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Book Review: Glarners in America: Stories of Immigrants and their Descendants from Canton Glarus, Switzerland

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Book Reviews

Robert A. Elmer. *Glarner in America: Stories of Immigrants and their Descendants from Canton Glarus, Switzerland*. [*Glärner in Amerika: Geschichten Glärnerischer Einwanderer und ihrer Nachkommen*]. Näfels, Switzerland: Küng Druck AG, 2015. 262 pp.

The prospect of emigrating whether of necessity or as an option brings into focus such vexing questions as—am I strong enough, can I handle the unknown, do I have sufficient funds, will the help of those who went before me be sufficient, what will become of me? In this book, Elmer presents 139 biographical sketches of individuals who were “immigrants and their descendants from just one small part of the globe”—the mountainous region of Glarus, Switzerland. After updating changes in surnames each sketch identifies the immigrant as to place of origin and time in history followed by documented events and stories about each immigrant’s accomplishments and relationship to contemporary American life. Interestingly, each sketch is given a side-by-side presentation in English and German—providing a useful tool for language learning. To the joy of genealogists, Elmer attaches bracketed numbers to relatives and ancestors corresponding to the Kubly-Müller genealogy,¹ a work cited in his massive *New Glarus Family Tree* covering over 5500 individuals extending over 500 years.

Elmer’s presentation of illustrated sketches is organized under the following categories: Early American History, Western Pioneers, Localities, Military, Art/Architecture and Homes, Books/Media and Music, Science and Medicine, Business and Philanthropy, Food, Education and Sports, Government and Religion, Tales/Mysteries and Crime Scenes. A list of references follows each section and a list of places cited is located at the end of the book.

Elmer’s biographical accounts yield a wide range of interesting immigrant connections and stories. Here are but a few. How the Liberty

¹ Johann Jakob Kubly-Müller (1850-1933) Genealogy. 36 volumes containing records dating to 1500s. Permission to search required from Landesarchiv des Kantons Glarus, Switzerland. [For information contact Robert Elmer, swissconsin4u@gmail.com.]
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Bell was hidden from the British following the Battle of Brandywine; about the Glarner who established his saloon in the wrong place as soon afterwards Carrie Nation came to town and started her campaign against “John Barleycorn”; an 18th century Minister to the slave community of South Carolina; an entrepreneur who bought barren cactus & mesquite land at 25 cents an acre, improved it by creative water developments, eventually owning 45,000 acres, an area slightly more than one quarter the size of Canton Glarus; a Union soldier involved in the 1865 capture of Confederate President Jefferson Davis; three brothers who spent their first winter living in a cave-like hole in the ground; an immigrant to the then independent Republic of Texas who became the leading benefactor of Galveston; a Wisconsin brewer who was kidnapped by gangsters; a U. S. Superintendent of Indian Schools appointed by Pres. Cleveland who adhered to the later much discredited assimilationist position for Native Americans; an active member of the KKK; the major compiler of Swiss genealogical records from original sources in Switzerland; a member of a white supremacist cult later charged with murder; an early 20th century immigrant who helped found a Chemistry fraternity whose members now boast 20 Nobel Laureates; an 1836 author of two volumes which defended same-sex relationships; a female stunt pilot before the time of Amelia Earhart. Elmer’s sketches are necessarily brief but give an interesting and diverse sample of what indeed did happen to Glarners who took on the challenge of establishing a new life in America.

Bob Elmer is a native of New Glarus, Wisconsin, and a descendant of 19th century settlers from Canton Glarus. He has written a New Glarus-oriented local history and publishes a quarterly family history newsletter which has contained some 430 articles referencing over 6,000 individuals. He has published two articles in the *SAHS Review*, one in 2005 (“Searching for a New Home: The Emergence of New Glarus in the summer of 1845”) and one co-authored in 2008 (“The Planting of Bilten”).

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