



NOJOSHING

Indian word for "straight tongue"

land protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue

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Non-Profit Organization 501c3

September 2021

Sometime between 1997 and 2004, Mary Brlek Franz presented a talk at a St. Francis Historical Society meeting. She talked about her parents Isadore and Magdalen Brlek, who owned an ice cream parlor at 2245 East St. Francis Avenue. Red Bar now occupies the building. The script for her talk was found in the historical society archives. Here is the story, edited for clarity.

A Night in the Old Town of Lake, Wisconsin

It's a pleasure tonight to talk to all of you and take you back to the old Town of Lake, where I grew up with my sisters Anna Brlek and Margaret Brlek Wilke. My sister Anna was scheduled to speak to you in May 1997, but she had a fatal heart attack and died on April 30, 1997, at St. Luke's Emergency Hospital. To know her was to love her. A wonderful caring woman, who was a friend from the moment you met her.

My father and mother, Isadore and Magdalene, came to America from Austria-Hungary before World War I. My father came through the Port of Philadelphia in 1903, and my mother came through the Port of New York in 1913. They lived five miles apart in Austria-Hungary but met in Milwaukee at a boarding house. My father had settled in northern Wisconsin in Crandon, Wisconsin, and was in a lumber camp. He needed a cook for 40 lumberjacks and met my mother. He wanted to get back to camp and asked Mom to marry him. Before you knew it, around 1917, they arranged a Sunday wedding at Holy Trinity Church, near Bruce Publishing Co. at 3rd and Bruce Street. They needed to get a special dispensation from the archbishop, which they did and had a big wedding with all their Croatian friends at a south side hall. Then they traveled to northern Wisconsin and started a new life. She used to tell us stories about how she would get up at 4 a.m. to feed 40 lumberjacks. That lasted for a year. Mother wanted to come back to the city. They came to the Town of Lake and met more of their Croatian friends like Joe Papa, Frank Jambretz, the Burazins, Matt Vuksich, and many others.

I was born across from the St. Francis Heights School, later Fairview School, on South Iowa Avenue, which is no longer there, replaced by low-cost housing. Mr. & Mrs. Al Pierce were our neighbors. My dad moved around in the Town of Lake. After we left South Iowa Avenue, we moved to East St. Francis Avenue and built a bungalow, where there was a grocery store named Papa's. Joe Papa was quite a butcher, and his wife, Rosie, helped to take care of the Croatian customers. It was my mother's order to get the leanest pork chops every time she sent me to the store. I can still see Mr. Papa behind the butcher block, teasing me, "No fat pork chops per Magda instructions."

We lived near a green house near Clement Avenue. I was sent to get green lettuce, but when I would try to unlatch the door, there was a barking bulldog that scared me, and I ran home "without lettuce."

Then my dad moved us closer to downtown St. Francis, and he built a cottage on South Ellen Street and then another bungalow. In 1925, he decided to take his life savings and put up the building at 2245-47 E. St. Francis Avenue, a redbrick with one apartment upstairs. St. Francis Ice Cream Parlor was on the west side of the building and the St. Francis Dry Goods on the east side of the building.

The ice cream parlor had a marble counter with five stools, and there were four tapestry-covered booths. Dad served all the local families. Children loved his cones with chocolate jimmies. I remember all the families that would come and treat the children to his "green river phosphates" and his special Brlek Banana Split. I remember Mr. and Mrs. Joe Kiehl would bring the whole family of kids: Herb, Joe, and Ray. Then when the boys started dating, they would bring their girl friends. I remember Jean Kiehl, the mayor's wife, who was there regularly. The Stormy Hill gang from East Denton Avenue loved his banana splits. Our Croatian friends, the Philip Masnak family, the north side Croatians, the Ganskes, the Hoppes, and the Hegyis were all regular Sunday customers.

Joe Simonz operated the St. Francis Dry Goods Store on the east side of the building. He had one lady clerk, Kate, who helped him on Fridays and Saturdays. Simonz had a good clothing store business until the depression hit in 1929, and then it went downhill and he went bankrupt.

Follow up research

Isadore died in 1937 and Magdalene in 1973.

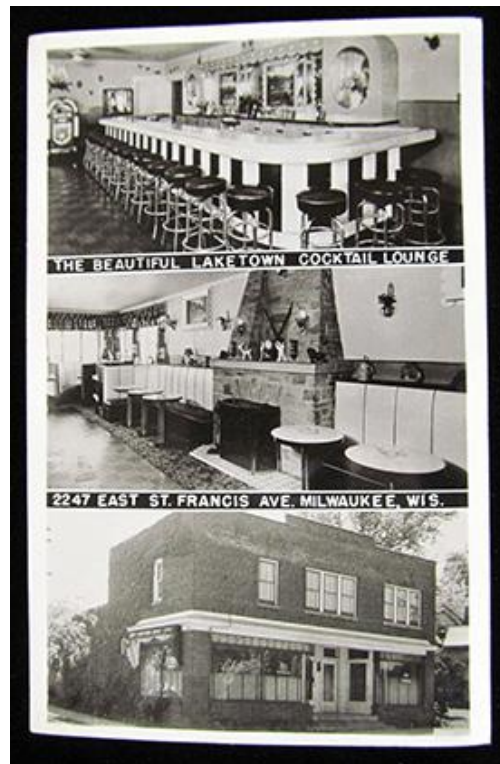
Mary Franz, the author of this story, died in 2004.

According to a 1946 Town of Lake directory, Magdalene was operating Izzy's Tavern at 3783 S. Kinnickinnic Avenue and lived there with her daughters Margaret, Mary, and Anna.

The St. Francis Avenue building later housed the Madjecki Restaurant, well known for its Friday fish fries. By 2008, it housed Cool Water Bar & Grill. In 2012, Red Bar opened in the space.



The nearly 100-year-old building at 2245-47 E. St. Francis Avenue now houses Red Bar and Saucing Swine.



Above,
A 1940s era postcard of the exterior and interior of the building, when it was the Laketown Cocktail Lounge.

Right,
Newspaper ad for Laketown Cocktail Lounge from 1949.

**Visit Wisconsin's
Most Beautiful
COCKTAIL LOUNGE**

2247 EAST ST. FRANCIS AVE. MILWAUKEE, WIS.

**Cozy . . . Beautiful
Secluded . . . Friendly**

**LAKETOWN
COCKTAIL LOUNGE**

Drive out Kinnickinnic Ave. to the
End of the Street Car line at St.
Francis Academy. Then Turn West
1 Block to

2247 E. St. Francis Ave.

St. Francis/Old Town of Lake Area Trails

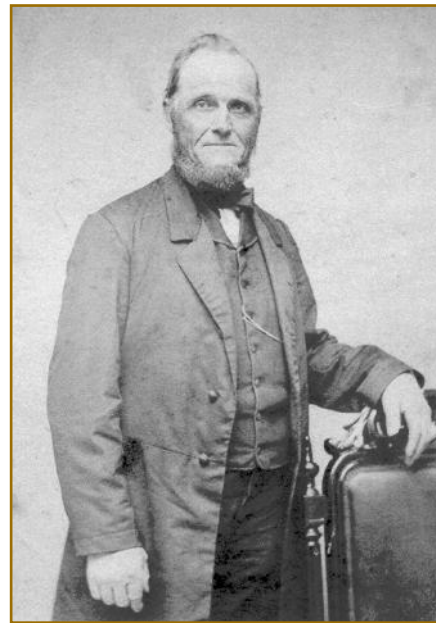
By Chris Barney

(Reprinted from the spring 1989 issue of the
St. Francis Historical Society newsletter)

Looking at 75 to 100-year-old photographs of St. Francis and other parts of the old Town of Lake, I am fascinated by how different the land area and the area's lifestyle was compared with the lifestyle of today. Even more fascinating to me, however, is reading and researching the lives of the pioneers who carved a life out of the rugged, and sometimes seemingly inhospitable areas, with their diverse composition from marshy to thickly forested with maples and other native trees. Men of vision, such as Elijah Estes and Jared Thompson, and their wives, of course, helped to shape Bay View and St. Francis, originally called Nojoshing by the Indians, meaning a "tongue of land protruding into the water." The Indians vacated the land in favor of the Yankee settlers from the East, who developed it into the fine communities we enjoy today.

The going was not easy for these early settlers, and it usually took many years to clear even a portion of the 80-acre or more tracts of land purchased from the U.S. government for \$1.25 per acre. But the pioneers persevered with the help of their sons and daughters and generations to follow. By doing so, they shaped a

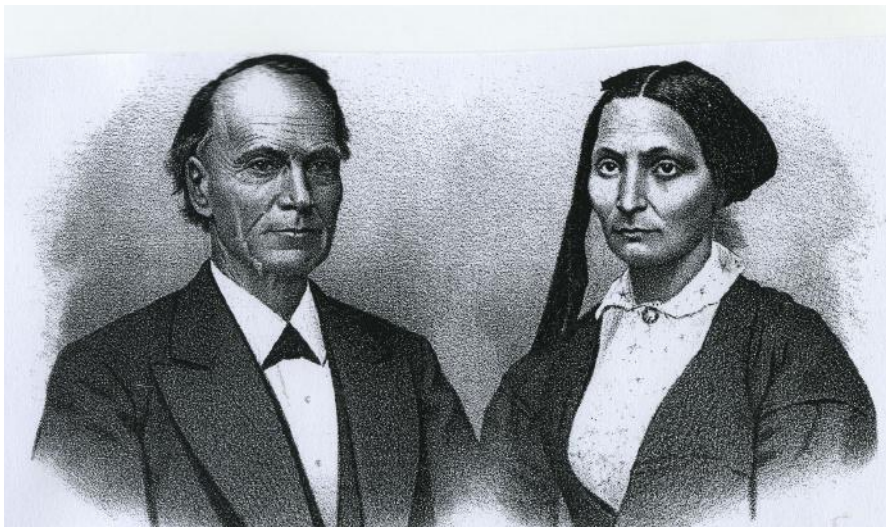
Husband & wife early settlers
Elijah Estes 1814-1887
Zebiah Estes 1810-1887



Jared Thompson 1802-1890

legacy for us to build upon and look back up with fondness and appreciation.

Most of us have heard our elders (parents, grandparents, etc.) talk about the "good old days" when things were different and better, according to them. And when they tell it, they are usually looking away, at a window or a picture on the wall. However, it is not their outward eyes that are doing the focusing. Their attention is centered on their mind's eye, a human sort of "VCR" or "CD" that preserves those memories and recollections, which most profoundly touched their lives. Some memories are sketchy, others are more vivid, but all of them have a deep and special meaning to the person doing the remembering. All put together, these memories make up a chronology of that person's life, or more succinctly, their "life history."



A Mother, Two Young Children Die in Kitchen Fire, All Buried at Sacred Heart of Jesus Cemetery

by Anna Passante

In the March issue, I wrote about the tragic cabin fire that killed three adults and five children. Seven of them are buried at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cemetery. I recently came upon a newspaper story about another fire that took the lives of a mother and her two children. They did not reside in St. Francis, but all are buried at Sacred Heart Cemetery. I wondered why they would be buried such a far distance from their home at 1746 S. 5th Street (formerly 690 Grove Street).

According to newspaper reports, on October 5, 1899, Franciszka Prudlof (also spelled Prudlow, Prudlo, Prudlof), the wife of Joseph Prudlof, was cooking supper when she noticed that the fire in the kitchen stove was burning low. So she took a gallon can of kerosene and poured some of the contents on the coals. There was an explosion, and flames shot high in the air igniting her clothing. She grabbed her five-month-old baby, Helen, and rushed from the house, but returned to rescue her other two children, John, age 2, and Anna, age 3, who had been playing on the kitchen floor. Her burning clothing set fire to the children's clothing.

Two neighbors heard the screams and found Franciszka and her children lying on the floor. They successfully smothered the flames. Both men suffered severe burns to the hands and arms. John, the two-year-old, was quite severely burned, and was carried to a nearby drugstore. His head, face, and arms were severely burned and it was at once apparent that he wouldn't live. He died at 9:00 pm. the next day. Franciszka was burned about the head, body, and arms and died of her burns the next day. She was 24 years old.

Infant Helen was burned on the top of her head, the left side of her face, and her feet. She died the next morning. It was thought that Helen would recover, but her burns were too severe. Three-year-old Anna had burns to her face and hands, but the burns were not considered dangerous.

A *Milwaukee Journal* article reported that the "...three caskets were taken from the home at 699 Grove Street to St. Stanislaus' church, Mitchell and Grove [now South 5th] streets, where Father Schulniska said the vigils of the dead. From there the caskets were taken to the Catholic Church at St. Francis [Sacred Heart], where Father Stemper officiated at the solemn mass, and accompanied the mourners to the grave where the last act in a tragedy without precedent in recent years was performed."

All three deceased family members were buried together in one grave in Franciszka's maternal grandparents' cemetery lot. The monument engravings list Paul Lubinski 1811-1894 and Christina Lubinski 1816-1881, who had resided in Town of Lake. Also engraved are the name of the fire victims, Frances [aka Franciszka] 1874-1900 and children John and Ellen. There are two errors on this stone. The Prudlof family members died in 1899, not 1900, and the baby's name was Helen, not Ellen.

According to census records, Anna, the only child to survive the fire, did not live with her father after the fire but rather with her maternal grandparents, Anna and Anton Bucholz, Franciszka's parents. Anna Prudlo grew up and married John Andrich. She died in 1975 and is buried in California.

No official cause of the fire was reported. "It is generally understood, however, that it originated in an attempt by Mrs. Prudlof to hurry the fire by pouring kerosene on it from a gallon can. It was about supper time, and this hypothesis seems reasonable," reported the *Milwaukee Journal* (Oct. 5, 1899). There were no witnesses of the actual accident other than the very young children.

Joseph Rechlicz, Frank Erdmann, and Peter Nowicki, the men who rescued the family, were called to testify at the inquest. A news article reported witness testimony, which at times conflicted with the earlier newspaper reporting. "It was not until the unfortunate woman was seen standing in the front room of her home, mute and helpless, with her blazing clothing throwing



Monument at Sacred Heart Cemetery inscribed with the names of the fire victims

a bright glare out into the street, that [they] knew of the accident.” According to Nowicki, he ran up the front steps, pounded on the door, and kicked in the door. He rushed and found Prudlof with her skirts on fire. The window curtains had caught on fire, and the sofa had begun to smolder.

According to testimony, Erdmann rushed into the smoke filled house and found the baby, Helen, in a baby carriage with its clothes on fire. After taking the baby outside, he came back and found John in a corner. Erdman tore burning clothes from the child, which resulted in Erdman burning his hand.

Franciszka’s husband, Joseph, was a carpenter. A year after the tragedy, he married Jadwig Napieralska. They had five children. Jadwig died in 1917. Joseph married a third time but later divorced. In 1924, he lived on South Ahmedi Avenue near Cora Avenue, not far from the Sacred Heart Cemetery where his wife and children rest. Joseph died in 1950 in Cudahy at age 84.

What’s New?

Board Meetings

Board meetings have resumed. They are held the 3rd Saturday of the month at 9:30 am at the St. Francis Civic Center at 3400 E. Howard Ave. Visitors are welcome.

A Bench for Barbara Janiszewski

In memory of the late Barbara Janiszewski, former treasurer of the St. Francis Historical Society, the Society board decided to place a bench on the edge of the children’s play area next to the library. Barbara very much loved books and the library’s woman’s book club, so a bench by the library felt appropriate. A plaque will be placed on the back of the bench recognizing Barbara’s work with the historical society. A short dedication will be scheduled once the bench is in place. Watch your emails for the announcement of the dedication.

Right: Society member Stephanie Maxwell (in the red plaid) helps the Morrison family work an old manual typewriter. Most children at the event were surprised that people had to use a typewriter rather than a computer.

Inset: Closeup attempts to type a name. (The typewriter didn’t want to cooperate.)

Bottom: Bill Drehfal and Anna Passante in the 4th of July parade. Board members Stephanie Maxwell and George Ramponi also marched in the parade.



This Old House on the Hill, Gone But Not Forgotten

by Anna Passante

Over sixty decades ago, at the present-day site of Wolf's Cleaners and the St. Francis Animal Hospital on Kinnickinnic Avenue, there was a large hill and on that hill sat an old house. Built in the Italianate/Second Empire style, it had tall windows, eave brackets, a flat roof with a widow's walk, and scrolled porch trim. All these features represented the Italianate style exceedingly well.

Martin Delaney and his wife, Elizabeth Packard Delaney, built the house. In May 1854, Martin Delaney had purchased ten acres from his father-in-law, Zebedee Packard, for \$257. It was on this land the house was built.

In 1867, Martin Delaney died at age fifty-eight. The following year, Elizabeth's sister Mary Thompson died leaving husband, Hayden Thompson, to raise seven children by himself. It was not uncommon at that time for a widower to marry his wife's widowed or unmarried sister, especially if there were children involved. So it wasn't surprising for Hayden to marry his sister-in-law Elizabeth Delaney on September 6, 1869. She was seventeen years his senior.

When Hayden married Elizabeth, he owned land near the intersection of present-day Howard and Kinnickinnic avenues adjacent to Elizabeth's land. Combining their property, the couple established a fairly large tree nursery on over 90 acres and lived in Elizabeth's house on the hill.

Around 1881, Elizabeth and Hayden sold the house on the hill to James P. Howard. In 1888, Howard sold five and a half acres of the land, as well as the house on the hill, to Joseph and Crescentia Felden for \$7,100. The house would later be addressed 3813 South Kinnickinnic Avenue.

Joseph Felden was born in 1852 in Prussia and immigrated to America in 1873. In 1878, he married Crescentia Dieringer. Felden was a tailor by trade, although the 1880 census lists him as a schoolteacher. The family moved from Fond du Lac to Milwaukee County in 1881, but it is unclear when the family arrived in Town of Lake. It is possible Felden rented the property from James Howard from 1881 to 1888, at which time he purchased it. Joseph and Crescentia had eleven children, although three died as infants. They didn't have many grandchildren, since only their son Barney had children.

In an interview with Mary Becker for a Cudahy Reminder newspaper article, Florence Felden Jucha, daughter of Barnabas "Barney," claims that when the Felden family bought the house on the hill, it



Top: Front view
Bottom: Rear view

This photo from the St. Francis Historical Society collection was taken in the 1940s when Adeline Karras lived there with her children.

was called Thompson Nursing Home. No records have been found to substantiate this. It is possible that Elizabeth and Hayden had taken in elderly boarders and that's where the name came from. Perched high on a hill, the Thompson/Felden house was described by Jucha as a large "beautiful home with a wide porch and plenty of room inside." She remembered the orchard and the red barn behind the house, as well as the horses.

Joseph worked his tailoring business from his home. He died in 1913. In 1917, his widow, Crescentia, built a white wood frame house at 3791 South Kinnickinnic, plus a grocery store at 3783 S. Kinnickinnic Avenue. The grocery store now houses Izzy's, a bar. Crescentia also built a brick home at 3795 South Kinnickinnic Avenue in 1928. She lived in the white wood frame house and rented out the old original family homestead on the hill. Son Barney eventually took over the grocery business. According to Jucha, there was a gasoline station next door to the south, with pumps located between the sidewalk and the curb on Kinnickinnic Avenue. During Prohibition, said Jucha, there was a speakeasy (the building now gone) behind the gas station.

From 1933 to 1952, Barney ran a tavern and filling station at 3724 S. Kinnickinnic Avenue, which became a popular gathering place for politicians. Sal and Sylvia Poehr later owned it. It is now Lovely, a beauty salon. Before he died, Barney bought a tract of land behind the tavern from the Schuerbrock family and developed East Elizabeth Avenue. Two of Barney's daughters, Florence Jucha and Bernadine Wagner, built homes on Elizabeth Avenue.

In the 1950s, Lyle O'Leary bought the old house on the hill as well as other acreage for his sheet metal firm, according to Jucha. The old house on the hill was razed shortly after.



What is a widow's walk?

It is a platform or walk atop a roof, often used as a lookout for incoming ships. The name is said to come from the wives of mariners, who would watch for their spouses' return, often in vain as the ocean took their lives, leaving the women widows. Most likely when the house on the left was built, anyone standing in the widow's walk would see the lake.

Around 1996, this photo was placed in the Cudahy/St. Francis Reminder newspaper in hopes that someone would recognize the family in the photo. Florence Felden Jucha of 2734 E. Elizabeth claimed the family as hers. Her father Barnabas "Barney" is in the white shirt leaning on the porch post. Note that you can see the "widow's peak" on the roof of the house in the photo.

Clockwise from left: Nobert, later a priest (with the bow tie); Felicitas, Crescentia (mother), with her toddler of the same name, Barnabas (Barney); twins Mary and Elizabeth, and Joseph. The photo was probably taken between 1895 and 1899, since Ludvig isn't in the picture, and he was born in 1899.



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.

September 18, 2021

October 16, 2021

November 20, 2021

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

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