



# 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

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Non-Profit Organization 501c3

## September 2015

### St. Francis: A Rocky Start

by Barbara Janiszewski, Sue Janiszewski Zuehike,  
Julie Janiszewski Myszkowski

When the city of St. Francis was incorporated, undated and unidentified newspapers clippings found in the archives show there was a bit of tension between the mayor and the common council. How much tension? Well, our first mayor, Paul Rainer, once adjourned a meeting after three minutes because he said, "he didn't want to start a riot." At another meeting they couldn't agree to adjourn - the vote was a tie 3-3! In yet another "peaceful" meeting, the city clerk refused to sign a simple document, stating she wanted to get "legal advice." The common council decided to fire her but they once again couldn't agree and therefore did not have the majority vote to do so.

A group of citizens put forth a petition to try to recall the mayor because of his "inability to govern the city of St. Francis or to formulate a program for its advancement." He was also charged with an "unseemly loss of temper" and thought to be "generally unfit" to hold public office. At one point there were not one but two mayors, each pounding his gavel during meetings and expecting to be heard. That didn't turn out too well.

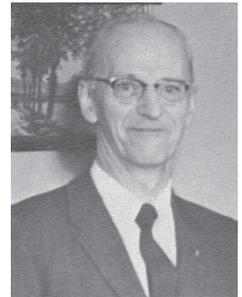
By way of explanation: In 1954 Rainer was reelected by a very small margin. His opponent, Robert Sommerfeld, asked for a recall,

and a number of absentee ballots were thrown out and he was declared the winner. Rainer then went to court and the thrown out ballots were 'thrown' back in.

Having two mayors caused a lot of problems, especially when one mayor appointed people to various offices and commissions and the other mayor didn't like his choices.

This is how one reporter described it: He called it "Every Man a Commissioner," a three-act municipal farce staged before an enthusiastic audience of nearly 100.

Act I began with Mayor Rainer stating that at the last meeting he had appointed five men to the fire and police commission. The council rejected one and took no action on the other four. "At this time I announce the appointment of these four" the mayor said. He proceeded to read a list of names. Alderman Frank Hilton said, "inasmuch as we have a fire and police commission that is functioning efficiently, I make a motion to reject the appointment." From then on things got out of hand. "I make a motion," began Hilton. "Just a minute, I didn't recognize you," Rainer broke in. He named another person to the commission and the council rejected it. The pattern was repeated about eight times



Top: Mayor Rainer  
Bottom: Robert Sommerfeld

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before Alderman Lyndon McFaul (who had been in a shoving incident with the mayor at a prior meeting) asked if they were going to sit there all night while the mayor kept naming names. "Why don't you reappoint them?" yelled McFaul. This line got cheers from the audience. "I do not choose to reappoint them," Rainer replied. Boos and catcalls were heard.

Act I ended with a plea by the city attorney for harmony between the mayor and council. "Boy," yelled a man in the audience. "They say Joe must go.... Paul must go!" This brought down the house.

Act II got lively when Alderman Schoendorf brought up a newsletter that Rainer had published. It was an attack on the council with an appeal for support from St. Francis residents. The part in question said, "I have heard speeches about no politics, love of community, etc., but in my opinion they do not have the ring of sincerity." This was the line that angered Schoendorf.

"I think I am as sincere as you," Schoendorf bellowed. "I have lived here all my life. I was one of the incorporators. The city was going well, and since you came back it has not been going so well." Rainer tried to parry this attack but Schoendorf just kept charging. Then the argument strayed to how much money each had spent on the incorporation effort. It ended with a verbal fray that rang with 'Did!' and 'Didn't!' until it was drowned out by yells from the crowd.

Act III resumed when the mayor attempted to name three more men to the fire and police Commission, but the council quickly rejected all three. Rainer had submitted a total of 15 names to the council when McFaul said that if this was going to continue all night they might as well adjourn. "If I appointed all the people in St. Francis you would reject them all?" Rainer queried.

He then tried to get the council to vote on the proposition that they would reject all St. Francis residents except for the five already on the present board. "You know how the council feels about it," said McFaul. "That's what I'm trying to find out," Rainer replied. "The council is too smart to do that. The council is just as smart as the mayor is," replied McFaul. The fire and police commission drama ended on that inconclusive note.

St. Francis celebrated its 64th birthday this past July. I'm glad things have calmed down.

## What's New?

### Welcome new members

Cindi Streicher, Jennifer Mertz, Cheryl Vaught, Ken Huber, Keith Schmidt, Chuck & Patty Sneesby, Dave & Helga Sartori, Juliet Hills and the Claire Stelloh family.

### Jim Ganey's Letter to the Editor

Having lived on Norwich Ave, I love the old stories of the power plant and the trains and the tons of coal we all played on. Thompson school and the Behwer greenhouses were my front yard and my first job. Many cold days we hiked over the Ola's hill to get to high school, when they had a pool!!!! My granddaughter attends St. Francis High now, so I have had a few trips up there again for her school activities. Wow, what a difference since 1971. Thanks for the wonderful memories. Keep up the great work and dedication.

### Ice Cream Social

Our Ice Cream Social was a success. We had about 100 attendees and everyone enjoyed hearing about Marietta Rawson's return to earth after being in heaven for over 100 years!! Two re-enactors from the South Milwaukee Historical Society read from Mettie's letters. The ice cream was donated by Pick 'n Save on Whitnall Avenue.

### Calling All Pie Bakers

We are planning a pie auction for the city's fall festival to be held the weekend of October 24. If you are a pie baker, we would welcome donations. Call our office at 414-316-4391 or email us at [stfrancishistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:stfrancishistoricalsociety@gmail.com) to let us know if you can bake for us.

### General Meeting

General meeting is on October 17 at 9:30 at the Civic Center. Carl Kitzinger will be honored for his generosity to the Society and refreshments will be provided.

### We Need Your Memories

Do you have any special memories about growing up in St. Francis, attending its schools, working or just living here? We'd love to publish your stories for all to enjoy. Just email us at: [stfrancishistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:stfrancishistoricalsociety@gmail.com) or call at 414-316-4391.

### Cousin's Subs Fundraiser

Cousin's Subs at 3058 E. Layton Avenue from 4:00-8:00 pm on Wednesday, Sept 16. Ten percent of all sales during that time will be donated to the Society.

# Train Smashes Buggy, Three Killed, Three Young Children Orphaned

by Anna Passante

The first warning of an approaching train is the ding, ding, ding of the lowering of the crossing gate that separates your vehicle from the passing train. The train conductor blows the whistles in the hopes that all have heeded the call to clear the tracks. But back in the 1920s, there was no such crossing gate near the intersection of present-day Kinnickinnic, Nicholson, and Denton avenues in St. Francis. It was at this crossing that a collision with a Northwestern-Chicago train in January 1920 took the lives of three members of the Joseph Rudolf family, leaving three of their surviving minor children orphaned.

It was a cold wintry afternoon, about five degrees, on New Years Day, 1920. The Rudolf family, bundled up with blankets, left their home at the corner of present-day Troy and Howard avenues at 2:00 to visit their son, Joseph Jr (age 26), for a New Years celebration at his home in the Tippecanoe neighborhood. Joseph Sr (age 53), his wife Gertrude, (48) and five of their children, Gertrude (20), Cecilia (16), Clarence (9), Robert (11), and Henry (7), piled into their horse-drawn buggy. The top was up. Joseph Sr was in the driver's seat, with Clarence and daughter Gertrude in the front passenger seat. His wife was in back with Cecilia, Robert, and Henry.<sup>1</sup>

Daughter Gertrude was dropped off on South Kinnickinnic Avenue, where she intended to take the streetcar north to East Lincoln Avenue to meet her fiancé. Robert then moved to the front seat, and the family traveled on to the railroad crossing. According to the train engineer, Edward M. Lane, his passenger train (number 205) was traveling north at about 50-60 miles an hour. "...As I was coming down the hill and when I got within a little ways from the crossing, I seen a horse and carriage coming," recalled Lane. He couldn't tell how far the buggy was from the track because "the smoke was blowing on my side of the engine and I saw this horse and buggy coming, not running very fast, and just then the smoke cleared enough so I could see through it and then the smoke rolled down on my side again and then I didn't see anything again until he was on my side of the engine." According to Lane, the train engine did not strike the horse or buggy. The horse had struck the middle of the engine leaving a mark on the locomotive about 15-20 feet from the front of the engine. According to Lane, he had blown the train whistle as he approached the crossing, as well as the crossing before. The breaks automatically locked on impact.

William H. Ollman who lived on Nicholson Avenue came upon the scene of the accident shortly after the collusion. He testified that Cecilia had been thrown forty feet from the crossing and died at the scene. Her mother was found nearby and also killed. The horse was found entangled in the wreckage and had lost two limbs in the accident. It died at the scene. The injured were taken to the Hanover Hospital, on present-day South Third and Madison streets in Walker's Point. Joseph suffered



Courtesy of Michael Rudolf

Joseph Sr and Gertrude wedding photo  
May 5, 1891



Courtesy of Michael Rudolf

Clarence Rudolf communion 1919

<sup>1</sup> The couple had three other children who were not in the buggy: Mary (18), Angeline (21), and Hildgard (25).



Postcard image of Hanover Hospital on Hanover and Madison streets in Milwaukee where the injured were taken. Hanover Street is now South 3rd Street.

serious wounds, a fractured skull, and bruises about the head and a badly torn ear. Robert had head injuries. Clarence was in a coma for three days. Both boys recovered, but their father died from his injuries on April 25 of that year.

A newspaper article said the following about the daughter Gertrude who had been dropped off at the streetcar stop and escaped the crash:

The stricken girl [Gertrude], made her way back to her home. She sorrowfully took away the Christmas tree from the parlor with its colored candles and the bright holiday trimmings. There was no room for reminders of the happy days there and of the evening when the family gathered laughing around the Christmas tree while father acted as Santa Claus and the flickering candles breathed peace in an upward pointed flame.



Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society

At the time of the accident the family was renting the old Reinert farmhouse, an Italianate Revival style house of cream city bricks, still standing at 3633 East Howard Avenue.

It is unclear if the buggy's side curtains were up or down at the time of the accident. According to Clarence and Robert's testimony at the inquest that took place after the accident, the curtains had not been drawn. However, Lane, the engineer, said that he thought they were pulled down. Due to the coldness of the day, they may very well have been drawn. Being that the horse hit the side of the locomotive, it is possible that Joseph Rudolf saw the train coming and tried to beat the train or perhaps with the shades drawn, he did not see the train.

At the time of the accident, the family had been renting the old John Reinert farmhouse, presently addressed 3633 East Howard Avenue. Michael Rudolf, the son of Henry, recalled his father saying that the rent on the house was \$365 a year. Henry remembered his mother going to a Reinert family member every month to pay the rent. Joseph Rudolf Sr. farmed the land around the house but also worked as a brass molder, working at Waukesha Valve and Badger Malleable in South Milwaukee. At time of the accident, the family was in the process of purchasing a house at 3720 South Bombay Avenue in the Town of Lake (now St. Francis).

Following the accident Clarence, Robert, and Henry went to live with their brother, Joseph, but it was said that his wife wasn't happy with raising three adolescent boys. So the boys moved in with their sister, Angeline, and her husband, William R. Brehmer, who were residing in the house on Bombay Avenue.

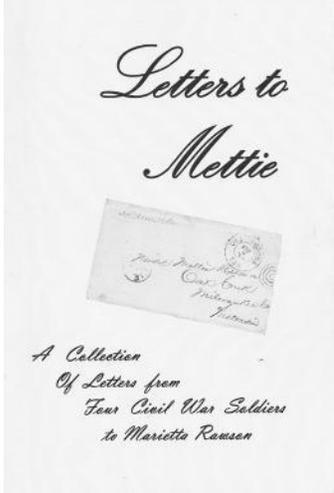


Courtesy of Michael Rudolf

Children of Joseph and Gertrude Rudolf in about 1950. From right to left: Clarence, Angeline Brehmer, Mary DeFrain, Joseph, Robert, and Hilda Shuhmacher

# PHOTO GALLERY

ICE CREAM SOCIAL, THURSDAY, AUGUST 20



Clockwise from top right: Steve and Lois Scheiter of the South Milwaukee Historical Society with one of the re-enactors. One of the re-enactors reading a letter in the "tent." Anna Passante playing the role of Mettie Rawson. Mary and Bill Drehfal with Carol and Ed Wagner. Jan Pientok and Sr. Ceil Struck serving up the pie and ice cream.



# St. Francis

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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.....Barbara Janiszewski

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Jan Pientok  
Cory Ann St. Marie-Carls  
Mary Drehfal  
Stephanie Maxwell

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

## Newsletter

Anna Passante  
Barbara Janiszewski

## Mark Your Calendar

**St. Francis Days:** Saturday, Sept 5. We will be in the parade at 11:00 am and will have a table at Vretenar Memorial Park until 1:00

**Cousin's Subs Fundraiser:** Sept. 16 4:00-8:00  
3058 E. Layton Ave.

**General Meeting:** Oct. 17, 9:30 am. Carl Kitzinger, our benefactor will be honored.

**Fall Festival:** Civic Center: Oct. 24 & 25--Pie auction

**Christmas dinner:** Polonez Restaurant  
December 3.

**Facebook:** St. Francis Historical Society

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**Website:** [stfranciswihistoricalsociety.org](http://stfranciswihistoricalsociety.org)

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