

St. Michael Historian

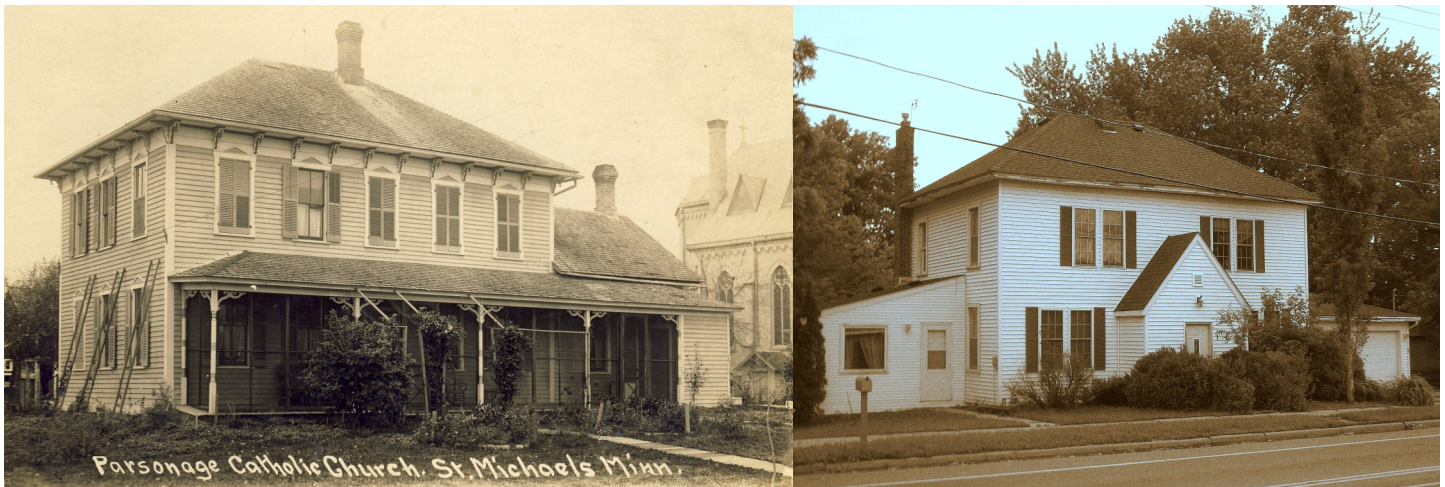
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St. Michael's Domestic Architecture *by Bob Zahler*

Renovate, or tear down and rebuild? That question is not new to the people of St. Michael. While some may criticize St. Michael's lack of architecturally significant homes compared to other towns of a similar age, this is largely due to the fact that St. Michael's founders were very practical people and not inclined to spend lavishly on their homes. On the other hand, many of the houses that were built when the Village of St. Michael first started to grow, mostly in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, are still around today. Only recently because of the redevelopment of the downtown area have some of the older homes been demolished. So why don't the older homes around town look more "stylish"? Again, it's mostly because the people of St. Michael have always been very practical. As the years went by, home owners were less interested in preserving a particular look or style and more interested in keeping the homes in good, usable condition. Unfortunately, we don't have many identified photos of older St. Michael homes from when they were newer; but presented here are a few that we do have alongside photos of their present appearance and some history to go with them.



The parsonage (or rectory), depicted in the photo at left was built in 1881 by St. Michael's Catholic congregation at a cost of \$1,279. At the time it was nicest house in the village; but to be honest, there weren't many homes in the village at that time to compare it to since most of the congregation were farmers. Regardless, this was considered a very nice home. The brackets under the eaves and the pediments above the windows are indicative of the Italianate style which was fashionable in 1881. This photo was taken in 1910, four years before it was moved from its original location at the northwest corner of Main and Central to its present location about two blocks south at 109 South Main. The congregation had decided to build a new rectory in 1913. During construction of the new rectory, the two buildings sat side by side, the new one built to the right of the old one. After the pastor moved into the new house in 1914, the parish sold the old one for \$300 to Henry Kasper who relocated the house to its present site. Since then the house has had many owners and has been greatly remodeled as is clear in the second photo. The upper story was also rented as an apartment for many years. At one time there was a single-stall garage on the left which was remodeled into the present lean-to room after which a two-stall garage was added to the right side of the house.



Frank Theodore Aydt was a St. Michael founder and one of the first businessmen of the village setting up a general merchandise store in 1866. In 1877 he built what is now the Ditto's Bar building. His large family lived in the upper story of the store building. F.T.'s wife Mary (Igel) died in August 1891 and nine months later he married his childhood sweetheart Mary Robertson who was from a prominent St. Paul family (her uncle was August Louis Larpenteur). In 1893 F.T. sold the store to his daughter Ida and son-in-law Andrew Brixius who took over the store and the living quarters. F.T., Mary and their baby daughter Veronica then moved north of the immediate village to a tasteful farmhouse built in a vernacular form of the Eastlake or Stick style (*above left*). The decorative Eastlake style was a specific type within the broader Victorian style denoted by the use of spindles to decorate the peaks of gables and along the tops of porches. In the photo at left can be seen Frank, Mary and Veronica standing on the south lawn about 1905. After F.T. Aydt died here in 1920 and Mary in 1935, the house and farm became the property of Dominic and Agnes Welter. In 1936 Dominic and his brother Leo co-founded Welters Implement. Over the next fifty years a large, successful farm developed around the house, but most of the farmland has now been sold and the out buildings razed. The old house, which sets just north of the Peterson Funeral Chapel, is currently owned by LeRoy Welter, son of Dominic and Agnes. Although the house has lost most of its Eastlake elements, it is still a very classy home (*above right*).



Another house that was moved from its original location was built by immigrant Anton Ritterath. Anton Ritterath was a veteran of the Prussian military. After his discharge in 1864 he came to the United States. His first wife died in childbirth after which he came to St. Michael where he purchased a half acre lot in 1882 at the present site of the St. Michael Community Education Center (*see photo, bottom left, page 2*). Presumably he built his house sometime around 1889 when he married Theckla Gerber. The house was built in one of the most typical styles for this region at that time: a vernacular version of Greek revival, which is indicated by the returning eaves on the gable ends suggesting Greek pediments. Anton, who was one of the village blacksmiths, died suddenly in 1900. After Theckla died the house went to son Alois Ritterath who donated the house and lot to the Church of St. Michael in 1952. The church needed the property so that it could build a Catholic high school. That school is now the Community Ed Building. The parish moved the house across the street and west to the corner of Central Avenue West and 1st Street SW (*photo, bottom right, page 2*). For several years the parish rented the house to one of the lay teachers at the high school. It went back to private ownership in the late 1960s. While the house retains its basic design, the more classic look of the house changed when the more sensible, wide hardboard siding replaced the original narrow, cedar clapboard siding.

Do you have a photo of a St. Michael house from long ago? If so, we're interested in getting a copy. We now have our own scanner at our office in the St. Michael City Center so we can scan your photo while you wait and hand your original right back to you. Contact the historical society by going to our website stmhistsoc.org and go to the "contact" page to leave us a message.

Who Are These People?

One of our board members came across this photograph (*below*) taken at the old public school in St. Michael. We need your help identifying who the people in this picture are, and, if possible, what year it may have been taken. If you have any information to share, please call our number on page 4 and leave a message on our answering machine, or call Bob at 763-843-3176, or Sheldon at 763-497-4205.



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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.stmhistsoc.org

Meetings held on the second Monday of the month at the St. Michael City Hall in the library meeting room.

This newsletter is published quarterly for the benefit of the members of the Saint Michael Historical Society. Reprints of this or any other newsletter by the Society are not permitted without the express written consent of the Saint Michael Historical Society.

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Bob Zahler, author of **Faith, Family, and Farming, a History of St. Michael, Minnesota**, added, "The photo might be from about 1912, as I think the boy next to the teacher is Henry Becker (born 1898), and the 3rd boy in the door (from the left) is Erwin Zahler (born 1897). These were all 7th and 8th grade boys (12-14 year-olds) at the public, or "free school", as they called it then. The teacher might be either Henry Shadeg or Bernard Torberg. Torberg was the teacher for sure in 1914, but Shadeg was before him and I'm not sure when the switch came."

Patty Fisher, daughter of Larry Schulte, donated the following article, which was published in a local newspaper in 1952. Back in those days, the main highway to the Twin Cities, on the west side of the Mississippi, was State Highway 152, which followed the route now occupied by County 18 from Monticello, Main Street to Central Avenue (now a one-way headed west), then following Territorial Road (Hennepin County 116) through Hassan and Fletcher.

St. Michael Group Seeks Refuge in Hassan Store During Snowstorm

"The snowstorm Tuesday, Feb. 19, enabled quite a few from St. Michael to get acquainted in Hassan, where they were forced to seek refuge at the Hassan store. Allen Nott, proprietor of the store, kept them well fed, warm and happy. They took turns sleeping on the floor. Among them were: Henry Schulte, Howard Eicher, Mr. and Mrs. Roger Bloms, Alberta Zachman, Bernice, Larry and Corintha Schulte, Annella Berning, Donna Mae Zachman, Florence Dehmer, Lloyd and Bill Steffens, August Eutener, James Gutzwiller and Lee Anselment.

Upcoming Events

St. Michael Daze & Nights Festival - Friday, August 12, Saturday, August 13th and Sunday, August 14th. The Historical Society will have a booth at the business expo on Saturday morning in the Town Center area. Also, we'll have a unit in the grand parade on Saturday morning.

Next regular monthly meeting— Monday, September 12th, 7:00 PM

Website Update

Check out our website at: stmhistsoc.org to see some of the updates. You'll notice one of our tabs has been renamed "Store". We now have items available for purchase through our web store. Some of the items that are now available are the **Historic Note Card** sets, Bob Zahler's book, **Faith, Family, & Farming, a History of St. Michael, Minnesota**, and The Blazers new album CD, **The Blazers: Reminisce, Live in Concert at the Historic Church of St. Michael**. This is a local band that has performed at the Wright County Fair and will also be performing at the Minnesota State Fair this year.