

BARBARA MARUGG CAME TO GRUETLI, TENNESSEE

by Dola Schild Tylor

In the late 1930s, my grandmother, Barbara MARUGG SCHILD, and I decided that I would write down some of her memories of immigrating from Switzerland to the Swiss Colony being settled in Grundy County, Tennessee. At this time, Grandma was living down on Collins River (postoffice: McMinnville) with her son, Rudolph, and his wife, Virginia, but the rest of her family, and her heart, were in Gruetli, and she spent every summer there. So, when we had the time, we sat in the old wooden swing, on the screened-in front porch, and Grandma did her reminiscing, in no certain order, while I scribbled as fast as I could on the old lined tablet. Now its 1999, more than 60 years later, and I am 84, when I decide to straighten out my messy notes and write them so others can read what Grandma told me, that summer. (I regret very much that I didn't continue this project during Grandma's other summer visits on the mountain.)

Grandma was born 1 October 1857, in Klosters, Canton Graubunden, Switzerland, the oldest child of Christian and Anna (BROSI) MARUGG. Her siblings were: Rudolph, born 27 Jun 1859; Martin, born 14 Apr 1861; George, born 19 Feb 1864; Christina, born 21 Apr 1867. The family came to America on the ship Silesia, from the port of Hamburg, Germany through Havre, France, to New York, arriving in New York on 27 Feb 1873. Grandma said it took 11 days from Havre to New York. Then they came by boat to Norfolk, Virginia. It was in late afternoon when they arrived in Norfolk and could find nothing to eat. In this eating place the regular meal time was over and all the food had been eaten. On a table Mother found a plate with some cracker crumbs and she also saw something that looked like thin jelly. She poured it over the crumbs and fed this to the children. Later she learned that this thin jelly was called molasses. This was their first taste of molasses.

Coming from Cowan to Tracy City, they sat on tow sacks in a rail car. A man with a wagon met them in Tracy and brought them to old man Bauer's place in Gruetli. It was a log house, one room of which was the general store and a smaller room where they sold shoes. Their only piece of furniture was a stove. Their meal on that first night in Gruetli was potatoes, black coffee, soup and cornbread. The potatoes were an old-fashioned red, oblong potato which takes a long time to cook. They didn't understand the kinds of wood growing in that area so the kind they gathered for the fire would not burn. Later they learned that it was green chestnut. At midnight, the potatoes were not yet cooked, but they could not wait any longer, so ate them half cooked. The soup was made from vegetables they bought from a farmer. The bread was made from corn meal and water.

Their first house in Gruetli was an abandoned, old, one-room building that had once been a store. They had no furniture except the stove so had to sleep on the floor. They sewed together potato sacks and filled them with leaves raked in the forest. The father and each child had his own "bed" and each was responsible for making and keeping up his own bed. The oldest girl (Barbara) fixed Father's bed. The first night he said his bed was too thin. The next day they carried his potato sack into the forest and filled it as full as they could

with leaves. That night, Father complained that his bed was too hard and lumpy in places. The children laughed and told him he would have to shake it up to suit himself!

Their Mother was a cripple and in rather delicate health and so for her was made a special bed. A large tree was cut in the forest and from it was made 4 stumps. The rest of the tree was cut into planks. This was done with a cross-cut saw. The 4 stumps were placed in one corner of the room in the formation of bed posts. Two planks were placed as bed rails and other planks placed crosswise as we now have slats on our beds. On this was placed Mother's mattress, a potato sack of leaves and what wild hay they could find. Then a blanket over that. Blankets were the only bed coverings they brought from Switzerland. Some of the neighbors wondered that Father would sleep on the floor like this...Father who in Switzerland had been president of the city!

Their chairs were made next, in the same way as the bed, except they were just plain stumps, one for each person. For a while, they ate off the top of a trunk, but it was so inconvenient because they couldn't put the feet under it. Then Father made a table using the same idea as Mother's bed: four stumps covered with planks. Some of the planks were rounded on the edges and their tin cups of coffee sometimes spilled. They could not afford such waste so Father whittled off the tops of the planks until they were smooth.

Naming the Colony. The men of the community committee decided to name the Colony after a place in Switzerland called Ruetli, but thought it would sound better to start the word with the letter G, so it became Gruetli. Ruetli was the place where William TELL shot the apple from his son's head.

One day in the summer of 1874, the whole family was going to Altamont to shop. Mother was riding and she and Father were quite a ways ahead of the children. Several miles from home the children met several men on horses. They were dressed in long, black coats with short capes over the shoulders and lots of shining buttons on the front. They wore queer looking hats which caused the children to giggle and say gleefully to each other, "Here comes Napoleon! Here comes Napoleon!" They spoke in German, of course. The men frowned and looked mean at the children and one asked gruffly, several times, what they had said. The children pretended they could not understand, so the men just said some short words that sounded mean and kicked their horses and rode on.

A few days later, four of these men rode into Gruetli just after dark. Two of them stayed a little way behind some bushes and the other two rode up to the house next to Bauer's Store and asked for old man Bauers. Agnes, the girl to whom they were speaking, said Mr. Bauers lived in the next house and she would go call him. As Mr. Bauers passed Agnes, he quickly handed her a small box. As she slipped it under the bed, she heard a pistol shot. She ran into the store and stumbled over the body of Mr. Bauers sprawled out on the floor. One of the men jumped over the counter and pulled out the money drawer and found only 15¢. This made him very angry and he threw open many drawers and plundered all over the store but he found no more money. They had killed a man for 15¢!

One of the killers was a wild bandit who had once shot a mail carrier from his horse to get what money he had in the mail pouch.

In Switzerland, the children started to school when they were 7 going on 8 years old. The younger children had only little reading books and the larger children studied subjects that would be used in everyday living, such as arithmetic, reading, geography, spelling and writing. They had 8 months school terms.

In 1875, two years after settling in Gruelti, they were able to send the children to Altamont to school. They boarded with a family named LOGAN. (I can find no LOGAN name in the 1870 or 1880 censuses of Grundy County, but in Altamont, 1870, there are Eli LOGUE, 62, shoe and boot maker, and his wife, Nancy, 57. In 1880, Nancy is a widow.) Grandma being the oldest child, was to stay home and help her mother. But Christina, the youngest, would not stay away from home unless her sister, Barbara, would go with her. So that is how Grandma for her American schooling--which was for 2 months. Just long enough to learn the ABCs in English. While they were in school, she had to mend and care for the children's clothing. Besides that, each week, she brought a basket full of darning and patching from home. When all her work was done, there was little time for school or playing or getting acquainted with the neighborhood children. Then, so often, it happened that the children laughed and made fun of her efforts to converse with them in her broken English. So she became shy and would not try to talk or play with them. In two months, her Mother became ill and her Father took her home to care for Mother. Here at home, Swiss was spoken entirely and almost so it was in the whole community. So Grandma had no chance to learn much English.

The school in Altamont had rough stump and plank benches and 2 tables made the same way. There were about 24 pupils. They had a reader book, a blue speller book, and a slate and slate pencil for writing. Sometimes in class they would write on the schoolroom floor with soft chalk. They had no blackboards in those days. The teacher could not speak or understand German, so brother Martin was the interpreter.

The younger children in the family played with the neighboring children and soon picked up many English words and expressions.

Grandma delivered milk for Mrs. Logan to a house about one-fourth mile away. Along the road Grandma saw such beautiful wild flowers. Nothing like those in Switzerland but just as beautiful. She put down the milk by the roadside and picked flowers and more flowers until her arms were so full they could hold no more. Standing there in the warmth of the setting sun, she realized that she was happy here, very happy in spite of the hard work and hard times they were having.

While in school at Altamont, brother Martin told Grandma that she should cut the hair of her brother George. He was 10 years old and his hair was in what we now call a long bob--it hung to his shoulders. Martin gave her the scissors and showed her the motion to cut the hair upwards, making the top hair shorter. She did as she was told and soon had George's head looking like an abandoned rat's nest. She didn't know what to do. The more she trimmed, the worse it looked and it looked horrible! Poor George! Mrs. Logan told her about a Mr. Wes BROWN who was a good barber, so she took George and the scissors and

went in search of Mr. Brown. She found him at the village store and taking George to him, she made a cutting motion with the scissors, around George's head, and said "Please" in her best English. Mr. Brown laughed and said "What?" and Grandma repeated "Please" and added "Do for me." And he did. He made George's hair look fairly well.

Mother wanted a big house like they had in Switzerland, so in 1878, Father built a saw mill on the creek near the house. He made a dam across the creek and used the water to power the mills, a saw mill upstairs and a grist mill downstairs. They had one big stone for corn and another one for rye. Father went to Louisville, Kentucky, to get the stone for the rye. They cut trees from their own land and sawed the lumber for their house. Under the house, Father dug a small cellar in which to keep milk and what vegetables they could grow. This was much less expensive way of preserving. Apples, pears, peaches, huckleberries and beans were dried. They did not know anything about canning food until someone in America showed them how to do that. They made jellies and figured it out so they have jelly for every day in the year. When they had a visitor, they had to stretch each person's share for the next few days. They used a 45-gallon barrell of molasses, during a year. Dried blackberries were very popular and did not last long. Huckleberries were a delicacy, used in muffins or eaten just plain. Sometimes there was meat just for Father and not for the children. Killed one hog and had enough lard for one year.

About late 1875-76, the community built a church house and then it was used for a school house. It was a log building with a ceiling and weather boarding to make it good and warm. The community donated 2 lots of land, 600 acres, for the benefit of the school. Later another 400 acres was given for the upkeep and improvements of the school. This building was still in use as the school until 1934 when it burned. Grundy County had never built a school house for the Colony but they had been given the building and 1,000 acres of land. They were given, also, a surplus fund, money, that belonged to the school. With all that, the County did not want to put up a school building for the Colony. School was taught in a private home and then in a garage while the people pleaded with the County for a schoolhouse. After some time, they built the Colony another schoolhouse. Grandma's son, Rudolph, taught the first county-paid school in Gruetli.

In Switzerland, they grew flax and hemp and made it into thread and cloth. Flax was used for dresses and hemp for aprons and leaf sheets. Flax was used also for underwear but it was rough. Sometimes they could swap their flax and hemp for cotton. In America, the Sunday dress for girls was calico in summer and linsey in winter. The dresses came just below the knees. Many colors. Low neck blouses. Button shoes. Black shoes had red buttons and brown shoes had gold buttons. Christina had the job to clean and shine the buttons, every Friday. She had a little box of polish in the shoe box. They had brought all their old shoes from Switzerland and then bought some in Nashville but those were too narrow and made corns on the toes. Tight shoes made Grandma faint in the field, one day. Sometimes girls fainted at dances because of the tight corsets.

One time, Lizzie ran away from home because her Mother wanted to pull her tooth. (This was Elisabeth SCHILD, born in Brienz, Switzerland, 27 Jun 1864, daughter of Peter, Sr. and Margarita RUEF SCHILD, who later became Grandma's sister-in-law and wife of her brother Martin.) Lizzie was 10 years old when she decided to leave home. She was wearing one hat and had another hat and shoes and clothes wrapped in a red cloth. When she told her Mother that she was going to leave, her Mother said "Go ahead". Lizzie went about a mile away to a neighbor's house and said she was tired so she laid down under a shade tree and went to sleep. This day, her father and brother just happened to be helping this neighbor with farming chores and so they brought Lizzie back home.

Doing the laundry: they soaked the clothes for one day in barrel-sized tubs made from hickory staves held together with metal bands. If the tubs got dry, they fell apart, so had to keep them damp at all times. Washing was done once in 4 weeks. In Switzerland, washing is done only twice a year. There they had a maid who helped with the housework, cared for the children, cooked and helped with the field work.

Grandma and her girl friend went to a dance at the Stocker house. John Schild and his friend were there too and they were all broken out. (Pimples or rash, maybe?) Grandma said to her girl friend "There are two of the ugliest boys!" Later she and her girl friend married those two boys! At this dance, John danced with Grandma and then walked her home. She was then 23. When John came to her home to see her, the Mother asked "What's up?" and Grandma replied "The right one comes!" For her wedding Grandma wore a black dress with white lace trimmings, always used for weddings. She got the dress from New York. Had a short white veil and white flowers. There was beer, music and a party after the wedding. They had gone to Tracy City to get the beer. Made an arbor in the yard, covered with brush and trimmed with flowers. Here was served the drinks and food. A large wreath on the front of the arbor had WELCOME on it. They served doughnuts and cake made from rye flour. She added to the description of her wedding outfit: black shoes and stockings and oodles of petticoats, and a false back, and hoop in the skirt. The wedding was 29 November 1884. John SCHILD was born 6 July 1858, Brienz, Switzerland, the son of Peter, Sr. and Margarita RUEF SCHILD. After their wedding, they stayed a few days with her parents and then moved to Nashville, on 14 Dec 1884. John had gone to Nashville when he was 14 years old and worked in a butcher shop. A few months after moving to Nashville, Grandma got malaria fever and was very sick. They moved back to Gruetli and she was sick until after John, Jr. was born (March 1886).

At one time, the people in Gruetli started a hat making business. They grew rye for making rye bread and decided to make hats from the rye straw. The straw was cut at a certain stage and was pressed flat. Then the straws were soaking in water until they were soft, maybe overnight, and then they were plaited. They used 3 straws in the plait if making a small plait and 5 straws if making an average, wide plait. Grandma first said that while the braids were yet soft, they were sewn together on a hat form and then dried. Then she changed her mind and said they hung the plaits up to get good and dry and then put them around the hat form and sewed them together. The hats were entirely hand-made and well put together and so lasted so well that the hat business did not flourish in the second year. People began to undersell

each other and soon the hat business was not profitable and so it stopped. During the first year, they sold hats in adjoining towns and even sent some to Louisville, Kentucky.

In thinking about schooling in Switzerland, Grandma said that in May, the snow would begin to melt. You could rake the snow off the ground and find pretty flowers blooming. About the second day after the snow had melted, the teacher would declare a holiday and take the children up into the mountains to see the flowers and pretty rocks. The flowers grew very thick and blanketed the mountain sides. They were mostly crocus and daisies of rainbow colors. They were already blooming under the snow and so were in full bloom when the snow melted. When they were on the mountain in the midst of all the flowers, the teacher had the children line up in formation and sing songs. The teacher or one of the older pupils would play a trumpet. The music and singing could be heard in the village below and would resound throughout the valley.

Grandma remembered that when her Father was a young man, his father gave him a filly to care for but, instead, he sold the young horse and then his father "thrash" him to make him give up the money he got for the filly. Over this, her Father ran away from home, over St. Moritz, into Italy. There he found a job as a school teacher but he himself knew not Italian so he had to learn the language as he taught his pupils.

In 1888, Father, Mother, George and Christina went back to Switzerland on a visit. They were to stay a year or two and then return but never did. Brother George came back but not the others. He returned in 1891. Sister Christina married in Klosters, Henry NETT, 12 July 1892. Father and Mother were glad they were there to help Christina when her first baby was born 1 Jun 1893. He was named Simon. Her second child was born 17 Aug 1894 and Christina, the mother, died 3 October 1894. On 4 Jan 1895, the second child, Anna, died. About 1½ years later, Heinrich or Henry NETT died. That whole family except Simon was gone and he was about 4 years old. Father died in Klosters, 8 Dec 1904, and Mother on 2 March 1907. (She has a tombstone in Tracy City Cemetery. Did she return to the US?)

The children of John and Barbara MARUGG SCHILD were: (1) John Martin, 26 Mar 1886/2 Jun 1954, married Sally HARGIS, 1 Dec 1913; (2) Christian Peter, 1 Aug 1887/22 Nov 1934, married Ethel Bell TATE, 20 Apr 1914; (3) George Willie, 8 Jun 1889/7 Oct 1948, married Martha Matilda ADAMS, 1 Sep 1913; (4) Anna Margaret, 4 Aug 1891/5 Nov 1974, married Leander BOULDIN, 14 Dec 1914; (5) Rudolph Henry, 22 Nov 1893/4 Apr 1948, married Virginia CAIN; (6) Elsie Christina, 19 Aug 1895/4 Jun 1916. Buried in the Swiss Colony Cemetery are parents and all children except Rudolph, who is buried in Philadelphia Church Cemetery.

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