

St. Michael Historian



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St. Michael Lions Celebrate 50th Anniversary, Bierstube Returns

by Bob Zahler

After a 21-year hiatus the St. Michael Lions Bierstube is back, or so many people hope. The first Bierstube was held in the summer of 1964, just a few months after the Lions Club in St. Michael began. The first Bierstubes were held at the old St. Michael Dance Hall (or Ballroom), but the need for more space forced a move to the parish school grounds in 1969. For many years the big draw was the all-inclusive admission price, but then that may also have led to a lot of over drinking as some sought to “get their money’s worth”. In addition to all the beer you could drink, guests also received a glass mug, felt hat with feather and a traditional German meal. In spite of the overindulgence that occurred, the Bierstube was the big event of the summer for over 25 years.



Above: This business card from 1967 provided all the pertinent details of the Bierstube. Even in 1967 dollars, the \$5.00 all-inclusive fee was a good deal, especially for those who knew how to “put ‘em down”.

Readers who weren’t around to see the old Bierstube back in the 1970s and early 80s might be astonished to see how large of an event it actually was. The entire school grounds were used and decorated with evergreen trees strung with colored lights. The favorite performing group for many years was the Happy Wanderers who performed traditional German music atop a huge flatbed trailer. The night was filled with singing, dancing, eating and drinking. But by the early 1990s it seemed that the Bierstube had run its course as crowds diminished, and so the Lions suspended the annual event after 1992; that is, until this past July 19th.

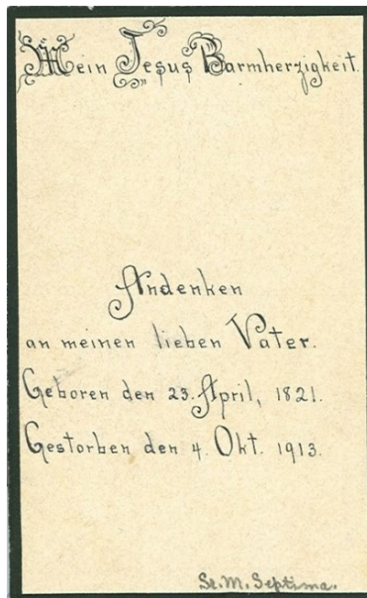
Held on a smaller scale than years past, the Bierstube returned this year. The format was different as people had a choice between buying a refillable mug or just buying beer by the glass. The meal (as good as always) was complimentary. The polka music was in the afternoon with a country band in the evening. The crowd appeared to be appreciative, but we may not know if the Bierstube is back to stay until the Lions assess the financial impact and decide to do it again in 2015.

At left: Don and Meg Klaers at either the 1964 or 1965 Bierstube. The Klaers were active in the St. Michael Lions and helped get the event started.

Memorial Cards Shrouded in Mystery

by Stephen S. Barthel

It was typical in the early to mid-20th century to print a memorial card of the deceased. The card often contained a printed photo, vital information, a prayer or a scripture verse, and perhaps a place of birth. On the reverse side of the card was a pre-printed religious image. The recipient would insert the card in a prayer book, so that he or she could pray for the deceased. Memorial cards have evolved over the years. They contain the same basic vital information used in the past, but are modified to include much more information and sophistication. Eventually, memorial cards get too numerous to remain in a prayer book, so they become historical items or collectors' items. Many of us inherit the printed memorials. We may wonder who some of the people are and how they connect with us. Fortunately, with online genealogical and historical sources, we can solve some of the mysteries. Below are two examples.



Who would match the birth of 23 April 1821 and death of 4 October 1913 given in the card at the far left? The card did not specify his birth name, so research was needed to reveal the answer; however, the card is riddled with clues.

The Minnesota Death Index, 1908-2002 which is found on <https://familysearch.org>, indicates there was a Sister Mary Septima Hackenmueller (name on bottom of card) who was born 18 July 1869 and whose mother was a Marx. The Minnesota Deaths and Burials, 1835-1990 index gives the same name, but includes her death date of 2 November 1955 in Blue Earth County, Minnesota. Her parents were listed in her death record as George Hackenmueller and Margaret Marx. The church birth record of St. Michael gives 'Frances Hackenmueller' as her birth name, and that she had been born on 18 July

1869. She was the daughter of George Hackenmueller, according to most census and vital records (Gregor Hackenmueller was given on the old St. Michael Cemetery tombstone). His tombstone birth and death dates matched this memorial card exactly. So, Sister Septima wrote this card for her father, George Hackenmueller, presumably when he died. Another clue on the card is the German phrase preceding the dates, "Andenken an meinen lieben Vater", or "Souvenir of my dear father". By the way, Sister M. Septima Hackenmueller is buried in Good Counsel Hill Cemetery in Mankato, Minnesota.

Fortunately the second memorial card of Susanna Felten was not thrown out of the donor's collection. The name of Felten was not known in St. Michael, and the donor was not sure who this person was. Certainly, the donor's ancestors would have known, or they would not have kept the card. The town of Oberweis was a clue, as that is where the Ehr's were from. The donor also had a memorial card of a Nikolaus Felten.

These names, and that of a daughter, were found on the <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi> website. Then, using the <https://familysearch.org> website, I found the Iowa marriage record of Nikolaus Felten with a Susanna Ehr. This record gave Susanna's maiden name. The records of Oberweis show an 1839 birth of a Susanna Ehr. She was the sister to Katharina Ehr, who married Wilhelm Barthel of St. Michael. The mystery is solved!

Other memorial cards with names and their connection to St. Michael may leave questions. Sleuthing is fun! Donate memorial cards of St. Michael and vicinity for scanning to the St. Michael Historical Society. These cards will eventually appear in the Biographical Files attached to the individual's name. (We can return the originals to you.)

Assessing Frankfort in 1864

By Bob Zahler

Among the records that are in the possession of the St. Michael Historical Society are a set of fragile, paperback assessor's ledgers for Frankfort Township: one is for real estate and the other is for personal property. Neither is more than 15 pages in length. So what is so great about these assessor's records? They're 150 years old, from 1864! In 1864 there wasn't even a Village of St. Michael, much less a "city". Frankfort Township, the only legal jurisdiction, was still 85% woods, lakes and swamps with settlers scattered throughout. The church of St. Michael was just a log and wood frame structure still in its original location along the banks of the Crow River near the present site of Berning's Millside Tavern. The first settlers had arrived in the Big Woods west of the Crow River just nine years earlier. While most of the land was claimed by 1864, there were still frequent land sales as many of the first claimants either changed their minds about settling or were just trying to cash out on what they had hoped to be a good land investment. The legitimate settlers were still in the early stages of establishing their homes and farms: building winter-proof cabins and clearing the land of the ancient trees in order to get some sort of crop in the ground. Delaying these efforts were the financial crash and locust plague of 1857 and then the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 and the Dakota War of 1862. In short, these records from 1864 provide us with a unique look at both the diversity in wealth among the various families and the limited means available to our forefathers (and mothers) in the earliest days of St. Michael.

NAMES OF PROPERTY HOLDERS, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER, (Care should be taken to make every Name and Figure plain and distinct.)	No. of School Dist.	AUDITOR'S COLUMN. Assessors will leave this column vacant for the use of the County Auditor. DOLLARS.	Total value of all the per- sonal property included in the fourteen items.	1. HORSES.		2. CATTLE.		3. MULES AND ASSES.		4. SHEEP.		5. HOGS.		6. CARRIAGES.	
				No.	VALUE. Dollars.	No.	VALUE. Dollars.	No.	VALUE. Dollars.	No.	VALUE. Dollars.	No.	VALUE. Dollars.	No.	VALUE. Dollars.
1 Aydt Henry	20	42	142		9	103						4	4	1	25
2 Aydt Leonard	20	58	158		4	25	2	100				3	3	1	20
3 Aydt Elisabeth	unknown		70		6	35			2	60		6	5	1	12
4 Boddens Edward	20		65		7	65						6	5		
5 Bingenheimer Jacob	unknown	121	221	2	70	17	121					6	5	1	10
6 Burgess Nicholas	44	8	108		9	70						9	5	1	25
7 Balls Joseph	44		43		5	25						2	3		
8 Berning Anthony	20	328	420	4	120	12	60					8	8	1	20

Above: A snippet from the first page of the 1864 Personal Property Tax Ledger.

The personal property ledger is interesting, first, in showing what things were valued. Horses were assessed at between \$30 and \$40 apiece. There may actually have been a greater range in the value of horses, but in 1864 there weren't many horses in the township. Of the 60 households assessed, only 13 had any horses and most of those households had just one. Anthony Berning and Phillip Schneider both owned four horses each! Valued higher than a horse, though, was a mule at \$50. A mule was slower, but more sure-footed, less excitable and generally had greater endurance. For the farmer, speed just wasn't much of a concern; however, in all of Frankfort there were only two mules and Leonard Aydt owned both of them.

The most common animals found in Frankfort were cattle. Most farmers had at least four, which were assessed at somewhere between \$5 and \$15 each depending, presumably, on the age and condition of each animal. Mathias Schumacher owned the most at 18 animals. The records do not differentiate in regard to the type or ages of the cattle, only the total number and value. If they only had a few, more than likely at least two were oxen. Oxen can be any breed of cattle, usually males, that are allowed to grow large and are trained for work. The advantages of oxen over horses or even mules was that they were cheaper to buy, they would eat just about any grass they could find and they could do the heavy work of pulling out stumps, dragging logs and pulling plows. Other cattle in the mix were likely beef steers and milk cows. Although there were some sheep in the township at the time, the other more common animal was the hog. Hogs were cheap, valued at just \$1 each, but they provided much of the meat these families survived on throughout the year either as smoked hams or the sausages these Germans surely loved. Owning between two and eight hogs was pretty common.

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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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Finally, stories have often been told of the early settlers walking everywhere, but this was only likely true for the first year or two and only for those of the most meager means. According to the records, by 1864 nearly every household owned at least one carriage, probably a basic wagon. These could be pulled by either horses, mules or oxen, but they were indispensable in transporting goods, work materials and the family. One last note, the ledger had columns for watches and pianos, but none were noted to have existed in Frankfort in 1864. It is difficult to know whether that was accurate or if the assessor just did not bother with such frivolous items.

So, who was the wealthiest citizen in terms of personal property in 1864? According to the records it was Anthony Berning with an assessed personal wealth (not accounting for land or any money in a bank) of \$428. Even though \$200 of that was merchandise for his store, his personal property wealth was still higher than anyone else. The average total personal property wealth was around \$100.

The real estate tax ledger is telling in a couple of ways. One, there are a lot of names on the 1864 ledger who did not become legitimate settlers. In other words, many of the people who were listed were not actually settlers at all, just real estate investors like Carlos Wilcox, a well-known town developer before the 1857 financial crash, who had obviously hung onto some of his Frankfort holdings. Some of the other unfamiliar names may have been people who intended to become Frankfort settlers, but decided that pioneer life wasn't for them and who then later sold their land to bona fide settlers. The other thing that stood out from the ledger is how few acres were tilled by 1864. The typical land holding was 80 acres, but several people had 160 acres; and a couple, like John Zachman and John Lindenfelser, had over 200 acres already; yet at that time the greatest amount of tilled land was just 20 acres. The vast majority of the land was still in its natural wooded state.

Overall, the two ledgers provide us with a great glimpse into the meagerness of pioneer life. How incredibly hard these people had to work to build the community we now enjoy.

Upcoming Events Through December 2014

Monday, September 8 - Old-timers Round Table. Stories and tales from the past. Anyone willing to share a story or tale from the past relating to events in St. Michael and/or sharing some of St. Michael History is encouraged to come and participate. This activity will follow our regular monthly meeting at 7:00 PM.

Monday, October 13 – Show and Tell evening. Anyone possessing an item or items from the past and who wishes to share the knowledge of said item(s) with others is encouraged to bring the item and participate in this event. The activity will follow the regular monthly meeting at 7:00 PM.

Monday, November 10 – Stephen Barthel, our own Genealogist Emeritus, will speak after the 7:00 PM meeting on how to access the Internet for those who might be interested in doing some ancestral research.

THERE WILL BE NO MONTHLY MEETING IN DECEMBER