NEW GLARUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Swiss Historical Village Museum

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

The Board was unable to meet in person for its scheduled April meeting and deferred election of officers until a face to face meeting can be held. We welcome John Freitag as a new member of the Board. Voting members elected John and confirmed Jim Hoesly for a second term. Each individual will serve a three year term. We thank members who took the time to communicate their votes.

Due to the Department of Health Services (DHS) extension of the Safer at Home Order until May 24 that limits activities for non-essential businesses such as museums, we will be unable to open for visitors on May 22, as previously scheduled. Ten scheduled tour groups have been notified of our inability to host their visit. Some group leaders may reschedule for later in the season and/or next year. Board members are reviewing the Badger Bounce Back plan and monitoring the DHS website for further directives that will impact our ability to open the museum. We know from past experience that it will take us approximately 30 days to prepare the buildings and grounds for visitors and that work may take longer depending on any changes that may need to be made to operations to comply with requirements.

In other business, the Board approved the 2019 and 2020 first quarter financial reports. No members submitted questions about the 2019 report published in the last edition of the newsletter.

We welcome Historical Society member, Sarah Altermatt, as a volunteer supporting our advertising efforts via our website. Sarah has family ties to New Glarus and has worked in marketing and communications field for more than fifteen years.

If you are a Facebook member, “like” and invite your friends to follow the Swiss Historical Village Museum page. Beginning in mid-April, we began publishing excerpts from the diary of Matthias Dürst, a member of the original emigrant group. The posts follow the chronology of the Glarners’ journey from Canton Glarus and will continue in the months ahead.

YOUR HEALTH AND HOME REMEDIES

News and social media has been focused heavily on self-protection and care during the coronavirus pandemic. In the early days of our community, when access to medical care was limited due to a lack of available clinicians, medical clinics and hospitals, one relied on family members and neighbors with reputations for healing remedies. Alvin Fridolin Streiff wrote a column for the New Glarus Post for many years, reminiscing about his experiences growing up in New Glarus. The reprint that follows focuses on his memories of community health practices and "specialists."

"Alvin Streiff Remembers"

"The other day while watching the news and seeing all the various ads for "Health Aids," my mind wandered to the olden days when many remedies to cure our aches and pains were ones that were "homemade." I will try to recall some of them and you in turn may think of many more that were used in your families.

Almost all of the older people would collect various herbs, roots, leaves and flowers for various medical needs. They would dry these in their woodsheds, barns and lofts and when they were completely cured they would bag them in salt and flour bags and store them away for future use. The collecting of blooms from the Linden trees would be used to make a tea for or "putting off" a cold. The roots of blue chicory weeds would be dug and dried and these would be mixed in with real coffee, and the mixture was rather pleasing. Some people (like my great grandmother, Rosina Schindler) preferred the chicory coffee to the regular stuff. Many did this process in order to save money, as many of these people lived on very small incomes. Many would bale the milkweed pods for another type of tea. Then there was the family Rocky Mountain Tea, which many of us grew up on, and would get a dose every Friday night to cleanse the system.

Another weed used was the "Kassley Grut" a small vinelike weed that contained little sections and these would be dried and aged, and used for salve when cuts or gashes would occur in various part of the body. This was always a sure cure and was a custom brought over here from Switzerland. (I saw the same weed and this same process used in the area around "Old Glarus.") Goose grease was also a favorite remedy, as was the coon grease and bear grease. The Haldiman family were great hunters and they would supply the town with this item. Many times, when all else failed, Mrs. Haldiman would produce some coon grease and soon the wound would be healed.

Dandelions were used very widely for the making of dandelion wine, and the greens would be picked and eaten like lettuce. This was a favorite delicacy of many homes. Watercress would also be picked along the Sugar River in the spring and this was also considered quite a treat by many.

My grandmother, Elsbeth Schindler Streiff, was considered to have quite a "knack" for various treatments of the eyes. She would make up "eye poultices" made of various herbs and this would usually cure "pink eye" or eye ailments. She would also remove "wild hairs" from the eyes and many people would come to her. Her nephew Philip Marty, always had eye problems and he would come to Aunt Baeti for treatments. Other people would call her and ask her advice for various medical problems.

Some of the ladies would make up a concoction of herbs, leaves and a bit of brandy as a cough medicine, and this usually cured one, too. Various "hot toddies" would also be recommended when one was coming down with a cold or high fever.

A sure cure for "car or train sickness" was the laying of "butcher paper" next to the skin on your chest. It had to be "brown butcher paper" otherwise it would not be beneficial. I well remember my aunt, Emilie Kubly, would always use this remedy when she would come from Iowa. Then my mother, Emma Streiff, heard of this and this was a complete cure for her, too, as previously she always became violently ill while traveling. Many people swore this helped them, too.

One of the patent medicines that was in every home in the early 1900s was the family Dr. Farhnis "Alpenkrauter." It was made in St. Louis and was sold in New Glarus by Fred Ott at his furniture store. It was $1 a bottle and it was really good for "whatever ailed you." I believe it had a high alcohol content so no wonder it helped one.

Poultices of all kinds were very extensively used during the early days of the settlers and early 1900s. Everyone had a favorite root or herb, they would boil or cure and use a chest poultice. These were used to aid in chest colds, or other sorts of inflammations. I remember my mother making a poultice from oatmeal when I had an eye infection, and this really was a very soothing remedy."

FORNI'S ALPEN KRAUTER

In the previous article Alvin Streiff reminisced about "Dr. Fahrni's Alpen Krauter," an over the counter remedy. The National Museum of American History Behring Center's website offers some history and a photograph of the bottle and label for this remedy. According to the Museum, a trademark for Alpen Krauter was obtained by Dr. Peter Fahrney and Sons of Chicago, Illinois, in September 1922. The remedy, manufactured in Canada, rather than in St. Louis as Alvin remembers, offered this description for the use of the product: " This medicine is designed for relief from constipation and the following symptoms: upset stomach, indigestion, coated tongue, flatulence, loss of appetite, headache, nervousness, restlessness, and loss of sleep when these troubles are due to constipation. Alpen Krauter helps to expel gas from the stomach and intestines and eliminate waste products by way of the bowels." The contents list did include alcohol as Alvin suggested in his writing; 14 percent to be exact. Other active ingredients were as follows: senna, fennel, mandrake root, peppermint, spearmint, mountain mint, horsemint, sarsaparilla, sassafras, hyssop, blessed thistle, ditanny, ground ivy, johnswort, lemon balm, sage, spikenard, and yarrow. To view the photograph of the Alpen Krauter bottle visit this website:
https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_715635

WHAT ABOUT "VICKS?"

Do you have a little blue jar of ointment on a shelf in your bathroom medicine cabinet? Can you close your eyes, think back to a time when you had a cold and picture your mother coming to apply the ointment to your neck and chest? Is this a good or not so fond memory? What we most commonly refer to as "Vicks" had its start in the 1890s as Vicks Croup and Pneumonia Salve. Developed by pharmacist Lundsford Richardson in Greensboro, North Carolina, it quickly became the best seller of 21 products made there. According to the Vicks website, sales of the ointment, now carrying the Vaporub name, grew from $900,000 to $2.9 million in just one year during the Spanish Flu epidemic. Vicks added cough drops to its product line in 1931 which also made sales history selling 25 million packages in its first year. Cough syrup, sinus spray, and the Nyquil and Dayquil medicines for colds and the flu continued to hit the market under the Proctor and Gamble company umbrella in following years.

. . . .AND THEN THERE WAS SKUNK GREASE

Adolph Strahm, grandfather of lifetime member Linda Schiesser, lived and farmed in York Township west of New Glarus for many years. Adolph suffered from a lung condition called pleurisy, the symptoms of which included chest pain with breathing, cough and shortness of breath.

To alleviate his symptoms, Adolph applied skunk grease to his chest, much like the Vicks VapoRub that became a regular household remedy. The grease was a homemade concoction that was prepared for Adolph by his neighbor Henry "Hank" Blumer, a skunk hunter in the 1920s.

The Wisconsin Historical Society holds this bottle of skunk grease in its collection, donated by Elda and Linda Schiesser, and it was featured it in an article on its website in 2007. That essay reports that the remedy was made like this: "One way to make skunk grease was to boil the fat from several skunks and add about two tablespoons of an adult male skunk's glandular secretions before the fat congealed. After the grease cooled, it could be stored in a jar or can, and the mixture would last for years. Some people who used skunk grease for respiratory problems swore that it got better with age." Do you know any skunk hunters?
https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2661

TREASURES AND SOUVENIRS

Are you cleaning out closets and cupboards during this stay at home Coronavirus quarantine? If you are finding Swiss themed treasures, books and souvenirs that you no longer have room for or wish to keep, consider donating them to the Historical Society museum gift shop. Over the past several years, Bob Elmer has donated a variety of items in nearly new condition that have proven to be attractive and unique gifts for visitors seeking a souvenir of their visit to New Glarus. The value of Bob's donations exceed $100. Some examples include: his *Glarners in Amerika* book, Swiss music CDs, etched beer glasses, porcelain plates with Swiss flower decoration, souvenir spoons, and other books about Swiss and local history. Thanks, Bob for sharing your treasures with us to support the Historical Society! If you have items to share, please contact us via email or telephone.

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

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