

St. Michael Historical Society



Spring 2008
Volume 2, Issue 3
Newsletter

Meetings for 2008

Aug. 25, 2008

Oct. 6, 2008

Nov. 3, 2008

Dec. 1, 2008

**Meetings 7:00 at
City Hall.**

Anyone is welcome

Special Points of Interest

- **Early Memories of Farm Life**
- **An Old Time Steam Engine**
- **St. Michael Farm Photos**
- **Look for more farm photos in the next issue**

**Created by:
Genny Kieley**

So much of who we are is linked to the farmer and farmland. Without farms what will the future of the rural parts of Minnesota become?

Early Memories of Farm Life

Wayne Kessler

I was born in 1937 and the years of drought were behind us, but the after effects of the Depression were still with us. In 1937, the Wright-Hennepin REA built a high-line transmission line past our farm. With a promise that they would soon build a line for farmers to hook on to. The war interrupted that plan. We didn't get electricity until August 6, 1946.

During World War II there was little in the way of consumer goods. Farm life was hard but no one had it easy during those years. Cows were milked by hand, hay was stored in the hay loft, which was the second story of the barn. Silage was thrown out of the silo by hand. In winter, it froze to the middle and had to be chopped. The manure was pitched out into a manure carrier on a track or cable. Most of the labor for crops was by horsepower, the four legged kind. Hay was hauled loose on a hay rack, usually elevated by a hay loader but spread over the wagon by hand.

Dairy cows weren't important to most farmers. Swine were the big item. They had the dubious title of being the mortgage lifters. Chickens were very important as their eggs bought the groceries. The biggest endeavor on a farm was Ma's Garden. People were very accepting of their conditions and sometimes happier than people of today.



Norbert Louis Barthel, son of Hubert was born 11 March 1916. This is him with his pigs on the farm across from Schulte's Greenhouse, south of St. Michael.

AN OLD TIME STEAM ENGINE

Things have changed on farms since the turn of the century. The old-time steam engines were once a common sight and an important part of the annual harvest. The steam engineer would blow the whistle in the morning when he started out. These were signals to help the fellow that hauled water for the steam engine. The engineer would start blowing the whistle, one long and one short. You could hear it for a mile or so. The same thing would take place at noon. The engineer would blow the whistle and everybody would stick their fork in the ground, head for the house, wash their face and hands; then sit down to a big meal. A water pan would sit outside the back porch for washing hands. The men would be extremely dirty, covered with grain and dust.



If you plowed two and a half acres a day you'd put in quite a day plowing. The binders were just coming into existence. They had reapers but they didn't have the binder that would wrap the grain up and tie a string on it to make it into a bundle. Threshing machines were quite numerous in the area and all of them were pulled by steam engines. Live steam was created by burning wood in the firebox. A group of neighbors



Haying and threshing 1944 and 1947

would help one another and they'd move right down the line of farms. All the neighboring farmers including sons and hired men took turns assisting each other with threshing.

Most farmers grew oats that were used for feeding the livestock. Crops of rye and barley were also grown. If they threshed out of the shock, they would take the shocks and put them on the wagon. Then haul them into the machine, pitch them in and haul the grain into the shed. Otherwise, they would stack the grain and the stacks would look almost like a honeybee cone. To build a stack was an art. You had to lay each bundle around in a circle, and slope your bundles so they wouldn't take water. It



Threshing Crew in early 1900s

would be like a thatched roof and from far away they'd look golden almost like a beehive. It was a beautiful sight to see.

In the fall, maybe around October 10th when all the plowing was done, then a farmer would try to get a machine in for threshing grain. It would be like a celebration, because the neighbors were looking forward to getting together so they could help one another.



Mrs. Hubert Barthel [Mary Ann] holding Norbert Barthel



Gregor Zachman
early 1920s



Bernie Hackenmuehler
1947

The women would cook meals that were wonderful and out of this world--beef, roasts, fried chicken, mashed potatoes with gravy, vegetables, pickles, fresh bread with butter and the finishing touch, a huge piece of home made pie. The tables would be heaped with food. They would really eat, 'cause it was hard work. At the end of threshing season there would be fun, jokes and they would play music.

During the year occasionally neighbors would go over and help each other in digging a well, or maybe erecting a barn or a building. It wasn't unusual if a farmer needed help or if sickness came the neighbors would go over and help him. Payment was never mentioned. "How much do I owe you?" That was a forgotten thing. It was just a matter of responsibility to your neighbor. That was the size of it.

There were many happy times during those early days when work was exchanged between farmers. Those relationships in today's world are hard to come by. Some say we've kind of lost something along the way.

Gleamed from Hyrom Sorenson interview

Scattered Seeds 1973



Hubert Gregory Barthel with his children



Norbert L. Barthel, Mary Ann Barthel, Gerturde Thome Miesen, [Mary Ann's mother]

St. Michael Historical Society

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Mailing Address Line 1
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We need your photos and stories



Barthel Family
in the barn



Robert Zahler with
chickens early 1950s



Hubert Gregory Barthel was born 12 March 1871 in Frankfort Township, Garrison Avenue south of Pelican Lake. Photo taken early 1870s. Note the log structure, also part of a man is barely visible on the left . Probably his father, Jacob Barthel. On the back are the words *Das ist der Hubert auch mit seinen Schweinen*, meaning That is Hubert, also with his pigs.

Membership Dues are Payable in January

If you have not renewed your membership for 2008, please send your name and address and submit it along with your check to the address provided.

If you are unsure if you are paid up, you can call St. Michael Historical Society at [763] 497-2041 and leave a message. Someone will check your membership status and return your call.

We are always interested in donated artifacts related to St. Michael's history. For more information and how you can help please call.

We appreciate your ongoing support.