

Swiss Cheeseland—No. 4

Bilten District Pioneers Cleared Heavy Timberland

Mention of Bilten settlement after 100 years is apt to sound legendary to most present day readers. Those familiar with the history of the region and the institution of dairying when the country was mostly timber, however, do not hesitate to credit Bilten as the stimulus of early day cheesemaking.

Adam Blumer, 1737 14th street, this city, was born in Bilten settlement. His grandfather, also Adam Blumer, came from the old town of Bilten with his wife and five children. The grandfather was reared on a dairy farm where he was familiar with cows and cheesemaking.

Arriving in Green county he entered 240 acres of land from the government in Washington township, west of Monticello. The year following he bought five cows and was making butter and the farm variety of cheese from skim milk.

The land was heavily timbered. He bought two oxen teams and started clearing and building with logs. Ten to 20 acres of land had to be broken every year in addition to the farming duties. The son, Adam Blumer, later head of the Monroe brewery, the youngest of the family, was five years old when he came here. The father died in 1855.

Adam Blumer, the grandson now retired and living here, became master brewer. The Blumers moved to Monroe in 1891. In recalling his farm experience, he said as a boy he had the care of three spans of horses and milked 12 cows morning and evening when his father had 101 cows on the Blumer farm.

The Blumer farm was the dividing point between the north and south valley of the Little Sugar river west of Monticello. Because the settlers were from Bilten, it became known as "Bilten Thaele" (Bilten valley). They were Glarners, among them the families of Frick Becker, Henry Hefty, three Bontley brothers, Andrew, Casper and John; Adam Blumer, three Blum brothers, Werner, Fred and Jacob; John Schuler, Gottlieb Wittwer, Jacob Schlittler, Alex. Tschabold, Henry Aebly.

The west end of the Little Sugar valley in Washington township was known as Berner Thaele, the settlers coming from Canton Bern. Among them were Jacob Zimmerman and sons, Jacob and John, Christ Loertscher, Christ Theiler, Jacob Theiler and Jacob Weissmiller.

Werner Blum, grandfather of the Monroe family, came in 1848 and took up land at the extreme west edge. This area was known



CENTER OF WORSHIP—This photo of Washington Reformed church, early house of worship for the Bilten settlement Swiss and others, might have been taken at the turn of the century. The sturdy building looks much the same today as it did when dedicated in 1876. The structure is believed to have been started in 1871 but the church records show the dedication was 73 years ago. (Times staff photo).

as Fox Hollow because it appeared to be the favorite haunt of fox. Plum in his later years became one of the founders of the present Washington Reformed church. His son, the late Werner, was the first American-born limburger maker in the township.

During early building, the newcomers managed to hold together as a group insofar as possible, for the old ties of their fatherland held firm. Settlers who came later had to spread out into new country, but identity as to canton and community of origin was fairly established by their countrymen here.

Bilten descendants have been proud of their connection with the

original expedition because of the success attained in their venture after failure of wheat growing. Family names and dates of establishment in new world homes were enlightening and meant much to their countrymen. Thomas Hefly, Rudolph Blum, Casper Becker, J. Jacob Zwickey, all came in 1847; Emmanuel Weissmiller and Anton Baumgartner in 1848; Adam Blumer 1849, David Benkert 1851, Martin Zumbrunnen 1852.

Americans had settled in central Washington after Bilten settlement was established. Recorded dates of arrivals include Linus Hare, Eldridge Cheesebro, Hames Confer 1854; John Naughton, Silas Moore, 1856.

Glarners and Berners settling in the northern section of Washington township had the Little Sugar river fork separating the two valleys.

The Freitag, Stauffacher and Voegeli farms to the east on the main Monticello and New Glarus highway are in the big valley sloping to the east where the Little Sugar tributary in Mt. Pleasant takes its course eastward to main Sugar river and eventually to Rock river.

The Glarners and Berners got along harmoniously. They finally joined in bringing Swiss cheese to Green county and the old divisions have disappeared in the promotion of common interest in the industry.