

St. Michael Historian



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56th Year Reunion for 8th Grade Class of '56

By Sheldon Barthel

Cinco de Mayo doesn't mean much to the average American citizen, but to the 1956 class of St. Michael Parish School it was a celebration date that would be hard to forget.

On Saturday, May 5th, fourteen of the twenty-two members of that class gathered at the American Legion Liberty Restaurant in St. Michael to share stories and memories from those by-gone days. After a noon luncheon of sandwiches and fruit, they visited the Parish School they attended as youth and were given an escorted tour by principal Jenny Haller. Bob Zahler from the St. Michael Historical Society was also on hand, helping to jog the classmates' memories on how things were in St. Michael back in the 50s by providing a slide show using pictures taken from that era. Things got so interesting that before they knew it, three hours had passed away.



L-R, back row: Darlene (Lehn) Hagel, Stan Barthel, Gary Weber, Maryanne (Lenneman) Rutoski, Dorothy (Ronning) Reinking, Teresa (Hagel) Jones, Jerry Dehmer, Dorothy (Dehmer) Solyst, Geri (Zachman) Fiedler, and John Jaeb. L-R, front row: Joanne (Becker) Chouinard, Jean (Babler) Dahlheimer, Betty (Lenneman) Kobienia, and Tom Diem.

Photo Courtesy of Geri Fiedler

Towards the end of their tour, principal Haller treated classmates to an audio message over the school intercom, "Will Stan Barthel please report to the principal's office?" Stan Barthel, one of the organizers of the event, recalled that he was often getting in trouble with his teachers and spent time standing out in the hall as one of his punishments, but, "not once" was he ever called into the principal's office. John Jaeb and present principal Jenny Haller soon changed that notion, much to the delight of the rest of his classmates.



Stan Barthel descending the stairs of the room that used to be the principals office.

When the group visited the auditorium/gymnasium, Tom Diem mounted the stage and began reciting lines of a play he recalled doing while attending the parish school. Along with Stan, organizers of the event were John Jaeb, Tom Diem, Joanne (Becker) Chouinard, and Darlene (Lehn) Hagel.

After the tour, the group returned to the Liberty Restaurant for a final sharing of memories and dinner.



Tom Diem reciting lines he learned at the Parish School. Could it have been Shakespeare?

Above photos courtesy of Geri Fiedler

Frankfort Soldiers in the Civil and Dakota Wars

Part One: the Famous First Minnesota Regiment

By Bob Zahler

On April 12, 1861 Confederate forces under Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard fired on the Union garrison of Fort Sumter, thus beginning the American Civil War. Minnesota had been a state for just three years and the town of St. Michael, as an organized community, did not yet exist. There was, however, the town (or township) of Frankfort, which had legally existed since 1858 and contained a population of sturdy and determined settlers who were still in the early stages of carving out modest farms scattered throughout the Big Woods. Most of the settlers of Frankfort were immigrants. Germans dominated the western and southern parts and those living in the eastern part toward Dayton were largely Irish and French-Canadian. Despite being immigrants, many of them had been in the United States from ten to twenty years prior to the outbreak of the war. Several had moved to Minnesota from their first places of settlement in southern Illinois, Missouri and Ohio and were certainly well aware of the national crises that had been brewing for years. Despite their foreign origins, they considered themselves Americans. They answered the call of President Lincoln to preserve the union and to create a country where all people prospered by the sweat of their own brows and not by the sweat of slaves. Minnesota famously became the first state to volunteer troops for the war since Governor Alexander Ramsey happened to be in Washington at the time Lincoln made the request for state militias. By the end of the war Minnesota contributed over 25,000 soldiers to the war effort. Frankfort did its part and at least 41 of its young men participated in either the war against the Confederacy or in the Dakota War which broke out in Minnesota in 1862. Little is known about the men from Frankfort who served during the time of the Civil and Dakota Wars. No artifacts from veterans are known to exist and besides some grave markers which indicate service in the Civil War, no monuments were ever erected to commemorate the service of Frankfort's men. But since it is known that some of the Frankfort guys served in the most documented

events of the Civil War, we can combine those accounts with their service records to piece together at least a partial picture of the experiences of a few of these soldiers during the most trying time of our republic.

The First Minnesota Infantry Regiment is probably the most celebrated of the Minnesota regiments partially due to the fact that it is one of the regiments that served exclusively in the east as opposed to those that served part or all of their time in the Dakota War in Minnesota. It also participated in some of the more well-known battles of the Civil War and was the first regiment formed as a result of Lincoln's request for militias. Three men from Frankfort were known to have served in the 1st Minnesota: John Elliott, Vincent Middlestedt and William Schumacher, who all served in Company E.

The first land battle of the war is known in the North as the First Battle of Bull Run and called the First Battle of Manassas in the South. It took place on July 21st, 1861 and was the first engagement of the 1st Minnesota Infantry Regiment. The battle was a victory for the Confederacy, but the disorganization of both armies is probably the most memorable aspect of the day. For example, the blue and grey uniforms had not yet been furnished to all of the troops and so state militias from North and South often wore the same colors. The Minnesotans arrived wearing red shirts as did men from Alabama. There is an account of an Alabaman soldier calmly approaching the Minnesotans thinking he was regrouping with his own comrades. In another instance the Minnesotans came close to firing on a militia from Massachusetts who were wearing grey uniforms. Disorganization also characterized the end result of the battle. Despite having the Northern militias on the run, the Southern militias were too disordered to pursue them when they retreated; and the Northern militias retreated in such disarray that the road back to Washington, DC became a tangled mess of men and sightseers from DC who had come to watch what they thought would be an easy Union victory. The 1st Minnesota was among the last troops to leave the field of battle and join in the chaos that ensued during the retreat. The battle made it clear to both President Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis that the war would be long and costly. Among the 4,770 casualties at Bull Run were John Elliott and William Schumacher who were both wounded, but not critically enough to take them out of action permanently. Elliott would be wounded again at the battle of Malvern Hill after which he transferred to the US Cavalry. Schumacher was later detached to a hospital unit and then was sent back to Minnesota to recruit volunteers. Schumacher later served in the Minnesota First Battalion of Infantry until the end of the war. Vincent Middlestedt remained with the 1st Minnesota Regiment and participated in two of the most famous battles of the Civil War: Antietam and Gettysburg.

On September 17, 1862 a horrible fight between North and South took place at Antietam, Maryland. With over 23,000 casualties it is still considered the bloodiest day in American history. Antietam is considered a Union victory in a strategic sense, but at the conclusion of the battle Union General McClellan failed to pursue General Lee who was greatly outnumbered. Many believe that McClellan had an opportunity to finish off Lee at Antietam and that his missed opportunity unnecessarily extended the war. Frankfort's Vince Middlestedt survived the battle, but was taken prisoner by Confederate troops. He was released and returned to his regiment in December of 1862 as part of a prisoner exchange.

Six months after his release Vince Middlestedt participated in the battle considered the major turning point in the war, the Battle of Gettysburg. In three days of fighting between July 1st and 3rd 1863 the Union held the high ground in Gettysburg. Victory for the Confederacy could only happen by forcing the Union away from their position along Cemetery Ridge. On the second day of fighting Confederate forces under Brigadier General Wilcox came close to breaking that line. After Union forces failed to hold the Confederates in the Peach Orchard, Alabaman troops began advancing on a gap along the Union left flank. Major General Winfield Hancock saw what was coming toward him but needed some time to bring up reinforcements. The Minnesota regiment had been positioned to protect artillery along Cemetery Ridge but were the only men available to fill the gap and hold off the Confederates. Hancock ordered the 1st Minnesota to charge the advancing Confederates despite being greatly outnumbered at least 5 to 1. Without hesitation the 1st Minnesota charged the Alabamans and managed to slow and even temporarily halt their advancement thereby giving Hancock the time he needed to bring up reinforcements. During the fateful charge 215 of the 262 men became casualties including Vincent Middlestedt who was wounded in the foot according to his service record.

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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 Gries and Lenhardt Public Meeting Room adjacent to the library.

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The 83 percent casualty rate incurred by the 1st Minnesota remains one of the largest losses by any surviving military unit in one engagement in U.S. history. Their sacrifice at Gettysburg was crucial to the Union victory. The remnants of the 1st Minnesota helped repel Pickett's charge on day three of the battle and then helped bury the dead the next day. This was the high water mark for the Confederates and the beginning of their eventual defeat. After Gettysburg, Vince Middlestedt was sent to convalesce in a Baltimore hospital. He was mustered out in August 1865.

At right: A list of Civil War Veterans from Frankfort Township (St. Michael), Minnesota.

Name	Name
Aydt, Alois	Lenneman, Eberhardt
Aydt, Leonard	Lindenfelser, John
Becker, John	Lutz, Conrad
Blake, Phillip	Marx, John Baptist
Buol, John	Middlestedt, Peter
Chute, Francis	Middlestedt, Vincent
Cochran, Arnold	Reems, James
Cochran, William	Reems, William
Columbus, Peter F	Reyling, Joseph
Diedrich, John G.	Roloff, William
Duerr, Peter	Schumacher, Peter
Elliott, John	Schumacher, Wm. E.
Elliott, William	Valerius, Valentine
Gutzwiller, Casimir	Vetsch, Jacob
Gutzwiller, Emil	Vetsch, Laurence
Gutzwiller, Ferdinand	Wagner, August
Haefer, Louis	Walesch, Simon
Igel, John	Wolff, Christian
Kinna, Michael Jr.	Zahler, Frank
Kinna, Michael Sr.	Zimmer, John
Klaes, John	

Meet the newest Board Member

Due to an unexpected need to fill a vacancy on the board at their monthly meeting in May, the Board of Directors has elected to appoint Brendan Sage to complete the remaining term of the office formerly held by Genny Kieley.

Brendan Sage has lived in Saint Michael his whole life growing up on the south end of town just off County Road 19. Brendan has been an historical society member since 2010 taking a strong interest in local history. A student at St. Michael-Albertville High School, Brendan also works in retail and is planning on attending the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse with potential majors/minors in Statistics, Actuarial Science or Accounting. In addition to the Historical Society, Brendan participates in Cross Country, Track and Field, Student Ambassadors, Fellowship for Christian Athletes, One Act Play (Tech Crew), National Honor Society and the local summer mileage club.

