



NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

Newsletter published quarterly

Non-Profit Organization 501c3

June 2024

Growing Up and Working in St Francis

by James Hempel

Actually, the title of this story is a bit of a misnomer since I grew up in Town of Lake before St. Francis became a city. My first memories as a youngster were in a house owned by my grandparents, Frank and Elizabeth Grabske. It is there, on East Tesch Avenue, that Mom and I lived while Dad was a long way from home in Southeast Asia during World War II. He was serving as an airplane mechanic in the US Army Air Corps. That first house was an old-style Milwaukee bungalow with living quarters upstairs where we lived, plus a coal-fired furnace in the basement.

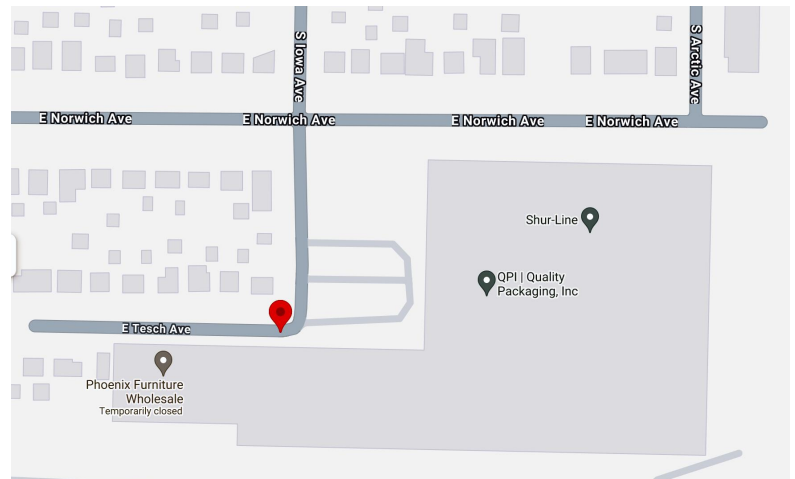
My house, or rather my grandparents' house, was on one end of the block at 2131 E Tesch Avenue. To the east was an open field going downhill to the Chicago and North Western railroad tracks. The entire block to the north had no houses, just open field with some with construction materials in the field. My great uncle Anton Grabske, owned the vacant property. Grabske's house was on Norwich Avenue, just north of us on Norwich.

On the west end of this block were more open fields. In winter, a portion of these fields was flooded with water from nearby fire hydrants for ice skating. There was a small heated shack for changing into your skates, with your shoes left behind on the floor. After a snow fall, volunteers (kids and their dads) would bring shovels and clear the snow. We practically lived on the rink in winter.

I remember the train tracks that went east to the Lakeside power plant. We would see the little Dinky train hauling coal to the plant or hauling used coal ash to the dumping grounds just south, between Tesch and Leroy.



James Hempel refers to this as the Dinky. However, that is somewhat controversial because some believe that the Dinky was the streetcar that ran from Kinnickinnic Avenue to the Lakeside power plant. In a Facebook survey on St. Francis Town Hall, done in 2018, it was 66% to 34% in favor of the train that hauled the coal (pictured above).



A map from Google Maps showing the area on Tesch that James Hempel is referring to.

That was a great area for young boys to play. There was a creek for crayfish, a pond for floating rafts, and lots of mounds and hills. There was a valley of lovely coal and ash---not a great place to stay clean.

Our house was one of only four on the entire block. To the west of us were only three houses. Beyond that was an open field before the next building, either Advance Screw Machine, or EZ Painter this needs more research. At one point in time, members of the Grabske family occupied three of the four houses.

Being surrounded by fields on all sides, on a street that was only two blocks long, there were many opportunities for young boys to get into mischief. As I mentioned already, one was the coal ash area. Another was putting pennies on the railroad tracks, waiting for a large freight to pass through, or playing in the rock quarry on Norwich, just west of the tracks. It was also a good area for a budding inventor, or so I thought. This is where I could experiment with a science and chemistry kit using real chemicals, or scrounging up old gas engines to build a go-cart to cruise back and forth on Tesch.

Several years later, EZ Painter wanted to expand their operations, slowing moving to the east and taking over that open field. Eventually, through additional expansion, the only four houses to the east on Tesch were purchased and taken down. Eventually, EZ Painter grew and took over the entire area.

As far as working in St Francis goes, like many boys my first paying job was delivering newspapers. I was still in school and didn't like getting up before sunrise, so I didn't go for the morning *Milwaukee Sentinel* paper. Rather, I delivered the *Milwaukee Journal* afternoon edition around the Tripoli / Armour streets area. The *Journal* had a shed there where we could put together the newspaper sections and go out to deliver them. It was door to door. In an entire block, it was very unusual for even one house not to get the evening news.

After that I moved to an indoor, climate-controlled environment. No more walking thru wind, sleet, and snow with newspapers. In my early teens, I worked at Lennie and Joan's grocery store on Howard and Kansas avenues, now the home of a law firm.

I saved my best, or at least most interesting, for last. In high school I thought about studying engineering. I was able to find a summer school job at Dittmore-Freimuth Corporation at 2517 East Norwich Avenue.¹ (Makers Village, the second location of Milwaukee Makerspace, opened here in 2020). My job there involved the testing and calibration of bathythermographs.² Being a tech nerd, this job fit me perfectly.

My job was to test the completed units to make sure the etching on the glass slides properly recorded the temperatures and depths, or pressures. Since water temperature may vary by layer and may affect sonar by producing inaccurate location results, bathythermographs were installed on the outer hulls of U.S. submarines during World War II. They were also used in our destroyers and oceanography studies. Eventually, advancements in technology, changes in warfare, and some legal issues caused them to shut their doors in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

I eventually moved on to become an electrical engineer.



A bathythermograph from Wikipedia

¹Makers Village, the second location of Milwaukee Makerspace, opened in the former Dittmore Freimuth building in 2020

²The bathythermograph, or BT, is a device that holds a temperature sensor and a transducer to detect changes in water temperature versus depth down to a depth of approximately 285 meters (935 feet). Lowered by a small winch on the ship into the water, the BT records pressure and temperature changes on a coated glass slide as it is dropped nearly freely through the water. While the instrument is being dropped, the wire is paid out until it reaches a predetermined depth, then a brake is applied and the BT is drawn back to the surface. Because the pressure is a function of depth, temperature measurements can be correlated with the depth at which they are recorded. *Wikipedia*

A Town of Lake Family

By Julie (Czechorski) Hughes

My grandfather, Stanley Czechorski, immigrated to the United States in 1910. He had been a butcher in Poland. He married my grandmother, Julia, in 1906. It was an arranged marriage. By 1910, they had three children: Stella (1907), John (1908), and Louis (1910). My grandfather came to this country, like so many other immigrants at that time, because he had heard “the streets were paved with gold.” He had a difficult time finding work here and wasn’t able to send for my grandmother and his two oldest children until 1913. His youngest son, Louis, had a childhood illness and wasn’t allowed to immigrate. Louis remained in Poland with family until he was 18 years old.

Shortly after Julia’s arrival, the family moved to the Town of Lake. They rented the Lohse house at 3952 South Packard Avenue. It was there that three more children were born: Mary (1914), my dad, Siggie (1916), and Angeline (1917). About 1919, the family moved to the former James Bonniwell farm on South Lake Drive, the site of the former Lakeside power plant and now the site of Parkshore Condominiums (3926 S. Lake Dr.). They rented the farm from the Wisconsin Electric Power Company. The power plant was built in 1920 and opened in 1921. Daughters Rose (1920) and Marge (1921) were born on the farm.

The farmhouse had a large library, as was the norm in English country homes. Aunt Rose reminisced about her oldest sister, Stella, having friends over to dance in the library. She said there was a large gaslight hanging in the center of the room. Rose and Marge, being just eight and nine years old at the time, learned to dance with Stella and her friends.

My grandparents farmed the land growing many different vegetables. They raised pigs, chickens, and ducks. They had cows and a horse named Billy. Dad would remark how the cows could walk down to Lake Michigan for a drink of water. That certainly wouldn’t be the case today with the lake erosion. There was a large apple orchard on the south end of the farm that was planted by the original owner, James Bonniwell.

Grandmother Julia drove a horse and wagon to Cudahy to sell the vegetables they grew. In the summer, people would come from all over the Town of Lake to swim in Lake Michigan. My grandfather would charge ten cents a car for parking on the farm. Grandfather and his brother-in-law brewed moonshine in the barn. His brother-in-law owned a tavern on Pulaski Avenue in Cudahy. Prohibition hindered his business but brewing moonshine helped keep it afloat. Dad recalled a memory of how men in suits came to the farm one day and broke up all the stills. Family lore tells us that the authorities took pity on my grandfather because he had so many children and only his brother-in-law was charged with a crime.

The Czechorski children went to Holy Family School in Cudahy when the family could afford the tuition, and there the children received First Communion. Other years they attended Thompson Avenue School. My dad’s teacher at Thompson was Miss Olive Bader. Many years later, my brother, sister, and I attended Thompson Avenue School and Mrs. Olive (Bader) Roberts was our principal.

At age 14, my dad had taken apart the engine of an old Model T Ford and put it back together again.



Marge and Rose on the farm



Stanley, Rose, Marge, and horse Billy

He enjoyed the challenge. In 1934, at the height of the Great Depression, Dad used this talent when he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. President Franklin Roosevelt established the CCC as part of his New Deal program to combat high unemployment. Dad earned \$30 a month repairing trucks and earth-moving equipment. As a condition of this program, \$25 of that monthly salary had to be sent home to his family. Auto/truck repair became Dad's life long profession.

About this time, my grandfather and his sons, John and Louis, were working at Cudahy Brothers Meat Packing Company. The once beautiful English manor house they lived in fell into great disrepair. Dad told of sleeping in the attic and being able to see the stars at night through the cracks in the roof. In 1935, the family was able to purchase a home at 2738 E. Denton Avenue in Town of Lake. It had a very large lot, and my grandmother was able to continue raising chickens and grow vegetables. Shortly after my grandparents moved from the farm, the Wisconsin Electric Power Company demolished the Bonniwell farmhouse.

My mom, Lorraine, and my dad, Siggie, married in 1942. They lived with my maternal grandparents, Peter and Anna Napieralski, at 3852 S. Kinnickinnic Avenue in the Town of Lake. Peter operated the Wind Mill Tap at that address. In 1945, my parents purchased their own home at 3901 S. Kirkwood Avenue, Town of Lake. It was here that I was raised with my brother, John, and sister, Helen. My dad passed away in 1988, having lived his entire life within a one and a half mile radius in the Town of Lake. Mom lived in her home until 1998, after which it was sold. She passed away in 2005.



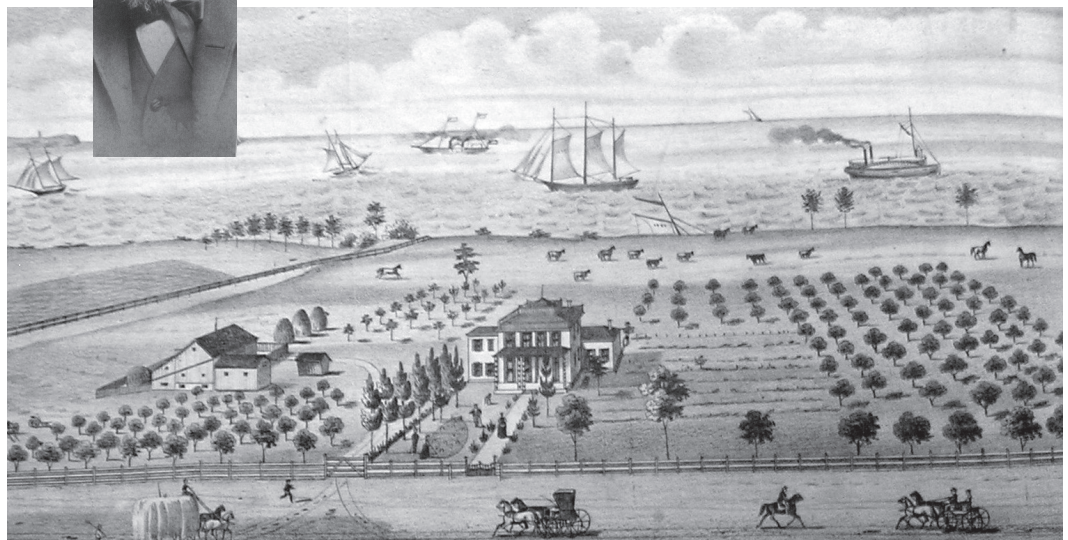
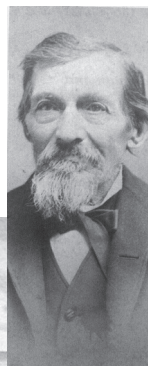
Siggie and cousins on the farm



Above: The old Bonniwell homstead where Stanley and Julia Czechorsk lived from 1913 to 1935.

Inset: James Bonniwell

Below: A drawing of the Bonniwell farm from the Milwaukee County Atlas 1876.



What's New?

Mark your calendars: Jessica Michna's presentation of her newest character on Thursday, June 13. Refreshments at 6:00 pm, program at 6:30 pm at the civic center. **"Molly Brown: Hard Scrabble to High Society"**

See: <https://youtu.be/9cuVpvfI0Ag> for a short video of Molly Brown.

Remembered as "The Unsinkable" Molly Brown, the lady was more than a survivor of the Titanic disaster. Gold prospector, gambler, and card shark barely scratches the surface of this brave, dynamic woman of the early 20th century. Learn of Molly's fascinating life and meet some of the interesting characters she met along the way.



St. John's School for the Deaf

Do you remember the St. John's School for the Deaf, once housed in what is now the Deer Creek Intermediate School at 3680 S. Kinnickinnic Ave? The school was founded in 1859 and closed in 1983. Because of its historical significance to the city of St. Francis, the St. Francis Historical Society is in the process of creating two new information signs to memorialize the deaf school. St. Francis Schools superintendent, Deb Kerr, and the school board have welcomed and are excited about the project. MKEgraphics, a local company, will create the signs. John Toth, the designer, has created many such signs in the Milwaukee County Parks, as well as two signs for the Lake Protestant Cemetery in St. Francis. We'll keep you updated!!

Deus Providebit: Celebrating 175 Years of God's Fidelity

Yes, you read that correctly! The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi have made Nojoshing home for 175 years as of May 28, 2024, our Foundation Day. It was on this day in 1849 when thirteen Franciscan tertiaries from Ettenbeuren, Bavaria, presented themselves to then Bishop John M. Henni and offered their services to the German immigrants of Milwaukee's diocese; afterward, settling in Nojoshing.

Within the first twenty-five years, several crises almost ended the fledging community. God blessed the young Franciscan community with the guidance of several key individuals and the strength and courage to persevere. The

faith-filled hearts of our six foundresses and early members formed a sound and sacred foundation on which hundreds of women have stood and continue to stand!

Several celebrations have been planned. The first was in April and the last will be October 4th, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. Others will dot some summer days here in St. Francis. We were also one of the honorees at the Milwaukee County Historical Society's Awards Dinner on May 9th.

We stand in awe and with hearts filled with deep gratitude for the innumerable ways God has blessed the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. It is humbling and so very true – DEUS PROVIDEBIT...God Provides.

Sister Ceil Struck, OSF, Archivist





St. Francis Historical Society
3400 E. Howard Ave.
St. Francis, WI 53235

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Newsletter

Anna Passante

Mark Your Calendar

Meetings at the St. Francis Civic Center at 3400 E. Howard Ave.:

The monthly board meetings are the 3rd Saturday of the month at 9:30 a.m. Visitors welcomed.

June 15, 2024

July 20, 2024

August 17, 2024

Upcoming events (see “What’s New” column for details)

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