New Glarus Historical Society, Inc.
Swiss Historical Village

Newsletter Issue 6 (100) **October 1, 2016**

Board and Committee Updates

The Board held its regular meeting on the evening of Tuesday, September 13. Highlights of the meeting are reported below:

Denise Wright, advertising committee chairperson continues to document and organize advertising strategies as a means to develop a pro-active approach for the future. The New Glarus Brewery made a contribution to support Harvest Fest advertising and other press releases are planned prior to the event.

The Board approved delegation of management of our Facebook page to volunteer Amanda Smith. Amanda offered her time and talent to the New Glarus Historical Society following her recent move to New Glarus. Amanda is a young college graduate with a degree in Communications and Marketing. We look forward to her contributions and support!

Harvest Fest planning continues and committee chairpersons Gail Beal and John Marty report that several previous demonstrators are unable to join us this year. Replacements for these individuals are being recruited. The Board noted concerns about the availability of sufficient volunteers to ensure set-up and clean-up tasks are covered. Signage on Highways 39 and 69 is in place to make travelers aware of the event.

Revenue from paid admissions is down when compared to last season. It appears that the reduction is due to an increase in child admissions and a decrease in adult admissions. Data will be reviewed and evaluated following the end of the season.

The Board agreed to extend a pilot process that relies on Collections Committee recommendations for acceptance of donations. No new donations were received during the month of September.

As the museum season comes to a close, plans are being made to schedule work days on which artifacts will be moved into storage and end of the season cleaning will take place.

Log Buildings Assessment and Restoration

Meetings were held with two contractors to obtain additional information about approaches to restoration of the pioneer cabin. The Board is seeking information to determine whether a full restoration that includes dismantling the entire structure is needed or whether a less labor intensive approach is a viable option. As a result of these visits, additional estimates are being secured for consideration at a future meeting.

Both contractors have expressed some interest in providing assistance with stabilizing the log church, however, focus on the repairs to the pioneer cabin remains the priority focus at this time.

Cost for repairs and restoration remains a concern and once final estimates are received, fund-raising plans will require discussion. Solicitation of voluntary donations from visitors has raised several hundred dollars to date.

Mary Dibble, chairperson of the Collections Committee, noted the need to remove key artifacts from the log church building for the winter given the current structural concerns and no immediate plans to stabilize the structure. The Board recommended making a list and proposing items for alternate storage at the next Board meeting. In addition, discussion included documenting these proposals/plans along with other recommendations made in past years by interns for best practice for off-season storage. Board members shared that the Hall of History may be an easy access storage location and that high school students could be recruited to assist with moving artifacts.

"*Another Fortunate Year*"

(October 1, 1930 edition of the New Glarus Post) "**Little Damage Done by Frost**

Light frosts have visited this vicinity on Monday and Tuesday night, but the damage done has been slight. Garden flowers and late garden vegetables are still uninjured by the frost. Crops of all sorts are now nearly all harvested, that frost at this late date will do no great damage. Usually heavy frost comes before the first of October, so this has been a very fortunate year in that respect."

The "Lethal Fog" in New Glarus

This year the Zika virus has been much in the news – what causes it, the damage it does, and how to prevent its spread. Fear of the virus, for which there is currently no cure, has prompted some communities to begin aerial spraying of insecticide to kill the mosquitos that carry the Zika virus.

Sixty years ago, New Glarus began spraying – or "fogging" – to kill mosquitos. But it wasn't Zika the area residents feared, it was polio. The year was 1953. The polio virus had been around for a long time, and it was common in the United States, making thousands seriously ill every year. The late 1940's and early 1950's, however, saw a rise in epidemics, both in the frequency and the number of people affected. About 3,000 people died from polio in 1952. Although that number is low compared to the death rate from other diseases at the time, polio was especially feared. It struck down children, and no one knew what caused it or how it spread.

Mosquitos carried other diseases such as malaria; maybe they spread polio too. The New Glarus Post reported on August 20, 1952, that the village board had discussed purchasing spraying equipment. *"Municipally owned and operated spraying equipment could be a big factor in village health and comfort in the future"*, the editor wrote. *"It seems that only when the threat of polio strikes an area does the idea of spraying enter our minds. But the flies and mosquitoes can be just as irritating and unhealthful even when the threat of the disease is not present."*

It wasn't until the following year that the village began an insect control program with its own equipment. The New Glarus Post announced the first "fogging" on July 1, 1953. Fogging was done by a TIFA unit ─ a Todd Insecticide Fog Applicator ─ mounted on the village light and water truck. The equipment was jointly purchased and shared by New Glarus and Belleville, but the spraying applications were always done by a New Glarus crew.

The spray contained about 25% DDT, a pesticide that was commonly used for insect control in the United States. Use of DDT was banned in 1972, but in 1953 its dangers were not known. The New Glarus Post passed the following information on to New Glarus residents: *"Since the fog does not leave any moisture or residue it is not necessary for homes and cars to be closed up tight. In fact, if windows are left open, the operators of the unit explain, the fog will accomplish an insect eradication job inside as well as out".* [NG Post, July 1, 1953]

Spraying during ideal conditions would *"make the fog cloud roll along the ground."* Not surprisingly, children found chasing in and out of the rolling insecticide fog bank to be a perfect game. We now know that mosquitos had nothing to do with the spread of the polio virus, and the prevention – spraying DDT – might have caused harm while relieving no more than the annoyance of insects. But at the time, people saw hope in taking some kind of action to fight polio. *"Local owned fog units have been heralded as the most effective weapon in controlling insects and the absence of polio in communities where a fog unit is owned is often cited as a positive health measure"*. [New Glarus Post, July 1, 1953]

A highly effective vaccine for polio was introduced in 1955, and today no naturally occurring cases of polio are found in the United States. That fear is gone, but it is remembered by area residents born before the availability of the vaccine. And today, as municipalities conduct aerial spraying of insecticides in areas with known cases of the Zika virus, a debate has arisen: should we be more concerned about the Zika virus or the potentially dangerous chemicals being sprayed to eliminate its carriers? There appears to be agreement on the following, however: there is a lot we still don't know.

[New Glarus Post, July 1, 1953]

"Aircraft Flash" – The Ground Observer Corps in New Glarus

Nearly every political news update these days seems to contain references to securing the borders of the United States. This concern is certainly not new; it was also a concern for the country in the 1950s and New Glarus residents responded to the national call for help.

The United States Air Force (USAF) radar system following World War II was incomplete. Gaps in this network prompted creation of a volunteer force, the Ground Observer Corps (GOC), to become the "eyes of the country," watching for enemies attempting to cross our borders by air. The regional monitoring centers were established and modeled after a joint control effort between local Civil Defense and USAF during World War II, the first GOC. The Chicago Air Defense Filter Center was implemented to serve our region.

The New Glarus Post issued the local call for GOC members on March 8, 1952. Eugene Steussy, the local Corps superintendent, invited those "*who wish to participate in the activity*" to attend a meeting on March 24. Requirements to become a GOC member were outlined in the GOC Manual, a book published in 1951 by the USAF and now found among the books in the New Glarus Historical Society archives. "*To join the GOC, one must have normal hearing (hearing aids permitted), normal eyesight or corrected vision with glasses, an ability to speak clearly and distinctly, exercise good judgment and make proper decisions*." The manual also noted that recruits must have "*a definite loyalty to the U.S. which can be checked by personal clearance*." Encouragement to join included a message that the Corps could "*reduce our losses as much as 50%, even though the work might be tiresome or seem useless.*" New Glarus had been chosen as a potential post because it was on the direct path of several airline routes.

Other New Glarus Post articles in the spring of 1952 reported that the local group would meet the 4th Monday of every month, a short training would be provided and "*members will qualify for wings and a card entitling them to man any post during an emergency*."

Stuessy's aim was to "*build up a corps of 40 personnel so the post can be operated 24 hours a day with two persons on each shift*." "*The people of New Glarus have never failed in an emergency*," Steussy was quoted. "*The need is urgent and the superior intelligence of the Air Force deems it necessary that the post here be manned on a 24 hour basis*." Unfortunately, the first meeting drew a small attendance and the Post indicated that the group would reorganize in the future.

By May 1952, interest was renewed and according to the New Glarus Post, "*Pete Klassy, Sr. engineered the project to erect a windmill tower on Legion Hill*," a north side New Glarus location, not far from the Shooting Park. "*The tower will be used by the New Glarus Fire Department and the Ground Observer Post*." Steussy renewed his call for volunteers and urged Legionnaires to sign up. "*We need 84 volunteers for 24 hour coverage*." Shortly thereafter, the news report identified 30 volunteers had signed up. Another recruitment notice said "*no one has to climb the tower" and that "children 14 years of age and older and women are especially needed to fill shifts*." The New Glarus Fire Department was noted as an independent volunteer group.

At the end of June, the USAF representatives of the Chicago Filter Center held a training session "*Skywatch*." Seventy-five recruits from Albany, Hollandale, Dodgeville, Clarno and New Glarus were present and 40 of the attendees represented New Glarus. Instruction included visual recognition of both U.S. and foreign aircraft silhouettes and listening for the beats of single, bi-motor/multi-motor and jet engines. In addition, calculating aircraft speed and confirming direction of flight were required. Speed and accuracy of reporting was emphasized. Recruits were discouraged from using field glasses because doing so could distort altitude and distance. Attendees were provided instruction about making calls to the Filter Center when a plane was sighted. Each local post was assigned a code name for calling in sightings to the Center.

The call for women resulted in 18 women signing up by the month of July. One of those women was Dora Ott. She wrote a letter to her future daughter-in-law Pauline in August 1952. "*Out in a storm again Monday night. Every time Dad (Gilbert) and I have been up on the hill, it storms, but a lot of fun*." Perhaps part of the fun was Gene Stuessy's approach to boosting the morale of his volunteers during a long shift, with perhaps little action. Dora's letter to Pauline goes on to say "*Gene Steussy brought a carton of beer up to us about 2 a.m. and sat with us until 4 a.m. You should see us, Dad in his work clothes and I in my fishing outfit. The shack is just a shack and an old table and a few chairs and bugs of every kind there. We have a coffee pot with us and all the magazines we own. Dad sits at the table with a hat on and a fly swatter in one hand, reading and swatting and drinking coffee, all at the same time*."

Dora's letter suggests her volunteer interest went beyond public service. "*I am still looking for flying saucers. Wouldn't you be proud to hear that Mrs. Ott in New Glarus, Wisconsin saw the first flying saucer in Wisconsin*?" Was personal notoriety a motivation for volunteer service for Dora?

Five B-52 bombers were deployed in a simulated field test in October 1952. The Chicago Filter Center traced the task force over 200 miles. Mr. and Mrs. Harlan Wernle (Harlan was the manager of the Pet Milk Co.) were on duty at the time of the test, which was reported as extremely successful. While the local GOC now boasted 120 volunteers, more were desired. Gene Steussy's call for more recruits in a late October edition of the New Glarus Post said, "*It is the spirit of helping one another that made America great in the past. Nowadays, it's easy to be selfish and think only of ourselves and that is what is causing the most of our trouble and dissatisfaction*." His final words were "*Do it now, not after we are bombed*."

The newspaper reported that Jack Pauli, Clarence Roth and Mert Colney were new recruits along with the first farmer, Gordon Babcock, who lived nine miles north of New Glarus, near Belleville. Volunteers were rewarded with a field trip to the Chicago Filter Center in January; 25 volunteers had the opportunity to visit at the O'Hare airport location.

Winter weather didn't discontinue the volunteer monitoring efforts and volunteers' eyes on the skies apparently didn't turn away at the end of the shift. Remember Dora's wish to see a flying saucer? Her wish was apparently realized and reported in the February 18, 1953 edition of the New Glarus Post. "*Dora Ott saw an unidentified flying object in the sky as she looked out the window of her home on Friday night, shortly after 8 p.m. The object seemed to hang from the sky like a light bulb*." She phoned Gene Steussy, who called Albert Kaech, on duty at the time, who phoned it in to the Filter Center. Steussy and Dora's husband Gilbert drove west on Highway 39 where they saw the object lower on the horizon." The newspaper report said that the glowing center changed shapes and finally disappeared at 9:24 p.m. Then, surprisingly, the newspaper goes on to report that "*on the following Sunday, at the approximate same time and length of time, the object was sighted again*." Orville Lee was on duty at the GOC post and called in the report according to procedures.

New Glarus GOC members were among 750,000 GOC members across the country in 1952 and received merit pins for 250 hours or more of service. The USAF's radar network was finally and fully enhanced in 1959, and the eyes on the skies from Legion Hill were no longer needed.

Attendance, Tours and Events – September 2016

We added Adams and Juneau counties to our list of WI tourist residences in the month of September.

Will we complete our United States map with visitors from all 50 states? We are still looking for visitors from Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Utah and West Virginia to make our list complete. Visitors from Switzerland continue to sign our guestbook and this month, we also welcomed visitors from Malaysia.

Tourist comments of note include:
"Very informative and well arranged"
"Very beautiful and even better than I expected"
""Thank you for saving Swiss tradition"
"Tres Jolie"