

The History of the Glarus Families, especially 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, 1920

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

VIII. The Rhyners

[pg. 88 - 92]

The tax roll of the Matt church, which now has already been mentioned repeatedly, reports beneath the date of "*Dritt-Herbst*"¹: "Item: Fridli Reiner obligation - one measure of butter and one pound of barley located in the field of Heinrich Stotter (?) opposite the house, opposite house in the lower valley [*i.e., below Elm*]."

In the same lower valley in which, according to this, Fridli Reiner lived in 1525, and from there had to pay a measure of butter and a pound of barley yearly to the Matt church, are found, 70 years later, as we were already told on an earlier occasion (see the chapter on the Elmers) Bat and Fridli, the Rinerigs, who, with the brothers, Cantonal President Heinrich and Banneret Hans Elmer, came before the council because of a goat hunting dispute. Undoubtedly, the Fridli Reiner of 1525 is the ancestor of the Rinerigs of 1596, one of whom had also inherited his baptismal name of Fridli from him, and thereby is the ancestor of the numerous Rhyners of today.

That he is paying tribute to the Matt church from his lower valley, could be seen as proof that the Rhyners were already resident in the lower valley at the time, since Elm also still had the use of the parish in Matt, that is, before Elm possessed its own church. However, this conclusion would be premature. The taxes under discussion were of a real nature, that is, they adhered to the piece of land in question and were passed on directly to the new owner by purchase or inheritance. Even if Fridli Reiner had first come to Elm in 1520, or even in 1524, and had acquired his landed property in the lower valley, the tax of a pound of barley and a measure of butter to the Matt church would be passed on to him with the inheritance of the landed property. In other words, it may be that the Reiners already lived in the lower valley before the building of a church in Elm, but as proof that it was so, their tax might not matter at all.

What strikes me in the quoted notice is the spelling of "Reiner" in place of "Rhyner". With other family names we have the opposite, that an earlier "i" or "y" was converted to "ei" in the 18th or 19th century, that the earlier "Pfyfer" was written "Pfeifer", the "Schnider" was called "Schneider", the "Giger", "Geiger" and the "Figi", "Feigi" (as per Melchior Schuler). Here, on the contrary, we have the opposite before us: in place of the "Rhyner" of today, Fridli "Reiner". That also makes me uncertain in my explanation of the name. Up to now I accepted that the Rhyners had formerly had their residence near the *Rhein* [*river*] and had received their name "Riner" or "Rhyner" for this reason. Our Fridli Reiner makes me suspicious of this explanation because, in Fridli Reiner's time, we did not spell our most beautiful Swiss river "*Rhein*" or "*Rein*", but "*Ryn*" or "*Rhin*" (see Valentin Tschudi, Egidius Tschudi, Fründ, Tschachtlan, etc.). On the other hand, for example, Valentin Tschudi, Fridli Reiner's contem-

porary, tells, in his Reformation Chronicles, on page 97, of the Glarus [*Calvinist*] religious image destroyers: "They were throwing all church decorations (of the castle chapel) into the Linth [*river*], down the '*Rein*'; therefore, '*Rein*' = slope. That suggests the conjecture that the Reiners² were named as such for that reason, they lived on a '*Rein*' or "slope". The name "Reiner" would therefore be synonymous with the family names of Büeler or Büler, which are found in many localities, and also with the Ambühls. That then later on, a "Riner" had at first come from "Reiner" (as in 1596) doesn't surprise us, since its dialect most frequently changed the "ei" into "i". But that then an "h" was later inserted after the "R" certainly occurred with regard to the spelling of "*Rhein*".

Today the Rhyners are the most numerous family in Elm³. According to the 1876 cantonal tax rolls, of the 265 head-tax payers of the Elm commune, 57 of them, therefore more than 21%, belonged to the Rhyner family. In second place in Elm, with 51 head-taxpayers, followed the Elmers, who surpassed them in regard to the taxable property (244,000 Fr. as against the 139,000 Fr. with which the Rhyners were charged). In 1915, however, the Rhyners are found with 55 of the 220 *Tagwen*^a rights of the Elm commune, therefore a full fourth, in their hands.

A much more modest place falls to them in the Glarner household, since, in 1876, with their 67 head-taxpayers (57 in Elm and 10 as settlers in other communes), they only rose to 37th place in regard to the number of head-taxpayers, and in regard to the taxable property only just to 64th place, while the Elmers, with 126 head-taxpayers, were found in 17th place. Also, by the way, in Elm the first place did not come to the Rhyners all the time; at the time of Bat (Beat) and Fridli Rhyner, that is, at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries, they only stood in 5th place, in that, of the 234 people to be baptized in the years 1595-1617, only 13⁴ of them belonged to the Rhyner family, and the Hausers, Zentners, Elmers and, finally, the Bäublers (59) surpassed them in number. So we will not be too much more surprised that no Rhyners are found among the cantonal leaders, cantonal administrative governors and honorary ministers that the Glarner *Landsgemeinde*^b appointed. Also, among the 18 federal councillors that Trümpy presents in his Chronicles as representatives of the Elm commune for the time of 1700-1774, are found, to be sure, 9 Elmers, also 4 Zentners and 3 Freitags, but no Rhyners. Since, in this world, as for the nations so also for the individual families, flow and ebb, ascent and descent follow themselves, they will thereupon have to console themselves that their stature is not found in the past, but in the future.

Although we find no Rhyners mentioned in the decisions that the *Landsgemeinde* made, nonetheless, in the 18th century, a Rhyner from Elm had put in a claim for himself to the Protestant *Landsgemeinde* in that manner, even repeatedly, albeit unsuccessfully. This old Paulus Rhyner from Elm, who, as his deceased spouse's replacement, intended to marry her niece, the daughter of her brother's deceased wife, Kath. Elmer. According to the law at that time, that was a marriage "to a forbidden degree". For this reason, he came to the Protestant *Landsgemeinde* of 23 April 1777 with the petition to give him dispensation for this. With the same objective, old Church Steward Jost Vögeli from Linthal had also presented a request. The *Landsgemeinde*, however, postponed the settlement of both requests to a forthcoming *Landsgemeinde*. But this "forthcoming *Landsgemeinde*" also did not have time to dispose of the two requests, although they took two days, Sunday the 16th, and Monday the 17th of July, 1777, but concluded that "my gracious lords and the authorities shall draw up a decision in the course of a year, and in it, consequently, shall outline the older laws on which degrees of not only friendship, but also the so-called blood and marriage relationship and the relationship established by the common descent from an ancestor, one compared with the other, might get married or not, and then present such a decision to a future *Landsgemeinde* for ratification or

optional modification, according to which judgment the marriages imagined above shall also, in due course, be rejected or granted". If, for an already old man, a further wait period of three-quarters of a year was already rather difficult, Paulus Rhyner thus nevertheless did not let himself be discouraged, but appeared at the next *Landesgemeinde* of 29 April 1778 anew with his petition. In the course of a year, an honors commission of worldly and spiritual standing had worked out an opinion, according to which not only marriage between first cousins remains prohibited, and also such in the 2nd and 3rd degree, but also, in regard to the so-called blood and marriage relationship and the relationship established by the common descent from an ancestor, marriages between relationships by marriage, and likewise the marriage with the deceased marriage partner's own brother's or sister's children, were forbidden. On the basis of this principled determination, the marriage requests of old Paulus Rheyner and Jost Vögeli were also "regarded as prohibited, therefore, these 2 old men were turned down".

An advertisement that we encounter in the "mandate" of 24 May 1829, and that originates from a Rhyner, might well still be of interest for the story of Elm. The aforesaid reads: "Caspar Rihner, communal postman of Elm, makes known herewith to an esteemed audience that he will deliver the Wichler-Bath water, the most famous of its time, throughout the entire summer, in bottles or in barrels - very fresh. Whoever also wishes to have this water, please register in Glarus with Cantonal Recorder Schmid, and in Schwanden with Judge and Innkeeper Tschudi."

There are two things that may be interesting in this document: first of all, that Caspar Rhyner designated himself as "communal postman of Elm". As we learned in the history of the Sernf valley service situation, even the 1835 postal regulations provided for a 4 times weekly mail connection only as far as Matt. On the other hand, we learn from the above that, nevertheless, as early as 1829, a communal postman from Elm also attended to the connection of Elm with Matt and the remaining world. Whether that was done only on his own initiative or in some way on behalf of the commune, I do not know. When even today the Elm post office is with the Rhyner family, so was it already with a Rhyner 90 years ago. But our fantasies may well imagine what a difference is found in the service of today's Elm post office and the communal postman of 1829; we lack reliable data. On the other hand, perhaps you know whether the Elm postal service of 1829-1919 remained continuously with the Rhyners or whether another family also stepped in besides in the meantime.

As the description of the communal postman gives evidence of an institution which moved on an ascending course since that time, then the remaining contents of the quoted publication give evidence of a vanished splendor. At first the Wichlen Bath was not only a Glarner, but a Swiss, celebrity. The Swiss chronicler, Joh. Stumpf (1548, "Description of General Swiss Confederation Chronicle-Worthy Achievements", vol. II, pg. 132) deemed it worthy of an illustration of its own, and mentioned in addition: "On the top of this mountain range, on an Alp, an extremely cold water (regarded more as a snow- than a spring-water) accumulates in a cavity, and in it the people are bathing and immersing themselves for all sorts of bodily afflictions. For some it is said to have given light to their clouded eyes once more. Some old people, who have lost their hearing, have gone into it and have recovered that again; of those I myself have known some well. Since one may not bathe long before chilliness, he must dunk himself completely down into it three times, so he has enough. Some damage has become better after this bath, also some has become worse." Also, the Glarner chronicler, Joh. Heinrich Tschudi (1714) sings his praise of it (pg. 9): "The most superior and that which is sought and used most of all, is the Wichler-Bath - This bath is said to possess its power mainly from salt, vitriol and sulfur. It is most useful for the healing of old, unclean and awkward injuries, as,

after that, many and varied patients afflicted with injuries of that kind were successfully cured in this bath, by means of God's grace. Many used it also for other objectionable bodily afflictions, not without good returns." Not without reason, Casp. Rhyner also speaks of the formerly "most famous" Wichler-Bath water; it outshone the Stachel mountain, that a Professor Ofenbrügger, in his travel essays, was permitted to designate the jewel of Glarnerland, that certainly today is also a splendor gone to ruin.

¹ November. (*Erst-Herbst* = September; *Ander-Herbst* = October; *Dritt-Herbst* = November)

² In addition, in the 17th century (1669) Pastor Tschudi wrote: Fridli Reiner and Dorothea Hämmerli. In other cantons the family name of Reiner is still found today (and elsewhere even Rainer).

³ Also, in the former Glarner jurisdiction of Werdenberg [*Canton St. Gallen*] are found very large numbers of Rhyners, as descendants of an Oswald Rhyner from Elm, who was born in 1768 and died in 1848. He arrived in the above-mentioned cantonal jurisdiction as an attendant of Cantonal Administrative Governor Heinrich Freitag, who will be mentioned later [*in the chapter on the Freitags*], and remained there with his family even after Freitag's flight and the end of the Glarner dominion. He became property administrator of Schloss and later communal overseer of Buchs. "His 5 sons became citizens of Buchs and are the ancestors of a large number of relatives." (J. K.-M).

^a An ancient Glarner term, from at least the 6th 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]

⁴ Of these, 9 of them were the children of Judge and Sexton Bat Rhyner in the lower valley (he died in 1639). From him, according to Mr. Kubli-Müller's information, stem all of today's Rhyners from Elm, most of them from his son Ulrich (who was born on 29 September 1600 and died on 10 December 1682 — the father of 6 sons).

^b 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]