

PIONEER PASSES; 92 YEARS OF AGE

End Comes to Oswald Babler, Swiss Colonist and Civil War Veteran

1835—1926

Oswald Babler, aged 92, pioneer Swiss settler, the sole male survivor of that brave little band of Swiss emigrants who more than 80 years ago founded New Glarus, has passed into eternity.

For seven long weeks, Monticello's oldest and most venerable citizen had waged an uneven but courageous battle against death, and for a time it looked as though he might win. But the odds were too great, and at 2:15 Friday morning while he lay asleep, the last male member of the Swiss pioneers yielded, unknowingly, to death's persistent call.

Death, not unexpected, was due to illness from heart trouble. His demise was hastened by old age complications.

The great crowd of people which gathered at the last rites of this highly respected citizen was a splendid testimony of the universal esteem in which he was held. Hundreds of sorrowing admirers taxed the capacity of the New Glarus Swiss Reformed church Sunday afternoon. Many were unable to get within the doors. Burial was in the church cemetery.

Before the services were held in the New Glarus church, brief rites were held at the home in this village. The services were conducted by the Rev. M. N. Berger, pastor of the Evangelical church.

The passing of Mr. Babler has taken from our midst a much beloved citizen whose place in life can never be filled. He was a splendid example of ideal manhood. The hard, bitter times of pioneer days had schooled him in courage and tenacity—two traits which were glowingly reflected in his losing fight against death. But those trying days of the pioneer had at the same time instilled in him a lasting spirit of altruism and he was ever ready to help those in need.

Probably no other aged person in the entire state has received such wide newspaper prominence as did Mr. Babler during his last years. Many were the columns in the state press which were filled with stories concerning the unusual activity and interesting pioneer tales of Monticello's oldest resident, who until this year had made annual hikes to Monroe or New Glarus. How greatly the citizens of Monticello will miss the familiar sight of this admirable old gentleman, with his quick, sprightly step, pecking at the sidewalk with his gold-headed cane as he walked along the streets of the village!

Oswald Babler was born in June, 1835, in Canton of Glarus, Switzerland, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Oswald Babler. At the age of nine, the deceased, with his parents and their four other children, deserted the picturesque scenes of his childhood days to make their future home in America. They were seven of a group of nearly 200 Swiss natives who set sail for America from Havre on March 16, 1845. After two months on the ocean, during which it was feared that at any other time the little craft would be swallowed up or dashed to bits, the emigrants landed in New York, May 6.

On July 2, the party arrived in Baltimore. From there they journeyed by rail to Columbus, Pa., this being the first train ride Mr. Babler had ever experienced. Canal boats were used by the colonists to reach St. Louis where they remained for almost a month, anxiously awaiting news from Nicholas Duerst and Fridolin Streiff, who had ventured north ahead of the main party. Word was finally received that the men had reached Wisconsin and immediately the colonists set out to join their comrades. The Swiss natives went as far as Galena by means of a slow going river boat.

Setting out on foot, they walked to Mineral Point, the location of the government land office, where they were informed that land had been purchased for them 32 miles east of that place. It must have been a peculiarly interesting sight to see the gritty little band of colonists slowly pushing its way to its new home, trudging closely behind wagons heavily laden with provisions.

After countless hardships, the new home of the Swiss emigrants was reached on Aug. 15, 1845. It was decided to call the place New Glarus because of its close resemblance to the hilly country of the native land which they had reluctantly bid goodby only a few months before.

There were no nearby towns in those days and it was from lumber hauled from Galena, Ill., that the first building was constructed in the new settlement. All of the colonists were housed under the one roof, the children sleeping in the attic. Family affairs were "threshed out" in the lower room which was only about 14×20 feet in size.

Two years after the founding of New Glarus, Mr. Babler's father became ill and died. He was buried Christmas day, 1847. From that time on, his mother resided with his sister, Mrs. John Streiff, until she was claimed by death in 1873.

Three terms of schooling comprised the sole education which Mr. Babler received. In 1856 he followed the trade of cabinet maker in Madison for a few months. His dexterous workmanship as a carver is revealed in the many skillfully worked photograph frames, jewel boxes, cabinets and other pieces of furniture which he made.

Mr. Babler was united in marriage to Sarah Kundert, a daughter of Mrs. Elizabeth Streiff, who had arrived in New Glarus from Switzerland in 1855. Until 1872, when Mr. Babler went to Chicago to work at the carpenter trade, they resided on a farm. Returning to New Glarus three years later, the deceased disposed of the farm to his son, Victor A. Babler. The couple resided there until 1911, however, when they moved to Monticello. For 12 years Mr. Babler officiated as town assessor at New Glarus. He was treasurer for two years and in 1910 took the census.

Mr. Babler saw service along the line of the Nashville-Decatur road during the Civil war. He was a corporal in Co. I, 46th Wisconsin Volunteers and was the last surviving member of the company.

Besides the widow, nine children survive. They are H. L. Babler, Otto Babler, and Mrs. Dick Freitag, of this village; Mrs. Henry Kundert, Sr., and Mrs. Matt Zentner, Monroe; Mrs. John Holdrich, Brooklyn; Mrs. John Zweifel, Victor Babler, and Edward Babler, New Glarus. Twenty-three grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren also survive.