



# St. Michael Historian

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## Beebe Island Encampment

J.E. Beebe, a native of Vermont, took a claim in section 29 on the south shore of the lake that was afterward named for him. He moved onto his claim in December of 1856 and in September of 1857; he cut his foot and bled to death. In August of 1856 Amos Denny took a claim on the east shore of Lake Beebe. W. O. Eldred took a claim near the Beebe pre-emption. The same year the Elliott family: John Sr., Andrew, William and James Dixon came from Ireland and settled on the north side of Lake Beebe.

In August, 1862, the news reached Rockford of the Indian outbreak and massacre of the Lake Shetek settlers. The whole countryside became panic stricken, the people, not knowing what to do or where to go for safety. The word soon became prevalent that the island in Lake Beebe offered the greatest security and protection. The island is about four acres which, at that time, was heavily timbered. There were quite a number of settlers then living around the lake, nearly all having boats. These boats were soon pressed into service and by nightfall the island was quite a popular piece of ground, upward of 150 souls having taken refuge there, with nothing but the stars for a roof. The people had taken scarcely anything from their homes except the clothes they wore. It was mutually agreed that no fires were to be made. In the morning the men took turns and ventured back to the mainland for food, also procuring quilts and blankets, making things more comfortable for the second night.

After three days and three nights on the island, word came that the Indians were checked in their march toward civilization, and that the danger had passed. So the people returned to their homes. On July 3, 1863, the settlers of North Rockford were again thrown into a panic on account of the reported massacre of the Dustin family on the Waverly and Rockford road.

Again they sought refuge on the island in Lake Beebe. This time the settlers took the precaution to provide themselves with axes and cross-cut saws, with which they felled trees and cut them into logs to erect a fort. Of course there were no oxen nor any beasts of burden taken onto the island, so the men had to haul, carry, or roll the logs to the site of the fort. In due time the fort was erected and named "Fort Steel," after Thomas Steel, the oldest man on the island. They spent about two weeks on the island that time.

After gathering on the island they soon formed a regular military organization, with Thomas Walker, as commander, and Thomas Steel and Amos Denney as second officers. Disciplinary rules and regulations were rigidly enforced. At night each man, in his turn was assigned to so many hours of picket duty. These pickets were placed in regularly designated positions on the shore of the island behind logs or brush, so that they could not be seen from the mainland.

It was Thomas Walker's duty to make the rounds several times during the night to see that the pickets were on duty and not asleep. On one occasion he found two of the pickets, a father and his son, had deserted their posts and were asleep in their tent. The next day the two men were court-martialed and sentenced to be shot. However, this part of the proceedings was never carried out. The officers postponing it under one pretext and another until they disbanded. Nevertheless the incident had a very salutary effect on the discipline of all the men from that day until they disbanded.

One of the rules was that no guns were to be shot off either on or off the island except at Indians. But on one occasion a settler, George Avery, living on the south shore, who had moved to Rockford during the summer, came up to look after his crop. Finding a drove of hogs in his field; he began shooting to scare the hogs. He succeeded in scaring the hogs, sure enough, but he scared the occupants of the island more than the hogs. For the people were sure that the shooting was either by Indians or at Indians, and were every minute expecting to see Indians making for the island. To make matters worse it was at a time of day when every man who could get a "leave of absence" was away on the mainland for supplies or looking after his affairs at home. So an attack at that time, when forces were so weakened by absentees, would have made fighting hard for the few left to hold the fort. It was a great comfort to the women and children when the men began to return to the island and tell the cause of the shooting.

A few days after this scare a detail of men was sent to Rockford for supplies and news. They were told of Little Crow's death, and the settlers were assured that there was no further danger. Then began a regular stampede of the people to return to their homes once more.

By John B. Walker—History of Wright County



### Meetings for 2010

- August 2
- October 4
- November 1

Newsletter Created  
By Genny Kieley



# Mayta Ernst Tells her Life Story

By Genny Kieley

Mayta Frank was born on Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1920 at home, on the corner farm on the north side of Beebe Lake. Her parents were Pauline [Schuman] and Gustave Frank. A neighbor who was a midwife delivered her. There were 3 girls and 3 boys in the family. She went to the one room school on the corner of #35 and Hamlin. Mabel Shawe was her teacher. Later she had Florence Snodgrass.

It was rough during the winter because there was no bus service at that time. She had trouble with Algebra and the teacher said, "Just forget it!" Some of her classmates joined the choir; so she thought she would try it. The choir director said, "Mayta, I don't think you better sing this time." It's hard to believe she struggled and almost failed home Ec. She knew how to cook but sewing in her freshman year was hard. Her mother could knit and crochet; but didn't know how to sew. She got worn out from ripping crooked stitches. Ruffles were especially difficult. Finally she learned how to do it and she liked the teacher. She would make aprons and pillow cases out of flour sacks. Later she made her own clothes.

Attending Buffalo High School was hard because she worked the first two years for her room and board. She lived with a family that owned a restaurant; doing housework and washing dishes. She wanted so badly to finish high school.

During the 30s there was a long dry spell in the area. She remembers in 1934 walking home from school for two miles with sand blowing in her face. The soil was heavy but it still blew. At the age of 10 she would have to sweep the floor every day. In her junior year she moved in with a different family that was nicer and she didn't have to work so hard.

As a sophomore she rented a room from a single older lady that was very nice. She had to eat lunches at school. Her family would eat corn flakes for breakfast and supper. To this day she can't stand corn flakes. Bus service came in 1935 in her junior and senior year but there were no tarred roads and she had to walk 2 miles and was determined not to miss school. Bus service went only on the tarred roads.

Once the bus driver stopped and he said, "Oh, your face is frozen." Then he put snow on it. Sometimes a student would miss the bus because the bus driver didn't see you. She would get reacquainted with her neighbors talking in the field. Her dad would always be working in the field when she came home from school. She graduated from Buffalo High School in 1938.

She and Arnold Ernst went to the same schools even though he was five years older. Arnold didn't go to high school because his dad wanted him to help with the farm. He would meet her at the end of the driveway on the way home from school every day. That's how they fell in love.



Although she didn't have a date for the prom, she went anyway with a group of friends. At the end of the night she said to the girls, "Here's my ride!" She got a surprise when she opened the door and it was not her brother, but Arnold. It turned out they drove the same kind of car. She says she will never forget one of their first dates when he took her to a dance hall at Lake Pulaski. They both loved to dance and went to many dances. She remembers once going to a dance at Medina Ballroom where Lawrence Welk played.

Mayta married Arnold at Pelican Lake Lutheran Church—1 mile north of their farm in 1940. His folks were Herman and Emma Ernst and they came from Wisconsin. He was born in 1915 in a small room on their farm on Beebe Lake. Later two sections of the house were added on. The land deed was signed in 1855 by Abraham Lincoln. The Ernst family purchased the land from John Buol. Arnold's brothers and sisters were Selma, Theodore, August, and Ortwin. All have since passed away.

Arnold and Mayta were married on November 27<sup>th</sup>, the same year as the Armistice Day Blizzard. It was 20 below on their wedding day when they decided not to date any more. They helped her sister out by staying at her house after they were married.

They both liked farming. She always said, "I'm not going to work until the boys are in school." Eventually they hired someone to handle the hay bales. She worked out of the house a lot. She started out doing 'day work' --cleaning a home in the Wayzata area and she really liked it. The ladies car pooled and took turns driving. With five ladies in the car it bothered her. She always worried "What if we were in an accident?" Later she worked at Buffalo nursing home called Retirement Center of Wright County in the kitchen area. Later this became Parkview Care Center. Shortly after that she decided to try and become a nurse's-aid

and worked there for 15 years. It gave her a good feeling and they appreciated the help. She quit in the 1990s.



# Making Bears & Attending Gardens

Most of her married life she sewed shirts and pants for the kids, tailor made corduroy suits, and made her own dresses. She has been making stuffed bears for the last 14 years. She started out with chenille bears and her son Gerald said, "Why don't you make bears out of fur coats?" She started buying coats from a man she met in Monticello at a flea market. He delivered them to her. Many people know Mayta from her mink stuffed bears that she makes for people. Sometimes people want to use a mink coat that has special meaning to them because it belonged to one of their loved ones.

## Dry Years

Mayta remembers that during the dry years on Beebe Lake you could walk across the bay from the Ernst farm to the Point. That whole bay belonged to Mutterer's Farm at one time, which is now Hansack Avenue. The street was originally called Shorewood Garden Road. 1934 was the driest. Only the water in the bay stayed in. The WPA came to dig a trench so water would flow to get the fish out; so they wouldn't die. The lake had gotten pretty low in the 1980s but never as dry as the 30s. The island lady Laura Mortermore was born and raised on the island. She passed away in the 1990s. She is Al Gulden's aunt. The Gulden family built a year round house and three cabins for relatives on the island. The rearing pond is where they used to pump water in from the lake and put fingerlings in there. They have since discontinued this process.

Mayta is very sweet and friendly. She has lived on the lake almost all of her life; still makes cookies and home-made bread almost every day and continues to make her adorable mink and old fashioned chenille bears.



Old farm house built in 1905 with 3 rooms; floors are still original. The barn & granary are still standing. Arnold and Mayta & family took over the farm in 1959.



Left: Mayta bends over to pull a few weeds. Below are 3 of her specialty bears, mink and chenille. You can buy them at the Buffalo Nickel & A Wreath of Franklin.



## Beebe Lake Park

The park on the south side of Beebe Lake was established in 1978. Hennepin County actually purchased the land and then leased it to Wright County. Before 1978 the public access most used was on the north side of the lake. People who wanted to swim at the lake usually went to the farm of Mayta and Arnold Ernst, which was also on the north side of the lake. Visitors dropped fifty cents in the pay box by the fence gate and that gave them the right to park in the pasture and wade in the water along with the cows. Also, for a dollar or two a day, Arnold would rent boats for fishing. The new park on the south side had beach sand that was free of "cow pies," a swimming area mostly free of weeds, and restrooms. The facilities were nicer than Ernst's pasture, but they lacked the countrified charm. [from Bob Zahler's book—Faith, Family & Farming]

# St. Michael Historical Society

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## *A Farmer's Wife*

A farmer's wife can be found sitting on a tractor, cooking up a favorite dish, turning down salesmen, setting out plants, looking for lost items and waiting on her husband. Beauty inspires her, children interrupt her, mud perturbs her, machinery puzzles her, phone calls delay her, but it takes her husband to stop her.

When he calls, "Come help me..." put the cows in, get the tractor started, bale the hay or fetch a part, a farmer's wife knows it's her duty to leave dishes in the sink, wash on the line, and the kitchen floor half-scrubbed, and go to his aid.

But it is also her privilege to work side-by-side with her man... to share in his labor and love, dreams, and disappointments, problems and plans, and pride in a job well done. She usually knows where he is and what he's doing, and tries to guess when he'll be in for dinner.

A farmer's wife needs to take time for herself, to watch a sunset, walk in the woods, read a good book, laugh with her children, whisper a prayer. And in spite of the trials that come in a farm family... sickness and injury, severe storms and crop failures, debt and discouragement... she is thankful, too, for the many blessing of life on a farm... the variety of changing seasons, the closeness of her family, the sight of a wobbly newborn calf, the helpfulness of a neighbor, the dazzling whiteness of snow, the smell of new mown hay.

A farmer's wife loves growing things... a growing garden that means beauty at her doorstep, growing crops that mean a continuation of her way of life and growing children that mean a continuation of life itself. And when it's been "one of those days," and she has run all over the back 40 helping her husband get the cattle out of the corn, the farmer's wife feels it's worth it all when he says, "Thanks, honey... I don't know what I'd do without you."



Editor's note: Thanks to Irmina Holthaus for sending along this item for publication in the Drummer.

*This poem was given to Mayta by a friend in 1986.*

### **Membership dues for 2011 are being accepted now**

We are now accepting membership renewals for the year 2011, please send your name and address along with a check for \$10, to renew family or individual memberships, to:

Sheldon Barthel  
401 Butternut Ln., S.E.  
St. Michael, Mn. 55376

If unsure of your status, call Sheldon at 763-497-4205. Also, we are always interested in donated artifacts related to St. Michael's history. If anyone has memories of St. Michael, please contact us at the above number or go to our website and click on the **contact** button. Our website is located at [www.stmhistsoc.org](http://www.stmhistsoc.org)