

On the History of the Glarner Families, Particularly Those of the Sernf Valley  
A Medley of Pictures from Past Days  
(Zur Geschichte glarnerischer Geschlechter, derjenigen des Sernftales insbesondere  
Allerlei Bilder aus vergangenen Tagen)

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[All lettered footnotes and information in brackets were added by the translator]

## V. THE GIGERS

[pg. 54-58]

According to the summary communicated at the beginning [in the “Introduction” (pg. 1 in the SW translation)], of the Sernf [river] valley *Tagwen*<sup>a</sup> rights in 1915, 9 *Tagwen* rights are found in the possession of the Gigers in Engi and 2 in Elm. With the communication of these numbers I had, of course, pointed out that the those from Matt wrote “Giger” and those from Elm wrote “Geiger”. However, this differing spelling is purely arbitrary. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, those from Elm<sup>1</sup>, as well as those from Engi, uniformly wrote “Giger; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand, the Glarner historian, Melchior Schuler, likewise wrote uniformly “Geiger” for those from Engi<sup>2</sup>, as well as for those from Elm. People just believed that family- as well as place-names had to be modernized, and, for this reason, also wrote “Reuti” for “Rüti”, “Feigi” for “Figgi”, “Pfeifer” for “Pffifer”, and “Weiss” for “Wyss”. Some even wrote “Kaubli” for “Kubli”. While now the Elmers stayed with their new-fashioned “Geiger”, those from Engi returned to the old name of “Giger”, in spite of Melchior Schuler, etc. Consequently, the spelling is different, as, on the other hand, the meaning of the family name is undisputed. The Geigers, as well as the Gigers, owe their family name to the occupation of their ancestor, who, with his violin, once played dance music for the young folks or stirred the hearts of the old by his melodies. A look in our Swiss state calendar, however, shows how very common the desire once was to be played to by the violinist. The last of the Swiss state calendars available to me, the one from 1913, has no fewer than 15 Gigers, 4 Geigers and 3 Gygers, hence, 22 of their clan enumerated among our federal officials.

If, in 1915, the Gigers were represented much more numerous in Engi than in Elm, then they seem to have an inverse ratio to 3 centuries ago. Among those baptized in 1595-1617, in Elm, 7 children are found from the Giger family, and in Matt-Engi, on the other hand, of the 241

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a *Tagwen* - an ancient Glarner term, from at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., which is still used today in Canton Glarus to denote the commune of the citizens, i.e. those who have inherited or purchased the *Tagwen* rights (this may only partially coincide with the political commune). It is derived from *Tage Wann*, meaning the work someone could perform in one day in the commonly-held fields, pastures and forests. Over the years the number of *Tagwen* in the canton has varied considerably, with the present-day number being 29. Also its duties have changed – from jointly working on and enjoying the benefits of its common property, to administering all the commune’s public interests, to (today) administering and enjoying the benefits of its common property. [SW]

1 Thus reports the Elm baptism book that, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nov in 1631, in place of Joachim Solman, who had been elected *Tagwen* official, had been elected as charity caregiver: Jakob Gyger, *Tagwen* master builder.

2 I am in possession of a list of citizens from Engi from 1781 who were entitled to pensions; it includes 6 Geigers among the 178 referred to as entitled.

baptized in the Matt church, only 2. This may give the impression that Elm was the original home of the Gigers and from there they had progressed to Engi. However, as we already remarked, the Gigers were certainly already resident in the Matt church commune in 1595 and paid their taxes there to the Matt church: Albrecht Giger, together with Jos Dusch, had paid a pound of grain from his property in the meadow and Heini Giger, a quarter of grain from his property in the forest. Also the place-names “Gigerhof” and “Gigerhofberg”, which are specified on our topographical map for Engi, speak for an early establishment of the Gigers in the Matt-Engi commune.

In addition to the Sernf valley, the Gigers were also found early in Schwanden, Glarus, Mollis and on the Kerenzen mountain — an evidence, perhaps, of how the Geigers were welcome personages at the different places for weddings and other festive occasions. In Schwanden were found, among the 274 baptized of the years 1611-1620, 4 children from the Giger family (children of Hans and of Peter Giger), and, by that, these were, thus, represented more strongly than the Knobels and Schiessers (3), who today are dispersed from Schwändi, the Bönigers in Nitfurn [*Nidfurn*] (2), the Wilds from Schwanden and the Kläsis from Luchsingen (3). On the other hand, they are not represented any more in 1763 among the Schwanden taxpayers. For Glarus, the list, discussed above on pg. 50 [*in “The Luchsingers” chapter (pg. 2 in the SW translation)*], of those participating in the [1504] Zürich *Glückshafen*<sup>b</sup> provides evidence of the Gigers’ presence, in which Peter Giger and Anneli and Salome Giger “at the castle in Glarus” made their offering of fortune.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the following was present at the great 1504 free-shooting contest and threw his contribution into the “lucky pot”: Lärý Giger’s son in Mollis.

On the Kerenzen, the Gigers, or Giglers, as they were also called there, were found already before 1388, according to Melchior Schuler. In the 1763 tax roll, they numbered 7 taxpayers at Kerenzen, in 1876, only still 4.<sup>4</sup>

Among the fallen of the 9<sup>th</sup> of April in 1388 [*Battle of Näfels*] is found a Chuni Gigler, from the Glarus church commune; among the fallen at Gams [*Canton St. Gallen*] (Swabian War, 1499): Peter Geyger. While the “Pfifers”, as such, were intimately bound up with the military service, it seems that the Gigers, who seemed more likely to be called to serve with their merry bows at friendly festivities, further surpassed those ones in warlike passion. Valentin Tschudi<sup>5</sup> tells us of a Hilarius Giger, who was famous as a “master gunner”, in his “Historical Account or Narrative”: “In the year 1521, it happened that Robert de la Marcha [*lord of Bouillon*], whom the Germans designated “from Aarburg” [*Canton Aargau*], who was a servant of [*in service to*] the King of France [*Francis I*] and was situated on the “border” (frontier district) opposite the Count of Nassau [*Rhine-Palatinate, Germany*], had some quarrel (misunderstanding, dispute) with this count, and, since that could not be settled with law — not by the legal proceedings —, he assembled an infantry, with the permission of the King of France, of free serfs (volunteers) from France; and, since he [*Robert*] only wanted to move against the count, the [*Holy Roman*]

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b *Glückshafen (lucky pot) - a kind of lottery in which considerable gifts could be obtained in exchange for a small contribution [SW]*

3 As J. Kubli-Müller reports in the *Historical Yearbook XXXVI*, pg. 78, the Gigers had already become extinct in Glarus by 1720.

4 For the entire canton, the 1876 tax roll shows 16 head-taxpaying Gigers, with a property of 22,000 Fr.

5 *Historical Yearbook of Canton Glarus XXV*, pg. 81.

Emperor [*Charles V*] had written to the King of France that wherever he would help Lord Ruprecht (Robert de la Marcha) with his people, he himself would also take on the war: by such he warned against the French adventurer. After they [*the French*] then withdrew, von Nassau assembled an army and overran Lord Ruprecht, damaged his land and smashed some of his castles: among these was one called Messancurt [*Messoncourt*].<sup>6</sup> Stationed there was Lärqi Giger, from our canton, and Thoman Rütiner from Schänis [*Canton St. Gallen*], with some French-speaking serfs. Lärqi Giger was a master rifleman; he would not give up the castle, but did them [*the Nassau army*] considerable damage with his gun.<sup>7</sup> However, they [*Lärqi Giger et al*] were defeated and lost it [*the castle*], since it was stormed; because they were few and the castle was not yet entirely completed, since they had only recently begun the building and the walls were not able to hold their own. Therefore, Lärqi Giger and Thoman Rütiner were condemned to death along with the others. Because of his bravery, the Count of Nassau wanted to give Lärqi his life. But Count Felix of Werdenberg [*Canton St. Gallen*] wanted to grant him no mercy, since he shot at night at a light in a house and shot some of his most noble noblemen; therefore, he must also be killed.”

In 1698, a Matth. Giger of Kerenzen, who had been shot blind in battle by a bombshell, died in the royal hospital in France; in 1748, Eustachius Giger, also from Kerenzen, died in the East Indian service, and, in 1762, field surgeon P. Giger was buried on the island of Angola.

These Gigers died as victims of their war-lust; in such a way, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a Giger from Elm had died as victim of a robbery-murder, which, without a doubt, had greatly excited the inhabitants of the Sernf valley. J. H. Tschudi relates in his *Glarner Chronicle* (pg. 564f.): “A curious story of murder, which may have happened approximately about this time (about 1630) and is recounted by old people, is also the following: Lärqi Giger at Elm (of whom there is still a grandson alive) journeyed in the autumn to the usual market in the French-speaking part of the canton or in [*Italian-speaking*] Lauis [*Canton Ticino*]. With his return home, he brought with him 2 large leather sacks with money; his servant, born in Canton Appenzell, took these sacks from the horse and carried them into the house, which [*sacks*] his master put onto the table-cloth; the servant, however, wanted to entice him into the stable after that, on the pretext that he should come and look at his cattle; the master made excuses with his weariness; but because the latter persists in his wish, he finally went with him into the stable; the servant called to the master that it seemed to him that a cow had gotten off its chains, and he should bring him the chain-hammer. As the master went into the stable and the servant relieved him of the same [*chain-hammer*], he suddenly hit him on the head with it, so that he fell into the ditch. The villain thought the master was dead, went out of the stable, fastened the door with the wooden nail, hurried into the house, took the sacks with the money from the table-cloth, threatened the woman who just now lay sick at the little estate that, if she spoke a word, he would stab her with the knife which he showed her. Meanwhile, the master was recovering again in the stable, crawled through the little hay-hole in the stable floor, came out through the large hay-hole to his benefit, made a fuss and called for help. The servant, hearing this, hurried from it [*the house*] with the money, but still committed this cunning roguery, that, since they wished to pursue him, he stuck knives into the ground at one place and another, so that his pursuers would hurt themselves and be stopped;

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6 In Picardy [*France*].

7 “This Geiger did not want to surrender the castle for a long time, but rather to play dance music for his enemies with the gun still longer, as he then also did them great damage with it”. J. H. Tschudi, *Glarner Chronicle*, pg. 374.

whereby Lärý Geiger's own brother had the misfortune to run into these knives once, which had gone through his foot; since, however, a new little snow had just fallen, they were able to follow the trail until outside Engi, in a forest, at a fir tree. They did not know where the man might have gotten to further. Finally they saw him at the top in the fir tree, and wanted to coax him down with good words. He would not; they began to chop down the fir tree, and as it was soon to fall, then he came down willingly. His sentence was that he should be beheaded, and his corpse be buried together with the knife under the gallows. Lärý Geiger, however, had died 3 days after the murderous blow."