

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*)

by  
Gottfried Heer

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Translated by Sue Wolf

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

## VII. THE WYSSES

[pg. 80-88]

Even today people having the same name as another without being related are differentiated, perhaps, according to their physical properties (according to their size, their complexion or hair color, etc.). Thus, in the great [*Linth river*] valley, for example, we had a “*blonden [blond]*” and a “*schwarzen [black]*” family. Then it is also easily understandable that surnames such as Lang [*long*] and Kurz [*short*], Dick [*thick*] and Dünn [*thin*] were at one time family names and that, in the same way, the complexion or hair color of an ancestor lived on in the family name of his grandchildren and later descendants. Thus the family name of “Schwarz” [*black*] is found on this side and the other side of the Rhine [*river*]; I remember only the excellent Cantonal President and Councillor of States Sam. Schwarz from [*Canton*] Aargau, the Senior Court Chaplain Karl Schwarz from Gotha [*Thuringia, Germany*], of whose pastoral eloquence a number of volumes of sermons give testimony, and the magician Berthold Schwarz. And, likewise, we meet with the family name of Braun [*brown*] in Switzerland (in Zürich — Mayor Braun of unfortunate memory —, in Canton Aargau, Bern, etc.) as in Germany (for example, botanist Alexander Braun, and the archaeologists Emil and Julius Braun). And still more common than the Schwarzes and Brauns, according to my observations, are the Wysses or Wisses or Weisses [*white*], and in Germany also the Weisses. Thus we find them in Zürich in the highest posts of honor as mayors (David, father and son) and professors (the theologian Felix Wyss, the historian Georg and his brother, the legal scholar Friedrich von Wyss); from Bern we know a National Councillor E. Wyss, and more ministers of the same name. However, [*Cantons*] St. Gallen, Solothurn, Basel and Zug also have, or had, their Wysses.

In Canton Glarus they are found established as citizens in Engi and in the capital city of Glarus. For Engi, by means of the same 1525 register which has already provided proof to us of the Beglingers, Gigers, Luchsingers and Martis for the Sernf valley, 2 Wyss brothers were also named. The aforesaid reported: “Item Hans Wiss and his brother shall give 1 pound of grain from their property to ... grind.” A postscript dating from later handwriting reported: “However, he is bound to 74 Batzen [*coin*] of taxable property, from which he shall give 19 Batzen tax from the aforementioned collateral; adjacent, in the first place, to Curat (Konrad) Büsser's farmstead, and on the other side, to Fridli Wise's acre.”

However, also in Glarus [*city*], we meet with the Wysses as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thus a 1565

list of citizens of chief market-towns mentions to us a Hans Wyss. In the following 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, a 1640 list mentions 3 Wysses to us: Standard Bearer Caspar Wyss<sup>1</sup> who lived in the upper *Tagwen*<sup>a</sup>, and Adrian and Rudolf Weiss, who are recorded in the “lower *Tagwen*” as house-owners. Of these, however, Adrian Weiss was a *Tagwen* citizen of Glarus just since 1638. During his first and second matrimones (first with Margreth Elmer, second with Sibilla Knobel) he had registered 6 children (Katharina, Jakob, Fridolin, Helena, Emanuel and Sibilla) for baptism in the Matt church; however, in 1638 he married again and this marriage (with Elisabeth Zollinger, daughter of Hans Heinrich of Glarus), and perhaps even his professional (box-smith) and military (captain) position, had also brought about his emigration to the capital city and his acquisition of the citizen right there. Whether the other Wysses who possessed the citizen right in Glarus in 1640 also stemmed from the Sernf [*river*] valley, is not told to us through the available documents. What this states is solely that, in both places, in the Sernf valley as in Glarus, the Wysses were already represented in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. On the other hand, they belonged, at that time, as through the following century and up to and including the present day, to the small, not very numerous families. In the 1763 cantonal tax register, the Weisses<sup>2</sup> numbered merely 10 head-tax payers (6 in Glarus, 2 in Matt and 1 each in Engi and Mitlödi), and, in 1876, their number<sup>3</sup> stood at 14 (5 each in Engi and Glarus, and 1 each in Elm, Matt, Schwanden and Ennenda). On the other hand, in spite of their small number, they were a great deal more prominent in government and church, than, for example, was the case with the more numerous Beglingers (1763: 32) and Bäblers (1763: 28). I have, with the Martis, permitted the representatives of the state to have their say in first place, so I am allowed here, first of all, to present to you the representatives of the church. Of the 92 clergymen who served in the local canton in 1629-1766, there were 6 Wysses or Weisses. Two of them, Joh. Melchior Weiss, who worked in Matt and Elm in 1629-36, and Rudolf Weiss, who pastored in Betschwanden in 1670-92, were certainly not Glarner, but Züricher, and, for this reason, I refrain from reporting any more on them. On the other hand, 4 other pastors from the Wyss family were native Glarner. Their line begins with Rudolf Weiss, who served in Elm in 1659-69, but then was elected by the Glarus council to Buchs, in the Glarner lord’s domain of Werdenberg [*Canton St. Gallen*], and

1 As J. H. Tschudi reported in his *Glarner Chronicle*, pg. 578, it was the above-mentioned Standard Bearer C. Wyss, together with Heinrich Heer, on the initiative of many other honest men and, most of all, Mr. Hans Heinrich Elsener, called Milt, who successfully “pressed” for the establishment of lottery tickets for the appointment of cantonal officers – in order to hinder the ambitious and greedy (see pg. 20 [*in “The Elmers” chapter (pg. 12 in the SW translation)*]).

- 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]
- 2 Thus writes Melchior Schuler, who, in the beginning of his *Glarner Chronicle*, quotes the 1763 cantonal tax roll, in the same way as he also invariably writes “Geiger”, “Pfeifer”, and “Reuti”.
- 3 More than by their number of persons, the Weisses came into consideration in the 1763 cantonal tax roll by that of their taxable property. Whereas the 32 Beglingers paid tax on only 13,000 fl. and the 28 Bäblers on only 6,900 fl., the 10 Weisses paid tax on 40,400 fl. The principal entries of these amounts fell upon the Weisses of the capital city, where, in 1763, the 6 Weisses were charged with 40,000 fl., and, in 1781, even with 80,500 fl. The greatest part of this property was found, doubtless, in the residence of Captain Fridolin W.; Treasurer J. J. Tschudi reported that, in 1776, since the church estate of evangelical Glarus came down to 6,000 fl., a freewill collection was gathered; with this, Captain Fridolin W. towered way above all others, in that he joined with 1,000 fl., while the 3 next-highest donors had given 105 fl. each.

served there in 1669-79. The second Wyss who entered into the Glarner church service, J. Rudolf Wyss, was the pastor of Matt<sup>4</sup> in 1671-1707, and also occupied the office of a dean in 1687-1707, and that certainly ought to be considered an acknowledgment of his excellence, since for a long time it was considered to be a rule that the administration of the Glarner church affairs was also vested in the pastor of the capital city, similar to, in Zürich, the secular priest at the Great Cathedral was considered to be the *antistes*<sup>b</sup> of the church there. Even more than in that way, however, Pastor Joh. Rudolf Wyss departed from the general rule in regard to his course of studies. Because not only for Glarner, but also for Züricher, Berner and Basler theologians, it was considered at the time, and is considered today, to be the rule, that they first completed their theological studies, then, after passing examinations and being administered ordination, they took charge of a pastorate, and then, when they had obtained a pastorate somewhere and fortune smiled on them, they sought for themselves a helpmate as pastor's wife and got married. The same-mentioned J. Rudolf Wyss, on the other hand, was already married for 17 years when he decided to study theology, and chose the vocation of a clergyman. "He had previously," reported our synod records, "lived in his marriage for 17 years, nevertheless, he continued his studies and underwent the examination with approval in Zürich and had been conceded worthy to the holy ministry." I know no clergyman, neither of Canton Glarus nor another canton, who entered into the ministry so late, after living in matrimony for 17 years. The Glarner synod had facilitated the decision to agree to the wishes of the petitioner, doubtless for this reason, that Joh. Rudolf Wyss was the son-in-law of the praiseworthy, well-known Cantonal President Joh. Heinrich Elmer, married to his daughter Cleopha (born in 1635, died in 1698). — According to the pronouncements of [J. Jacob] Leu, J. R. Wyss had already allowed a dissertation, "De Notis ecclesiae verae" ["Of true church writing"], to be published in printed form in Heidelberg [Germany] in 1659, and demonstrated with it his preference for ecclesiastical questions.

Dietrich, a son of Pastor and Dean J. Rud. Wyss, was pastor of Elm, therefore a neighboring pastor of his father, but had already quit, or had to quit, his benefice<sup>c</sup> in Elm after 4 years of service (1692-96), since he caused displeasure to his father and offense to his commune by his conduct. He died in 1736 on July 21<sup>st</sup>, as a "teacher of arts and sciences".

The fourth pastor from the family of the Glarner Wysses was Bartholomäus Wyss, who had not only been employed repeatedly by the synod but also by the Evangelical *Landsgemeinde*<sup>d</sup>. As was already recalled to your mind on an earlier occasion (above, pg. 54 [in "The Beglingers" chapter (pg. 3 in the SW translation)]), Glarus, like Zürich, was a ruling member state in [Canton] Thurgau and the Rheintal [Canton St. Gallen] and, for this reason, believed that Evangelical clergy also had lawful claims to Evangelical benefices at those places. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries there was certainly no dispute over these claims, since so few Glarner studied

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4 With his commencement of service in Matt, Pastor Wyss reported in the baptism book there: ["Sunday, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of *Christmonat* [December] in 1671, through God's providence and the commune by unanimous majority, I, Johann Rudolf Wyss, cantonal citizen and *Tagwen* citizen in Glarus and Engi, have been called to the service of the Matt church." The fact that Pastor Rudolf Wyss already, at his commencement of service, names himself as a *Tagwen* citizen of Engi, seems, consequently, to indicate that his father or grandfather originated from Engi but established himself in Glarus and bought into the *Tagwen* right there.

b *Antistes* - the head of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Switzerland, bet. 1500-1800. [SW]

c *Benefice* (*Pfründe*) - a church office that guaranteed a fixed amount of property or income (see also footnote e) [SW]

d *Landsgemeinde* - the Popular Assembly, which is the Glarus cantonal legislative body. It is made up of all the citizens of the communes who have full citizenship rights. [SW]

theology that the Glarner communes were always short of their own canton's clergymen and, for this reason, Zürich always had to be asked again to share with them some of the young theologians from their surplus. However, it was different in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in that, by this time, instead of the former shortage, a surplus in Glarner theologians was found. Then the Glarner believed they ought to also lay claim to the benefices in Thurgau. And actually the Bishop of Konstanz [*Baden*], who — paradoxically<sup>5</sup> — possessed the *Kollaturrecht*<sup>e</sup> over various Reformed benefices of the Thurgau territory, chose a young Glarner, who was named Bartholomäus Weiss, to be the pastor of Müllheim. However, Zürich considered that as an infringement on its rights, which had been acquired through long practice, and there sprang up a 20-year war of words [*Federkrieg*] over it. “Mr. Bartholome Weiss of Glarus,” reported Trümpi's *Chronicle*, pg. 565, “who already occupied his benefice house as pastor, had to be carried out of it in a sedan chair. Evangelical Glarus felt this event very hostilely; it knew that, governing as well and as anciently in Thurgau as the honorable city of Zürich, it had, in the 1712 war and peace, retained all its rights intact and could not comprehend that its previous shortage of clergymen should have taken from it the natural right of access to benefices in lord's domains under joint administration. Evangelical Glarus protested to the honorable member state of Bern, who was astonished by this event.”

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April in 1721, the matter came before the Evangelical *Landsgemeinde*. The *Landsgemeinde* minutes report about it: “Concerning the current advance of the Müllheim business in the standing dispute with the honorable member state of Zürich, my gracious lord has conveyed, nonetheless, that, if this is not settled amicably, he shall in no way abandon our rights, but will propose the impartial right and will direct the rulers to expedite such, nevertheless with the addendum that the canton shall not in any way be concerned with the outstanding costs of Mr. Bartholome Weiss.” Above all, the closing sentence, which left the outstanding costs to him without assistance, may have been a disappointment for candidate Bartholome Weiss, since the preceding meant an “exchange of a long time”, in spite of the commanded expediting. He knew well at what a fast speed the old *Tagsatzung*<sup>f</sup> worked. In spite of the efforts of the Glarus Evangelical council, and in spite of the intercession of Bern, even in January 1740 the “Müllheim business” was still not settled, and member state Bern saw itself called forth “in June to announce a new Evangelical council where the matter should be settled by mutual agreement or by Evangelical right, and not only the parties, but the judge, had authorized it”. This council even succeeded in the achievement of solving the disputed question which had been pending since 1720, and, of course, chiefly to the advantage of Evangelical Glarus. However, it is obvious that Barthol. Weiss had not been able to wait so long at his post. Already, in 1724, the Evangelical *Landsgemeinde* had given him a sign to stay no longer at this Müllheim benefice, while they entrusted the council, certainly, with the energetic continuation of the Müllheim business, however, with the addition: “Candidate Weyss is, herewith, not removed to make him

5 Compare Dr. Konrad Straub, *The History of the Rights of the Evangelical Church Communes of the Thurgau Territory*, pg. 45 ff.

e *Kollaturrecht* - between 1540 and 1804, the Catholic bishop of Konstanz held the *Kollaturrecht* [the Right of Collation] for Thurgau, that is, the right to appoint a clergyman to a given benefice, whether it be Catholic or Reformed. In the case of a pastorate and a secular clergyman, this appointment implied the obligation of the clergyman to discharge the duties of caring for the souls, in exchange for the right to enjoy any revenues which might accumulate. [SW]

f *Tagsatzung* - the legislative and executive council of the Old Swiss Confederacy, from its beginnings in the 14<sup>th</sup> century until the formation of the Swiss federal state in 1848. Its power was very limited, since the cantons were essentially sovereign. [SW]

available for another benefice, according to his wishes.” Following this sign, he then, in 1727, also applied for the diaconate in Glarus, which fell to him as well; after the death of Pastor D. Luchsinger, he also advanced to pastor in 1733, likewise, in 1761-66, he occupied the position of a Glarner dean, but he also still had to submit to a reprimand by the Evangelical *Landsgemeinde*. The *Landsgemeinde* minutes for the 28<sup>th</sup> of April in 1762 report about it: “It is concerning the Federal Councillor Joh. Peter Weyss’s complaint that a copy of the pastor's marriage consent document, by which he would be permitted to marry his promised young lady beloved, Maria Margreth Schmid, daughter of Your Good Reverence, Pastor Samuel Schmid, had not been given to him and recognized by Your High Reverence, the Dean and Pastor Weyss, and the marriage had not been authorized to the Federal Councillor, on the pretexts that protestations had been put forward, thus, consequently, the copy of the pastor's marriage consent document should be given to him and handed over without delay, also the wedding should be proclaimed. The less than gentlemanly conduct of Your High Reverence, the dean, has been referred to my gracious lords.” I do not know which you wonder about more, whether over the less than gentlemanly behavior of the dean, who denied to a Federal Councillor marriage with the daughter of a colleague, the Sevelen [*Canton St. Gallen*] pastor's daughter, or besides, that a *Landsgemeinde* had to concern itself with personal matters of that kind. “The separation of powers” was even at that time still not a state principle and the *Landsgemeinde* was the possessor of the highest powers.<sup>6</sup>

And now, in addition, I shall tell of the Wysses who served the state. Moreover, it is obvious to name first the associate of this family who occupied the highest position that the free people of Glarus had to give, the position of cantonal president: Joh. Peter Weiss. After he succeeded to the position of Evangelical treasurer in 1670, for 6 years, he was named as the cantonal military administrator to the *Landsgemeinde* of the year 1675, so that, during one year, he occupied both offices, that of a cantonal treasurer and that of a cantonal military administrator. In 1679, since the mace (the office of cantonal president) passed over to the Catholics, according to the agreement, he was elected cantonal vice-president, then, between 1681-84, to the office of cantonal president. It was specified with it that, during the years 1679-84, he also had to represent Evangelical Glarus in a series of confederate meetings. We deliberately describe him as the representative of E v a n g e l i c a l Glarus — not: the representative of member state Glarus. Just at that time when J. Peter Weiss had occupied the position of cantonal vice-president and cantonal president, the tension of both confessions was again very high, so that both Glarner delegates appeared scarcely as colleagues, rather as opponents, in the assemblies of the *Tagsatzung*. Likewise, as extensively as the Reformed Glarner had made concessions, under the pressure of the situation, through the 1623 cantonal agreement, these concessions by no means satisfied their Catholic cantonal citizens and, for this reason, rose to the surface in the confederate meetings, to Cantonal Vice-President, and then Cantonal President, J. Peter Weiss, who had collaborated in the most diverse projects for the overcoming of the existing opposition. Thus, in all seriousness, a cantonal partition was proposed, according to the model of Appenzell. The Catholics of the Linth [*river*] valley and Mitlödi would have to be transplanted to the lowlands, to Niederurnen and Bilten, and to make room for them, the Reformed from Netstal,

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6 The same 1762 *Landsgemeinde* which had negotiated for J. P. Weiss also had to make the bliss of marriage accessible for another Weiss. “My gracious Lord and all the sovereign cantonal citizens, in humble support of songwriter Weyss, namely of his absent son, who has entered himself into a promise of marriage to the maiden Elsbeth Oertli, single daughter of Josuas Oertli, with whom he is related in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> degree of the maternal line, out of mercy have allowed the marriage, notwithstanding the cantonal laws, without prejudice, with the addition that he shall pay 16 fl. dispensation-penance.” (*Landsgem.-Prot.*)

Niederurnen and Bilten then would have to be moved to the large [*Linth river*] valley. Since, by this partition of the canton, over 1000 Reformed would have had to change their residences, while the number of Catholics which this same allotment would affect amounted to only 93, it was very easily understandable that Cantonal President Weiss designated such a compromise project as simply *unacceptable*, all the more so as it might not just have expected the residents of Niederurnen and Bilten to forsake their present productive homeland to emigrate to the “wild Linth valley”. However, Cantonal President Weiss had also designated a 2<sup>nd</sup> project, that would force fewer Reformed into emigration, as impracticable, so that for some time this “Glarner business” took on a very ominous character. Finally then, as is well-known, instead of the cantonal partition, a partition of government control was put into action as a way out, that is, the institution of separate denominational courts (Catholic and Evangelical nine-judge- and Catholic and Evangelical five-judge-courts, etc.), and denominational council chambers, that separation of power which the new constitution of 1837 first repealed. That Cantonal President Weiss had a particular satisfaction in the solution arrived at in 1683, can hardly be accepted; but finally he was satisfied that the unpleasant business had been solved without any warlike complications.

With the *Landsgemeinde* of the 27<sup>th</sup> of April in 1684, Cantonal President Weiss had stepped down from his office, in order to relinquish the mace to a Catholic (J. G. Bachmann); however, J. Christoph Elmer was selected as cantonal vice-president “through the impartial lottery”.<sup>7</sup> In 1715, he accepted retirement “by reason of advancing age” by resignation from the board of a “war-council” as well.

Of other associates of the Wyss family who were in service to public affairs, are still to be mentioned:

*Dietrich* Wyss was elected, in 1593, as *Landvogt*<sup>g</sup> to Werdenberg [*Canton St. Gallen*].

*Adrian* W.<sup>8</sup> was elected, in 1624, by the Glarner *Landsgemeinde* as the *Landvogt* of Uznach [*Canton St. Gallen*]; however, contrary to the 1623 cantonal agreement, the Schwyzers did not let him assume the post because, in their opinion, in the Catholic territory of Uznach, only a Catholic was of use as a *Landvogt*. Obviously, the Evangelicals did not want to consent to this curtailment of their rights; however, with the slow progress of the *Tagsatzug*'s negotiations, Adrian Wyss, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his term of office, did not get to keep his promotion to it, but had filled his office by means of a Catholic, as a substitute.

Joh. Heinrich Wyss, son of Pastor J. Rudolf Wyss in Matt, received the first prize in 1676, that is, he was selected for the first prize by my gracious sovereign cantonal citizens, and received, as a result of the lottery, the then important and lucrative position of a cantonal recorder and was permitted to ride repeatedly as “envoy over the mountains” (to cantonal vassal territories lying on the other side of the mountains — in [*Canton*] Ticino — for the auditing of accounts).

Joh. Rudolf Wyss, the Cantonal President Weiss's son, became cantonal treasurer in 1690, and had to ride to [*Canton*] Solothurn in 1692 and 1693, to obtain the pensions from [*French*]

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7 Concerning the 1685 *Landsgemeinde* proceedings, which were probably hardly agreeable for Cantonal President W., to which gave rise to the marriage of his daughter, Katharina, to nobleman Christof Tschudi, see above, pg. 34 [*in “The Elmers” chapter (pg. 23 in the SW translation)*].

g *Landvogt* – an administrative and judicial official of a cantonal government in a vassal territory [SW]

8 In 1622, Captains Adrian and J. Jakob Wyss went to the Reformed Leagues [*Canton Graubünden*] with 2 Glarner companies, to help.

Ambassador Amelot. His son, Joh. Peter, (born in 1698, died in 1783) became federal councillor of the Glarus *Tagwen* in 1723, and he occupied the position for 60 years. On him had Dean Bartholome Weiss played the trick, that he put obstacles in the way of his second marriage.

In the year 1711, the Evangelical *Landsgemeinde* created a permanent “inspection court”, which was selected by the *Landsgemeinde*, in place of the former “*Untergänger*”<sup>h</sup>, which was sanctioned by the council respectively for each legal proceeding. On this newly-constituted court they selected, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Federal Councillor J. Peter Weiss (born in 1663) from Matt, who also occupied this position until 1734. The selected person was a son of J. Rudolf Wyss, the before-mentioned pastor and dean, and also obtained the Matt *Tagwen* right for 160 fl. in 1713 and became the ancestor of the Matt Wysses. That he already represented the Matt *Tagwen* as Federal Councillor before 1713 for a period of years (he was already Federal Councillor in 1700), affirms from it that Matt and Engi at that time formed an election *Tagwen* and Joh. Peter Weiss was a *Tagwen* citizen from Engi, as was his father<sup>i</sup>.

PS. I am also honoring the still-remembered teacher, Jakob Wyss (born in 1848), who died in October 1917, who, in 1871-1910, discharged his teaching duties in Elm with exemplary honesty, but also earned the thankful appreciation of the commune by conscientious performance of his duty in other positions (organist, department director, registry office director, church president).

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h *Untergänger* - a person who had been sworn in by the court, who had settled outstanding disputes by his own authority, and who also set the boundary lines and their markers. [SW]

i *For a differing viewpoint about this, see pg. 57-58 in “The Wysses” chapter of the Martin Baumgartner lectures (pg. 3-4 in the SW translation). [SW]*