

“He was a soldier and died just before the close of the Civil War”

By Ken Kraemer

So says the epitaph on a grave marker in the old St. Luke Cemetery just south of Plain, Sauk County, Wisconsin. The grave is actually that of Elizabeth Degen Reaser, but the marker also seeks to remember her husband Ulrich Reaser.



Photo by Gary Haas

Inscription on grave marker:

Elizabeth Reaser¹
Born 1832 – Died 1917
Wife of
Eulrick Reaser
He was a soldier and died
just before the close of the Civil War
May their souls rest in peace
REASER

OBITUARY—RIESER.
One of the oldest pioneers, Mrs. Elizabeth Rieser, died at her home Tuesday morning, after an illness of three weeks at the age of 85 years. She was born in Switzerland and came to this country about 65 years ago. Her husband was a soldier in the civil war and died in the service.
About twenty years ago she joined the Catholic church, of which she has been a member ever since. She was buried Thursday morning in St. Luke's cemetery, Rev. Geo. Pesch officiating.
She leaves to mourn her loss three daughters and one son, John Rieser, Emily and Elizabeth Rieser of Spring Green and Mrs. Christina Haas of Plain, and many friends.

Weekly Home News
Feb. 18, 1917

Anyone seeing this marker has to be moved by the fact that so little was known about a man who gave his life fighting for the Union side in the American Civil War – not even his birth, death or where he died are indicated. Consider the shock that his widow, Elizabeth, must have felt upon getting word of his death. She was suddenly left alone with four young children.

So, who was Ulrich Reaser? Ulrich was born in Switzerland about 1831 and married Elizabeth Degen on 24 November 1850 in Bubendorf, Baselland, Switzerland (Switzerland Marriages, 1532-1910).² They immigrated to America aboard the ship “William Jarvis” which departed from Antwerp, Belgium, and arrived in New York City on July 18, 1854. The ship manifest which follows shows that Ulrich was age 29 and Elizabeth age 28.³ Although Ulrich and Elizabeth were from Switzerland, the manifest listed them both as “belonging” to Germany and intending to live in the United States.⁴

Ship Manifest for the ship “William Jarvis”- July 18, 1854

Headers: Names, Occupation, Age, The country to which they severally belong, The Country they intend to inhabit
326: **Ulrich Rieser**, farmer, age 29, belongs to Germany, intends to inhabit the United States.
327: **Elisab.** “, age 22, belongs to Germany, intends to inhabit the United States.

¹ The last name was originally Rieser, and sometimes misspelled as Reiser. Later it came to be spelled as Reaser (per Eliz. baptism record; marriage record, obituary).

² "Schweiz Heiraten, 1532-1910" database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FVNZ-CNG>), Ulrich Rieser and Elisabeth Degen married 24 Nov 1850; citing Bubendorf, Baselland, Switzerland.

³ Elizabeth Degen was born 18 Dec 1831 in Bubendorf, Baselland, Switzerland to Jakob and Anna Degen. "Schweiz Taufen, 1491-1940," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FV8L-HZG>)

⁴ Both the marriage record and the 1860 U.S. Census support the notion Ulrich and Elizabeth were both from Switzerland. Subsequent censuses say they were from Switzerland, from Germany and Waldmünchen, Bavaria. We give the greatest credence to the marriage record and the self-report in the 1860 census.

DISTRICT OF NEW-YORK--PORT OF NEW-YORK.

I, *Mr. Ballard*, do solemnly, sincerely, and truly *swear* that the following List or Manifest of Passengers, subscribed with my name, and now delivered by me to the Collector of the Customs for the District of New-York, contains, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a just and true account of all the Passengers received on board the *Ship Mr. Jarvis* whereof I am Master, from *Switzerland* So help me God. *Wm. Ballard*

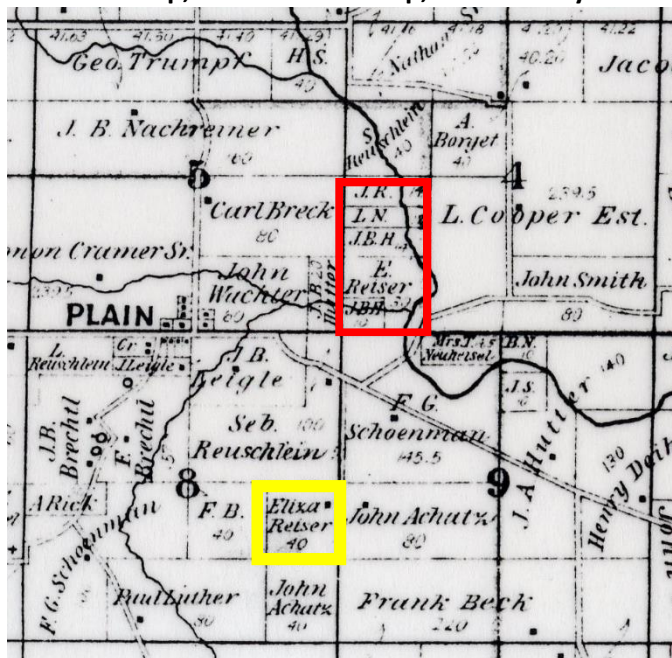
Sworn to this *13th* day of *July* 1854 at *New York* in the presence of *Wm. Ballard* Collector of Customs

LIST or MANIFEST of all the PASSENGERS taken on board the *Ship Mr. Jarvis* whereof *Wm. Ballard* is Master, from *Switzerland* burthen *ton.*

| CL ^o | NAMES | AGE Years & Months. | SEX | OCCUPATION | The country to which they severally belong. | The Country in which they intend to become inhabitants. | Died on the voyage. |
|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---|---|---------------------|
| 201 | <i>Ernst Lucher</i> | <i>Farmer</i> | <i>34</i> | <i>Swissman</i> | <i>United States</i> | | |
| 220 | <i>Ulrich Reiser</i> | <i>Farmer</i> | <i>30</i> | <i>Swissman</i> | <i>United States</i> | | |
| 224 | <i>Elizabeth</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Swissman</i> | <i>United States</i> | | |
| 225 | <i>Emilie</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Swissman</i> | <i>United States</i> | | |

Source Citation: Year: 1854; Arrival: New York, New York; Microfilm Serial: M237, 1820-1897; Microfilm Roll: Roll 142; Line: 36; List Number: 885. Source Information: Ancestry.com. New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957

1893 Plat Map, Franklin Township, Sauk County



We do not know where the Reasers lived between 1854 and 1860, but they were living in Franklin Township, Sauk County, Wisconsin, as of the 1860 census. On June 1, 1860, "John Ulrich Riser" received a Land Patent for 40 acres in Section 8, Town 4 Range East from the Land Office in La Cross, Wisconsin. See yellow box on the map. Sometime before 1865, they acquired a second parcel of land just east of Plain – this was 80 acres in Section 4, located just north of the present-day Cedar Grove cheese factory (see red box on map).

Ulrich and Elizabeth were listed as born in Switzerland in the 1860 U.S. Census. It is likely they were Swiss-German as the ship manifest and later census records show them as German and/or German speaking. The census also indicates that White Mound was their

postal address. Plain did not have a post office until 1861. Based on their reported age in the 1860 U.S. Census (following), Ulrich would have been born in 1831 and Elizabeth in 1832. This later date is consistent with the birth records, ship record and the date on Elizabeth's grave marker.

1860 U.S. Census, Town of Franklin, Sauk County, Wisconsin

The 1860 census shows Ulrich and Elizabeth had twin daughters.

Transcription:

Ulrich Rieser, age 30, male, farmer, 200 value of real estate, 100 value of personal estate, born Switzerland

Elizabeth, age 26, female, born Switzerland

Elizabeth, age 4, female, born Wisconsin

Emilie, age 4, female, born Wisconsin

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SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in Franklin in the County of Sauk State
of Wisconsin enumerated by me, on the 31st day of August 1860. J. P. Dill Ass't Marshal.
Post Office White Mountain

| 1 | 2 | 3 | Description. | | | 7 | VALUE OF ESTATE OWNED. | | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|----|------|------|---------------|----|---|--------|------------------------|-----|-------------|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 4 | 5 | 6 | | 8 | 9 | | | | | |
| 37 | 1207 | 1188 | Ulrich Reiser | 20 | m | Farmer | 200 | 100 | Sauk County | | | | |
| 38 | | | Elizabeth | 26 | f | | | | " | | | | |
| 39 | | | Elizabeth | 4 | f | | | | Wisconsin | | | | |
| 40 | | | Caroline | 4 | f | | | | | | | | |

Before Ulrich would go off to the Civil War, they had a daughter Christina and a son John R. (who died just before his 4th birthday).

"RIESER: John R. d. May 8, 1867 - 3y 11 m - Son of U. & E." (Source: Myrtle E. Cushing, *Cemetery Inscriptions of Sauk County, Wisconsin*, volume 6, page 35). Burial was at Pleasant Hill Protestant Cemetery, west of Plain on the right side of County B when traveling west in Franklin Township, Sauk County, Wisconsin.

Like others from Franklin Township,⁵ Ulrich was placed on a draft list for the Civil War in 1863. Surprisingly, given his age (32) and father of four young children, he enlisted to serve in the Civil War on 19 October 1864 in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He may have been motivated by an enlistment bonus.

Draft List, June 30, 1863, Third Congressional District, Wisconsin

Consolidated List of All Persons of Class I, subject to do military duty in the Third Congressional District consisting of the counties of Richland, Iowa, La Fayette, Green, Crawford, Grant and Sauk, State of Wisconsin, enumerated during the month of June 1863, under direction of Capt. John G. Clark, provost Marshal.

Headers: residence, name, age, white or colored, occupation, marital status, place of birth

Franklin Township

Reushlin [Reuschlein], Joseph, 25, white, farmer, married, Germany

Reushlin [Reuschlein], Sebastian, 23, white, farmer, single, Germany

Rick [Riek], Anthony, 31, white, farmer, married, Wittertemberg [Wuerttemberg, Germany]

Reaser, Ulric, 36, white, farmer, married, Germany

Records from the Wisconsin Veterans Museum document Ulrich's war history. He enlisted in the 1st Wisconsin Light Artillery for one year on October 10, 1864, at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He was described as 40 years old, married, brown eyes, black hair, dark skinned, 5' 7" tall, and a farmer.

The regimental muster roll ("M") for December of 1864 shows Ulrich was a new recruit who joined the unit at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on 22 Dec 1864. His unit made many long marches, participated in many minor movements, and made frequent contact with the enemy. In the muster and bi-monthly muster rolls ("M & B.M.") for June of 1865, Reaser was listed as absent, because he was sick in the General Hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It does not indicate the exact date he went to the hospital. It is likely that Ulrich was hospitalized in the Asylum for the Deaf and Blind in Baton Rouge, LA. During the Union occupation of Baton Rouge, the Asylum housed a general hospital while Union troops often camped about its open grounds. Ulrich died on July 2, 1865. According to the Regimental History, volume 20, page 285, he was buried under the name Ulrich Reiser in section 45 grave 325 in a cemetery at Jefferson

⁵ See the June 2015 issue of the OFTHS Newsletter for a story about John and Michael Weishan who also enlisted in the Civil War.

Barracks in Lemay, St. Louis County, Missouri. Jefferson Barracks was a Union military post with a hospital that served both sides during the Civil War. Either he died in the hospital at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and was taken nearly 650 miles north to the St. Louis area to be buried, or he rejoined the regiment after his stay in the hospital and died somewhere between Baton Rouge and St. Louis. The entry is unclear on these points. He was mustered out of the army with the battery on July 18, 1865. It is likely that they officially mustered him out on July 18, even though he had actually died a couple of weeks earlier. Elizabeth filed for a widow's war pension and received payments until she died in 1917.

Widow pension payment card

"United States Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907-1933," database with images, *FamilySearch*

There was no will, so Elizabeth filed for probate on 9 October 1865. She was 33 years old and had three girls and a boy: Amilia (Emily) and Elizabeth ages 7; Christina age 3, John age 2 (who would die in May 1867). The property inventory prepared by an appraiser for the court shows that the total value of the estate

was \$537.42. It was comprised of the real property and household property. Most of the value was in two pieces of property.

| Description | Size | Valuation |
|--|----------|-----------|
| 1. East 1/2 of the SW 1/4 of Section 4, town 9 north of Range 4 east | 40 acres | \$125 |
| 2. NE 1/4 of SE 1/4 of Section 8, town 9, north of Range 4 east | 80 acres | \$200 |

The Reasers lived at property #1 as original homesteaders. Property #2 was located about 2 miles away, just northwest of the Sylvester Schweiss Cheese factory (now Cedar Grove Cheese Factory) shown on the plat map above in red. At the time of probate, the court ordered an inventory and appraisal of household property as follows. They did not have much, but then few people did in those days.

| Number | Description | Value |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Household furniture | | |
| 1 | Bedstead and bedding | \$6.00 |
| 1 | Bedstead | 2.50 |
| 1 | Cooking stove and furniture | 10.00 |
| 1 | Clock | 1.00 |
| 1 | Table | 1.00 |
| 2 | Chairs | 1.00 |
| 2 | Chests | 2.50 |
| | Tin ware and crockery | 1.00 |
| | TOTAL | \$25.00 |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

| Number | Description | Value |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Other property selected by the widow | | |
| 1 | Yoke work oxen | \$60.00 |
| 1 | Black cow 11 years old | 9.00 |
| 1 | Red cow 7 years old | 10.00 |
| 3 | Pigs | 6.00 |
| 4 | Hogs | 40.00 |
| 1 | Truck wagon | 5.00 |
| 30 | Bushel ears corn | 6.00 |
| 10 | Bushels oats | 1.00 |
| 16 | Bushels wheat | 12.00 |
| 1 | Sled | 2.00 |
| 1 | Old plough | 1.00 |
| 12 | Harrow teeth | 1.92 |
| 1 | Log chain | 1.50 |
| 1 | Pork barrel and wash tub | 1.00 |
| 1 | Chopping ax | 2.00 |
| | TOTAL | \$162.42 |

Elizabeth later lived with her son John T. Reaser (born 1867) and his wife Magdalena “Lena” Winkler on the family’s 40 acre farm. As of the 1905 Wisconsin census, Elizabeth lived in Spring Green with her two unmarried twin daughters. She died at the age of 85 on February 13, 1917, and was buried in the old St. Luke Cemetery in Plain, which is where this story originated – with her grave marker. It is very likely that Elizabeth and her children never knew any the details of Ulrich’s service and death. Her children, or whomever created the grave marker, certainly did not know Ulrich’s birth and death date.

Editor’s note: The December 2017 issue of the OFTHS newsletter featured the story about John Reaser and Lena Winkler by Ken Kraemer: *“Lena Reaser: A Sweet Old Moonshiner Who Loved Children”*

If you are interested in more about Ulrich’s life and military service, Ken Kraemer plans to write a more detailed account of the lives of Ulrich Reaser and Elizabeth Degen and their family.

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