New Glarus Historical Society

Volume 6, Issue 5 : August 2023

2023 Board of Directors

Larry Klassy, President

David Hustad, Vice President

John Freitag, Treasurer

Carol Hassemer, Secretary

John Colstad

Rebecca Forbes

Jackie Judd

Al Lienhardt

Tim Pauli

Kelly Ruschmann

Dwight Truttmann

Contact Us

New Glarus Historical Society
& Swiss Historical Village Museum

PO Box 745
612 7th Avenue
New Glarus, WI 53574

608-527-2317
admin@swisshistoricalvillage.org

Erica Loeffelholtz, Newsletter Editor

Board of Directors Update
By Carol Hassemer

The Board met on July 11 th and focused on the finances, infrastructure review, collaboration opportunities with the Village and other Swiss historical organizations, and a start to reviewing and updating the Society's policies.

The Society's finances are slowly improving after three COVID years. The Society did not receive a Wisconsin Historical Society mini grant this May. Only one-third of the over fifty grant applications were awarded grants. The Board will determine whether to apply again next year or to budget in 2024 for the archiving software that would be so beneficial to the organization.

The Gift Shop is doing well. The new P.O.S. management system's bugs continue to be worked out and cashiers, which are still needed, will receive additional training.

The Hall of History's five new murals are still in development, with the target installation date of the first panel now in early October. The internet installation has finally been set for a go-live date for the first two weeks of August! This has been a long-term process but will enhance the Clover system, as well as other administrative management.

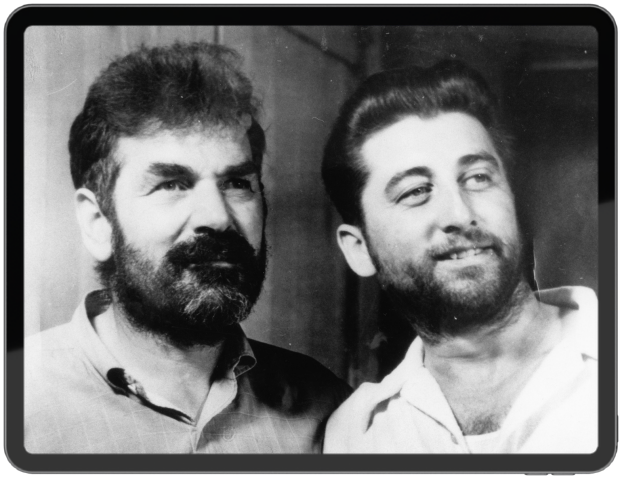
Mark your calendars for Saturday, August 12th , for which the Society and New Glarus Public Library are co-sponsoring an old-fashioned Pie & Ice Cream Social for the community from 4:00 – 6:00 PM. The annual Church Service, honoring the original Swiss immigration in August 1845, will immediately follow the event, with the Jodlerklub performing.

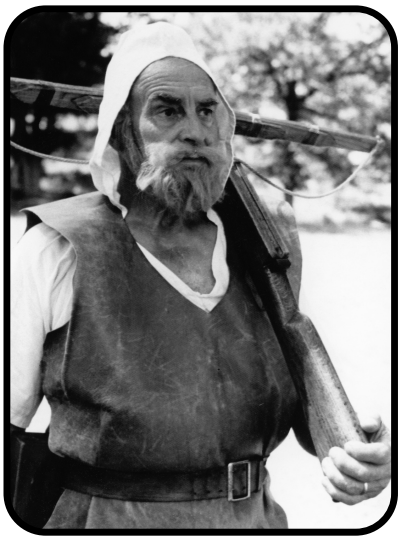
Also, Harvest Fest is on Sunday, October 8th . Hold that date!

Wilhelm Tell Festival

August in New Glarus typically brings a flurry of preparations for the annual Wilhelm Tell Festival, held over Labor Day Weekend. Over the decades, hundreds of local volunteers have spent thousands of hours memorizing lines, sewing costumes, and learning choreography in preparation for this signature festival. In this issue, we look back at some of the performers who've brought the story of Tell to life.

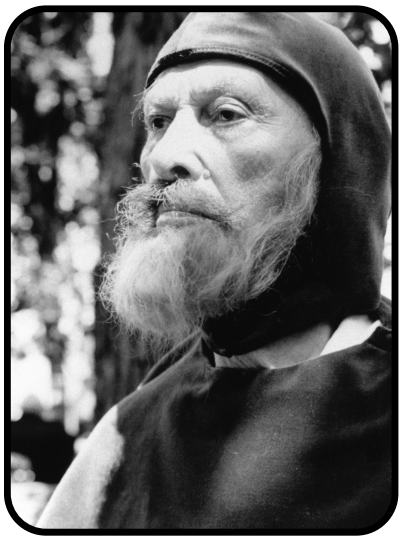
Left: Paul Grossenbacher as Gessler. Paul performed Gessler from 1938 to 1957 and again from 1960 to 1963.
Right: Ed Vollenweider and Gilbert Ott - the first two Tells in 1938.





Hans Anderegg, Sr. as Tell. Hans played Tell from 1958 to 1982.

Harvey Ott as Rudenz and Sally Ott as Bertha von Brunek. The Otts performed from 1938 to 1948.



Ernest Thierstein as Walther Fuerst. Ernest played Fuerst from 1941 to 1975.

The history of the Wihlem Tell play in New Glarus, including many great photographs, is told in the book *Wilhelm Tell In America's "Little Switzerland," New Glarus, Wisconsin* by Deborah Neff & Phillip B. Zarrilli. The book is available for purchase in our gift shop!

The New Glarus Fire Department
By Abigail Biank

September 19, 1902. This is the day the New Glarus Fire Department was born. According to an October 12, 1932, *New Glarus Post* article chronicling the history of the Fire Department, “When the village was incorporated in 1901, the need of better Fire Protection was felt … A meeting was called of the men of the village for Sep. 19, 1902, for the purpose of discussing and perhaps organizing a Volunteer Fire Department … At an adjourning meeting, held Sep. 26, 1902, it was decided to organize.” The community mobilized to make the fire department a reality, as “the necessary hose and a cart were bought by the village and a hook and ladder truck was partly paid for by subscriptions from local business men. Practice in both the hose and hook and ladder departments were held regularly ever since during the summer and fall months.”

The *New Glarus Post* is full of stories about fires threatening houses and outbuildings and the New Glarus Fire Department coming quickly to help. The town’s gratitude is evident as for almost every article about a fire there is a note in the “Card of Thanks” category thanking the firemen for their service. Fireplace sparks seem to have been the number one hazard, as many chimney fires are described in the *Post*.

Mr. and Mrs. Herman J. Marty faced a house fire but “prompt work by the firemen … prevented serious damage” according to the April 26, 1933 *Post*. The same paper included a thank you from Mr. and Mrs. Marty: “We wish to express our appreciation to the members of the New Glarus Fire Department who responded so promptly and assisted us when called.”

In 1932, Mr. and Mrs. John W. Elmer faced a more serious fire, sadly losing their home. The fire department, however, was able to contain the fire and save outbuildings, likely incredibly valuable to the Elmers' rural living. Information about the fire was included in the December 14, 1932 newspaper, which also published the Elmers’ wish “to thank each and every one who helped save our other buildings from destruction," especially noting the New Glarus Fire Department, friends, and neighbors.

Along with firefighting, the New Glarus Fire Department attended many competitions over the years. The state fireman’s tournament in 1915 was held in Monroe, with New Glarus giving the event its full support. The June 27, 1915 newspaper related the only sad story from the occasion: “The uniforms which the New Glarus Co. had ordered for the occasion did not come till Friday evening and they appeared in the parade in their old blue ones. It was a great disappointment for them as they surely would have made a fine appearance in the new suits.”

Despite uniform mishaps, the New Glarus firemen have always represented New Glarus well. The history of the New Glarus Fire Department is best summed up by the ending from the October 12, 1932, article: “All these years the fire company has very efficiently served the village and the firemen have many times saved life and property. The firemen have always been a valuable asset to the village.”

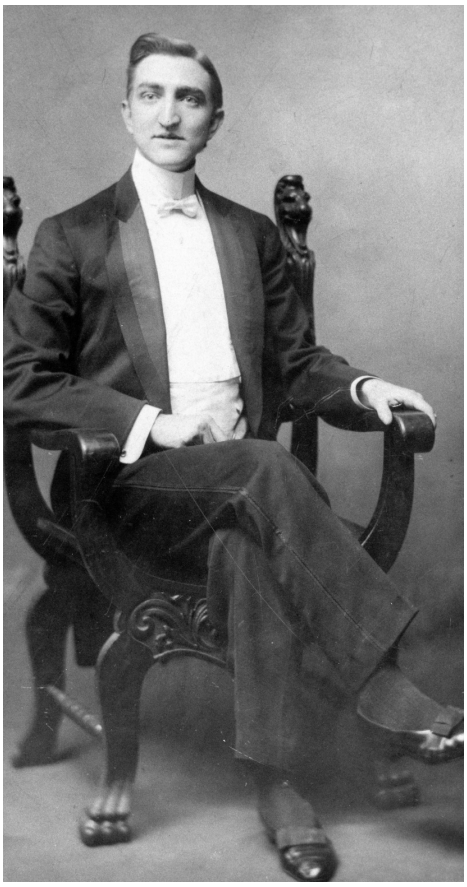
Did you know that historic issues of the *New Glarus Post* have been digitized and are now available online?
Digitized papers are available through the Archive of Wisconsin Newspapers, and can be accessed through the New Glarus Public Library's website. For more information, or to get a library card, contact the library at 608-527-2003 or staff@ngpl.org.

(Years 1912-1933 are currently available online.)

The Bank of New Glarus
Powering Growth in Our Community

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

Ancestry Corner



The Wilhelm Tell play as we know it today would not exist without the efforts of the man shown here. Edwin Barlow (1885-1957) was the only child of Lena Streiff and Warren Barlow. Edwin was a world traveler and patron of the arts.

After completing construction of his New Glarus home, The Chalet of the Golden Fleece, in 1937, Barlow set his sights on adding more European flair to the tiny village of New Glarus. Inspired by performances of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* in Interlaken and Altdorf, he rallied the community to produce their own open-air performance of the play using local talent. The play has been a yearly tradition ever since!

(Photo from the Historical Society Archives)

New Glarus Historical Society &
Swiss Historical Village Museum
PO Box 745
612 7th Avenue
New Glarus, WI 53574

Recipient Name
Mailing Address
City, State, ZIP Code