# NEW GLARUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 4/Issue 8/November 2021


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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

At its October meeting the Board of Directors reflected on the past season of museum operations and talked about maintenance needs for next year.

Volunteer Ann Marie Ott compiled 2021 attendance data from information recorded by the museum cashiers and provided by Board Treasurer John Freitag. The total number of visitors to the museum in 2021 was 4171 individuals. The number of museum visitors was down when compared to attendance totals in 2019, even when adjusted for keeping the museum closed on Mondays in 2021. In 2019, the total attendance was 5259 persons. Of the 5259 visitors in 2019, 446 of those came to the museum on Mondays. This year's attendance was closer to attendance in 2018 when we had 4624 visitors. Looking at the data finds the number of bus tours impacting the totals. In 2021 only 175 adults were associated with bus tours, while in 2019 we had 491 individuals. Likewise, the number of school groups touring the museum greatly declined from 2018 (491) and 2019 (162); in 2021 only 1 group of 21 children came to the museum. The school attendance was likely impacted by the continuing concerns related to COVID transmission. The visitors who recorded their names and addresses in our guest book hailed from all 50 states with the exception of the State of Hawaii.

## HARVEST FEST 2021

The weather cooperated and we welcomed 459 visitors to Harvest Fest 2021. This number of visitors is just slightly less than the Harvest Fest 2019 attendance of 466 people. We were fortunate to have both the Maennerchor and New Glarus JoklerKlub perform during Harvest Fest this year. It wouldn't be Harvest Fest without retired teacher and museum guide Marie Pagel sharing stories with our guests about teaching in a one room schoolhouse. Watch for an article about Marie's teaching experiences in the newsletter next spring. For additional photos of Harvest Fest 2021, see page 3 of this newsletter and many thanks to the all of the volunteers that took time to share their talents with our visitors at this event!

**Note**: This is the last edition of the New Glarus Historical Society newsletter for calendar year 2021. The Board is still seeking volunteers to help with writing the newsletter in 2022. Please contact us at: admin@swisshistoricalvillage.org or Ann Marie Ott at: ottannmarie@gmail.com to learn more! We extend our thanks to the contributors to this month's edition, Chip Williams and Duane Freitag.

# THE DOBB SISTERS

This article was written by Historical Society member Chip Williams a retired band director who lives in Plymouth, Minnesota. Along with his wife, Joni Sutton, they recently published their first book, French Bliss, about their time spent in France.

In the 1930s and 40s, the Dobbs sisters were well known in the Monroe area. A lot of their notoriety was due to their musical abilities. More on this later. I want to begin with the story of what brought them to that place and time.

The Swiss part of this story begins with the emigration of John Luchsinger. Along with his parents, Johannes Luchsinger and Barbara Wild, he was part of the 1845 Glarnese who came, by one route or another, to New Glarus. John's future wife, Elsbeth Kundert, emigrated soon thereafter with her parents- Henry (Heinrich) and Elsbeth Kundert. We can presume John and Elsbeth met in and around New Glarus, and were married there on August 18, 1868. They were the grandparents of my grandmother, Louise Luchsinger. Fast-forward 50 years. My grandmother, Louise, met a handsome young man in southern Illinois, Williams Lester Dobbs. Shortly after he was released from his World War I army service, they married in 1919. Louise's uncle, Frank Luchsinger, told them in a letter that the Luchsinger farm on the west side of Monroe was for sale. They purchased it and moved back to Wisconsin.

Surviving during the Great Depression years (1929-1939) was difficult. Due to the farm, however, they were able to raise chickens and grow their own vegetables. Williams Dobbs was selling eggs to folks in town. The family story goes that a customer asked him if he had any milk for sale as well. This prompted him to purchase a few dairy cattle, and he began to sell milk and butter in town. Eventually the farm was named the Grandview Dairy, and William and Louise ran it successfully until the late 1950s. During this time, they were also busy raising a family. They had five girls- Elsbeth (born in Illinois before the move to Wisconsin), Dorothy (my mom), Annabelle, Ada, and Martha. Sadly, Annabelle died at a very young age.

The Dobbs sisters excelled at anything musical. Not only were they naturally gifted, they were encouraged to develop those skills. They were never destined to become a sensation like The Andrew Sisters, as they all leaned towards more serious music. Their parents made sure they were given piano lessons from an early age. When they got into the Monroe Schools, the district's music teachers took their natural skills, and honed them into fine musicians. They all played instruments in band and/or orchestra, and sang in a wide variety of choirs. Their pictures appeared in many Monroe High School yearbook music pages throughout the years from the mid-1930s to the late 1940s. Several pictures of these groups show two or even three of the Dobbs sisters in the same music ensembles.

In these yearbooks are notations next to their senior pictures about their numerous musical accomplishments and awards. Take, for instance, my mother, Dorothy Dobbs. She played cornet in band throughout school, as well as string bass in orchestra. She also sang in the Girl's Glee Club, the Mixed Chorus, and Madrigals. She served on the student boards of both the band and orchestra. In her senior year alone she earned 1st Place awards at music contests for a Brass Quartet in which she played, her cornet solo, her string bass solo, a String Quartet, a Vocal Trio, and Madrigal group. Similar lists accompanied her sisters in the yearbooks. Sometime during their school careers, one of their music teachers must have encouraged them to pursue their music talents at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Summer Music Clinics. Attending this clinic gave them the chance to see how their skills lined up next to the best school musicians in Wisconsin. Unbeknownst to them, two of the sisters played at Music Clinic at the same time as their future husbands. They also performed in the Wisconsin All-State Band and Orchestra. This further expanded their musical horizons.

Elsbeth graduated from Monroe High School in 1939, Dorothy in 1942, Ada in 1947, and Martha in 1948. Just for historical perspective, during many of these same years, World War II was in full swing.

After high school, all four sisters attended the University of Wisconsin (UW). They all played in band or orchestra during their years there, and they all took degrees in Music. They were the first ones in their families to earn college degrees. It should be noted that this was a significant accomplishment for young women of this generation. Elsbeth, the oldest, married fellow musician Robert Petzold before he left to serve in World War II. She earned her degree in Music and Education from the UW. During the war, she would return to Monroe to help out with the high school orchestra, in which her younger sisters were still playing. Aunt Elsbeth taught piano students well into her 80s. Dorothy, my mom, earned her UW Music Education degree. Early in her career, she taught band, and was so successful that one high school yearbook where she taught was dedicated to her. After a hiatus when her sons were young, she taught strings and general music in the Madison Public Schools for many years. She continued to play her string bass in the Madison Symphony Orchestra for many, many years. Ada met fellow musician John Iltis at Summer Music Clinic, and they got married while attending the UW. She earned her Music degree from the UW. She occasionally taught piano lessons, substituted for her husband as a band director, and continued to play her French horn on and off throughout her life. Aunt Ada enjoyed music in many forms, and loved being around Uncle John's band students. Martha also went to the UW, played in orchestra, and taught music in the Wausau Schools after graduation. She married UW Journalism major Bill O'Brien. Aunt Martha did continue to perform occasionally on her violin. She later pursued a Master's Degree in Counseling, and settled into a successful career as a school guidance counselor. The Dobbs sisters and their era have now passed into history. Between them, they had eleven children, and encouraged all of us Dobbs cousins to make and enjoy music. We are still doing so. A fitting legacy.

Years later, we were having some musician friends over to our house in Minnesota. One older woman, who had also attended the UW, was walking through our living room, and stopped short in front of a picture of my mom's family. She asked, "Aren't those the Dobbs sisters?" After I had confirmed that to be the case, she said, "Oh, they were famous when I was in music school at Wisconsin."

## HARVEST FEST 2021

Here's a few photos from Harvest Fest in the event you were unable to attend. We thank new Historical Society member Amy Jo Behling and Board member John Freitag for sharing some of their photos of the event.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Swiss American Historical Society was interested in having a story about our Historical Village in their scholarly magazine. Duane Freitag, a retired journalist who is a member of that organization as well as the New Glarus Historical Society, agreed to do the writing.

The article is tentatively scheduled for the February issue of the Review, which is published three times a year and is mailed to members of the international group. The article will focus on a wide number of people who have played key roles in the development of our museum. They include descendants of the original colonists, Swiss immigrants from later years, and people who have moved to New Glarus and have embraced its history. Some of the displays that are unique to our museum – such as the bee house, the tombstones, and the embroidery factory items – will be highlighted.

## Contact Us

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

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