St. Michael Historical Society — Est. 2005

That time of year! Membership dues are due!

Once again we ask all members to send in their dues payment for next year at this time. Help us save on postage and at the same time hold our annual dues at $10 per year. The following have already paid their dues through next year. If you are not on this list, we are looking forward to hearing from you promptly.

Members who are paid up through 2012 are: Ken & Kathy Barthel, Stephen & DeeAnne Barthel, Judith Becker, Norman Berning, Dave & Teresa Carlson, Katey Caspers, Ray & Kate Daleiden, Tom & Judy Dehmer, Elmer & Karol Eichelberg, Clarence & Mary Ann Eull, Barbara Fissette, Barbara Goth, Jim & Cindy Haller, Kendall Hemish, Rev. Maurus Jaeb, Richard & Margery Lenneman, Charlotte Lowery, Jim Ouellette, Agnes Solarz, Richard Swanson, Harry Welter, LeRoy Welter, Donald & Sylvia Wurst, Alvin & Barbara Zachman, and Donald & Clara Zachman. Thank you for your continued support!

To send in your dues at this time, send to either of the addresses listed below. If you have a change in address, or any other information, please submit that information to us also at the time you send in your dues.

St. Michael Historical Society ; 11800 Town Center Drive; St. Michael, MN 55376 ………….or………...

Sheldon Barthel; 401 Butternut Lane, SE; St. Michael, MN 55376

The Vetsch Pioneer Families of Saint Michael:

JACOB VETSCH AND ELISABETH CORDES,   **JOSEPH VETSCH AND JOSEPHA IGEL**

Jacob and Elisabeth Vetsch, Photo courtesy of Bob Zahler

The Vetsch family originated in Niederlauterbach, a town in the northeast corner of France closet to the Rhine River, which creates the eastern border with Germany. This area, known as Alsace (or Elsass), is now referred to as *Bas Rhin* (lower Rhine).
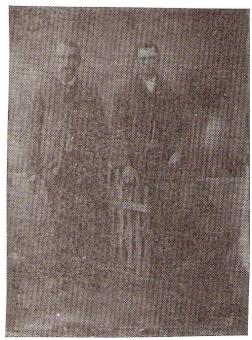
George Balthasar Vetsch (sometimes spelled Fetsch), born on 21 April 1802, and **Maria Eva Illig** (or *Alliez* in French), born on 2 July 1801, were married in the Catholic church in their native village on 6 March 1823. Their families had lived in the vicinity for at least 150 years. George's father, **Jacques**, had been a mason. George Balthasar was a customs house officer in France. A year to the day after their marriage, George Balthasar and Maria Eva Vetsch gave birth to their first son, **Jacob** (or *Jacques* in the French records). They had at least four more children in France.

Margaret (Marguerite) was born on 20 July 1829 in Altenstatt, **Jean Michael** (later known as Francis Michael) was born on 27 September 1831 in Soultz-sous-Forêts. Then they moved to Cleebourg, where **Joseph** was born on 9 June 1834. At the time of the 1836 census, they resided in Guntershoffen, and another child, **Marie Eve**, was born there on 11 July 1837.

The family may have sailed on the barque *Citizen* from LeHavre, France, which arrived at New Orleans on 28 December 1838. Of the two passenger lists for this vessel—a manifest and a quarterly abstract—the manifest (National Archives microfilm series M259, roll 17), showed G. P. Fitch, age 36; wife; and six children (not named). No occupation or country of origin was recorded.

The quarterly abstract (National Archives microfilm series M272, roll 2, page 63) listed Mrs. Fitch, age 32; then males G. J. or P. Fitch, age 36; J. Fitch, age 13; and M. or W. Fitch, age 9. All of the passengers on this vessel were shown to be from France. Although the age of Mrs. Fitch is five years off from that of Maria Eva née Illig, the age for G. J. or P. Fitch exactly matches George Balthasar; the age for J. Fitch is only a year off from Jacob's; and the age for M. or W. Fitch is a close match for Margaret (except she wasn't a male) or off by two years for Francis Michael. If this was the Vetsch family, an additional child would have been born after Marie Eve (the baby), then died young. Vetsch, 1839 (National Archives microfilm series T623, roll 798, enumeration district 225, page 5A, line 36).

Also, Joseph's obituary said he came to America with his parents at age five ("Old Pioneer is Laid to Rest—Joseph Vetsch Died Last Week Friday At Age of Four Score Years and One," *Richmond Standard*, Richmond, Minnesota, Friday, 19 March 1915, page 1).

MISSOURI SETTLEMENT

Joseph & Jacob Vetsch,

Photo courtesy of Evelyn Roehl, and Alice Freeze Molitor

By 1840, the Vetsch family had settled and began farming in Cuivre Township, Saint Charles County, Missouri (north of Saint Louis). The United States 1840 census showed the "Yorick Fetch" household with two males ages 5-10 (Francis Michael and Joseph), one male age 15-20 (Jacob), one male age 40-50 (George Balthasar), one female age 10-15 (Margaret), and one female age 30- 40 (Mary Eva) (National Archives microfilm series M704, roll 230, page 29). The baby, Marie Eve, apparently died before this census. Two sons—**George**, born on 28 April 1841, and **Lorenz**, born on 22 May 1844—were baptized at Saint Paul Catholic Church in that township. The family of George Balthasar's brother, Francis Michael (typically just Michael in the records), and wife Anne Marie Weigel, also emigrated to Missouri; they used the spelling "Fetsch" and lived in the city of Saint Charles.

Georg Balthasar Vetsh [sic] declared his intent to become a citizen of the United States and renounced his fidelity to King Louis Philip of France on 17 July 1843, at Saint Charles County Circuit Court. He died on 5 October 1848 at age 46 and was buried in the "Molitor Graveyard" on Koch Road in Cuivre Township, today a small, unkempt cemetery in the woods on land once owned by the Molitor family.

Jacob Vetsch married **Mary Anne Link** at Assumption Catholic Church in nearby O'Fallon, Missouri, on 12 May 1845. They had three children: **Catherine**, born on 23 February 1848, **Jacob Jr.**, born in 1849, and **Frank**, born on 29 January 1853. Mary Anne died after Frank was born.

Jacob Vetsch, widower, then married **Elisabeth Cordes** on 13 February 1855 at Saint Paul Catholic Church. Her full baptismal name was Anna Maria Elisabetha Cordes (or Koers). She was born in Belecke, Westfalen, Prussia, on 26 June 1830, to Franz Anton Cordes and Margaretha Hesse Richter—their eighth and last child, only four of whom lived to adulthood. Franz Anton died on 4 August 1831 at age 48; Margaretha died on 21 November 1847, age 55.

Elisabeth, whose three older brothers stayed in Belecke, was the godmother of two of her nieces and one nephew, the last of whom was born in March 1852. She came to the United States after that, sailing with two other people from Belecke on the *Russell Sturgis* from Bremen to New Orleans, arriving on 5 November 1853, destination Saint Louis. The manifest showed her name as "Elis Cors." (Other Belecke natives who moved to Saint Charles County, Missouri, included the Arens, Cruze, Frey, Heidelman, Löbbecke, Molitor, Schoene, and Stahlschmidt families.)

Margaret Vetsch, Jacob's sister, had married Belecke-born Francis C. Molitor in March 1846, and they had three sons, one of whom died in infancy. Francis C. Molitor died in January 1854, then Margaret married his younger brother, Joannes Casper ("Casper") Molitor, in September 1855 and had four more children.

George Vetsch, Jacob's brother, died in 1857 at age 16. Brother **Francis Michael Vetsch**, who had married Theresa Beckmann in 1854 and with whom he had two children, died of sunstroke in September 1858 at age 27. George and Michael were buried in the Molitor Graveyard by their father. (Michael's son, Francis George, lived in St. Michael, Minnesota, with his family in the 1890s, where four of his children were born. They moved back to Missouri before 1900.)

THE MOVE TO MINNESOTA

Jacob and Elisabeth's family, and brother Joseph Vetsch, moved from Saint Paul, Missouri, to Frankfort Township, Wright County, Minnesota. Jacob and Elisabeth had one daughter while they lived in Missouri: **Mary Theresia**, born on 7 January 1856. Jacob's son, **Jacob Jr.**, died on 12 June 1857 at age 7 and buried the next day at Saint Michael Catholic mission. Jacob and Elisabeth's second child, **Josephine**, was born on 20 October 1857 and baptized at Saint Michael. On 11 May 1858, at a township election, Jacob was chosen to be an overseer of the highways. They had seven more children.

Joseph Vetsch married **Josepha Igel** on 24 January 1859 in Saint Michael. She was born on 20 January 1835 in Herbertingen, Württemberg, a daughter of Sebastian Igel and Anna Braun. (Only five of the fifteen Igel children lived to adulthood; three others also immigrated to Saint Michael: Anna Maria, with whom Josepha sailed on the ship *Belgique* from Antwerp to New York, arriving on 20 June 1857; Theresia; and Johann Nepomuk Igel). Joseph and Josepha Vetsch had ten children.

CIVIL WAR ERA

Family and farm life were disrupted somewhat during the 1860s. When draft notices came for Joseph and Jacob to serve in the Union Army for the War Between the States, their youngest brother, Lorenz, who had come up from Missouri to visit, volunteered to go as a substitute for Joseph. On 30 May 1864, he became a private in Company D, Fourth Regiment Minnesota Infantry. Jacob Vetsch later volunteered and was mustered into the same regiment as Lorenz, but in Company A, at Fort Snelling on 2 September 1864. (One military record described Jacob as 5 feet, 6 inches; dark complexion; black hair; grey eyes.) He and nearly 300 new recruits met up with the rest of the regiment in a camp in eastern Tennessee in mid-September. There they were assigned to guard the railway against the enemy's cavalry, while other troops prepared to march to Atlanta, Georgia.

In early October 1864, the Battle of Allatoona began. Allatoona, about 40 miles north of Atlanta, is where Union General William Tecumseh Sherman had established his depot of supplies. During the battle, a bombshell exploded near Jacob Vetsch, causing deafness in both ears, from which he suffered for the rest of his life. (He later received a disability pension of $22.50 per month.) About two weeks after the Battle of Allatoona, Lorenz Vetsch became ill with fever, then died of peritonitis, an intestinal disease, on 19 or 20 October 1864, at age 20. His body reportedly was buried in eastern Tennessee.

The Fourth Regiment Minnesota Infantry continued with General Sherman on his famous "March to the Sea" through Savannah, Georgia; Columbia, South Carolina; Bentonville, North Carolina; and on up to Richmond, Virginia. The Confederate General, Robert Edward Lee, surrendered on 9 April 1865. Then on 24 May 1865, the Fourth Regiment Minnesota Infantry marched at the head of the column of Sherman's grand army of 65,000 soldiers in the review at Washington, DC. They proceeded to Louisville, Kentucky, where Jacob Vetsch and other Minnesota soldiers were mustered out on 12 June 1865. Other Saint Michael–area soldiers in the Fourth Regiment Minnesota Infantry included Ferdinand Gutzwiller (Co. G), Baptist Marx (Co. A), and Valentin Valerius (Co. I).

Jacob's mother, Mary Eva Vetsch, was very grieved and upset by the death of her youngest child, Lorenz (sometimes Lorenzo or Lawrence on military documents). In 1876, she was granted a survivor's pension of $8 per month, for which had to prove her celibacy and lack of support by other children. After daughter Margaret and Casper Molitor died in October 1867, she had become the sole caretaker of the Molitor children. Grandma Vetsch stayed in Saint Paul, Missouri, until her death on 24 December 1880, at age 78. In her Will, she bequeathed $1 each to her sons Jacob and Joseph, $685 each to grandchildren Josephine and George Vetsch (Francis Michael's children), and $274 to each of her five Molitor grandchildren. Mary Eva Illig Vetsch, Margaret Vetsch Molitor, and Casper Molitor were buried at Saint Paul Catholic Cemetery. (Mary Eva's brother, Joseph Illig, came to that area in the 1860s from Niederlauterbach, France, with a few of his children; he died in 1885 and was buried at Assumption Catholic Cemetery in O'Fallon.)

In the 1870s, Jacob and Joseph Vetsch served as Town Supervisors for Frankfort Township. Jacob was chosen as treasurer in 1873, 1876, and 1877, and was Justice of Peace in 1879. Joseph served as assessor in 1876 and 1877. When a railroad station was built in the township, he supervised the development of a new town site there in 1885, originally called Saint Michael Station, now known as Albertville.

JOSEPH VETSCH DESCENDANTS

Joseph's wife and three of their children died of diphtheria in May 1883. They were buried in the cemetery next to the old Saint Michael church. After they died, Joseph went to Saint Louis, Missouri, and married Mary Frasch on 3 November 1883. They adopted a child, Mary Koch (or Cook), who was born in Minnesota in 1892. In about 1902, they moved to Richmond, Stearns County, Minnesota, and he died there on 12 March 1915 at age 81. His body was buried at Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery. His wife Mary died in Saint Paul, Minnesota, on 12 May 1937, and was buried at Calvary Cemetery.

Joseph's children who lived to adulthood included **Alois** (or Aloysius), born on 23 Nov 1859, married Anna Smith and had eight children; he died in Hennepin County, Minnesota, on 24 July 1941 at age 81. **Theresia**, born on 18 July 1868, married Matthew Weber; they moved to North Dakota. **Joseph Balthasar**, born on 6 January 1870, married Susanna Wheeler; they had six children and moved first to Idaho and then to Portland, Oregon, where he died on 3 July 1957 at age 87. **Franziska**, born in September 1871, became a nun, Sister Delina M., was in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in 1900. **John Ignatius**, born on 5 June 1876, first married Anna Lautenmeyer, with whom he had three children. After she died in 1909, he married Marie or Mary Augusta Wittenhagen, with whom he had five children. They lived in Sherburne County, Minnesota, and he died there on 27 February 1962 at age 85.

JACOB VETSCH DESCENDANTS

Elisabeth Cordes Vetsch died on 12 September 1913 at age 83, and Jacob Vetsch died on 27 December 1914 at age 90. Both died of paralytic stroke and were buried in Saint Michael in the cemetery next to the old church. (Their tombstone erroneously shows Jakob Vetsch with birth year of 1842, instead of 1824.)

Jacob's two adult children from his first marriage were married in Saint Michael but moved out of the area. **Catherine** married John Schumacher and had ten children; she died in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, on 14 June 1909 at age 61. **Frank** married Elizabeth Becker and had nine or ten children; he moved to the Superior, Wisconsin, area, and died there on 2 June 1918 at age 65.

Most of Elisabeth and Jacob's children married and stayed in the Saint Michael/ Albertville area.

Mary Theresia married Conrad Friedrich and had seven children. She died in Saint Michael on 19 October 1935 at age 79. **Josephine** married Ferdinand Gutzwiller and had ten children; she died on 21 May 1937 at age 79.

John Joaquim, born on 23 October 1859, married Pauline Duerr and had seven children; he died on 13 August 1919 at age 59.

Anton Jacob, born on 3 February 1861, married Eva Neiss and had seven children; he died on 8 December 1924 at age 63.

Jacob & Elisabeth Vetsch tombstone, photo courtesy of Evelyn Roehl,

Old St. Michael Catholic Cemetery

Lawrence Michael, born on 29 September 1863, married Maria Barbara Marx and moved first to Golva, North Dakota, then in 1923 to Rimbey, Alberta, Canada. After Barbara died there in 1943, he stayed with a daughter in Watkins, Meeker County, Minnesota, where he died on 4 July 1948 at age 84 (his death certificate is under the name "Morris Vetsch.") They had thirteen children and have numerous descendants in the U.S. and Canada.

John Jacob, born on 22 April 1865, was baptized at Saint Walburga parish; he died a year later.

Mary Elizabeth, born on 16 April 1867, married Peter Frederick Hoeckelmann (a native of O'Fallon, Saint Charles County, Missouri) and had seven children. She died on 1 January 1908 at age 40.

Cecilia, born on 25 May 1869, married Henry Kasper and had seven or eight children; she died in 1900 at age 31.

Bertha Regina, born on 9 December 1871, married Joseph Kasper, brother of Henry, and had ten children; she died on 29 August 1952 at age 80.

About the Author: *Evelyn Roehl, a native Minnesotan and descendant of Jacob and Elisabeth Cordes Vetsch, has been studying her family history since 1992. She started a research service, Kin Hunters, in Seattle in 1995, and provided information on the St. Michael area ancestors from the Trier District of Rhineland, Germany, to Bob Zahler, which he used for his St. Michael history book.*