



NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

Newsletter published quarterly

Non-Profit Organization 501c3

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Remembering...Black Bear Soda

By Karen Gersonde

I am not a big soda drinker. Oh, I like soda, of course. But at my age, I drink it moderately. Growing up in St. Francis in the 1960s and 1970s, we were never allowed to drink soda unless we had company over. For those special occasions, my dad would stock up on Black Bear Soda and have a case of it at home.

Black Bear Soda was a true original. In 1920, Louis Patmont opened a spring water bottling company, Patmont Mineral Spring Company in St. Francis. A spring located at the site provided the water.

In 1924, Patmont renamed the company "Black Bear Soda" after his pet bear cub that he had tied up near the springhouse.

Eventually, the company expanded to produce flavored sodas. In 1935, Lucas Unger took over the company. His son William and Lucas' son-in-law, Alfred Richards, took over the business. In 1955, the Richards family became the sole owners. (Alfred's son, Alan, worked for the company and became the mayor of the city of St. Francis from 2004 to 2012.) Black Bear Soda quickly became a true Wisconsin tradition.



Above right: An unidentified newspaper photo and caption about the spring house.



Two other views of the spring house

In 1961, Black Bear Soda was passed on to the Caruso family. Peter Caruso, who owned Cadet Dry Cleaners in Milwaukee thought it would be a good business for his sons. The original bottling facility was 10,000 square feet and was located at 4264 South Packard Avenue, just north of Lunham Avenue.

Black Bear sodas became best known for their unique flavors, including orange, punch, grape, and peach. Two of the most popular flavors were blue raspberry (the company's best seller) and black cherry. My personal favorite was always their cream soda.

Black Bear eventually outgrew its facility in St. Francis. In June 2001, Black Bear moved its production and distribution to an industrial park at 190 West Marquette Avenue in Oak Creek. (The St. Francis location is now FM Auto, a car repair shop.)

In 2017, Black Bear Bottling closed its Oak Creek plant. Today, it is still produced under Sprecher Brewing Company. The many soda flavors can still be found in local grocery stores, various taverns, and restaurants.

The soda I remember was bottled in glass bottles. I remember going to Black Bear in St. Francis in the 1960s with my father to get a case of soda. He would take a case of it to my grandparent's house on certain holidays and special occasions so all of my cousins (there were a lot) and my brother and I could have those delicious flavors. I remember the bottling plant. One would drive down the hill to the facility and park. Dad would have me pick out a wooden case. Then we would go through the line, and he let my brother and me pick out the flavors. I believe a case was 24 bottles. We were more than happy to load it up with our special flavors. I remember the bottles clinking as we carried it to the car and put it in the trunk. Then the bottles clinked together in the car, but never broke. I believe my cousins and I consumed most of that soda in a weekend. Then dad would take the wooden crate home so we could fill it up for the next special occasion.

Those were great times! And great St. Francis memories! St. Francis was so fortunate to have a unique bottling company like Black Bear. From time to time, I may purchase a Black Bear soda just to relive the memories! And of course, it is always a cream soda. Those memories will never fade with me. I will always cherish them!

Note: Information about the history of Black Bear Soda was obtained online via Google. There are several articles about Black Bear Soda, and all of them were interesting reading. Check it out if you have the time! The bottle photos were obtained online from Ebay.)



Unidentified newspaper photo of the Caruso brothers from the St. Francis Historical Society Archives.



Above left, 7 oz
Right, 12 oz



Black Bear wooden crate with 24 bottles



Above: Peter and Esther Caruso. Their sons Philip, Peter, and Leonard worked for the company.

William Puetz (aka Texas Bill): A Teenage Bandit Desperado

by Anna Passante

The headlines of *The National Enquirer* newspaper never fail to get your attention at the grocery store check out line: “William Seizes Power From Dying Charles,” “Elvis Presley Haunted By Supernatural Forces!” Back in the 1880s, mainstream newspapers were much like today’s tabloids. Take for example the *Milwaukee Sentinel* November 15, 1883, headline: “Dime Novel Reading Leads Them to Attempt Robbery and Murder.”

The “attempted robbery and murder” referred to the shooting of a streetcar driver, Mr. Grothe, in the Village of Bay View on Sunday, November 11, 1883. Two days after the incident, Mahlon McCullough, age 17, and William Puetz, age 18, were arrested for the crime.

On December 4, the two young men were arraigned on a charge of “assault with intent to kill.” McCullough resided in Bay View at the time, with the news media describing the McCullough family as respectable and heart-broken over their son’s arrest. McCullough had purchased a revolver a week before the robbery, but his father took it away the Saturday before the shooting. McCullough, as well as Puetz, had been suspects in recent robberies in the area, such as firing into passing railroad trains.

William Puetz was living with his grandmother Elizabeth Puetz, the widow of Jordan Puetz Sr., at 3737 South Kinnickinnic Avenue in the St. Francis neighborhood. The Puetz family was one of the early settlers in the St. Francis area, immigrating to America in 1845 with their eight children.

Like many young men at the time, William’s free time was spent hanging out, often in Bay View, and sometimes employed doing odd jobs. It was said that he had been suspected of petty thefts quite often, but nothing to the extent of armed robbery.

A trial date was set for the two young men, with the prosecution planning to use their rap sheets against them, as well as the confessions the two made to the police during their time in lockup. Witness testimony also played into the prosecution’s scheme. The defense, however, hoped to win the case with an alibi provided by family and friends.

The sensational newspaper articles continued over the weeks following the arrest. One article stated that it was well established that Puetz fired the weapon, but “it is doubtful, however, if he can be held mentally responsible for the act, as he is evidently of unsound mind.” It was said Puetz poisoned his brain by reading too many “dime novels.” (Dime novels were inexpensive, usually paperback melodramatic novels of adventure, popular in the United States roughly between 1860 and 1915. They often featured western themes and were aimed at a mass audience.) When arrested, Puetz was wearing a broad white sombrero hat, mimicking the heroes in the dime novels. Around his hat was a piece of paper on which he wrote “Billy from Texas,” but he liked to be called “Texas Bill.” He carried a pistol, and when asked why, he said, “Everybody else does so.” According to McCullough, Puetz wanted to create a reputation as “a bad man” and “was bound to kill his man.” A newspaper article suggested that William was “a proper subject for a lunatic asylum.”

This over-the-top sensationalism from the media coverage carried over into the trial. The courtroom was crowded to the doors, and the proceedings were followed with close attention. The first witness for the prosecution was Clarence Chase, son of Enoch Chase. Clarence claims that McCullough told him that the two defendants were short on cash and decided to hold up the streetcar driver. Puetz tied a handkerchief over his face and demanded the money. Grothe struck him with his whip, whereupon Puetz fired and shot him in the face. Grothe whipped up his horses and McCullough sent a bullet after him, hitting him in the side. They then took the empty shells from the chambers of their revolvers, and McCullough shot twice into the ground.

McCullough testified in his own defense, accusing Detective Dennis Sullivan of slapping and shaking him every day, several times a day, in order to get a confession. He was told Puetz had confessed to being the shooter. Sullivan then offered to let McCullough out if he testified against Puetz. McCullough finally signed a



Above: Razed decades ago, this house at 3737 South Kinnickinnic Avenue was the home of Jordan (Sr) and his wife Elizabeth. William Puetz was living here with his grandmother Elizabeth at the time of the arrest.

Below: A streetcar similar to the one driven by August Grothe.



statement to that effect but later claimed that he didn't know what he had signed. Furthermore, he didn't recall anyone reading Puetz's confession to him. McCullough's grandfather John Rycraft and McCullough's father, Richard, testified that they had found McCullough in a sickly condition when visiting him in his cell.

Puetz testified as well that Detective Sullivan punched and hit him, and Detective Riemer threatened to shoot him. Both Sullivan and Riemer declared that the confessions were given voluntarily. The stationmaster, John Roach, swore that the boys had asked to see the detectives when they were ready to confess. Lieutenant Janssen testified that the two boys, in Janssen's presence, accused each other of the shooting.

A witness for the prosecution, teamster William M. Williams, McCullough's employer, contacted the police and testified that he thought he had seen the two boys on the south side on the night of the shooting. When learning that a reward was being offered, he felt he was entitled to the reward. Emma Manegold also testified that she saw William Puetz in Bay View on the night of the shooting, and he threatened to kill someone.

Many citizens were interested in the outcome of such a trial. A crowd of spectators completely filled the courtroom all day, and standing room was at a premium.

Heinrich "Henry" Puetz, the uncle of William Puetz, testified that William had been at his farm in Town of Lake on the day of the shooting. William had been playing cards with friends at the farm and was sleeping at the time of the shooting. Ross Van Eimer, John Keller, Jordan Puetz, Frank Schuster, and George Grobschmidt testified that they all saw Puetz at various times between the time of the shooting and his arrest.

Victor Schuerbrock, a farmer and saloonkeeper, testified that the detectives brought the two prisoners to his barn. The detectives were looking for a pistol that Puetz supposedly had hidden in the barn. Schuerbrock testified that it was very cold that day, and the two prisoners were kept in the rickety old barn for two hours, while the detectives were in the tavern partaking in refreshment. [This tavern is now the location of Lovely Salon and Spa at 3724 South Kinnickinnic Avenue.] John Meunier, a gun dealer, testified that the cartridges found at the scene could not have been discharged from a revolver but rather from a rifle. The dent made by the gun's hammer was twice as large as what could be made by a revolver.

The defense made a motion for a mistrial due to a rebuttal of Emma Manegold's testimony. Emma's sister-in-law, Mrs. H. Manegold, claimed that Emma was at her house all day on the day of the shooting and was not in Bay View, where Emma claimed she saw William. Emma, said Manegold, felt that William had done the shooting and wanted him convicted, so she made up the story. The judge denied the motion for a mistrial.

On March 1, 1884, after a nine-day trial based mainly on circumstantial evidence, the two boys were found innocent of assault with intent to commit murder but found guilty of assault with intent to rob. Puetz was sentenced to three years and six months, and McCullough received three years and three months. Puetz asked the judge to send him to Waupun Prison rather than the House of Correction, and the request was granted. Detectives Struebig and Sullivan split the \$500 reward.

While Puetz and McCullough served time in prison, there was another inmate serving time for burglary. During his incarceration, he sent for a priest, Father Decker, to whom he confessed to committing the crime that had sent Puetz and McCullough to prison. Father Decker went to Governor Rusk asking him to pardon Puetz and McCullough. Due to priest-penitent privilege, Father Decker refused to reveal the confessor's name. Without the name, the governor couldn't pardon them. However, Governor Rusk did review the case and unconditionally pardoned the two young men shortly before their release from prison in June 1887. McCullough died of tuberculosis the following year. Puetz went to live with relatives in "an interior Wisconsin town" and was said to have suffered ill effects for a year due to his confinement. Grothe, the streetcar driver, lost sight in one eye.

It wasn't until August 1891 that the name of the man who made the confession to Father Decker was made public. Patrick Toohey had left the area after serving his time for an unrelated robbery charge, but he returned to Milwaukee to confess to the shooting of the streetcar driver. Toohey revealed to Daniel Graham Rogers, the former attorney of Puetz and McCullough, that he was the person who confessed to the priest. He identified his two accomplices as Val Dooley and Bill Rockaway, both employed at the rolling mill in Bay View. Because of the statute of limitations, none of the men could be prosecuted. The police detectives involved in the case claimed that Toohey was just looking for notoriety. Val Dooley and Rockaway denied any role in the shooting and believed that Toohey was crazy.

[This story, as well as the following tragic story about Herman Schoenberg, is from the book *From Nojoshing to St. Francis: From Settlement to City, Part 2: The Early Settlers of St. Francis, Wisconsin 1836-1900* by Anna Passante. It is available for purchase (\$20) through the historical society. (For purchasing information, email st.francishistoricalsociety@gmail.com or call 414-316-4391.)

What's New?

Mark your calendars for these two events coming up this summer and fall:

Thursday, June 19, at 6:30 pm at the St. Francis Civic Center 3400 E. Howard Avenue

David Wiedenkiller is a "living historian," whose primary focus is to present history from a first-person perspective. He is presenting a first-person narrative of First Officer Charles Lightoller, who served on the ill fated ship, the Titanic.

Thursday, September 11, at 6:30 pm at the St. Francis Civic Center 3400 E. Howard Avenue

Paul Akert will portray John Muir in his presentation: "Journey with John Muir from Scotland to Wisconsin to California and around the world." Paul will present a narrative and stories with PowerPoint slide images.

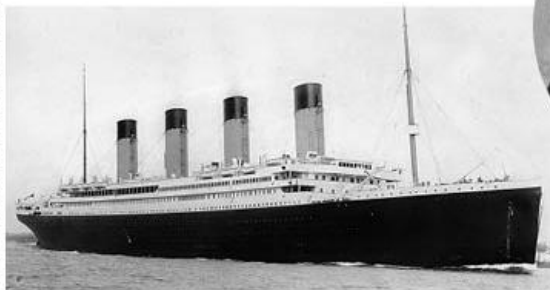
Coming Soon!!!

Jared Thompson, St. Francis pioneer and founder of the Lake Protestant Cemetery, will be getting a new gravestone in the cemetery that he founded. Wenta Monuments Company of Milwaukee is working with historical society board member Randy Borland to install the new stone this summer. Randy designed the new stone to complement the original stone that is beyond repair. Watch for the dedication of the stone this summer. The total cost of the stone was raised through fundraising by the historical society.

**St. Francis Historical Society Presents:
Historian David Wiedenkiller Portraying
Senior Officer Charles Lightoller
of the Ill-fated Titanic**

**Thursday, June 19, 2025
St. Francis Civic Center 3400 E. Howard Ave.
6:00 light refreshment 6:30 program**

The sinking of the Titanic is one of the most famous shipwreck disasters of all time. Join Officer Charles Lightoller as he tells his story as the senior officer to survive the sinking on April 14th 1912. Listen to him as he explains some of the mysteries surrounding the Titanic and the effects that it had on maritime travel. Despite the incredible popularity of the story of Titanic, new information surrounding the sinking is still being uncovered as time goes on. See one of the largest collections of books, and items related to the Titanic as well as a few actual artifacts from the wreck.



Officer Charles Lightoller

By George....I think he's got it!!!

by St. Francis Historical Society board member George Ramponi



I had my first paying job when I was four. It was piecework. Neighbor Otzelberger had a chicken coop, and I was small, quick, and game enough to retrieve an uncooperative decapitated bird come slaughtering time. To this day I marvel at how far and how fast a headless being can travel. Each successful apprehension brought a nickel bounty. It wasn't too long until ma found out, forcing me into early retirement. I got to keep the nickels.

In my little corner of the new city, at least three of the neighbors kept chickens. A century and more ago, when St. Francis was a neighborhood in the Town of Lake, the practice was widespread enough to attract malefactors.

In another section of Milwaukee County, in early March 1899, a stray horse and wagon sauntered into Wauwatosa. The marshall was called in. He did an examination of the wagon and discovered 75 dead chickens and a pair of pliers, exciting his curiosity.

For several months, eastern Town of Lake had suffered from multiple coop raids: "The seminary in St. Francis alone is said to have lost no fewer than two hundred and fifty hens, while many of the farmers in the neighborhood also found themselves victims of midnight visits," reported the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on April 1, 1899.

The day after the discovery of the horse and wagon, one Fred C. Gras of 202 Keefe Avenue, who was described as an "occasional peddler," appeared before the sheriff to report a stolen horse and wagon. Directed to 'Tosa, he identified his property and was promptly arrested. While in custody, he confessed to have "stolen many hundreds of chickens which he (had) later sold to local butchers."

Remember, this was before the F.D.A. existed. Vendors didn't always concern themselves of provenance of their wares. About this time, the Milwaukee Health Department was busy investigating a "west side veterinary surgeon (who) has been slaughtering horses that had become useless for work and has been manufacturing summer sausage from the flesh." The health department also had been hunting to find a rogue factory, according to the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, "in which the cheese, which has been causing ptomaine poisoning, was manufactured." The President McKinley era is fun to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there.

The City of St. Francis Has Allowed Chickens since 2020

Residents must have an annual "chicken permit" and submit a building permit for a coop, with a scaled drawing of the location of the coop.

Permit wise, no more than four chickens are allowed in an enclosed coop, and only two in an open coop. Chickens must have a minimum of two square feet per chicken, up to a maximum of 40 square feet on a single coop.

No roosters are allowed and no slaughtering of the hens within city limits.

Chicken owners also need to register with the Wisconsin Dept. of Agricultural Trade and Consumer Protection.

Neighbors are informed and have 30 days to file any objections. Objections have a public hearing before the city's plan commission.



I haven't been able to find out what became of Fred C. Gras, whose chicken industry may have been his chief source of his livelihood. He was forty-four years old, married, and had four children, so I suspect it was more a crime of desperation during hard times.

I don't know when the last coop in my neighborhood disappeared, but it was sometime in my Willow Glen Elementary School years. Young families were moving in who weren't fond of the smell, the dirt, and the hoard of semi-feral cats meant to deal with the mice and occasional rat. We were "suburbanizing" after all, and that also meant supermarkets and a ready supply of meats. All F.D.A. Approved!

Herman Schoenberg Killed by a Train in 1889

by Anna Passante



Before automatic railroad crossing gates, there were a lot of train/vehicle accidents. Back in the late 1880s, there were no crossing gates on Norwich Avenue, west of Kinnickinnic Avenue. Perhaps if there had been, Herman Schoenberg's horse wouldn't have ventured across the tracks on October 3, 1889, as a locomotive barreled down towards it. The horse was killed in the collision along with Schoenberg, who lived a block from the tracks at present-day 3005 East Norwich Avenue. The train accident was covered in the local news. The coroner's inquest jury found that his death was due to his own carelessness.

The following article from the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 4, 1889.

"Run Over by the Cars"

Shortly after 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon, Herman Schoenberg, a milkman, was struck and instantly killed by an in-bound passenger train on the Chicago & Northwestern road, about half a mile south of St. Francis train station, and just in sight of the man's home. Schoenberg was driving home from the city, and it is thought that he was sleeping, as the engineer of the train whistled repeatedly, but Schoenberg failed to take any notice of the warning. The milkman's body was thrown about thirty feet in the air, and when it landed on the ground it was lifeless. The wagon was entirely demolished and the horse was killed. Schoenberg was a married man, 35 years of age, and leaves a wife and six children. At the track at the point where Schoenberg was killed, runs at a direct angle and hidden on both sides by bluffs, high enough to shut out all possible chance of seeing a train until it strikes the crossing. Several similar accidents have occurred at this point, and the town of Lake authorities have often talked of [putting] a flagman there. The train stopped to pick up the unfortunate man, whose remains were badly mangled. They were taken to his home and the coroner notified.

Schoenberg was born in Prussia in 1852. The 1880 census reports him employed as a peddler and boarding with Paul Manhart, also a peddler. Schoenberg married Catherine in 1881, and they had five children: Elsie (1879), Alma (1883), Albert (1885), William (1887), and one other unidentified. (According the above newspaper article, they had six children.) Schoenberg built the home in Town of Lake on 3005 East Norwich Avenue and had a dairy farm there.

After Schoenberg's death, his wife, Catherine, married Anton Baumann a year later. Catherine was thirty-seven and Anton twenty-eight. The couple continued in the dairy business. They had three children together: George (1891), Cora (1894), and Edwin (1897).

Schoenberg is most likely buried in Lake Protestant Cemetery, which is located on the same block as his house. Adolph Schoenberg, who most likely was a relative, owned the cemetery lot #2. According to a letter received in the historical society archives, Anton Baumann may also be buried there. Catherine and Herman's son William Schoenberg, a tool and die maker, lived in the house into the 1960s.

A grandchild described Catherine Schoenberg as being a quiet little old lady with twinkling eyes, about 5-foot tall and 100 pounds. She was a terrible housekeeper, but was a hard worker when it came to outside work. She had a hard life, doing the farm work while Anton drank, said the descendant.



Years later, a bridge was placed over the Norwich Avenue railroad tracks but later razed.



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 21, 2025

July 19, 2025

August 16, 2025

Upcoming events (see "What's New" column for details)

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