

# St. Michael Historian



Official Newsletter of the St. Michael Historical Society, St. Michael, Minnesota

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*The Hagemeyer-Adkins house as it appeared in the mid 1980s*

## Lost St. Michael The Hagemeyer-Adkins House *by Bob Zahler*

In 1992 Minnesota historian and author Larry Millet published his first book, *Lost Twin Cities*, on the great buildings that once stood in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Borrowing from Millet's title we would like to provide for our readers a look back at some of the structures that once existed in and around St. Michael. This is likely to appear as an occasional feature in this newsletter. We start with the Hagemeyer-Adkins House, arguably the most ornate home ever built in St. Michael. Built in 1875, it disappeared from the local landscape in 2002. For 127 years this imposing edifice greeted travelers coming from the east as they entered the village limits of St. Michael.

Joachim Hagemeyer (or Hagemeyer), along with Joseph and Jacob Vetsch, came from St. Charles, Missouri where they had first settled. In late 1856 or early 1857 these families migrated to Minnesota and took claims near one another on Section 12 in Frankfort Township, which today is bordered on the south by Highway 241, on the north by 50th street, on the west by County Road 19 and on the east by MacIver Avenue. Joachim Hagemeyer's first home was likely a log house like everyone else had. Presumably this house was located in the vicinity of where the later brick home was built, along Highway 241 near the present site of CVS Pharmacy. Joachim, however, would not live to see the brick house rise as he died in 1862 at the age of 49. His wife Wilhelmina was left to take care of the family which included sons Edmund, Anton, Joseph, Jacob, and daughter Pauline.

Joseph, the third son, would grow up to become one of St. Michael's finest builders and eventually the principal owner of the house. Included in his later accomplishments was the imposing "Wasserkur" built on the north side of St. Michael in 1894. While it is presumed that Joseph was the primary builder of the magnificent brick house, we know from newspaper accounts and maps that the "Hagemeyer Brothers" operated a brick-making business on the eastern edge of their property near what is today MacIver Avenue. It is therefore likely that the construction of the home was more of a family enterprise utilizing bricks from their own brickyard. The completed structure housed not only Joseph, but his mother and several siblings. In 1886 Joseph married Margaret Fehn, and according to the 1900 census, his mother and brother Jacob were still living in the house with Joseph and Margaret's growing family.

The style of the house was probably best defined as Victorian Vernacular. It's layout was fairly typical of a 19th century farm house, but it's exterior was heavily ornamented with Italianate elements, principally a wide cornice, brackets under the eaves, bracketed hoods over the windows, and the almost absurdly tall chimney that mimicked the towers on Italian villas. It is likely that Joseph had seen these architectural flourishes in pattern books or on homes he saw during trips to St. Paul and then added them to the family home to demonstrate his skills as a carpenter and bricklayer.

After Joseph Hagemeyer passed away in 1924, the house remained occupied by his widow and several of their unmarried children: Margaret, Joe (Jr.), Burgie (Walburga), John, and Mike. Mrs. Hagemeyer passed away in 1951 at the age of 89, but the siblings continued to operate one of the largest farms in the area: 325 acres, roughly split in northern and southern halves by Highway 241. They even had a cattle pass under the road just east of the current “people pass”. By the 1960s, though, they were all at or nearing retirement age and needed to slow down. They sold the property south of Highway 241 to Roy Simms and Dominic Welter who platted it into the Edgewood housing development. Most of the northern half, except the house and about two acres, was sold to Larry and Jean Haller who moved to St. Michael from Osseo in 1965 so that they could have more farm land. The Hallers built a new home just west of the brick house and retained an easement through the farmyard to access the barns and sheds. Within two years after the sale of the farm, Burgie and Mike Hagemeyer passed away. The big old house was too much for the remaining siblings to maintain and so they decided it was time to sell.

The new owners were Wally and Betty Adkins who purchased the house and two acres in 1968. The Adkins learned about the place because Betty’s sister was next-door neighbor Jean Haller. Wally was a Minneapolis fire fighter who, until then, had been required to live within the city of Minneapolis. When the city relaxed this policy, Wally and Betty decided to move out to St. Michael, which was the furthest west of Minneapolis one could get and still have a “metro” (non-long distance) phone number. According to daughter Nancy (Adkins) Boeckers, when her parents bought the house, it had been updated little, if at all, since construction. There was no electricity, running water or central heating yet. Water was obtained from a pump in the milk house and they were still using an outhouse. Wally turned the smallest room on the second story into a bathroom and brought running water and electricity into the house along with central heating. According to Nancy, there had been chickens in the kitchen before they totally gutted and remodeled it. After substantial updating, the old brick house happily accommodated Wally and Betty Adkins and their children Pat, Susan, Mike, Kathy, Caroline, and Nancy.

One of the more interesting “elements” of the old Hagemeyer house was the supposed ghost of Margaret Hagemeyer, who died after her sleeve caught fire while stoking the stove. She ran out of the house in flames and neighbor Larry Haller rolled her in the snow to put out the flames, but Margaret died anyway. Nearly everyone in the Adkins family claimed to have experienced the ghost of Margaret Hagemeyer. Wally reported that she was watching him during the remodeling until he finally told her to “go away”. The Adkins girls frequently heard the creak of her footsteps on the second floor moving toward the stairway. Their dog would bark, run to the foot of the stairs, and then run under the bed when nobody appeared at the top of the stairs. They also reported that a rocking chair would rock on its own in the front parlor, and the girls sometimes heard the “swish” of Margaret’s long dress. No doubt, the reclusiveness of the Hagemeyers and the community’s perception of

them as being “a little different” added to the spookiness. Despite the apparent presence of Margaret Hagemeyer’s spirit, the Adkins loved their old house, especially the large rooms and the big, oak banister.

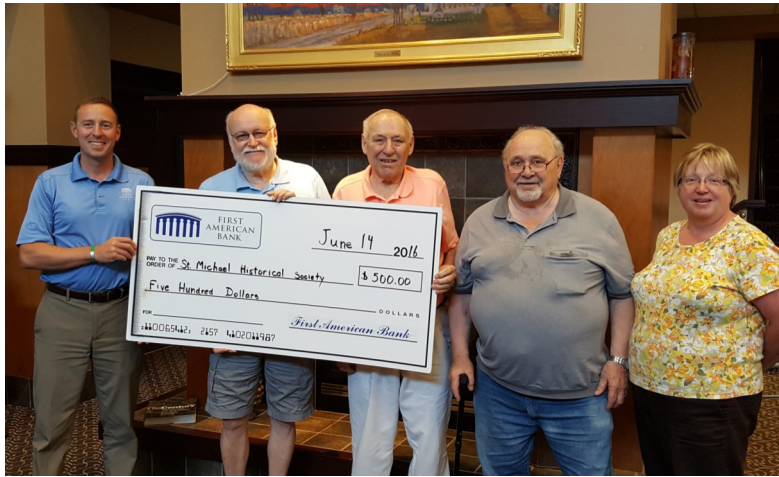
After serving the Adkins family for eighteen years, the house was sold to an investor in 1986. Although the new owner attempted to start an antique store in the house, it remained empty for much of the next sixteen years. By 2002 the city was preparing for a widening of Highway 241 and creation of the City Center Development, so the house needed to go. The yard had become overgrown and trees nearly blocked any view of the house. By the end of the summer, another piece of St. Michael history had disappeared entirely.



*Demolition had already begun when this photo was taken in June 2002*

## Society Receives Gift From First American Bank

This past June the First American Bank of St. Michael presented a check for \$500 to the St. Michael Historical Society as part of their “Dollars for Denim” campaign for giving back to the community. Each week the bank employees chip \$5 into a fund which allows them to wear jeans on Friday. When the fund reaches \$500, they donate it to a local charity. The historical society is grateful to the First American Bank employees and administration for their generosity.

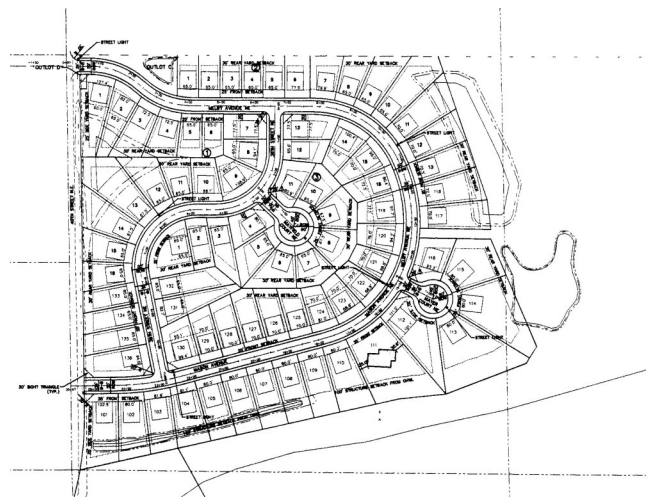
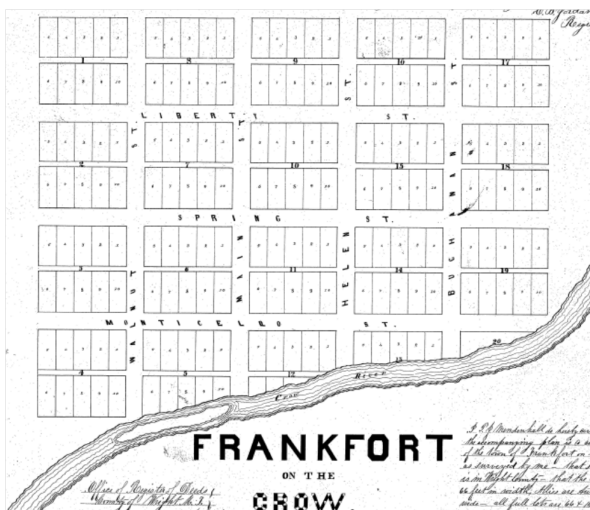


*Formal presentation of the “Denim For Dollars” gift took place in the lobby of First American Bank of St. Michael in June. From left to right: Nick Schultz, Market President, First American Bank; Sheldon Barthel, President, St. Michael Historical Society; Wayne Kessler and John Robeck, historical society board members; and Char Zachman, teller, First American Bank.*

## 160 Years Later, “Frankfort on the Crow” Finally Gets Developed

*By Bob Zahler*

Although not exactly the layout that Peter Scheirich had in mind, the new “River’s Edge” development on the Vernon Berning farm is finally maturing into something similar to what Peter Scheirich envisioned back in 1856. Scheirich, however, was not just thinking “housing development”; he was thinking “entire city”. The plat map on the left was officially filed with the county in January 1857, but the nation-wide financial crash seven months later dashed all hopes of Frankfort on the Crow from ever moving beyond that scrap of paper. Shortly thereafter, in September 1857, another St. Michael settler and land



*Above: River’s Edge housing development, 2016. Left: the same land, as originally platted in 1856 as the townsite of “Frankfort on the Crow”*

speculator, John K. Aydt, purchased the townsite from Scheirich for \$1,000 (Scheirich had been offered \$24,000 a year before). Aydt apparently believed that he was getting a bargain. Yet, five years later, he sold the land to Anton Berning for just \$300. The recovery from the 1857 financial crash was slow and then the onset of the Civil War in 1861 greatly retarded any upturn in land values. Since 1862 Anton Berning and his descendants have made a living off of farming this land. While some may think that the River's Edge housing development, like similar developments in St. Michael, is a betrayal to our farming heritage; the Frankfort on the Crow plat map reminds us that our ancestors were not just thinking about farming.

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*We're on the Web!*

See us at:

[www.saintmichaelhistory.org](http://www.saintmichaelhistory.org)

Like us on **Facebook!**

Meetings are 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 St. Michael Historical Society.*

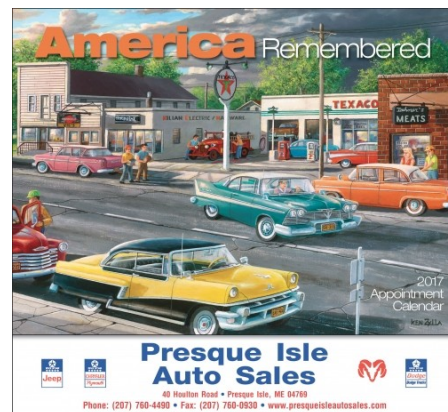
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Editors: Sheldon Barthel  
Stephen S. Barthel

## Zylla's "St. Michael, USA" to Appear in 2017 Calendar

In 2014 the society commissioned artist Ken Zylla to paint a memory of St. Michael as it appeared in the early 1960s. While our objective was to create something for ourselves and all those who cherish that memory of the old St. Michael, Ken's creation became a part of the portfolio that he produces every year for the Brown and Bigelow company, a national leader in promotional products. Each year Brown and Bigelow produces a calendar called "America Remembered" featuring the nostalgic images of Ken Zylla. The 2017 calendar will not only feature "St. Michael, USA" as the image for the month of May, it will also be the cover image for the calendar. This will give our print national exposure and will likely boost its value as a collectible. If you have not yet purchased your signed and numbered print, or you know someone who collects art prints and still needs this one, contact Sheldon Barthel at 497-4205.



*Promotional image of the 2017 America Remembered calendar featuring Ken Zylla's recreation of St. Michael as it appeared in the early 1960s.*

## Upcoming Events

**September 11, Sunday, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM,** Visit our booth at the St. Michael Parish Harvest Festival. You can renew your dues for next year, purchase a Ken Zylla print of "St. Michael USA", purchase memo cards of historic St. Michael, order a copy of the 1931 church anniversary photo, or purchase a history book of St. Michael entitled "Faith, Family, and Farming", all in one stop. Also on display will be other items related to the history of St. Michael.

**September 13, Tuesday, 7:00 PM,** Tour of the St. Michael Historic Church, regular monthly meeting to follow in the lower level of the Historic Church. Please note that the regular meeting will be on a Tuesday for the September meeting only.

**October 10, Monday, 7:00 PM,** Regular monthly meeting in the conference room adjacent to the Great River Regional Library at the St. Michael City Hall.

**November 14, Monday, 7:00 PM,** Regular monthly meeting in the conference room adjacent to the Great River Regional Library at the St. Michael City Hall.