



# St. Francis HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

Land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

### The Newsletter of the St. Francis Historical Society

published quarterly  
Non-Profit Organization 501c3

## March 2015

### Meet Your Board Officers

by Barbara Janiszewski

#### Anna Passante, President

Anna was born and raised on the northwest side of Milwaukee and attended UWM earning a bachelor degree in secondary education and a Master's of Library and Information Science.

She married Ron in 1970. Anna worked in MPS as an English teacher, literacy coach, and librarian. Ron worked for the water department. They lived in Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood for 42 years. For the last 4 years they have resided in St. Francis. Both retired in 2005. They have two children and two grandchildren.

Anna authored four books, *A God Given Talent*, *Peter J. Brust, Architect*; *Anarchy in Bay View's Little Italy*; *Dick Wiken, Milwaukee Architectural Sculptor*; and *From Nojoshing to St. Francis, From Settlement to City*. She is currently working on the second part of the city's history. She joined the Society



in 2011 and has become very active in the Society, working on the archives and helping with the displays in the Civic Center.

Her hobbies include knitting, weaving, spinning yarn, and researching local history.

#### Sr. Ceil Struck OSF, Vice President

Sr. Ceil (Celia) was born and raised in Milwaukee and attended St. Sebastian's grade school and St. Mary's Academy. During high school the family moved to Hustisford, Wisconsin, where she graduated in 1970. She attended UW-West Bend for two years, then transferred to Cardinal Stritch University where she earned both a bachelor's degree and master's degree in education. She also earned an Instructional Media Specialist (Library) degree.

Sister Ceil entered the convent in 1972 and taught elementary school for 33 years in Wisconsin and North Dakota. Because of health issues, she had to cut her hours of teaching and was asked by her order to be the Congregation Archivist. She works at the Motherhouse in St. Francis and is also in charge of the library there.

Both of her parents are deceased, but she has three brothers, one older and two younger. She has three nieces and four nephews and three great-nephews.

Sr. Ceil learned about the Society from Anna Passante who needed some information from the archives at the convent. Anna invited Sr. Ceil to a board meeting and asked her to join.

Her hobbies include reading, gardening, painting with watercolors, card making, and other crafts. When she retires, she hopes to resume work on her family genealogy.



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### **Randy Borland, Secretary**

Randy grew up in St. Francis, the youngest of five children. He attended Willow Glen Elementary and graduated from St. Francis High School in 1973. He enrolled at UWM as an engineering student. When his parents moved to Florida in 1975 he applied to the University of Florida and declared Nuclear Engineering as his major "because it sounded interesting." He earned



both a bachelor's degree and a masters degree in Nuclear Engineering with a minor in computing.

He worked for SAIC, an engineering consulting firm in the Washington, D.C. area until he retired in 2011.

Married to Lori, he is active in many sports and is a motorcycle enthusiast. He has learned much about home restoration and woodworking and is an avid reader and loves to travel.

His interest in history was piqued while living in northern Virginia, and as a number of his family elders began passing away, he began doing family research, much of it in the 1990s.

His family has long-time ties to St. Francis. His maternal great-grandfather was the grandson of Jared Thompson, and his maternal great-grandmother was the granddaughter of George Wentworth, who owned the land upon which now stands St. Francis High School (aka Bessey's Hill).

Randy is very active in the Historical Society and is a lifetime member. The Society is grateful for Randy's donation of a new desktop computer and the network version of the PastPerfect software and his willness to set it all up.

### **Sue Bostedt, Treasurer**

Sue grew up on 6th & Grange but her friend's grandparents lived on East Norwich Avenue across from Kitzinger Corporation) in St. Francis, and they frequently rode their bikes over to the grandparents' house.

From age fourteen to eighteen, Sue was in the Golden Arrow Archery Club, and she won three 1st place awards in competition. The club had a booth at St. Francis Days and she volunteered to work at the booth for four years.

When she married her husband, Jim, they bought a house in St. Francis where they have lived for nearly 22 years. She loved the community and wanted to get involved.

The mother of four, she and a group of parents formed the Parent Advisory Council for the St. Francis

School District. Coaching rec basketball, serving as assistant coach at Deer Creek, working with the Booster Club for the high school, and serving on the 4th of July committee are activities that she thoroughly enjoyed being part of. In 2008, she was elected alderwoman and has served ever since.

Sue attended Bay View High School and MATC where she earned an associate degree as a paralegal. She works in that capacity at a downtown law firm.

Always intrigued by history, she wanted to learn how the city grew throughout its history, so she joined the Historical Society. She enjoys fishing, camping, hiking and hunting and takes trips to the Nicolet National Forest and Castle Rock Lake with her husband.



### **What's New?**

#### **Welcome new members**

Chris Barney, Bernadette Lisiecki, Mary Ann Memmel, Kathi Stremki, and Viola Zausch

#### **Donations**

Our Cousin's Subs fundraiser check was for \$108.07. Thanks to all who supported this fundraiser.

#### **Archive update**

Barbara and Anna are working hard at entering data into the PastPerfect software program. Soon the entry of the documents will be completed and the photos will be scanned and entered. Chris Barney, a member, donated a good number of photos dealing with Town of Lake. Thanks Chris for downloading these to CDs.

#### **Contributions:**

When doing your estate planning, think about including a bequest to the historical society. It would be greatly appreciated.

#### **Bylaws Update**

A draft of the bylaws revision will be available to members on the Society website by March 22. The document will be voted on at the April 18 general meeting. Paper copies available upon request.

#### **Visit us on Facebook!!**

## Carl Kitzinger, Barrel Maker

by Anna Passante



The Cracker Barrel restaurant logo depicts an old gentleman seating next to a cracker barrel in an old country store. Baby Boomers, who grew up with the wild, wild west television shows---Little House on the Prairie, Ponderosa, Gunsmoke---are familiar with this depiction of general stores that had barrels full of good things to eat---pickles, sauerkraut, vinegar, and of course, crackers. With prepackaged food now being the norm, the idea of preserving and storing in barrels is unimaginable to the younger generation.

Ask Carl Kitzinger about barrels, and he can give you a lesson on how they are made. He had a good teacher. His father Jacob learned the craft in Hungary and passed the knowledge to his sons, Carl and Jacob Jr.

Jacob Sr. was born in Santanna, Hungary, in 1889 and came to America in 1913 aboard a ship on which he was apprenticed to a cooper. When the ship returned to Europe, Jacob was not onboard. He decided to remain in America and ended up in Madison, Wisconsin, working as a cooper on a farm. Jacob eventually sent for his wife, Marie, and their eight-year-old daughter, Eva. World War I broke out in Europe in 1914 and ended in 1919, so it wasn't surprising that Marie and Eva didn't arrive until 1921. They traveled on the ship Mount Clinton and their destination was Berkshire, New York. The family lived on a farm in Berkshire for about a year and their daughter Mary was born there. From there the family traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, where Carl and brother Jacob were born. City directories show that by 1927 the family was residing in Madison, Wisconsin, and it was there that their last child, Helen, was born.

By 1930, the family was living in Cudahy on Morris Avenue, with Jacob working for the Cudahy Brothers Company making pork barrels. He also worked out of his two-car garage on Morris Avenue making barrels. He needed more room, so in 1935, the family moved to a 10-acre property in present-day St. Francis at 3200 East Waterford Avenue. At that time, Waterford Avenue only went as far east as Barland Avenue. There was a cement-block building on the property that once housed the Shamrock Riding Academy. (After Shamrock moved out, the Cudahy Auto Parts took over the building and subsequently relocated to Kinnickinnic Avenue.)

The Town of Lake planned to extend Waterford Avenue eastward. Half of the old riding academy building, which was 150 feet long, was in the way of the future road. So Jacob cut the building in half to make way for the extended street. The structure housed the family and the shop where Jacob made wine and beer barrels. He could make eight barrels a day with the help of four men. Carl was known to sleep in the shop in a hammock hung from the rafters. The family had two cows and chickens and had no running



Jacob Kitzinger Sr. Morris Avenue, 1933.



Jacob Kitzinger Sr.'s truck loaded with barrels



Carl, Helen, Mary, Jacob Jr.



The Kitzinger family home that still stands on Waterford Avenue

Photo shows part of the building being removed to make room for the new road.



Carl Kitzinger 1949

water or refrigeration. A spring provided water and was used to keep perishables cold.

Carl attended St. Frederick's Catholic School in Cudahy and later attended nearby Thompson School. He spent the first year in the old school building and second year in the new one. He recalls the bell that once hung in the old school building that was razed to make room for the new building in 1939. Carl helped build a stand for it, and the bell was placed in the hallway of the new school. The bell was mighty tempting to the school children, itching to pull the string and let the bell ring out through the school hallways. Some gave in to the temptation and were punished by the principal.

Carl soon gave in too, but in order not to get caught and punished, he tied a rope to the bell and strung it across the street to the abandoned cemetery. Hiding among the tall weeds and gravestones, Carl oh-so-gently pulled the string and rang the bell. He didn't get caught! (Or so he says.) It appears that the cemetery played an important role in many a student shenanigan. Some mischievous boys knew there were mice in the graveyard that could be secretly placed in teacher Miss Olive's desk drawer. Oh my! Pearl Higgins sat in front of Carl in school, and he dipped her pigtails in his ink well. One time the teacher slapped him and he went home, only to have his father send him back.

Carl left school at 16, but he was not forced to do so because of his mischief making, mind you. Most young men his age left school by that age. When World War II was raging in Europe, Carl enlisted and served in the European sector of the war. Brother Jacob didn't go to war but rather took a job with a wholesale druggist. With no one to help him in the barrel-making business and because of the lack of steel, Jacob Sr. closed the business and opened a tavern in South Milwaukee. He died in 1947.

Back from the war, Carl reopened his father's business with his brother, Jacob, at the Waterford Avenue location where they made barrels for milk, buttermilk, oils, and grease. When the trend for steel drums impacted the use of wooden ones, the brothers turned to reconditioning steel drums.

The company soon needed to expand and incorporate, which they did in 1951 at their new location at 2529 E. Norwich Ave. Here they reconditioned drums and barrels by burning them out and testing



Carl Kitzinger



Backyard of Waterford Ave. property 1936

for leaks by forcing air into the drums, and then plunging them into a vat of water. Air bubbles revealed any leaks. Some barrels were repaired by welding, dents were removed, the barrels sandblasted, washed, and painted. Another plant building made new steel barrels and drums from 18-22 gauge sheet metal.

Carl married Lucille and lived on Whittaker Avenue in Greenfield. In 1968, Carl and Lucille purchased a 250-acre farm near Fort Atkinson. The following year, his brother wanted out of the business, so Carl bought Jacob out and became sole owner.

Carl split his time between his St. Francis business and his farm. The couple raised chickens, sheep, ducks, cattle, hogs, and even had six peacocks. Sadly, Lucille died suddenly in May 1992.

Carl is well known for his philanthropy work. He was a generous donor to the Ronald McDonald



Norwich Avenue shop 1959

House, a “home away for home” for families whose lives have been disrupted as a result of their child’s illness or injury. Carl was good friends with one of the founders, Sol Steren, back when Steren was an owner of a McDonald’s restaurant in Cudahy. When a capital campaign was initiated for expansion of the house, Carl made an initial donation that jump-started the campaign, said Ann M. Petrie, Chief Executive Officer. “He was one of the major supporters of this expansion, and thanks to Carl, we were able to reach our capital campaign goal and complete the expansion in September 2014.”

“Carl has generously supported St. Ann

Center for Intergenerational Care for many years, allowing for stability in our programming,” said Casey Rozanski, Capital Campaign Manager for St. Ann’s. “Because of Carl, we have been able to help so many families in the Bay View and St. Francis area by caring for their parents, siblings, and children. Carl was also one of the first individuals to donate to our replication project to build a second St. Ann Center on the Northside of Milwaukee. This new center will care for hundreds of children and adults in the 53206 area. His donation to the project really initiated the campaign and added credibility to the project. Carl is truly a member of the St. Ann Center family.”

When the St. Francis Library Foundation was established in 1997 to develop the lower level of the library, Carl’s generous gift helped bring that project to fruition. “He also gave the library funds to help celebrate the 25th anniversary in 2012,” said former library director Helen Hachmeister.

After moving from the Lupo House in 2009, the St. Francis Historical Society desperately needed a new permanent home. Through the efforts of the late mayor, Milt Vretnar, Carl graciously donated funds to the Society for a facility in the new St. Francis Civic Center. “I was in shock when Milt phoned me with the news. I felt a miracle had taken place. And the board of directors was in disbelief when I shared the news with them. Their disbelief was soon followed with smiles, laughter, and a BIG thank you prayer,” said Bill Drehfal, former Society president. “Happiness is the word that comes to mind when I think back on that moment. We are blessed to have Carl as a member.”

Carl and his second wife, Karen, enjoy the farm fields, wooded acreage, and ponds on their Fort Atkinson property. At 91, Carl still cuts grass and takes care of his farm equipment. In 2011, Carl sold the Kitzinger Cooperage Corporation to Mid-America Steel Drum Company of Oak Creek.



Above: Toni Grabske Nevicosi, Bill Drehfal, Karen Kitzinger, Mary Mingesz, and Carl Kitzinger pose in front of two of the new display cabinets at the new St. Francis Civic Center.



# St. Francis HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Come join us Thursday, March 26, 2015, at the Civic Center for an event featuring Carl Baehr, local history research and writer, and a former member and newsletter contributor of the St. Francis Historical Society.*

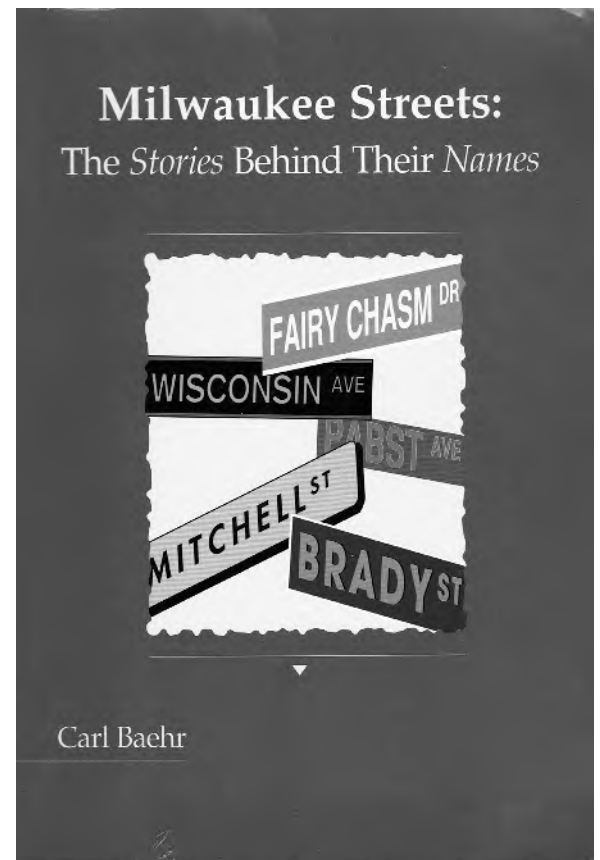
Carl Baehr will talk about the naming of Milwaukee Streets as well as the naming of some of the city of St. Francis streets.

Where: City of St. Francis Civic Center  
3400 E. Howard Avenue  
St. Francis, WI

Time: 6:30 p. m.  
Refreshments will be served.

Parking: Behind the Civic Center and  
at the St. Francis Lions Club 3476 E.  
Howard Avenue.

Questions? 414-316-4291



## Charles Weber, Concertina Player

The historical society is the proud owner of not just one, but two concertinas once owned and played by the late Charles Weber. They were donated by his sons Chuck and Dennis. At the Society's January general meeting, Chuck brought one of the concertinas and spoke about his father, who had lived in St. Francis from 1962 to 1984 at 4361 South Pennsylvania Avenue.

Charles was born in 1922 and played the concertina as a teenager, playing by ear. He played from the 1930s to the 1970s. During his youth he worked in a CCC camp planting trees, and as an adult, he was a timekeeper at Nordberg. In his spare time, he played the concertina in a band, playing at corner bars (including Sal's Tap on Kinnickinnic and Elizabeth streets and the Spanish Tower at 16th and Lincoln Avenue, and at the State Fair. A local television station offered him a weekly show, but he declined. He liked playing at live venues and became well known in the area, even playing with "Concertina Millie." Neither Chuck or Dennis play the concertina.

Charles died in 1984. After his death, son Chuck found recording equipment in his dad's basement on which his dad had created 78-rpm records. Chuck hopes to find one of the recordings his dad made of his concertina playing. Let's hope he finds one so we can include it with the concertinas!!

Do you know anyone who plays the concertina? The Society would like to find someone who would be willing to play the instruments at one of our special events!!



Left, Charles Weber, Sr., with his concertina. Right, his son Chuck demonstrating the instrument at the January General Meeting.

## Tea Parties on Crawford Avenue

by Kay Beres

Back in the 1970s, the children (as well as their parents) on our street were invited regularly to attend tea parties hosted by Mrs. Frances Ehmke. She baked tasty treats, such as kolaches, pies, and cakes and served them with warm tea. The tea parties were fun times, with lively conversation. But Mrs. Ehmke had rules. Boys had to run home and put on shirts and shoes. Elbows were always off the table. Table manners were taught and followed. Born in 1900, we knew how old Mrs. Ehmke was. She was tall and always wore a dress and an apron. Her long hair was pale red, braided and pinned up on her head. She was always interested in what the children were doing and enjoyed their visits. Sometimes she played the accordion for them. When she moved to Denmark, Wisconsin, to help her sister care for their sick brother, she was missed. She was a legend on Crawford Avenue.



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



### 2015 Officers

President..... Anna Passante  
Vice-President..... Sister Ceil Struck  
Secretary.....Randy Borland  
Treasurer.....Sue Bostedt

### Board of Directors

Barbara Janiszewski  
Dennis Wojtecki  
CoryAnn St. Marie-Carls  
Mary Drehfal  
Stephanie Maxwell

### Honorary

Jim Goodwin  
Ralph Voltner  
Bill Drehfal  
Maggie Luczywko  
Lois Neubauer  
Richard Raatz

### Newsletter

Anna Passante  
Barbara Janiszewski

### Up and Coming Events

March 21, 2015

Board meeting 9:30 a.m. Civic Center

April 18, 2015

General Membership Meeting 10:00 Civic Center  
Board Meeting following

May 16, 2015

Board Meeting 9:30 a.m. Civic Center

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