

St. Michael Historian



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

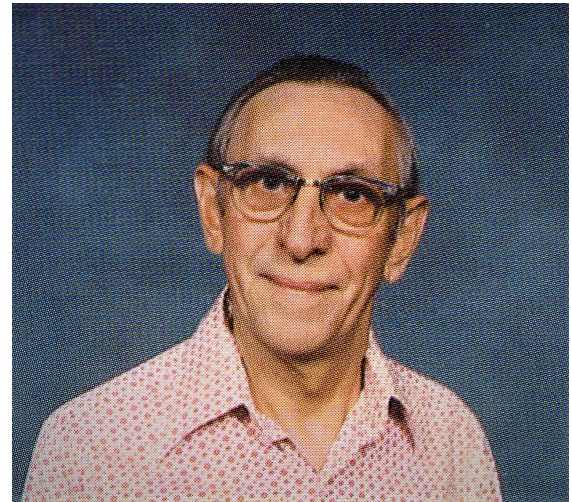
November 2017, Fall

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Luke!

by Bob Zahler

First, let me start with an apology. If you didn't personally know the subject of this story, Alfred "Luke" Georges, you really missed out knowing one of the most interesting characters to have lived in St. Michael. One didn't really have to know Luke very well to know who he was; this is what being a "character" means. In a small town, as St. Michael was for most of its existence, everybody knew each other or at least knew "who they belonged to". In other words, you knew their family. You knew each other through familial relationships and through town gossip, which was never considered harmful; it was just conversation. Luke's manner of turning a phrase became famous, and he was often quoted; partly because what he said was sometimes shocking and partly because what he said was just darn funny.



Alfred "Luke" Georges as he appeared in the church directory from 1988. He was 72 at the time.

Additionally, without having a memory of what Luke's voice sounded like, parts of this story will be challenging to appreciate. To help you imagine what it sounded like, think of the sound your own voice makes when trying to speak and clear your throat at the same time, and then clip and add emphasis to the last word in the sentence. If you can imagine that in your head, you'll get a sense of what it was like to hear Luke talk. If you can't, don't be discouraged. Just read on and you might come to know something of the man who sometimes frustrated people, often made people chuckle, and nearly always impressed people with the skill of his craft.

Luke was born Alfred Joseph Georges on October 19, 1916 to Nick and Susan Georges. How he came to be called "Luke" is not known. Luke had six sisters: Leona, Adelaide, Margaret, Alistina, Bernice, and Anna, who died at a young age. His father was a well driller and died when Luke was just eight years old. To the best of anyone's knowledge, Luke lived in the same house his entire life; the house that now belongs to Rodney Duerr. It sits on the corner of St. Michael Parkway and First Street SE (today it's the best decorated house in St. Michael during the Halloween and Christmas seasons).

Little is known about Luke's youth other than that one of his good friends was Alfred Barthel; and according to Alfred's son, Duane, Luke was fond of waiting for the hogs to come out from under their straw-built pens and jumping on their backs for a ride. Perhaps it was natural, then, for Luke to graduate to another type of hog, an Indian motorcycle, which people remember him riding well into adulthood, wearing his ever-present cap backwards as he tore around the dirt streets of St. Michael. During WWII Luke headed south to find work, which is likely when he learned the trade for which he was famous, welding. For some years after the war he worked at Lewis Nut and Bolt, but mostly he worked out of his garage, competing with neighbor Robby Hartman for the welding work that existed in the St. Michael area.

Luke would often say, "I can weld water if it has enough iron in it!" Those familiar with his work would agree. There was almost nothing he couldn't weld. Companies in the Twin Cities who had been told by other welders that a certain welding job could not be done, would call on Luke to do it. He was a craftsman, and he didn't like to be rushed. If you brought a job to him, you had to be willing to wait. If you put a time constraint on Luke, he would likely send you away or let you know in no uncertain terms that you were being unreasonable in your expectation. In a way he was a welding artist. He

would say, “You bring me the steel and I’ll make you a pair of steel shoes.” If Luke liked you (you treated him with respect), he would do anything for you. Nonetheless, if he agreed to do a project for you and it turned out to be a difficult one, he’d let you know that too. Once, after Harvey Zahler picked up some pipes that he brought to Luke to weld for a set of clothes-line poles, Luke told him, “If I had known those pipes were galvanized, I would have chased you clear to Canada with them!” Galvanized pipes create poisonous zinc oxide gas when welded, and Luke wanted Harvey to know that it had not been a pleasant job.

Two of Luke’s frequently quoted expressions came out of a job Luke was hired to do for the priest in Albertville who asked Luke to do some welding on the church bells. Luke had a portable welder that he hauled on his pickup truck. When asked whether he had enough cable to reach from the truck to the bells in the steeple, Luke responded, “Have I got cable? Why I could have left the truck at home!” During the welding job on the bells, Luke apparently ran into some problems, and a few cuss words left his mouth. When the priest came back he asked Luke if was able to finish the welding on the bells. Luke replied, “The bells are fixed, but they might need to be re-blessed!”

Luke was actually a very faithful Catholic. He had a strong belief in the intercession of the saints and would recommend to people which saints were good to pray to for help in certain situations. He not only attended Sunday mass regularly, he attended other services, but his devotion did not stop him from speaking his mind if he was annoyed. Once, during a mass concluding Forty Hours Devotion, a priest gave an unusually long sermon. According to those around him at church, Luke proclaimed loudly, “Will that man ever shut up?!” Luke gave his own account of another incident at church. Town barber Don Klaers had asked Luke if he had recently gone to confession. Luke said, “Yes, and did I have a load!” He had gone to the priest in Rogers and while in the confessional the priest asked Luke, “What is your state in life?” “I’m single,” said Luke. The priest then advised Luke, “The Lord said that it is not good for a man to be alone.” Luke replied, “You’re alone.”



Luke’s house as it appeared in 2008, long after it had been purchased by the Duerrs, although looking much as it did when Luke lived there.

at the Corner Bar. Luke accepted the drinks that were purchased for him, but when it was his turn to buy and somebody hinted that he should get the next round, he patted his breast pocket and said, “The wallet is in the locked position!” Luke was so cheap that he wouldn’t buy green bananas because he believed they weighed more and thus cost more. His house was sparse and was never modernized beyond a 1940s appearance. He never built a proper bathroom in his house. He did, however, install a toilet at one end of his dirt-floor cellar. The stool sat atop the sewer pipe with nothing but the boulder foundation walls around it. He used light bulbs with the lowest wattage he could stand, and witnesses said that he had shirts that had been purchased for him that were still in plastic but that had turned yellow from age. Later in life, when he finally decided to

While Luke remained a bachelor his entire life, he was known to flirt with the ladies, especially if he had had “a couple” at the Corner Bar. One time Armella Kilian and Armella Simms came into the bar all dressed up, Armella Simms was wearing a white coat. Luke, on the other hand, was still filled with dirt, grease, and grime from the day’s work, which was typical for him. Upon seeing Armella Simms, Luke got up from his stool and gave Armella a hug, placing his hands on her bottom and leaving dirty hand prints. Bar owner LaDonna Zachman, watching what was going on, said, “Luke! You behave yourself!” Luke retorted, “You have eyes like an attic bat!” LaDonna kicked him out of the bar. It’s not likely that Luke took his temporary exile too personally; for many years Luke was a fixture at the bar where he entertained people with his stories or by creating an incredibly realistic-sounding train whistle. Most people loved hearing the train whistle, but there were times where he did it so often that it got on people’s nerves. But as long as he made people laugh, he kept doing it.

Another Luke characteristic that people talked about was his frugality. One time someone started buying rounds of drinks

buy a new truck, he insisted on a model that came without a radio (he claimed that he wanted to be able to hear the engine). When the salesman asked if would like to make payments, Luke said, "Payments!? Why? So that I can pay for it twice? This'll be cash on the barrelhead!" And then after a slight pause he said, "I might even have the money on me right now!" Issues of money concerned him. Anybody who cheated him was "lower than a snake in a buggy track!" Luke was frequently hired to thaw frozen pipes using a contraption he invented himself. Once when he hadn't been paid right away by a customer, someone asked what he would do about it. Luke said, "I'll reverse the polarity and freeze 'em back up!"

While Luke's brash and abrupt manner of speaking turned some people off, those who knew him and could get past his rough edges, genuinely liked him. Later in life he developed a good friendship with Fr. Leonard Seibenaler and it is believed that this relationship helped Luke give up drinking completely. His sharp tongue, however, never went away. Frank Zachmann, who spent a lot of time with Luke during his last years, tells of how he had taken Luke to see a doctor in Maple Grove. The nurse who took his vitals was wearing a spiked hair style popular at the time. On their way home, Frank teased Luke by asking him, "That nurse was pretty good looking, don't you think?" Luke said, "She looked like she was dragged through the brush pile, backwards!" That was classic Luke. On January 19, 1996 next-door neighbor Andy Pohlkamp found Luke dead on his kitchen floor; he was 79 years old. Many people mourned the loss of St. Michael's most familiar character. The fact that so many people continue to enjoy "Luke stories" is a testament to the positive mark he left on this community. My thanks to Joey Dehmer, Tom Dehmer, Frank Zachmann, Harvey Zahler, Jeff Schoen, and Duane Barthel for sharing stories for this article.

Treasures Found on Historical Society's Website!

by *Stephen Samuel Barthel*

The mission of the St. Michael Historical Society is to collect, preserve and share the history of the City of St. Michael, Minnesota. How is that going to help you, if you are not a native of St. Michael?!

Granted, a lot has changed since St. Michael was a tiny farming community! It is no longer just a community of German Roman Catholics, but now a city consisting of people of numerous religious, non-religious and ethnic backgrounds. If you live in St. Michael today, but you have absolutely no early roots in the City of St. Michael, you are really part of its ongoing story, just as much as the first pioneers became part of its story! Our Society recognizes where we are at today and it does include you!

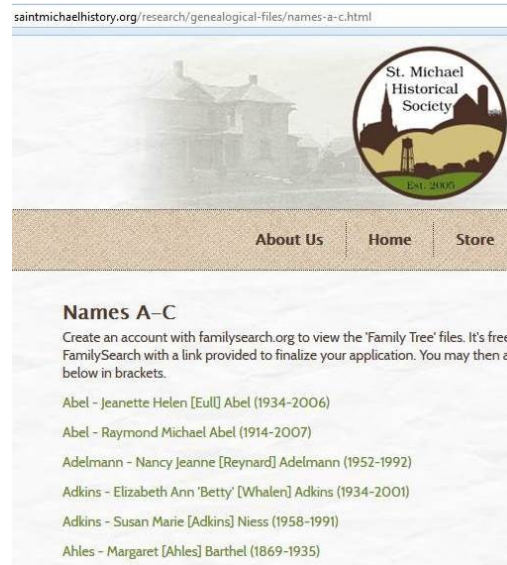
Genealogy (the study and tracing of one's lineage) is history, but not all history is genealogy. Our website saintmichaelhistory.org is a tremendous resource for many wanting to trace his or her roots. Go to the website and hover your cursor over the word Research. A dropdown menu will open, which leads you to **Basic Genealogical Files**. Once you move the cursor down and click on the Basic Genealogical Files box, you will be linked to a selection of numerous genealogical sites from FamilySearch.org to foreign language translators; from detailed German Empire and European maps, to the Norwegian Word List; from a link to the digitized online records of the former Duchy of Baden, to the records of Sweden and Switzerland! If you want to see the digitized records of Luxembourg or The Netherlands, you can do that! German and Polish links are available as well. If you have trouble remembering the URLs for sites, just bookmark the Basic Genealogical Websites found on the St. Michael Historical Society website. Have fun exploring these links.



Clicking on the "Research" tab on the St. Michael Historical Society website will drop a menu that can take the researcher to several genealogical sites with a wealth of information.

If you have ancestry from the St. Michael-Albertville area, or events have taken place there (such as births, marriages, or deaths and burials), you will find more than 4100 names with links to their genealogy of the deceased listed in Family Trees in FamilySearch. This is another valuable resource. Go to our website and hover the cursor over Research to see the dropdown menu, hover the cursor over **Genealogical Files** and an alphabetical menu

will appear. Click on the file you need (files are arranged by birth name and married name). The files are still a work in progress, but plenty of names are there. You will, however, need to open a free account with FamilySearch to access the Tree. Once you register when opening an account, you will be notified by email to verify. Once you have done that, you will have access to not only the tree, but to many more digitized images found on FamilySearch.



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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.saintmichaelhistory.org

Like us on **Facebook!**

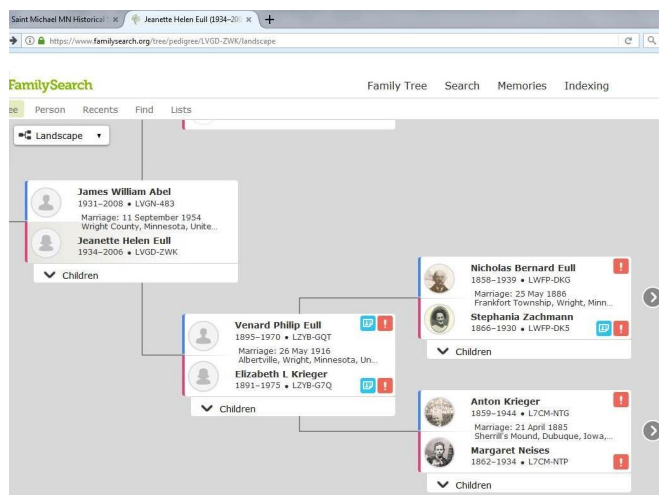
Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at the St. Michael City Hall in the Gries and Lenhardt Public Meeting Room adjacent to the library.

This newsletter is published quarterly for the benefit of the members of the St. Michael Historical Society. Reprints of this or any other newsletter by the Society are not permitted without the express written consent of the St. Michael Historical Society.

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 Stephen S. Barthel

As a retired accredited genealogist in German research, and retired European Reference Consultant at the world's largest genealogical library, I have accumulated a lot of knowledge and skill. I have applied some of this to the St. Michael Historical Society's website. Again, whether you have roots in the St. Michael-Albertville area or not, you can benefit by being a member. More of what will be offered will be explained in our winter newsletter, so plan on being or becoming a member.



Top right: hovering over Genealogical Files from the Research tab reveals an alphabetical name list. The first listing takes the researcher to the page shown.

Then, clicking on the first name takes you to the Family Search website where one can select a family tree option producing the one shown at left.

Upcoming Events

Please Note: There is no Board of Directors Meeting in December.

January 8, 2018

Regular Board Meeting, 7:00 PM, Library Conference Room, City Hall

February 12, 2018

Regular Board Meeting, 7:00 PM, Library Conference Room, City Hall