NEW GLARUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT – APRIL 2018

Board members finalized plans for preparing the museum for its May 4 opening day. Artifacts are being returned to displays following indoor winter storage.

New Glarus High School students are scheduled to perform grounds and prairie plot clean-up tasks on opening day as part of their volunteer community service requirements for graduation. Another group of students will work on tasks associated with filing and updating inventory lists of available items in the Historical Society archives. Priority work in the archives is being placed on creating a list of the family genealogy documents that are among our materials because our most frequent request for information is related to family history research. Once complete, the list will be shared with the New Glarus Public Library and the Green County Genealogy Society (GCGS). The GCGS has shared their electronic reference list with us to assist in responding to requests for information.

The building and grounds committee is scheduling building maintenance including stabilization of the log church by Michael Yaker, repair of the doors and roof fascia on the Hall of History and making plans for board and door replacement as well as painting of the Print Shop. The Hall of History painting project by Coplien Painting is nearly complete.

A newly painted mural, funded in part through a Community Foundation grant will be installed on the north side of the Hall of History in May. An open house to view the installation is planned for June. More information about the event will be shared in the June newsletter.

Recent Donations

Mary Donnelly donated a number of old photographs of the New Glarus Stauffacher family as well as some antique scrapbooks, autograph albums and a small beaded purse. Mary spent time identifying and noting the names of all individuals that appeared in the photographs, making the collection a wealth of information for others who may seek information about this family.

Historical Society member Don Fjelstad donated picture frames for use in exhibits, a Carl Marty print of a horse drawn buggy on a country road and other Swiss landscape prints.

Correction: In last month's newsletter we noted a monetary donation by "Jan" Freitag rather than "Joy" Freitag. We apologize for the error.

MAY THE BEREAVED BE COMFORTED

When the United States declared war against Germany in April of 1917, the country was not at all prepared. It needed several million trained men in the armed forces, yet it had a standing army of only 127,151 and a National Guard of 181,620 members who were not ready for combat. [Dept. of Defense] It needed military equipment, uniforms, weapons, and transports. It needed training camps and the infrastructure to support them – roads, water and sewer systems, railroad spurs, supply depots and hospitals. And it needed money. The United States hadn't decided to just support the Allies – Great Britain, France and Russia, who had been fighting since 1914 – it also wanted a place at the table when the war ended. And for that, the country had to deliver.

The federal government instituted a draft, initiated a Liberty Bond program, passed the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act, and implemented a propaganda program to support the war. The U.S. Food Administration called for citizens to plant Liberty Gardens and observe Meatless Mondays and Wheatless Wednesdays. Training camps were thrown up, and men began to report for duty and training in the fall of 1917. Mobilization for war against Germany was the priority, and constitutional concerns, civility and the truth were swept aside when they became impediments. Therefore, it is no surprise that a stealthy and ultimately more deadly enemy was ignored.

Its presence in America was first documented in Haskell County, Kansas, in January of 1918. A doctor noticed a concerning pattern in a local flu outbreak and was sufficiently alarmed to alert the U.S. Public Health Service.[1] Shortly afterwards, young men from Haskell County reported for training to Camp Funston (Fort Riley), and one morning in March, a soldier reported to the infirmary with flu. Several hours later there were more than 100 soldiers in the infirmary, and 500 by the week's end. Many more were sick in their barracks. Several dozen soldiers died, but the vast majority recovered. The virus flashed through most of the other over-crowded camps training men for war. Then in March and April, the United States shipped large numbers of troops to Europe, sending the flu virus with them.

That first wave – the spring of 1918 – was not unusually lethal in the United States or the war theater. It infected an enormous number of people, but there had been serious flu epidemics before, and this one seemed to pass. But it was not over. A second wave struck in late summer of 1918, and this time it was a killer.

Viruses were not understood in 1918, and some doctors thought they were perhaps seeing a new disease. This flu was killing strong young adults at high rates, whereas previous flu outbreaks had primarily targeted young children and the elderly. Because of its lethality, the 1918 flu strain is still being studied. A research team headed by a UW-Madison virologist concluded in 2007 that the 1918 flu "unleashes an immune response that destroys the lungs in a matter of days, leading to death". [2] The aggressive immune response of healthy adults was killing them; their lungs filled up with fluids and they drowned.

When hundreds at military bases in Massachusetts began falling ill in August of 1918, Army and Navy medical officers accurately assessed the danger of crowded quarters in camps and on ships and recommended that sick troops be quarantined, not transferred in and out of various bases, and not shipped out with the healthy. But General Pershing wanted fresh troops on the western front, and so medical staff were ignored. Thousands died as a result.

Army and Navy medical staff were on the front lines in the battle against this strain of influenza, and they were overwhelmed by the crisis. In late August, New Glarus physician C. A. Hefty left the community for Fort Riley, Kansas. That left New Glarus with only one doctor, S. J. Francois, just weeks before the flu struck.

The flu moved from the military bases into the civilian population in September, 1918, radiating west and south. Information was spreading by rumor, as censorship policies were still quelling any impulse by newspapers to report the facts of the disease that had become a voracious pandemic. Recognition of the Spanish flu (it now had a name) first appeared in the *New Glarus Post* in the September 26 publication. The national news-feeds seemed to be designed to deny any cause for alarm, as they quoted officials on the bases stating that the epidemic was "well in hand" and "on the wane." [*New Glarus Post*, Sept. 26, 1918] The following month would be the deadliest.

On October 3, the *New Glarus Post* (*Post*) announced a death due to influenza. On October 10, Wisconsin's experienced and well-coordinated public health system aggressively swung into action. The state public health officer ordered all public institutions closed, and that same day the New Glarus Board of Health announced in the *Post*: "On account of the 15 cases of influenza in and about New Glarus, the local board of health closed the School, churches, Public Meetings of any kind, and other places of public assemblage to check the spread of influenza…" The *Post* began printing advice on how to prevent the spread of the flu and care for the sick.

In reporting the death of a 32-year-old New Glarus woman, the Oct. 17 paper described a heart-breaking scenario that would be repeated time and again in the community over the next few months. "About a week ago she contracted a cold but was up and around again and seemed to have recovered when she suddenly had a relapse and pneumonia set in and in a short time her end was here… Because of the influenza epidemic, no church services could be held so private funeral services were conducted…"

The Oct. 24 paper listed nine more deaths due to flu or the pneumonia that followed it, most of them to adults in their 20s or 30s. Oct. 31 logged eleven more deaths; Nov. 7 ten more. Pastor Elliker of the Swiss Reformed Church reached out to comfort church members through the newspaper, suggesting the study of certain bible passages at home. As the flu progressed, New Glarus health officials issued increasingly strict rules to prevent the spread of the disease. "…crowding at the Post-office must cease. People shall stay out until the mails are distributed and then walk in and receive mails and immediately walk out again." [*NG Post,* Nov. 7, 1918]

The number of area deaths began to wane until December of 1918, when the third wave of the pandemic swept through the country. "All business places are to be closed at 6 P.M.…All the homes and buildings containing a case of influenza should be placarded." [*NG Post*, Dec. 5, 1918] A week later, the *Post* printed an announcement from the New Glarus Board of Health issuing very specific rules to enforce the quarantine of persons and homes and the prohibition of public gathering, warning that violation was subject to a 3-month jail sentence.

The New Glarus area did not experience the horror that took place in large cities in other parts of the country – wagons driving through the streets picking up bodies left on porches, no one to make caskets, no one to care for the sick or bury the dead – but the trauma to the community was no less real. With so many sick, family members had to provide most of the care, and those family members nursing others could easily fall sick themselves. Mrs. Kathryn Theiler, a New Glarus resident, recalled years later, "Many places entire families were sick and in some cases there was more than one death in a family. There were funerals nearly everyday somewhere nearby." [3] Farm families struggled to milk their cows and care for their animals while nursing sick family members. Isolation from others within a normally well-connected community was forced by public health regulations and reinforced by fear of death. Still, "Neighbors and relatives helped each other out as much as possible and as long as they could." [3]

By the end of March, the most devastating disease in human history had burned itself out. The terror of the pandemic seems to have faded from societal and cultural memory. But here are some sobering statistics: at least 50 million people world-wide died from the flu or from pneumonia that followed the flu; about 675,000 Americans died, most in a three-month period, more than the total of Americans who died in all of the military conflicts of the 20th century combined; and 8,459 people in Wisconsin died during the second and third wave. During the country's single-minded focus on prosecuting the war, more U.S. soldiers and sailors died from disease (63,114) than from combat (53,402); and as many as 30,000 troops died before ever reaching the war theater.

And New Glarus? The *Post* spoke for the community as New Glarus buried its dead: "May the bereaved be comforted." [4]

[1] "Journal of the Plague Year", John M. Barry, *Smithsonian*, November, 2017
[2] https://news.wisc.edu/study-uncovers-a-lethal-secret-of-1918-influenza-virus/
[3] Mrs. Kathryn Theiler, from "Armistice Day, Nov. 11, 1918", published in the *NG Post* and for *Yarns of Yesterday* (University of Wisconsin Extension)
[4] *New Glarus Post*, Oct. 10, 1918

DID YOU KNOW?

The first bank in New Glarus was the Bank of New Glarus, founded in October, 1893. Prior to the Bank's establishment, the Swiss Reformed Church collected funds and offered small loans to people in need. Starting with between $12,000 and $16,000 in capital, when it consolidated with Citizens State Bank in 1930, the combined assets totaled $2 million. During the depression years, while many banks failed or closed across the United States, the Bank of New Glarus was in a strong financial position and closed only temporarily. This year marks the 125th anniversary of the founding of the bank.

We thank the Bank of New Glarus for their support in publishing the New Glarus Historical Society newsletter.

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and Sugar River Bank Branches
www.thebankofnewglarus.bank

Contact Us

New Glarus Historical Society & Swiss Village Museum
612 7th Avenue P.O Box 745
New Glarus, WI 53574
New Glarus, WI 53574
www.swisshistoricalvillage.org
608-527-2317

NEW GLARUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY & SWISS VILLAGE MUSEUM
612 7th Avenue P.O Box 745
New Glarus, WI 53574

Recipient Name
Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code