

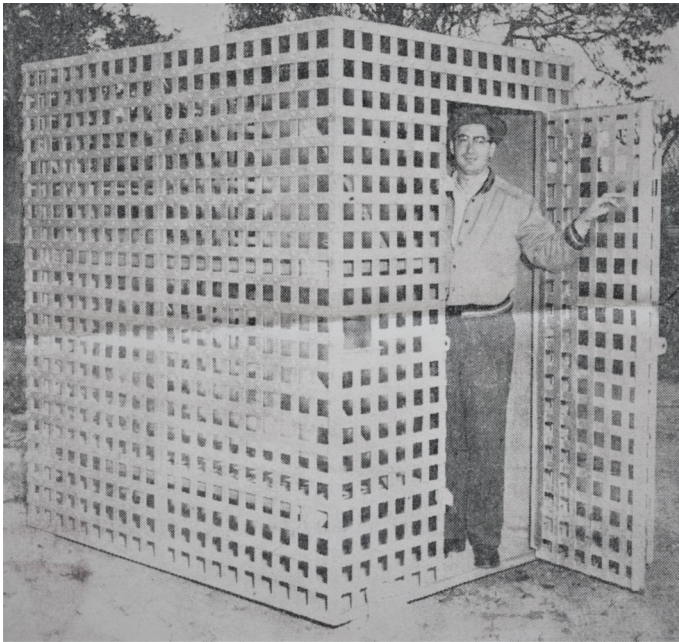
St. Michael Historian



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Historic Hoosegow

by Bob Zahler

Sixty-five years ago the Village of St. Michael advertised that it had a jail for sale, but not with the photo you see at left. It is probable that Village Clerk Don Klaers placed an ad in the Minneapolis Tribune and someone there found the ad humorous and notified the news-room, who then sent a reporter out to St. Michael to check out the story. The photo at left ended up in the paper on October 28, 1953 with the following caption:

Need a Jail? - St. Michael, a community 25 miles northwest of Minneapolis, has so little crime it wants to sell its jail. Nobody's been in it since seven years ago when an out-of-town drunk spent a drafty night in it. Donald Klaers, town barber and village clerk, poses at the door of the all-steel, double-bunked hoosegow which is about 50 years old. St. Michael is buying a new fire truck and wants to park the old one as standby equipment in the fire hall where the jail has been standing.

We know that the fire truck the village purchased was a 1952 International that they took possession of in late 1953. The “standby equipment” was more than likely old “Suzy”, the 1929 Chevrolet still used in parades. The building that housed the jail and the fire trucks was the old “fire barn” that was demolished for city redevelopment in 2004. It was located near the present site of the Main Street Farmer restaurant. The jails were in the rear. Yes, that’s jails—plural. There was actually two of them at one point. The jail in the photo above was the second one, and it was eventually sold to the city of Monticello. Another one was sold a few years earlier to Leon Kilian who used it for his dogs and occasionally to lock up his boys when they were getting out of hand. That jail was recently rediscovered, still on a lot owned by Archie Kilian.



As a kid I was aware of this old jail being there at the top of a ravine since we played in and around it, but I never knew where it came from or exactly what it was. This was back in the 1970s. Late last summer I ventured back there to find that the old jail, or what’s left of it, was still there, but now overgrown with brush and used as a place to stack fallen branches. The 1953 article mentioned that it was about 50 years old then, which would date it back to the time when the old fire barn was built between 1900 and 1905. So here lies the remains of a “double-bunked hoosegow” purchased at a time when the village fathers were dreaming big, and thinking that St. Michael might occasionally attract the wrong sort of people and need to put them on ice. Not just one jail, but two. They were thinking really big.

Skiping Back A Hundred Years

by Bob Zahler

One of the things that I always enjoyed as a history student was a timeline. Timelines are useful in seeing the general progression of history in a snapshot sort of way. When starting to think about what to write for the first issue of the new year, I stopped to think that it was the year 2018 already! And then I started to look back 25 years and then 30 years and so forth. It was fun to notice in my notes the interesting things that happened in St. Michael going back five years at a time, many of them giving an indication of what was happening in other places in the country; so here's a timeline skip through St. Michael history starting 100 years ago with one or more significant events from each five-year interval.

100 years ago: 1918 The entire world was experiencing a flu epidemic, what some referred to as the "Spanish Flu", and St. Michael did not escape. In 1918, ten people died of the flu according to the death registers for the Village of St. Michael and for Frankfort Township. It was also in 1918 that the parish of St. Michael decided to convert the convent from gas lights to electric, indicating that it was about this time that those living in the village were converting to electricity. Oh, and Ollie Schumacher was born on March 26 (Ollie turns 100 this year).

95 years ago: 1923 Another sign of the modernity reaching rural areas like St. Michael was the Parish of St. Michael upgrading the church organ from an old hand-pumped organ to a new pipe organ that was powered by an electric motor. Parts of the 1923 organ, in particular the decorative pipes, are still in the Historic Church.

90 years ago: 1928 Emil Duerr, who had recently purchased the dance hall from Matt Barthel's widow, Pauline; added a gas pump in 1928 on the west side of the dance hall. The pump was leased by the Pure Oil Company. They installed, maintained, and provided the gas for the pump; and Emil received a cut of the profits. This was during Prohibition, so they probably needed additional revenue to make their confectionary and pool hall profitable.

85 years ago: 1933 Prohibition came to an end which prompted brothers-in-law L.A. Dick and Howard Sipe to start beer distributorships for Grain Belt and Gluek's, respectively, in 1933. Their businesses were both along Main Street about two blocks from each other.

80 years ago: 1938 Everett Berning opened the Millside Tavern in a remodeled blacksmith shop in August 1938. Bernings are still serving up good beer and food in that same remodeled blacksmith shop. Certain traditions never go out of style.

75 years ago: 1943 Twenty-five year-old Ollie Schumacher was scouted by the New York Yankees as a potential pitcher. His "advanced age", however, prevented a deal from being made.

70 years ago: 1948 Land O'Lakes, which was leasing the St. Michael Co-operative Creamery building, started bottling milk here. This would turn the creamery into St. Michael's largest business until it closed 22 years later. Post-war "super markets", and the dairy wholesalers who stocked their modern refrigerators, were quickly replacing hometown sources of dairy.

65 years ago: 1953 The St. Michael-Hanover road was finally black-topped. The car culture of the 50s demanded an endless track of good roads even between small, rural towns. The St. Michael Saints, the town's baseball team, made it to the state tournament for the first time. The metro newspapers reported that so many fans drove to the game that St. Michael was a ghost town.

Enjoy *Gluek's* Beer

The Beer With the Real Beer Flavor

A REAL GET-TOGETHER
BAKED VIRGINIA HAM... PLENTY OF RYE BREAD...
A GOOD GLASS OF BEER

Gluek's PILSENER PALE BEER

H. G. SIPE, Distributor
St. Michael, Minn. Tel. 521

Howard Sipe ad from 1936 published in the Wright County Journal Press

60 years ago: 1958 The village purchased the land along the river for the sewage treatment ponds from Rob and Edna Zahler. Some of this land would also become the city's recreation center about 20 years later. The original sewage settling ponds are gone, but the treatment plant is still located on this land. It was also in 1958 that Dr. Jim Chervenak started practicing dentistry in St. Michael, which he would continue to do for another 44 years in St. Michael. He was the first full-time dentist in St. Michael.

55 years ago: 1963 Larry and Roseanna Schulte opened their first greenhouse behind their home on County Road 19 south of town. Schulte's started small when the town was small and has grown with the city. The *Crow River News* also began publication in 1963. While technically not a St. Michael business, it has been the closest thing approaching a hometown newspaper.

50 years ago: 1968 Vern and Aggie Hackenmueller opened their new grocery store at the present site of O'Reilly Auto Parts and started the shift of St. Michael's business district to the east. Vern's Fairway Foods sat amid farms and fields at the time. The era of the small stores all located downtown along the sidewalk, was coming to an end. Also in the fall of 1968, the STMA school district began offering a complete K-12 program. This was the birth of the STMA "Knights".

45 years ago: 1973 Two new eateries opened this year. Big Tom's Supper Club opened in the old St. Michael Dance Hall building, and Mr. Z's Drive-in opened near the intersection of Edgewood Drive and Highway 241. It was also in 1973 that Dale's Off-sale opened adjacent to the family filling station.

Each of these new businesses indicated that St. Michael was modernizing. The remodel of the dance hall into Big Tom's shifted that businesses focus from beer and dancing to fine eating. Mr. Z's was St. Michael's first short-order restaurant open in the evenings through the entire weekend and really catered to kids and families. Dale's Off-sale was St. Michael's first stand-alone liquor store.

40 years ago: 1978 Blom's Super Market closed after a hundred years as a family business in the old downtown area. While it remained open for a few more years as Schuster's Market, it was clear that small grocery stores were no longer very profitable without gas pumps to go with them. That same year the Colonial Mall opened on the other end of town. Near the end of the year the R & R Club (formerly Big Tom's and the St. Michael Dance Hall) burned to the ground as a result of a gas leak and explosion.

35 years ago: 1983 Greg Zahler opened his photography studio, the first in St. Michael, adjacent to the laundromat on Central Avenue; and Wally and Pat Adkins opened Crow River Lanes on the west end of the Colonial Mall.

30 years ago: 1988 The St. Michael Mall opened on the north side of Highway 241. Dr. Dirk Posthumus opened his dental office next to Dehmer's Meat Market, and the bar formerly known as the "Blue Moon", "Robert's", and "Wayne's"; officially became "Ditto's" in 1988.

BIG TOM'S
SUPPER CLUB
FOR THE FINEST IN DINING and ENTERTAINMENT

LADIES' NIGHT
EVERY TUESDAY NIGHT
LIVE MUSIC
8:30 p.m. - 1 a.m.
* A ROSE FOR EVERY LADY!
* DRAWINGS FOR FREE DINNERS
* MANY OTHER SURPRISES

8:30 P.M. TO 1 A.M.
JIM JOHNSON
& THE COUNTRY CUT UPS
EVERY TUESDAY, THURSDAY & FRIDAY THRU DECEMBER

CHARLENE BENTLEY
"NASHVILLE RECORDING STAR!"
EVERY MONDAY EVERY WEDNESDAY EVERY SUNDAY
BIG TOM'S APPETIZER

PRIME RIBS \$4.50
Texas Style T-BONE 24 oz. \$5.95
CHICKEN, RIBS or SPAGHETTI \$2.50
ALL YOU CAN EAT 12 - 8 p.m.

NOON LUNCHES MONDAY - FRIDAY 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.
BAR OPEN MONDAY - SATURDAY 8 a.m. - 1 a.m.
OPEN SUNDAY 12 noon - 1 a.m.

DINNER..... 5 p.m. - 11:30

MAKE RESERVATIONS NOW FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE
THANK YOU FOR SUNDAY LIQUOR
ST. MICHAEL, MINN. phone 497-9907
(Big) Tom Libra, Proprietor

The ad above is from a 1973 issue of the Crow River News. Note the "thank you for Sunday liquor" at the bottom of the ad. While beer had always been allowed in bars on Sundays in St. Michael, hard liquor had not. In fact, in the former dance hall, they only served beer and set-ups. Patrons brought their own liquor bottles to Friday and Saturday dances. Tom Libra, the new owner, petitioned the village council to change the ordinance so that he could serve mixed drinks with meals on Sundays. While the prohibition on hard liquor was a concession to religious sensitivities, by 1973 there was an understanding that the town needed to progress.

25 years ago: 1993 Don Klaers retired as the city clerk, a position he held since 1953. Don's retirement was somehow symbolic of the change taking place in 1993 as new homes were being built at a surprisingly fast rate. An entirely new phase in St. Michael's history was taking place. The "grand opening" of a business use to be a celebration for the entire community. We congratulated the neighbor who was sticking his neck out to improve the town. As the 1990s progressed, the expansion of housing and business developments became expected and just happened in the background of a new and persistent hustle and bustle. And so this seems like a good place to end our timeline skip through St. Michael history.

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.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.

Publisher: Bob Zahler

Editors: Sheldon Barthel
 Stephen S. Barthel



The above photo was taken in the early summer of 1992. Shortly after this photo was taken, the corn field became a housing development.

What's Next?

This is a common question at St. Michael Historical Society board meetings. Three individuals have now served four years each as president of the society, the maximum allowed in the bylaws. The Board itself is aging and we are in desperate need of young blood to keep the society going. Is keeping alive the memory of St. Michael's history important to you? How about sharing your history with your children and grandchildren? Encourage them to become involved. Very little time and energy is required. Mostly, we just need people to show that they care.

Also, is there a St. Michael history topic you would like to see explored and published here? Send a message to Bob Zahler at zahlerb66@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

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| March 12 | 6:30 PM: Steve Barthel will offer a mini-lesson on genealogy. The regular monthly board meeting will follow at 7:00 PM. Library Conference Room, St. Michael City Hall. |
| April 9 | 7:00 PM: Annual open meeting. Five board members will be elected to three-year terms. After the board election, the board will elect a new president and vice-president to serve for the next two years. Library Conference Room, St. Michael City Hall. |
| May 14 | 7:00 PM: Regular monthly board meeting. Committee and staff assignments will be made along with secretary and treasurer appointments. |