

St. Michael Historian



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Hubert Welter Jr., Documenting a Legacy

by Bob Zahler

Every immigrant who eventually settled in St. Michael can be credited with bequeathing to their descendants a life likely far better than the one the immigrant left behind. Unfortunately, for most of these courageous settlers little record was left behind to trace their trials and victories other than what can be gleaned from public records. Hubert Welter Jr., however, seemed to have a sense of the history he was making when he left his home village of Obersgegen, Germany, at the age of just eighteen, to come to America. Hubert saved many of the papers and letters that now help us understand the ambitions of an industrious young man and his dream for prosperity in America for himself and his family.

Hubert Welter Jr. was born to Hubert and Elizabeth (Barthel) Welter in January 1854 in Obersgegen, Germany, a small village about a mile and a half from the border with Luxembourg and less than 20 miles west of the city of Bitburg. Obersgegen lies in the region known as the Eifel, at that time an economically depressed region from which many of St. Michael's founders emigrated including Hubert's uncles: Jacob, Mathias, Wilhelm and Hubert Barthel. It is likely that letters from his uncles convinced young Hubert that his fortunes lie in America. According to his brief autobiography, Hubert left



Above, a young Hubert Welter Jr. poses for a photographer, probably while he still lived in Brighton, Illinois about 1875. The original photo is a tintype, which was relatively inexpensive to produce. He likely sent a copy to his family in Germany to assure them that he was "making it" in America.

Obersgegen on June 6, 1872 and landed in New York 19 days later. He remained in New York for seven months working, at least part of this time, for a flatcar company unloading sand for 25 cents an hour. In January of 1873 Hubert left New York bound for Brighton, Illinois where he would remain for the next five years working, saving money, and learning English. He worked for E.B. Meriwether, a stock breeder, for most of his time in Illinois. When Hubert left his employer in March of 1878, Mr. Meriwether saw fit to send a letter of recommendation with Hubert. Hubert was on his way to St. Michael to live, and hopefully buy land, near his uncles; yet not ever having been to St. Michael, he had no idea how difficult it might be to find work. In the letter Mr. Meriwether seems to be very sincere when he states that Hubert is "one of the best of men, being honest, industrious and capable, pleasant and agreeable and particularly attentive to his business and has no bad habits whatever. I would gladly give him two hundred and fifty dollars per year to stay with me, but his desire to live among his relatives in Minnesota is such that he feels he must go to them and I cannot complain."

Hubert arrived in St. Michael in April of 1878; he was now 24 years old. He lived with his uncle Matt Barthel who farmed southwest of the village of St. Michael (17th Street NE and Jaber Avenue). After working as a laborer for two more years, Hubert was finally able to buy his own land. On October 5, 1880 he purchased from John Igel 140 acres, the land just north and west of the Historic Church. While buying the land was certainly a major accomplishment, it is clear that Hubert had other goals as well. Preserved correspondence between Hubert and his sister Maria, still in Germany with their parents, indicate that Hubert had

been sending money back to Germany to help take care of his parents and that he and Maria had been discussing the idea of how she and the elder parents might join the relatives in St. Michael. In a letter (translated from the original German) dated April 15, 1877 Maria stated, "How many springs will come till you will come back home again? According to your letters, you might come, but not to stay. Think about it. Maybe we should come to America? Ask your uncle about this. We would sell everything here and establish a home in America. Things are not good here. You can't forever send money home, and father and mother are getting older and cannot do much. If the two of us were together, we could better take care of them and they could relax and take it easier". In 1877, however, Hubert was still working in Illinois and not yet ready to bring the rest of the family. Although Hubert did not technically purchase his land in St. Michael until early October 1880, it is clear that the deal had been in the works for some time as another letter from Maria dated August 29, 1880 indicates that the plans to bring his parents and sister over from Obersgegen were already in motion. She stated that they had a potential buyer for the property there, and if things worked out, they would be on their way to St. Michael that fall; otherwise, it would be in the spring. She also referenced others from the area who were selling out and coming to America. On top of an already depressed German economy, Maria stated that they just had the third hail storm of the summer and that the oats and fruit were nearly all destroyed. No doubt that all this bad luck made the prospect of leaving their homeland behind just a little easier. As it turned out, there must have been some problems with the sale of the property; perhaps the destroyed crops changed the value of the farm or the ability of the other party to make the purchase. Regardless, according to Hubert's own notes, Maria, Hubert Sr. and Elizabeth arrived in St. Michael on May 1st, 1881; and according to Hubert Jr.'s children, the cost of the trip for all three was paid for by their father.

Then, in appreciation for Maria's care for their parents for the last many years, Hubert divided his farm giving the western half to Maria and his parents. Within two years Maria married Mathias Hengels, the two of them taking care of the aging parents on the farm they received from Hubert. Mathias and Maria Hengels had three children: Hubert (later married to Ida Dehmer), Elizabeth (later Sr. Anselm), Anna (later married to George Eicher) and Theodore; but sadly, Mathias and Maria's

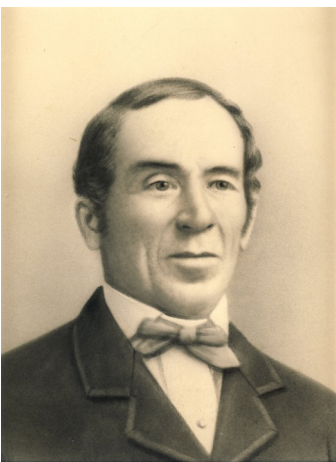
life together was cut short as Maria died in March of 1889 due to complications after giving birth to Theodore, who also passed away six months later.

In addition to improving his farm, Hubert apparently did other jobs such as picking up store goods in Minneapolis on behalf of J.K. and Lena Zachman who operated Zachman's Store in town. It was through this business relationship that he came to know Lena's sister, Anna Willems. Hubert and Anna soon married in 1886. From this union were born five children: Angela (later Sr. Angelica), Gertrude (Sr. Rosalia), Veronica, Dominic and Leo. Dominic would marry Agnes Hackenmueller and Leo would marry Armella Berning.

Hubert's sons, Dominic and Leo, with the work ethic and ambition they inherited from their father, started Welter Implement in St. Michael in 1936. Welter's Im-



Hubert's sister, Maria Welter, in 1874. This photo was taken when she was still in Germany. She would eventually marry Mathias Hengels in St. Michael.



Hubert and Maria Welter's parents: Hubert Sr. and Elizabeth (Barthel) Welter. Hubert Jr. brought his parents to St. Michael where they spent their remaining years. Hubert Sr. died in 1914 and Elizabeth in 1905.



Above: Hubert and Anna Welter at the farm with four of their five children in 1916: Leo, Dominic, Veronica, and Gertrude (Sr. Rosalia). This house and the surrounding farm buildings stood northwest of the historic church near the present intersection of Birch Avenue NW and 2nd Street NW

At right: Hubert Jr. and Anna Welter, date unknown

plement anchored the downtown business district until 2002 when the west side of Main Street was redeveloped (Cornerstone site); but the business continues to this day as Trueman-Welter's in Buffalo.

Hubert and Anna lived a long life together on their farm in St. Michael surrounded by children and grandchildren. Hubert died in 1941 at the age of 87 and Anna died in 1943 at the age of 82. Hubert's legacy is not just in the material success of his descendants, but also in the strong devotion to faith and family that lives on in them as well.



Immigrant Timelines

Example: Matthias Weinand (1804-1877) and Margretha (Schroeder) Weinand By Stephen Samuel Barthel, Accredited Researcher (Retired)

The Genealogy merit badge is offered to the Boy Scouts of America when they fulfill a number of requirements. One requirement may be to talk to a genealogist. (See the merit badge handbook for other requirements.) One task the scout can select is to develop a timeline on a particular person. You draw a vertical or horizontal line and place the person's birth date at one end and the death date at the other. You can place dots on the lines when you enter the dates and events of what happened when and where. Then you fill in the space between the dates.

If you go to a graveyard or visit one online through findagrave.com and select an ancestor, you will note there is sometimes a dash between the year of birth and the year of death. You now have the makings of a timeline. A lot happened in that person's 'dash' of life. We leave records wherever we go. Many of these records are online through familysearch.org. It is a free website. By doing a search on an individual, you can access many records, such as federal census records, to show where the ancestor lived every ten years.

The following is an example of information I found on one individual's life. Since it is text format, you can create a timeline (or two) for the married couple and enter the dots on the lines with what happened written next to the dots (use the familysearch.org website to find them in census records). Then, add the couple's children within the timeline.

Here is the information I found on St. Michael pioneer Matthias Weinand. See what you can do with this information, then do one on someone else.

According to the Civil Registration records (vital records), Mathias Weinand was born in Steinsel, Luxembourg on 14 Messidor XII on the French Republican calendar. The date converter found at Napoleon.org calculates his birth to 3 July 1804 on

the Gregorian calendar. The date of birth on his tombstone reads 8 June 1804. Unfortunately, the church records of Steinsel are missing the pages covering his date of birth, so it is next to impossible to verify which birth date is correct. The Status Animarum (parish census) for Saint Michael, which is invaluable but has many mistakes, gives his date of birth as 8 June 1804 and that Mathias is the son of Johann Weinand and Margretha Harsch.

The civil marriage record of Steinsel, Luxembourg also gave the 14 Messidor XII as his birth date. The marriage took place on 26 February 1832. The marriage record gives Margretha Schroeder's birth date as 30 Nov 1807 and that she was the daughter of Nikolaus Schroeder and Margretha Lentz, both of Steinsel. Her church birth record gives the same date of birth. It also mentioned that she was baptized on the same date. Note that name spellings typically varied from one record to another.

Mathias Weinand and Margretha Schroeder departed with their family through Antwerp, Belgium and arrived at the port of New York on 29 April 1852. The name of the ship was the Camellius. The family members listed on the passenger list were Mathias Weynand, age 47; Marg., age 46; Susanna, age 19; Mathias, age 16; Peter Weynand, age 14; and Catharina, age $\frac{3}{4}$.

According to the Status Animarum, the family first came to Port Washington, Ozaukee, Wisconsin in 1852, then left for Minnesota in 1856.

These are the immigrant children (born in Steinsel) of Matthias Weinand and Margretha Schroeder: Mathias Weinand (1835-1913) who was the husband of Helena May. They were buried in the old Saint Michael Cemetery; Katherine Weinand (1850-1928) who was the wife of Joseph May. They were buried in the old Saint Michael Cemetery; Peter Weinand (1838-1906) who was the husband of Mary Sweigert. He and his wife were buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Greenfield; Susanna Weinand (1832-1892) who was married to Martin Delles. Both were buried in the old Saint Michael Cemetery.

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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.

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Upcoming Events

June 13, Monday, 7 PM

Greg Vetsch, who belongs to a tool collectors club, will make a presentation on rare, unusual, and old tools. Presentation and the regular monthly meeting that follows will be in the Library conference room, St. Michael City Hall.

NOTE: No meeting in July

August 8, Monday, 7 PM

Regular monthly board meeting, Library conference room, St. Michael City Hall.