities. In the Canton

itself, natural historians and history lovers have their own active organisations. Yet the biggest cultural achievement was made on the grounds of political culture where one's fellow-creature was highly respected as embodiment of the highest political ideals. And from the point of view of democratic humanism, it seems appropriate that there is a man in the Glarus coat of arms, St. Fridolin, carrying the Holy Book.

*Georg Thürer*



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