

St. Michael Historian



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The Storm I'll Never Forget The Armistice Day Storm, November 11, 1940

(as written by Eldon Kasper, February 9, 2006)

It was the biggest storm that I have ever seen, and I am 83 years old now. It couldn't get any worse. It started out as a nice day. It wasn't cold in the morning. We did all the morning chores, then Pa took the cream to the creamery and took the kids to school, not knowing what the weather was going to do. By 10 o'clock that morning it started snowing so bad that you could not see far. Stormy winds started to come so Pa picked up the kids from school and some other stuff and tried to get home from St. Michael. It snowed and the wind was so bad, that they only got to Alex Duerr's. They tried to go further but got stuck on the road, so they went back to Alex Duerr's and were glad to get in a house. They wondered what to do, so Mary and some younger girls, I think it was Dolores and Arlene [Eldon's sisters], walked back to town with the wind on their backs. They got to Grandma Barthel's who lived in St. Michael. They were cold and not dressed for a big snow storm.

Pa wanted to get home, but how? So at noon he called home from Alex Duerr's, asking me to come with the horses and flat bed wagon. I didn't know if I could make it. I harnessed up the two best horses I thought we had and put them on [to pull] the wagon. I put on warm clothes and took off for St. Michael. You couldn't see far or even tell if you were on the road. All I could see was the top of the telephone posts sometimes. The horses didn't know either what was going on. I got down to Richard Kasper's and the horses stopped. I wondered what was wrong, so I looked at their eyes and noses. They were all covered with ice and snow, but they never turned us down yet, so I said "giddyap" and off we went, hardly knowing where we were.

We finally made it by one o'clock to Alex Duerr's. Pa was glad to see me; and with Pa was Linus Lenneman, who was also stuck. Linus just got married to my sister Bernice, so he thought he'd go as far as our place and stay there. We loaded up the cream cans and gas cans and headed for home. Pa wanted to drive the horses home. That was alright with me, so we [all the kids] and Linus sat on empty cream cans and held on to other stuff in the wagon. We got to our gravel road, and going down the road by Willie Friedrich, Pa got too close to the side of the road by the hill, and then we slid off the wagon. Myself, Linus, and cans all slid off the wagon. We stopped to pick up everything and took off again. We were glad when we saw the farm. It was windy, snowing, and it got a lot colder. We put the horses in the barn and then went into the house to get warmed up. Linus Lenneman stayed by us overnight. He walked home the next day over our field and through the woods with over four or five feet of hard snow drifts. Bernice and Linus had to milk the cows and do the other chores.

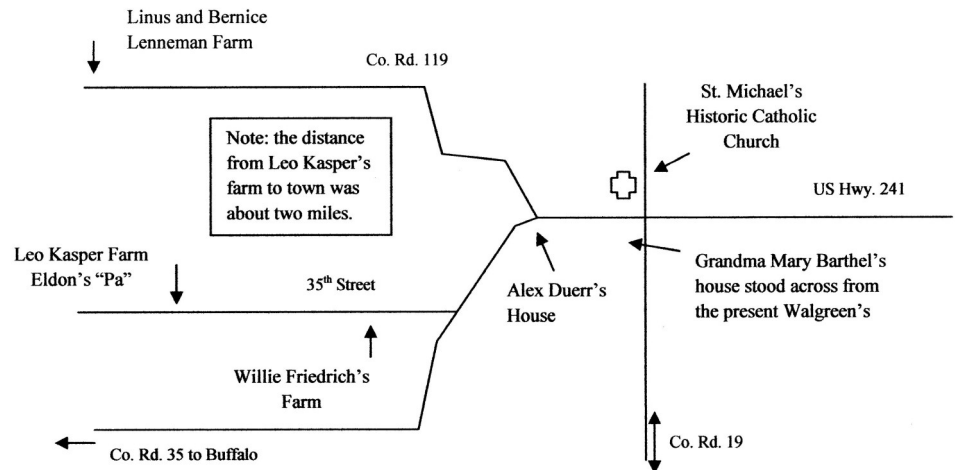


**View looking North on Main Street [County 19]
from the area which is now in front of the St. Michael-Albertville Funeral Home**

Photo Courtesy of Roger Robeck

It was hard to get around; every place was blocked up with snow. All roads were closed for two to three days. We didn't have the snow plows that we have now. We had no tractor and snow buckets either. We had to shovel a lot of snow by hand. There were a few farmers that had a big truck with a snow blade or V-plows. Schmidt Brothers came with their truck, but we had to help shovel the snow when he got stuck. The Lehn Brothers had a caterpillar with a big blade on, so they came and helped open a lot of the roads. We had to shovel paths from the house to the barns and other buildings in three to five feet of snow.

The weather was so nice that morning, so a lot of duck hunters went hunting here at Pelican Lake and other places around the state. Some hunters didn't make it back home. Some froze to death. They weren't expecting the storm, so they were not dressed for it. A lot of turkeys on some farms died in the storm also. The storm and wind were so bad that you could not see the barn from the house, so some tied a rope from the house to the barn so they could find the way back. I am 83 years old now, but never could I forget that storm. I didn't know if I could ever make it back with the horses after Pa called and told me to bring them. I don't think I would have made it at my age now. I was only 18 years old then.



Rt. Rev. Peter Engel in 1894 at the time he was elected the fourth Abbot of St. John's

Photo from the archives of St. John's Abbey

St. Michael's First Celebrity

By Bob Zahler

Long before superstar Matt Spaeth put St. Michael on the map with his emergence in the national spotlight as a professional football player (Spaeth is now with the Chicago Bears), St. Michael had another famous "native son", Rt. Rev. Peter Engel who became one of the most influential abbots and college presidents of St. John's College in Collegeville and the person for whom the Peter Engel Science Center at St. John's University is named. He is mostly known for his advancement of the field of science and photography at St. John's and for administering the college during an extremely rapid period of expansion.

Peter Engel was born in 1856 in Belgium, Wisconsin, so technically he was not a native of St. Michael; but when just a boy of nine he came to St. Michael with his parents Jacob and Margareta Engel settling on a farm west of the village of St. Michael along what is now County Road 119. According to his own "vita", or brief autobiography, his parents noticed that he was more suited for books than for farm work and sent him to school with the Benedictine monks of St. John's in 1869. Although he stated that at first he had no clear idea of his vocation, his parents often expressed that they wanted him to become a priest and in early 1874 he made up his own mind to join the Benedictine Order. By 1875 he was teaching at St. John's and in 1878 was ordained a priest. He celebrated his first mass in St. Michael in the same church, he noted, where he received

his first holy communion. Despite being away for much of his formative years, it is apparent that Fr. Engel still considered St. Michael his home parish.

For much of the 1880s and early 1890s Fr. Engel taught many courses at St. John's, in particular philosophy, physics and chemistry. He took a personal interest in photography and it was during the mid 1880s that Fr. Engel visited St. Michael and took some of the earliest photos we have of the village. The archives of St. John's contain hundreds of glass negatives of Fr. Engel's photographic work, mostly images taken in and around St. John's. In 1887 he was named Master of Novices and then in 1894 he was elected to be the fourth abbot of St. John's.

During his 26 years as abbot, St. John's experienced tremendous growth. According to Colman Barry, who wrote the definitive history on St. John's, *Worship and Work*, Abbot Engel opened a meteorological station, created a physics laboratory, installed a wireless telegraph office, and constructed an astronomical observatory. Abbot Engel constructed six buildings in the first decade of the twentieth century, most of which are still in use to this day including Wimmer Hall, Guild Hall, St. Francis House, Greg House and Simons Hall. The last building, Simons Hall, was built originally for science classes and named "Engel Hall" in honor of the former abbot in 1967. This building was renamed "Simons Hall" in 1999 and then a newer science building was renamed the "Peter Engel Science Center". One other often overlooked achievement that occurred during the presidency of Abbot Engel was the creation of MIAC (Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference) that the abbot helped organize with six other colleges in 1920.

Throughout his tenure at St. John's, Abbot Peter Engel made numerous visits to St. Michael to see his parents and to be present for major celebrations like the parish's Golden Jubilee in 1906 and for the first masses of other native sons who may have joined the Benedictine Order due to his influence. Again, according to Colman Barry, Abbot Engel was a man of the "extreme center". He was a man loved for his fair-mindedness in spiritual and pastoral matters, in addition to his great contributions to education. Abbot Peter Engel died at St. John's in 1921 at the age of 65 and is buried in the monastery cemetery.



This photo of the parsonage and church of St. Michael was taken by Rev. Peter Engel in 1888

Photo from the archives of St. John's Abbey

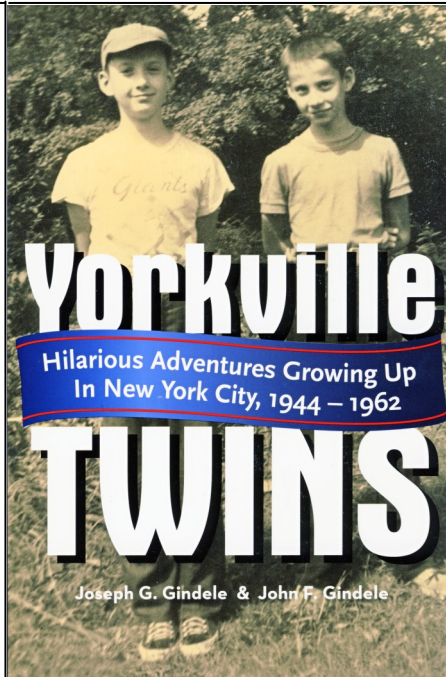
St. Michael**Historical Society****11800 Town Center Drive****St. Michael, MN 55376***Phone: 763-416-7967**We're on the Web!**See us at:****www.stmhistsoc.org***

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.

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.

Publisher: Sheldon Barthel

Editors: Robert Zahler
Stephen Barthel



Authors with St. Michael Connections Publish

John and Joe Gindele, nephews of the late Hugo and Lillian Gindele of St. Michael, recently published a book they entitled *Yorkville Twins: Hilarious Adventures Growing Up in New York City, 1944-1962*. As the title states, the brothers grew up in New York City, but they visited their aunt, uncle and cousins in St. Michael frequently after moving to Minnesota to attend college in St. Cloud. Eventually, they both became educators in school districts in the Minneapolis suburbs and have maintained connections with their St. Michael relatives. In their book Joe and John share their memories of being children of immigrant parents living in a Manhattan tenement. Their

amusing anecdotes take the reader on a fun romp back in time. For those of us who grew up in the rural Midwest, *Yorkville Twins* is a fun way to get a feel for what life was like for a working-class New York City family.

If you interested in purchasing a copy you can do so by visiting their website at: www.YorkvilleTwinsBook.com

Renew your Membership now for 2013

On Friday, January 4th, we included with dues notices a revised edition of our Membership Application form, now entitled "MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL FORM". We ask that when you submit your dues for this year, if you haven't already done so, please fill out the information requested and submit this form to us along with your annual dues. This will enable us to do a better job of serving you and help us keep our records current.

Beginning with this issue, for those submitting Email addresses, we are Emailing a digital or online copy instead of a hard copy directly to you. Those of you who wish to continue receiving a hard copy, we ask that you simply leave the Email question blank and you will continue to receive your newsletter by regular mail.

Some of the advantages of receiving the newsletter by Email are: 1) All photos in the newsletter will be in full color instead of black and white. 2) You will still be able to print your own copy from the electronic newsletter. 3) You will help save trees. 4) You will help your historical society save money and time on mailing and printing costs.

Please take the time now to renew your membership if you have not already done so! Send your annual dues to the address listed above on this page, upper left hand corner, or send directly to our membership director listed below:

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

If you have any questions concerning your membership, please feel free to call Sheldon at: 763-497-4205