

St. Michael's Catholic Church

125th Anniversary

1873 -1998

St. Florian, Alabama

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June 3, 1998

Dear Friends in Christ:

The year nineteen hundred ninety eight (1998) marks the one hundred twenty fifth (125) anniversary of the establishment of Saint Michael's Catholic Church in the Community of St. Florian, Alabama. The people of Saint Michael's and the Community of St. Florian are proud of the tradition of civic responsibility and religious harmony that exists between Catholic and non-Catholic for these 125 years. The parishioners are marking this joyous occasion with a seven month period of celebration starting Easter Sunday (April 12, 1998) and ending on All Soul's Day (November 2, 1998).

We feel you, your parents and ancestors have helped play an important role in the achievements of St. Florian Community and St. Michael's Catholic Church. In recognition of these contributions we invite you to come to St. Michael's Parish and the St. Florian Community and join us at any one or all of the events planned during this period. A schedule of events along with a response card are included.

Do plan to join us. Help us celebrate this important occasion and relive the memories of years gone by. The parishioners of St. Michael's and the people of St. Florian invite you to join in our anniversary celebration.

Yours in Christ,

**Abbot Victor Clark
Pastor of St. Michael's
Catholic Church**

**Chris Connolly President of
St. Michael's Parish
Council**

June 5, 1998

Dear Classmate:

Mark July 5th on your calendar and come join us for a day of special reminiscence of your years at Saint Florian County School and/or St. Michael's Catholic School. The first reunion of those who attended either of these schools is planned at Saint Michael's Church and Gymnasium for July 5. You are invited to join us and help in observing this special remembrance.

A complete program is planned. Those who can may wish to join us at the 10:00AM Welcome Home Holy Mass. Meetings of classes will be grouped by years: 1:00PM - 2:00PM classes from 1916-1940; 2:00PM - 3:00PM classes from 1941-1954; 3:00PM - 4PM classes from 1955-1956. You are welcome to attend all of the sessions if you desire.

Bring your camera, old photographs - including: class pictures, other special memorabilia and stories you would like to share with your classmates. Light refreshments and snacks will be served. Bring your spouse, family, grandchildren, and friends,- as family games will be available for those who may not wish to participate in the class reunion. Opportunities will be scheduled for a tour of the church, old school classrooms, the Parish House, and the Cemetery. We have invited our teachers, including nuns, to attend.

Please plan to join us on July 5th and return the enclosed postcard so we can make your welcome home a pleasant one!

The Reunion Committee

BACKGROUND OF SETTLERS

The entire 19th century in Europe was one of turmoil. During the early part of that century the Napoleonic Wars raged all across Europe. After Napoleon's defeat, return and second deportation, turmoil continued intermittently. The Karlsbad Decrees of 1819 resulted in extreme censorship with extreme punishment in Germany. Even the Swiss had a revolution in 1847 while the Italian War of Liberation threatened Austrian territory south of the Alps. The Belgians revolted from their Dutch rulers and established an independent state. The French overthrew the regime of Louis Phillippe in the February Revolution in 1848 and its revolutionary spirit spilled over into Germany. This occurred at the time when the 39 sovereign states of Germany were being consolidated into the German Confederation and succeeded in creating even more confusion.

The decade of the 1860s in both the United States and Europe was a very perilous and unsettling time. In the United States, the Civil War was raging. In Europe, France under Napoleon III regained its ascendant position because of the collapse of the coalition of states opposing Napoleon I. The Italians, with the assistance of France, had fought for and achieved unity in 1861. The Austrians and Prussians had fought Denmark over Schleswig and Holstein in 1863-64. The Prussians had fought the Austrians in 1865-66. The various German states were being herded together by various means (primarily by Otto von Bismarck) to form the German Empire; this was finally accomplished during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

In Prussia and in several other German states, there was a requirement for three years of service in the militia. Most other German states had a similar requirement of two years of service in one of the armed forces.

Large numbers of families and individuals emigrated as a result of the military service requirements as well as the hardships inflicted because of the constant turmoil to say nothing of these armed conflicts, the constant threat of war, and the damage caused when large bodies of troops moved across their property even when no military action was taking place there. It was these immigrants who formed the backbone of the early settlers in St. Florian.

HISTORY OF ST. FLORIAN

Although Native Americans undoubtedly used the land now occupied by St. Florian as a hunting ground and as the source of various materials such as flint which were necessary for their existence, there is little evidence that they established permanent residence. They did establish temporary habitations on some of this land as there are some references to this in local lore, but it wasn't until the United States government assumed ownership of the area and proceeded to sell land to private individuals that the present system of land ownership was established.

St. Florian is located on land purchased in 1818 and over several subsequent years by John S. Wilson and Matthew Wilson, Sr. and developed as plantations. These plantations, consisting of several thousands of acres and operating with slave labor, existed until the end of the Civil War.

On October 18, 1872, Dr. John Henry Hueser¹, a priest of the Fort Wayne, Indiana Diocese and the director of the Homestead Society of Cincinnati, purchased 1196 acres of land from Matthew (the name is also spelled Mathew in some land records) Wilson, Sr. He also purchased several other parcels in 1872. On November 1, he purchased 160 acres from Oliver S. Kennedy and William J. Wood and on January 1, 1873, Father Hueser made two purchases, one of 165½ acres at \$3.00 per acre from Henry Jones and the other of 80 acres at \$7.50 per acre from W. T. White. (He was also continuing to buy land in Lawrence County, Tennessee because on December 23, he bought 1882 acres in that county from Livenia Turner for a down payment of \$50.00 and a commitment to pay 75 cents an acre after the exact acreage was established.) Father Hueser had already established the communities of Lawrenceburg, Loretto, St. Joseph, and St. Mary, all in Tennessee, and wanted to establish a colony of German Catholic settlers in Alabama.

On April 30, 1865, three people, John S. Wilson, his nephew Matthew Wilson, Jr., and a servant, Christopher Brewer, the grandfather of W. C. Handy, had been murdered by the Thrasher group of renegades.²

John S. Wilson's will stated that the plantation should be operated by his executor until his grandchildren were 21 years of age. Because of the emancipation of the slaves,

¹ There is some confusion in the spelling of the name of Father Hueser. Some publications record the spelling as Houser, two spell it Heuser, one spells it Huiser and another even spells it Huizer. The spelling used here, Hueser, was taken from the Lauderdale County records of the land sales to Fr. Hueser and sales by Fr. Hueser to several of the early settlers in St. Florian. The Hueser spelling is also used in the Commemorative Centennial Book of the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Lawrenceville, Tennessee.

² Some records indicate that Matthew Wilson, Jr. lived at least long enough to identify the assailants, that they were apprehended near the present day intersection of Hermitage Drive and Royal Avenue, and were shot and killed there.

this proved to be impossible and so the executor received permission to sell the land. Some was auctioned but a buyer could not be found for most of the plantation.

In 1873, John W. McAlister, (also spelled McAlester in some records) the executor of the John S. Wilson estate, offered the unsold John Wilson land of 2296 acres to Father Hueser. He bought the land in May, 1873 for \$5.50 per acre with a 5 percent down payment and the remainder to be paid off in two equal annual payments. This later became a very important consideration.³

All of the land purchased by Father Hueser was subdivided for the purpose of selling it to Catholic families of German ancestry. The foundations of both St. Florian and St. Michael's were laid when, in 1872, Father Hueser began selling the land for homesteading. The prices per acre varied from \$8.00 to \$15.00 depending on what improvements, if any, were located on the specific lot and the location of the lot. Some of the lots were as small as two acres and some as large as 80 acres. Roads were planned with the main roads to be 30 feet wide and secondary roads to be 20 feet wide. As it developed, most settlers were farmers and only a few followed trades such as blacksmith or wagonmaker therefore the smaller parcels did not sell as rapidly as the larger parcels.

Thus the histories of St. Florian and St. Michael's Catholic Church are inextricably intertwined. St. Michael's exists because of St. Florian and St. Florian exists because of St. Michael's.

According to Father Albert Hilger, writing in the *Diamond Jubilee of St. Michael's Parish*, the first settlers in what would become St. Florian were the families of Florian Rasch, John Kasmeier, Sr., Frank Breidanger, Adam Zulauf, and Theodor Weltering, all of them arriving in the latter part of 1872. After these first five families settled here, many more came and in the years 1872 to 1876 forty families purchased property in the community.

The families of the area exhibited a number of features which deserve comment. First, was the willingness to give assistance as needed to other members of the community. This willingness is noted in a number of instances. The John Matthew Stumpe family lived with the Rasch family while neighbors helped them build a house. The Kasmeiers swapped land with the Crossheims so that Martin Grossheim could conduct his business as a blacksmith and wagon-maker in a roadside location. The John Locker family stayed with the Blalock family while the house that stood on their land was repaired. (Although it has been reported that the Blalock family stayed in what had been the overseer's house on the Locker family property while the house across the road was readied for the Blalocks.) The

³ There is no record of the sale of this land by Mr. McAlister to Dr. Hueser until May 11, 1877 although this Deed Book entry cites a Chancery Court ruling of May 16, 1873 and affirms the decision of the Chancery Court thus clearing title to the properties. The Chancery Court Book which contains the ruling could not be located in the Lauderdale Courthouse. There is a reference in a deed dated July 1, 1874 transferring land from Dr. Hueser to Schmidlkofer stating "this is from the John S. Wilson survey."

Mecke family stayed with the Kachelman family (the Kachleman family was not Catholic) until the church building that stood on the Mecke land could be converted to a residence.

Second was the willingness of almost all of these families to work together and work very hard to carve a producing farm out of the land they had purchased or, in a few instances, to establish a profitable business serving the community. And, it was not an easy task. Very few of the farmers had horses; most tilled the ground using oxen. Although oak trees furnished excellent building material, the stumps did not yield easily to the axe and grubbing hoe and so the quick method of plowing around the stumps had to be adopted until time and fire completed the clearing process. Because their financial situation dictated, they had to clear, plant and cultivate crops at the same time.

The nearest sawmill was at Pruitton, nine miles to the north, but dressed lumber had to be brought in from Iuka, Mississippi. There was a flour mill located at Shoal Creek. The first threshing machine was a tread machine operated by horse power and cotton gins were operated in the same manner. A trip to Florence took half a day in good weather for there were no buggies. In case of sickness, a good neighbor volunteered to go to town and summon one of the two doctors who served the entire Shoals area.

Such were the circumstances under which the earliest settlers of St. Florian worked and lived.

The third attribute of these settlers, but far from least, was the religious devotion which moved most of these families. This is evidenced in the history of St. Michael's Church. Most of the first settlers had been raised in Catholic Europe and in districts where a village without a church was unthinkable. Where attending mass on the Lord's Day was considered a grave obligation and where the feast days and holy seasons of the year were celebrated rigorously. This background was evidenced by the desire to select a saint's name for the colony and the decision to name it for the baptismal name of Florian Rasch who had presented to the church its first donation - a church bell. A bell still in use in the church today, 125 years later! (The first name of Mr. Rasch in certain deed records is spelled Florian.)

St. Florian, although it had no exact boundaries at the time, continued to grow and prosper. By the time it was ten years old, 40 to 50 families were located in the area.

In 1913 the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company attempted to attract more settlers to the area to increase use of the railroad by issuing a book titled "Letters to L&N from People Who Formerly Lived North about Lauderdale County, Alabama". Some of these letters, which were solicited by the railroad, were from people who lived in St. Florian. The following are representative of those letters.

"We are members of the German Colony, located at St. Florian, Lauderdale County, Alabama. We own our own land and grow all kinds of crops, such as corn, cotton, wheat, oats, rye, millet and stock peas. We grow two crops of Irish potatoes from the same land each season, they yield well. We all have orchards and vineyards, and pay considerable attention to stock raising and poultry, we have a good market for all we raise.

"The colony is very prosperous as a whole; we had a hard time at first, for the need of read money, we like the country and the people. The natives treat us well, in fact everybody in the South seems glad to see you.

"We are all satisfied, contented and happy in our southern home. Henry Stumpe"

"I left Wisconsin and located in Lauderdale County, Ala. I bought 95 acres without improvements of any kind, although loaded down with a good sized mortgage to keep me in good working spirit, that is to battle for a living. In a few years, I succeeded in having a nice little farm in good condition, which furnished me a good living and money to make improvements.

"Those who will locate down here, to make themselves comfortable homes and live in a temperate climate, with good water and good health in general, may do so if they are willing to work for it, and besides have some money, without fear of climate and people.

"The country is well adapted to diversified farming; as wheat, oats, barley, rye, clover, and Irish potatoes, under favorable seasons will bring good returns. Besides, we raise cotton, corn, millet, different varieties of peas, sorghum, peanuts, sweet potatoes and all garden truck which bring fair prices in the market Strawberries and melons grow here to perfection, as fruits, such as apples, peaches, pears, plums, cherries and grapes do well.

"The people are fair and upright, and if a man can't get along with them he must be either a political fanatic or not of an agreeable humor. Fair dealing is required on both sides to get along with one another.

"St. Florian is a German Catholic settlement of forty-five families, mostly farmers, and nearly all live in good circumstances. They moved here from different Northern States.

A. Schmidkofer"

"I was one of the original members of the colony, organized by Dr. Houser (sic) at St. Florian. We came from Pennsylvania. I purchased a farm. We had a hard time at first. We had the advantage of being able to work out of doors all winter. In the summer, we found the days long and hot, yet the nights were always cool, we felt refreshed and ready for another day's work. All the members of the colony were successful, with a few exceptions, and that not being the fault of the country.

"We have a thriving community, we have good schools and are constructing a new church which is to cost \$15,000.00 when completed. The farmers of the colony, as well as the rest of this community, are very prosperous.

"Our county is taking great interest in road building and before long, we will have good roads everywhere.

"Our principal crops are wheat, oats, corn, rye. We grow fruits of several varieties and the grapes do well.

"Lands have advanced in values, yet there is plenty of good cheap land to be had on reasonable terms. The natives are kind and clever to us. We were made to feel at home from the very beginning.

"We diversify our crops, many of them giving us two crops from the same land the same year; cut wheat and sow the same land in cow peas, the peas make good hay. We have ready sale for it at from \$18 to \$22 per ton. This pays in two ways, the profit in the hay and the peas improve the land at the same time. We get about a ton per acre of this hay.

"We are turning our attention to raising poultry, horses, mules, cattle and hogs. We are raising poultry, which we find very profitable.

"For the man with little means, this is the country.

Joseph Eckl"

St Florian continued its growth and was incorporated as a town on August 24, 1970. According to the census of 1990, the population of St. Florian at that time amounted to 388 souls. The estimated population as of 1998 is approximately 500. The occupations of the inhabitants have expanded from consisting primarily of those engaged in agriculture to a broad mix of professions and occupational pursuits. It is expected that St. Florian will continue to increase in population as new subdivisions are constructed and as industry in the area expands.

HISTORY OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

The first settlers, when they arrived in 1872 in what became St. Florian, found no church awaiting them and no regular services except when Father Hueser came down from Tennessee. But they immediately set out to rectify the lack of a church. The first church and a parsonage were built in 1872, this before some of the families had adequate housing for themselves. Both church and parsonage were of frame construction. The parsonage was a two-story house and the church, of two-story height, was 50 feet long by 24 feet wide. This building, situated across the road from the location of the present church, was moved in the 1870s (one reference says 1874 another says 1878) and expanded in 1878 and 1879.

It was not, however, until the spring of 1873 that Father Hueser was able to obtain a priest for the church.

The first priest to serve St. Michael's Parish was a secular priest of German extraction, Father Michael Merz. Father Merz brought his niece with him to his new pastorate. She had lost her parents and her only brother in Germany. Annie Merz became the first teacher in the school which was established in the new church building. (The last name is spelled Mertz in some references. The spelling Merz is from deed records to M. Merz and A. Merz and a power of attorney from J. H. Hueser to Michael Merz.)

Father Merz was one of the victims of the tragedy that befell St. Florian in 1876. A traveling salesman who had boarded at the Zulauf establishment developed smallpox and the disease spread throughout the community and resulted in several deaths. Father Merz contracted the disease but was on the way to recovery when he got out of his sickbed to administer last rites to a parishioner. This weakened him and led to his death on February 12, 1876. He is buried in St. Michael's cemetery.

Another tragedy of a different sort also occurred in 1876.

Financial troubles caused Father Hueser to be on the verge of losing title to the land. Although those who had purchased property in St Florian from Father Hueser had paid for that property and had even loaned him about \$6,000, his financial obligations in other communities were such that he was unable to meet them and was, therefore, unable to meet his mortgage payment on the St. Florian land. He, consequently, wrote to Archabbot Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., requesting the Benedictine Order to assume the debt and offering 800 acres of land to the Order. This appeal was supplemented by a petition to Archabbot Wimmer from Mr. Lawrence Specker, Mr. Florian Rasch, and Mr. Joseph Buffler imploring him to take over the parish and the debt. Father Hueser had previously written to the Most Reverend John Quinlan, Bishop of Mobile telling him of his financial difficulties and his contact with Archabbot Wimmer. The latter also wrote to Bishop Quinlan asking for permission to enter the diocese. These entreaties were not answered immediately because Bishop Quinlan was on a Confirmation trip. Father Hueser then wrote a second appeal to the bishop and this was favored at once with a reply and the Benedictines were invited to take over St. Florian and, of course, St. Michael's parish.

Thus, St. Florian and St. Michael's both were saved from the auctioneer's hammer and, on April 23, 1876, Father Gabriel Guerster became pastor and two Benedictine brothers, Majolus and Fridolin, came with to take care of the sacristy, house, and farm. From this point until today, the Benedictines have furnished the priests for St. Michael's and they have served it well.

Father P. Benedict Menges, who later became the first abbot of St Bernard in Cullman, succeeded Father Guerster, who left, because of ill-health, after 15 months. Services were provided by Father Menges, to the Catholic workmen building the Muscle Shoals Canal. But after a stay of one year, Father Menges also had to resign, in 1878, because of ill-health.

In August of 1878, Father Joseph Keller, O.S.B., became the pastor. He was a saintly man, a man who led his parish by his example. He was held in great reverence and it was said of him that, "he could make it rain, whenever the farmers needed it." Father Henry Hohman, O.S.B., came in 1884 and left the following year. Father Keller had been sent to Skidaway, near Savannah, GA, "but could not endure the climate and returned in 1885 to St. Michael's much to the joy of the parishioners." He also served the small (30 to 40 members) congregation of Florence with services twice a month. This was in addition to providing services for the Canal workmen. He was recalled by his superior in August 1891.

Father Severin Laufenberg took over St. Michael's from Father Keller. He led a very ascetic life and was strict with himself and those to whom he ministered. Father Laufenberg was succeeded by Father Fridolin Meyer, O.S.B., from May, 1892 until May, 1894 at which time Father Laufenberg returned to serve until the summer of 1900. During this period, once in 1878 and again in 1889, the church building was enlarged to accommodate the growing congregation.

Also, in 1898, St. Michael's celebrated its 25th anniversary. The following two newspaper articles tell the story.

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. FLORIAN

(Florence Herald, Thursday May 26, 1898)

TWENTY -FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

St. Florian will Celebrate its Founding Monday

St. Florian will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding on Monday.

The German colony was founded by Father H. H. Heuser (sic), of Loretto, Tenn., now of Huntington, West Virginia. Nearly fifty families now live in the St. Florian neighborhood while five men only remain of the original colony. Father Heuser (sic) brought the various families together from the north-west (sic), and many came with small earthly possessions which were invested in poor uplands, then considered worthless as farm

lands. These lands were known as the barrens and are now the most productive lands of the county. Lands that were worth but a song now bring \$50 an acre. So much for the enterprise and thrift of our German citizens.

On Monday the celebration will commence with High Mass at 9 a.m. which will be followed during the day with suitable ceremonies and exercises. Fathers Bruner(sic), of Florence, and Leo, of Tuscumbia, will take part in the celebration.

The five original colonists are Messrs. L. Specker, J.M. Stampe (sic), John Kashmier (sic), Banard (sic) Henken, and Henry Willen.

The Herald congratulates the good people of St. Florian on the celebration of this eventual (sic) occasion and the great progress they have made and the obstacles they have overcome.

(Florence Times, Friday June 10, 1898)

ST. FLORIAN A Notable
Event Celebrated.

On Monday of last week our German friends at St Florian held a notable celebration, one which justifies more than a passing notice in The Times. It was the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the settlement of St. Florian by our German-American friends.

Twenty-five years ago in January, the original settlers came, and six months later the priest came to minister to their spiritual wants. It was this latter event that entered largely into the celebration, the day partaking chiefly of the features of the religious festival. At 9 solemn high mass was celebrated by Rev. Gammelbert Brunner of Florence, assisted by Father Severin, pastor of the church, and Father Leo, of Tuscumbia, in the presence of a large congregation. Subsequently the crowd was photographed by Mr. Echard, after which good cheer at the various homes of the people was enjoyed.

Many of the first settlers (sic), (and of those that followed them) have passed over the river; and the only remaining (sic) ones who came first are Messrs. Matthew Stumpe, Jon. Kasmeier, Barney Henken, Lorentz Specker and Henry Willen.

There are now living in this excellent community 40 or 50 families, and to say there is no more thrifty and intelligent neighborhood in our county is stating the case mildly. Thrift and industry are observable on al (sic) sides. The people there have shown the possibilities of our soil and climate. They are good citizens, and in their advancement and prosperity all our people rejoice.

Following Father Laufenberg, a series of priests served St. Michael's for short periods of time. Father Leo Mayer, O.S.B.. served for eight months, Father Placidus Becker, O.S.B., stayed for a short time and, because he was an artist, while here he added

frescoes to the church, Father Dennis Stolz, O.S. B., took over for a few months, he was followed by Father Jacob Lauth, O.S.B., who in his younger years had converted two Lutheran ministers, and he, in turn, was replaced by newly-ordained Father Augustine Palm, O.S.B., in November, 1903. Under his direction, both choir and Glee club flourished.

Father Augustine's pastorate ended in 1907 and Father Alphonse Klug, O.S.B., became the pastor. Of all the pastors, he stayed the longest - until 1933. Father Alphonse was a "builder" pastor. It was during his pastorate that the existing church building was planned and built as was the brick school building. The church building fund started with a bequest of \$7000 from the Wolfinger estate. An architect, Mr. Brielmeier of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, drew up the plans and in 1914 the parishioners excavated for the foundation. They quarried stone, donated by Robert Kilburn, at Shoal Creek and hauled it to St. Florian in their wagons where they assisted the stone-mason, Mr. Caspar Haeger, in constructing the foundation. It was a community affair as each one contributed freely of his labor. After the foundation was completed, there was a lull while additional funds were accumulated to erect the walls, roof, and tower. The cornerstone was laid in 1916 with the Bishop and the Abbott participating, and the walls, roof, and tower were completed in the rough in 1916, again with the willing labor of the parishioners. Members cut trees from their woods and took them to Ed Rasch's sawmill to be cut and planed into lumber for the church. They helped with the carpentry and also by hauling material from Florence that could not be produced locally.

According to Father Albert Hilger, writing in the *Diamond Jubilee of St. Michael's Parish*, "The interior, however, looked not much better than the stable of Bethlehem - the walls were without plaster, the subfloor showed many cracks and there were no regular windows, only canvas covered the openings. It must have been cold in winter and damp during the rainy season but the people put up with these conditions, until they were able to get such — as would do honor to the house of God." But these conditions did not deter the people of St. Michael's from their regular worship of God.

There seems to be general agreement that the beautiful stained glass windows were installed in 1924 but the manner of their being ordered and purchased has more than one version.

Father Klug left in 1933 and he was succeeded by Father Vincent Hegle, O.S.B., who left in five months because of ill health made worse by seeing his parsonage burn. When Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., arrived in 1934, he had to live in the church sacristy from March until the new rectory was completed in December. (In 1905, Father Hilger had said his first High Mass at St. Michael's.) During his pastorate, an addition to the school was constructed and a new convent for the Sisters (the present Parish Hall) was built. Father Albert, who had tended to the needs of his parish with dedication, left in 1954 to become chaplain of St. Mary's Hospital in Humboldt, Tennessee. Father Sylvester Fangman, O.S.B., a robust, cheerful former baseball player and an accomplished musician, served until his death on February 2, 1960. Father Peter Diesel, O.S.B., was appointed

administrator and stayed until early 1961 when Father Fabian Hoffman, O.S.B., came as a temporary administrator until June, 1961.

Father Damian Gusmus, O.S.B., a native of Florence, Alabama, had studied in Rome and said his First Mass in the Basilica of St. Peter, Vatican City. He was an energetic man who meticulously carried out his pastoral duties. Father Gusmus was succeeded by Father Gabriel German, O.S.B., in 1974. He served until 1976. Father Bernard Patterson, O.S.B., 1976 to 1979. Father Roger Lott, O.S.B., 1979 to 1984. Father David Morehouse, O.S.B., 1984 to 1992. Father Thomas O'Connor, O.S.B., 1992 to 1996. Abbot Victor Clark, O.S.B., who was born in Cullman, Alabama, became VIII Abbot of St Bernard Abbey in 1987 and assumed the pastorate of St. Michael's in 1996.

Bringing the church building to its present condition was a long, slow, but fulfilling, process. Sacrifices were made by many of the parishioners to attain the comfortable and inviting edifice that now exists. The Buffler family had the interior painted in memory of their son, Edward, who had been killed in World War II and the floor was covered and new pews installed in 1957.

ST. MICHAEL'S STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

(The following information is from transcripts of interviews conducted during November, 1981 by Mrs. Marianne Bernauer)

Purchase

Mrs. Biddie Gruber: (from telephone conversation with Marie Rasch) "Marie Rasch arrived in St Florian in late May, 1922. She remembers Father Alphonse (Klug) going to Cincinnati and some people being upset because he finalized the purchase of the windows. She remembers Father asking people to donate or sign up for windows. She is sure that they were installed no later than 1924."

Mr. Joe Stumpe: "Father Alphonse went to the Benzinger Brothers Church Supply house in Cincinnati in 1922. He was forced to make the commitment to buy the windows because the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act was passed. This tariff would have made the windows much more expensive. Father felt very bad about having to make the decision so quickly. He said it was the first time he had to do anything like that without consulting his parishioners, but he knew his parish would back him up. Father Alphonse said that the German artists were working for pennies after World War One."

Miss Mamie Rasch: "Uncle Ed (Edward Rasch) had planned to pay for the St. Florian window, but a lot of work had to be done on the church and he had already donated a lot of work and money. When the windows finally came, he didn't feel able to give that large window, but chose a smaller one instead. Father Alphonse encouraged him to give the larger window because he thought it would be appropriate for a Rasch to give the St. Florian window."

Mr. Edwin Eckl: (recollection of the words of Mrs. Annie Eckl) "The windows were purchased and paid for before World War I, however, the war delayed their delivery. They laid on the docks at Hamburg for quite some time after the war. The delay was due to the change in the value of currency. A list of the windows was placed in the back of the church and parishioners were asked to put their names by the one they would donate. The best we can remember the small windows were \$150.00 each, the regular size were \$450.00 each, and the large window of St. Gregory in the front was \$1000.00."

Transporting

Mr. Joe Eck: "The windows were handcrafted — each piece was hand-done. Rudolph Langer was a young man at the time and he helped to install the windows. He said they were put in in 1924. The windows were packed in sections. Each section was packed in a pine box made of 3/4-inch boards. It took four men to handle a box. It took three wagon loads to carry the St. Gregory window. The windows arrived in perfect condition, not a bit of damage was done to any of them."

Mr. Edwin Eckl: "A virtual caravan of wagons went in to bring the windows out. It seems like there was one truck, I can't remember who it belonged to, but it was too small to be of any use. There were probably about fourteen wagons. I particularly remember John Rasch — his big, black, shiny team, and harnesses with lots of brass (a kid remembers things like that). Mr. Rasch asked me to ride with him, and I asked my Daddy, but he said that Rasch's team was too young and frisky and that I had better ride with him. Some other men with wagons I remember are August Eck, W.P. Eckl, John Eckl, Leo Mecke, Bud Rasch, — Ed Rasch didn't go but had someone drive his wagon and team — and, of course, my Daddy, Ed Eckl. The windows arrived at the church in perfect condition. They stood along the wall of the church about a year before being installed. A man was sent to do the installation and Rudolph Langer helped with the work. Lead was used in the installation and when the job was done scraps (of lead) were all around the church. The young boys pounded the scraps into pellets to shoot in their flips (sling-shots)."

Miss Eleanora Eckl: "School was out. I had my music lesson and my sisters and I were bounding home when we saw the wagons coming with the windows. My daddy had the St. Agnes window and part of another. He told us to wait until they got the windows unloaded and we could ride home with him. Of course we were glad we would not have to walk the mile and a half home."

Installation

Mr. Joe Eck: "The man who was sent to install the windows came from Cincinnati. He had a German accent. The windows were oversized. Several inches had to be cut from each window. (Joe said that some of those pieces of stained glass were in his barn that burned.) I remember serving Mass one morning when the windows were being installed. The man who was installing them gave me 25 cents and told me to go to the store and get him some 'John Ruskin cigars'. I came back with a handful of cigars. (He probably had gone to Schaut's store.)"

Mr. Edwin Eckl: "I brought a group out to see the windows. Father Alphonse had a sheet (from the company) on each window explaining the symbolism in that window. Special notice was given to St. Boniface's eyes — he seems to be looking at you wherever you are in the church. Those sheets on the windows could have been lost when the Rectory burned (in 1933). At that time some things were saved -- John Rasch saved the Baptismal Records."

Denver, Colorado Windows

Mrs. Mary Alice Meyer: "Windows in a church in Denver, Colorado looked the same as those in St. Michael's. A woman, who had asked to accompany the St. Michael's group because she was alone, said the Denver windows were made by a company in Bavaria and that it (the plant) had been bombed in World War I."

(The following information was supplied by Janet Ragland.)

The name of the saints honored or scenes depicted in the windows are followed by quotations of recognition given in the corner of the windows. Further information is given in italics.)

WINDOW

RECOGNITION

St. Michael	W. & Mrs. Kemper in memory of our parents <i>William and Flora Goeser Kemper donated this window in memory of their parents, both Kemper and Goeser</i>
St. Scholastica <i>Mother and son</i>	Mrs. Theresia and August Buffler
Baptism	Alois Krieger and Family
St. Elizabeth <i>The family of Frank & Alice Robb Eck</i>	Family Eck
St. Boniface <i>The Willens were the adoptive parents of nephew, August Eck</i>	In memory of Heinrich & Mrs. Antonia Willen
St. Peter	Knights of Columbus
Moses and Commandments	John Ultsch & Family
Immaculate Conception	Children of Mary <i>Children of Mary was an organization of single, young women. It is no longer in existence</i>
St. Matthew	Alois and Mrs. Crescentia Schmidkofer

St. Mark Bernard & Edward Rietman
Father and son

St. Luke Mrs. Catherine Turner
*Mrs. Catherine Turner was the housekeeper of the Benedictine
pastors of St. Michael's for many years. The window was
donated in her memory.*

St. John Rudolf Langer & Family
*Rudolph Langer worked with the representative of the Zettler
Company to install the stained-glass windows.*

St. Joseph Holy Name Society
*The Holy Name Society was an organization of men in
St. Michael's Church. It is no longer in existence.*

Mary Magdalene Julius & Mary Rasch

St. Paul C. N. Gruber & Family

St. Agnes Edward J. Eckl & Family

St. Florian Frank & Mrs. Julia Buffler

St. Benedict J. L. Buffler & Family

St. Cecelia Edward & Mary Rasch

St. Gregory Joseph & Mrs. Ursula Eckl

Small diamond-shaped windows are in the outside walls of the two confessionals. They feature a serpent and crossed nails. According to Eleanora Eckl, in a statement to Marianne Bernauer in 1981, "Jim and Jerry (her twin brothers, James and Jerome -Jerome was killed in World War II) were born in 1921. Daddy gave the two small windows in the confessionals in their names."

The following is a page from The Bulletin of the First Methodist Church of Florence commenting on the beauty of the stained glass windows of St. Michael's Catholic Church.

Bulletin

of

The First United Methodist Church

Florence, Alabama

A VISIT TO ST. MICHAEL'S

In the little village of St. Florian stands an awe evoking Roman Catholic church of splendid Gothic design. St. Michael's. Both Florian and Michael are Roman Catholic saints but Michael is much better known, celebrated in scripture, art and literature. John Milton makes Michael a prominent character In his epic Paradise Lost.

The thing that overwhelmed me as I entered the Sanctuary of St. Michael's on a sunny, spring-time Sunday afternoon was the brilliance of those superb and splendid stained glass windows. They were designed by a famous German artist, Francis Zettler and manufactured in the Zettler studio which has been making stained glass windows for over 100 years, located in Munich, Germany. The cornerstone of St Michael's bears the date 1916. Whether the windows were made then or later. I do not know. They look as though they were made yesterday and the color together with the design form the most beautiful stained glass artistry I have seen anywhere in this state. There are a dozen full size windows and several smaller ones. There is one of Moses, one of Peter. Paul and the four Gospel writers and one of Mary Magdalene Others portray various Roman Catholic saints, including St Michael. The most beautiful one of all is the Saint Agnes window with the Saint holding a lamb in her arms. The truly outstanding thing about these windows is the shading of coloring in the clothing of the figures and the superbly fine use of flowers in each of the windows.

Some people insist they can worship God in a barn or a tabernacle better than in the most ornate cathedral I must frankly confess that I am not of that band Beautiful sanctuaries with windows and yes, even statuary, are mood creators When I enter a beautiful sanctuary like our own or St. Michael's, I'm off and running at the business of worship. How could anyone keep from worshipping in such surroundings

If you haven't visited St. Michael's on a sunny day, I recommend you do It soon. But don't be in a hurry when you get there. Take time to worship In true ecumenicity

—Allen D. Montgomery

CHURCH STAFF

Allen D. Montgomeo	----- Pastor
James H. Holland	----- Associate
Mrs. W. R. Ray, Jr.	Educational Associate
Wayne Christeson	Director of Music
J. H. Voorhies	Associate Director of Music
Mrs. J. H. Voorhies	----- Organist
Mrs. Howard Dart?	----- Church Secretary
Mrs. R. L. Morrow	----- Pastor's Secretary

OUR MISSIONARIES

Rev. & Mrs. Andrew J. Williamson	----- Missionaries to Malayan
Miss Martha Almon	----- The Palama Interchurch, Council, Honolulu, Hawaii

HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

The remarks of Father Albert Hilger, O.S.B., to the Florence Rotary Club in June of 1940 indicate the attitude of the settlers of St. Florian toward education.

Father Albert said: "While religion held such a prominent part in the life of these pioneers, still 'secular education' was not neglected. ... (T)he Catholic takes a different view regarding the school question than the average Protestant. The Catholic believes that 'secular education' ought to go hand-in-hand with religion; that mind and heart be trained together; that the necessity of obedience, punctuality, modesty, morality and love of sacrifice can be inculcated in the heart of the child only by referring it to God and our dependence upon Him. These early settlers, therefore, considered a school as necessary as the church; and in fact, in the beginning, the church building had to serve also as a school."

There has been a school of some variety at St. Florian since its beginning in 1873 with the coming of the first priest, Father Merz. His orphaned niece, Annie Merz, came to St. Florian with him and became the first teacher in a school that was opened in the church building. (This building, which had been built in 1872, was then on the south side of Church Road but in 1878 was moved to the north side.) Only two grades were taught at this time. Miss Merz was succeeded by Mr. John Sauter and, in 1875, by Father Merz. From the first, it is said, the four "R's", reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and religion, were taught and neither the rod nor music was spared.

The school eventually outgrew the little church and a 30-foot by 30-foot school building was built on the south side of Church Road opposite the church. By this time the curriculum included all the subjects ordinarily taught in elementary schools. Father Gabriel Guerster was the pastor when the Benedictines took over in 1876. They employed lay teachers, all of whom were local residents. These teachers were Messrs. Truemper, John, Peter, and Alex Schaut, John and August Buffler, Misses Annie McLaughlin, Margaret Hastings, Eva Clark, Eleanor Kircher, Julia and Elizabeth Rasch, and Emma Buffler. At times, Father Severin also helped out and Brother Pius of St. Bernard Abbey taught from 1900 to 1902. The school was considered to be parochial but, because there was no public school in the area, Protestant children were admitted and the local school board paid the teachers from \$15 to \$30 per month. The pupils sat at long, rough-hewn wooden benches which had a box beneath to hold their books. (These benches were replaced with desks in about 1902.)

There was a blackboard and chalk but each student used his or her own slate and slate pencil. At first instruction was in German but there was also a "little English book" and German gave way, little by little, changed to English.

A few of the children went home for lunch but most brought their lunch to school with them. When there were several children in a family, all the lunches would be packed in one bucket, the smallest child keeping it. (Age discrimination?) In the winter, it was not uncommon for the teacher to remind the students to loosen the lid on the bucket so the sandwiches would not get soggy if they had frozen and were thawing.

It is reported that in 1909 this one-room, ungraded, parochial school was in session nine months a year with the local school board paying for seven months and the parish paying for two. By this time, regular state-required textbooks were used and tablets had replaced slates. Because no law regulated when a child had to start school, St. Florian parents sent their children to school as soon as they reached their sixth birthday without regard to what time this occurred in the school year.

In 1917 Father Alphonse Klug, O.S.B., added a room to the school and secured two Benedictine Sisters from the Sacred Heart Academy, Cullman, Alabama, Sister Mary Hilda and Sister Mary Fidelis, to teach the seven grades for a period of seven to eight months each year. To provide a place for them to live, the old, original church was converted into a convent which was termed "The Ark" by the nuns.

An old residence located on the school grounds was acquired and it housed the junior high grades from 1923 to 1926. The teaching staff was increased to three Sisters and the school term was lengthened to nine months with the acquisition of the third nun.

The community continued to grow, the roads to be improved and more school rooms became imperative. In 1926, the question arose: "(S)hall the school continue its parochial character or shall it take in all children of the district and function as a public school?" The answer of the parishioners was to function as a public school if the Sisters could be retained. As a result, the following proposition was presented to the county school board: "We agree to erect a school building, according to the existing state plans and open the school to all the children of the district, provided we can retain our sisters as teachers." Although this arrangement was entirely unique, i.e., a public school taught by a religious community, it was approved by the school board. Although the school was associated with St. Michael's Church, the school board paid a stipend for the students attending. Thus was St. Florian School born.

A four-room, brick-veneer building, which met state specifications, was erected at a cost to the parishioners of \$10,000, a big undertaking for a small parish. There was a debt of \$3,000 for several years until Mr. Ed Rasch, Sr. offered to pay \$1,500 if the congregation matched it by the end of the year. This was accomplished quickly and the parish was out of debt.

Religious instruction at St. Florian School was kept entirely separate from the school curriculum. Catholic children went to Mass and to catechism before school hours and no religion was taught in the school.

By the mid-1930s another annex to the school was needed. In the school year 1934-35 enrollment was 126 in the elementary grades and 83 in the junior high school. The school had to be enlarged or the junior high school would have to be abandoned. Once again the parishioners made the necessary sacrifices and, in 1936, an addition of two classrooms and a hall was completed.

The expansion of St. Florian School did not stop here. The school enrollment was still growing and more modern conveniences were needed. In 1949, a second building was added. This building contained three classrooms, an auditorium-gymnasium with a stage, and a modern cafeteria. This was a tremendous asset because it provided space for recreation, parish gatherings, as well as additional classroom space.

All of the school buildings represent an investment by the people of St. Michael's parish of their money, their time, and their labor both physical and mental.

Although the relations between the county school board, school superintendents and the community had been consistently cordial and considerate, the return of the school to a strictly parochial school occurred in 1955 - and St. Florian Public School was no more. Taking its place was, once again, St. Michael's Catholic School. This decision by the diocesan authorities and Sacred Heart Convent reduced the enrollment considerably. The lower grades remained in the new building while the upper grades attended classes in the older building. In the next few years, many changes were made in the school. The old school received new floors, fresh paint, and a new lighting system. When two rooms that had been unused were brought into use, all eight grades were located in the older building and the gymnasium/auditorium building was used for parish activities.

St. Michael's Catholic School was closed in 1968 by order of the Diocesan School Office. This decision came as a surprise and saddened the entire community.

Though St. Florian Public School and St. Michael's Catholic School no longer exist except as the buildings of Riverhill School, they are kept very much alive in the memories of those who were students there.

With the closing of St. Michael's Catholic School, the era of education provided by a school in the parish ended. The focus of religious education for the parish became two-fold: the expansion of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program (CCD) and the subsidization by the parish of the education of students attending St. Joseph School in Florence.

The CCD program was already instructing high school students attending public schools. They were taught initially by the pastor, then by the pastor and a lay teacher, one evening each week. This was expanded to Sunday morning classes for elementary students attending public schools. Over the years, classes have been held in the gymnasium building, the school, and the parish house. When the school was used, the first task in winter was to build a fire in the stove. The Religious Education program coordinators and teachers have always been generous volunteers. Some of them had children in the program but many did not. They work in conjunction with the Diocesan Office of Religious Education in Birmingham. In addition to instruction in their Catholic faith, students have participated in outreach activities and projects including involvement with shut-ins, liturgical ministry, parish and community events and projects, and support of the Holy Childhood Association.

Teachers in the Religious Education program emphasize the tremendous value of parent involvement. Participation by parents as teachers, helpers, and supporters has been instrumental in maintaining an effective program which provides the youth, and, indeed, all parishioners, with a solid foundation in and appreciation of their Catholic faith.

LIST OF SISTERS WHO SERVED ST. MICHAEL'S
(This includes those at St. Florian School & St. Michael's School
plus some Sisters who were not teachers but also served here)

Sister Hilda Haas	Sister Fidelis Ketchum	Sister Elizabeth Kramer
Sister Rita Obering	Sister Josephine Feldung	Sister Mary Donaghue
Sister Regina Campbell	Sister Stanislas Donaghue	Sister Edith Price
Sister Eulalia McCormick	Sister Mary Francis Crawford	Sister Mary Catherine Flynn
Sister Mary Charles Daly	Sister Mary Ann Arndt	Sister Eugenia Schmitt
Sister Mary Thomas Daly	Sister Josephine Brumbach	Sister Hildegarde Mulzer
Sister Patricia Hitt	Sister Scholastica Workma	Sister Dolores Olbert
Sister Geraldine Rigotti	Sister Fidelis Miller	Sister Mary Paul Gusmus
Sister Cornelia Beckman	Sister Raphael Colosia	Sister Barbara Roepke
Sister Juliana Daly	Sister Antonia Zappone	Sister Celestine Schaefers
Sister Louise Eck	Sister Monica Vogt	Sister Isabel Sands
Sister Francine Hasenbein	Sister Mary Carol Bishop	Sister Florence Veigl
Sister Gretchen Warren	Sister Anita Nicastro	Sister Marilyn Watson
Sister Johanna Daly	Sister Beatrice Slovensky	Sister Mary Margaret Mulvey
Sister Antoinette Priest	Sister Genevieve Mancos	Sister Marv Bernard Geck
Sister Helen Hoch	Sister Mary Agnes Obergfel	

NOTES FROM SISTER EDITH ANN PRICE

(Quoted from a History of St. Florian presented August 2, 1974 during Community Week)

St. Michael's parish had a school for 95 years and Sisters served as teachers for 51 of the 95 years. During these years there were five vocations from the parish. These five were: Sister Luitgarde Peters, Sister Bernadette Freihammer (who was not a native of St. Florian but was from Sheboygan, Wisconsin), Sister Louise Eck, Sister Jeanette Eck, and Sister Mary Grace Mecke.

Totaling the years of all the Sisters who taught there from 1917 to 1968, we can boast of more the 150 years of service to St. Florian parish (sic).

As far as living conditions are concerned, our Sisters lived in the old church building for 30 years, and they lovingly called it the ARK; and indeed as one approached it from Jackson Highway, the east end did resemble Noah's ark - with one very great difference. Instead of one door, it had about fifteen or twenty, for as one walked from one end to the other, one must pass through 10 doors alone; and this did not count those doors into side rooms and those leading outside.

In 1934 there was danger of losing the ARK in a fire which destroyed the rectory, but this was not to be; for the Sisters continued to live in it for 13 years more. However, in 1947 the parish built the Sisters a modern, comfortable Convent, which served them for the remaining 21 years (1947-68) when the school was closed, and our apostolate in St. Florian came to an end.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF THE ALTAR SOCIETY OF ST. MICHAEL'S

The organization we know today as the Altar Society started life in St. Michael's parish as St Ann's Altar Society. Although the exact date of the establishment of St Ann's Altar Society is not known (many records were lost when the rectory burned in 1933), it was in existence before 1914. Cecilia Lamprecht says that when her mother came to St. Florian in 1914, St Ann's was a functioning entity.

It was originally not really an organization because it met only once a year and that solely for the purpose of electing officers. And, for many years, just two officers were elected. These two were responsible for chairing the picnics, buying the meat or arranging to have it donated, arranging to have the hogs transported and slaughtered, killing and cleaning the chickens for the stew, hiring the band for the dance, handling the finances of the picnics, writing a report about the picnics, as well as performing the duties expected of all St. Ann's Society members. It was very difficult finding women to fill the officer positions. This was sometimes settled by electing as officers two from among those ladies who failed to attend the yearly meeting. You missed the meeting at your peril!

Mrs. Minnie Bernauer was able to avoid being an officer by preparing the Forty Hours dinner for the priests. (Although from some accounts, this was quite a chore in itself!)

Because cleanliness is next to godliness, the activities of the women of St. Ann's were limited pretty generally to cleaning. They deep-cleaned the church building twice a year - before Christmas and Easter - and did general cleaning in between. Cleaning involved scrubbing the wooden floor of the church. (This meant that hot water had to be carried from the rectory in buckets - but everyone pitched in to help.) The windows were washed and the statues were dusted. The weekly cleaning was assigned by the priest from the list of parishioners - although bachelors were exempted from these labors. If for some reason you were unable to take your turn, you were expected to hire someone to do it for you. And the dues charged for allowing the members to perform these services were only \$2.00 per year.

The church laundry, altar linens and those portions of the priest's vestments that could be laundered, was also done by the ladies in their turn. It is reported that when the nuns came, in 1917, they assumed the duties relating to the altar that had been performed by the ladies of St. Ann's Society. The Sisters also took over procuring the candles, a task previously performed by Father Damian. The Sisters decorated the church with cut flowers grown in the gardens of and gathered by the members of St. Ann's.

Although the responsibility for the picnics was on the shoulders of the officers of St. Ann's Society, the men of the parish did assist. For one of the earliest picnics - if not the first one - held at Henry Stumpe's spring lot, John Rasch purchased the whole hogs, the men slaughtered them, and the women cleaned them. The women also killed, plucked, and cleaned 100 chickens for the stew. Some of the men, including Frank Buffler, John

Baumer, and Martin Peters, took care of the stew pots and the barbecue.

Father Damian recommended that the Altar Society use committees to distribute the workload more evenly. This made the job of chairing the picnics much easier.

Another activity of St. Ann's was sponsoring the Holy Name Breakfast.

Over the years, the Altar Society has added to its duties and causes. In addition to the responsibilities of decorating the altar and buying the candles, it offers a meal after funeral services to bereaved families of the parish. Through the *Loaves and Fishes* committee it takes a meal once a week to various elderly and ill persons. Help is offered to women considering abortion by the Altar Society group called *Helpers of God's Precious Infants*. Cleaning the church is still a part of the duties of the Altar Society as is helping with all parish activities.

All of the women in the parish are considered as members of the Altar Society. Dues at this time, 1998, are \$5.00 per year - not much of an increase from the dues of \$2.00 in years long past. Meetings are held monthly, with the exception of the summer months, and are enjoyable "get-togethers" with programs of interest and information.

(Contributors to this article include:

Clarissa Meyer, Dorothy Eckl, Rita Zierer, Janet Ragland, Ruth Eckl, Eula Reynolds, Harriet Albright, Cecilia Lemprecht, Carolyn Powers, Evelyn Newberry, Alice Locker, Marcella Eckl, Boots Eck.)

**CELEBRATING THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY
OF
ST. MICHAEL'S PARISH
AT
ST. FLORIAN, ALABAMA**

The celebration of the 125th anniversary of both St Michael's Catholic Church and the town of St. Florian, Alabama began on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1998. The stained glass windows in the church featured photographs of the donors of the windows or of those who were honored by the donation of that window. Also, the Resurrection scene removed from above the altar when the church was redecorated in 1985-86 was displayed on the steps of the sanctuary and the back page of the Church Bulletin contained a thumbnail history of the parish and the town.

On Sunday, June 7, 1998, an exhibit titled, "The First Fifty Years" was held in the gymnasium with many of the parishioners whose ancestors were members of St Michael's Parish in the period from 1872 to 1923 displaying pictures and various items of the period which had belonged to and been used by those ancestors. The displays included maps, legal documents, religious articles, clothing, implements, publications, letters and other writings, as well as paintings and photographs.

In the Church Bulletin of June 14, 1998, an article titled "The Barn" was enclosed which was written by John Beumer and which told of the community spirit exhibited in the 1930s by the parishioners of St. Michael's. By this date, letters had been mailed to each family in the parish inviting them to join in the Welcome Home Celebrations to be held at the July 4th Picnic, the July 5th Welcome Home, and the September 27th Feast Day Celebration. Letters had also been mailed to each parishioner who had attended either St. Florian County School or St. Michael's Catholic School informing them of the Homecoming and Reunion to be held for all school attendees on July 5th.

Recollections of times past were solicited for the 125th Anniversary in the Church Bulletin of June 21, 1998. Exhibits to be placed in the gymnasium were planned for the July 5th Homecoming and Reunion.

The July 4th Picnic and the School Homecoming and Reunion were tremendous successes. It is estimated that over 900 people attended the Homecoming and Reunion. The Picnic, as usual, drew a large crowd from the parish and from the community at large.

The schedule and other information concerning the Labor Day Picnic was included on the last page of the Church Bulletin of August 30, 1998.

A Special 125th Anniversary Celebration Mass was held on Sunday, September 27, 1998. The Right Reverend Douglas R. Nowicki, the Archabbot of St. Vincent Archabbey of Latrobe, Pennsylvania delivered the homily. Concelebrants were our Bishop, Most Reverend David Foley, Abbot Cletus Meagher, and Abbot Victor Clark. At this Mass, the blessing of a new chalice and ciborium occurred. The chalice was donated in memory and in honor of all the Benedictine priests and sisters who have served St Michael's Parish.

The ciborium was donated in memory of Frank and Julia Rasch Buffler, August and Elizabeth Stumpe Eck, Edward and Anna Schmidkofer Eckl, and Joseph and Anna Kobus Zierer.

The final event of the 125th Anniversary Celebration was a display honoring those members of the parish who are or were in the Armed Forces. This exhibit was held on Sunday, November 1, 1998 in the gymnasium and consisted of pictures, newspaper articles, military clothing, maps, books about military operations in which parishioners had participated, flags, weapons collections, and other memorabilia.

APPENDIX

LIST OF LAND TRANSFERS FROM DR. HUESER
(Unless otherwise indicated)

The Deed Books in the Lauderdale County Courthouse contain the legal information regarding every recorded land transfer that has occurred in the county. The following information was obtained from these Deed Books.

<u>Purchaser's Name</u>	<u>Deed Book-Page</u>	<u>Transaction Date</u>
		12/4/72
J. C. Holleman	20-331	12/15/72
W. Breitherschinger	20-331	12/31/72
J. Gundy	20-339	2/5/73
J. Apfelback	20-381	2/27/73
J. B. Locker	20-400	3/10/73
L. Specker	20-401	3/29/73
J. Kreitz	20-415	5/1/73
G. Beisker	20-440	7/1/73
P. Drager	20-477	7/1/73
J. M. Kackleman	20-480	7/17/73
J. Buffler	20-487	5/1/73
J. Buffler(1)	21-406	5/1/73
S. Riesgraf	20-489	7/1/73
J. Nordman	20-566	3/10/73
T. Weltering (from J. Gundy)	20-566	12/1/73
T. Woltering (from J. Gundy)	20-582	12/1/73
T. Wolfinger	20-589	11/1/73
T. & A. Wolfinger	20-590	11/1/73
F. Nordman	20-603	4/10/73
M. Merz	20-656	1/1/74
J. M. Stumpe	20-657	1/1/74
F. Foerter	20-676	1/1/74
J. Boens	20-685	5/1/73
F. Priemer	20-714	3/26/74
A. Schmidlkofer (2)	21-3	7-1-74
J. Young	21-8	1/20/74
M. Kriege	21-173	1/1/?(no yr)
M. Fritsch	21-182	1/1/75
J. Schall	21-182	3/5/75
P. Stenz	21-187	7/1/74
H. Hilker	21-283	5/1/74
J. Kashmier	21-284	1/1/74
C. Hager	21-284	1/1/75
M. Merz (3)	21-351	10/26/75
M. Merz (4)	21-357	10/27/75

J.B. Locker et al (5)	21-365	11//75
A. Zulauf et al.	21-432	1 1/?/75(no day)
M. Grosheim (6)	21-439	1/27/76
F. Priemer	21-455	2/7/76
W. Mecke	21-467	3/4/75
T. Weltering	21-476	12/17/75
J. W. Stewart (7)	21-502	2/16/76
C. Specker	21-509	2/8/76
M. Kriege	21-510	2/9/76
J.B. Locker	21-511	2/8/76
M. Grosheim	21-512	2/8/76
F. Rasch (8)	21-541	4/29/76
A. Zulauf (from A. Merz)	21-799	3/19/77
Benedictine Society	21-537	4/9/76
C. Hager	21-554	5/1/76
Benedictine Society	21-602	5/17/76
G. Guerster (9)	22-48	4/25/77

- (1) New deed recorded because an improper description was given of the property location on May 1, 1873 transaction
- (2) The Deed Record states "...this is from John Wilson survey..."
- (3) Father J.H. Hueser gave Power of Attorney to Father Merz
- (4) Father Merz was deeded Lot 2 by Father Hueser
- (5) Father Hueser conveyed property to several individuals for \$10 so that they would pay off \$4100 mortgage owed to heirs of Matthew Wilson
- (6) Date of Filing - No Transaction Date listed
- (7) Father J.H. Hueser gave a Power of Attorney to Lawyer John W. Stewart
- (8) A note with the deed record signed by Attorney John W. Stewart states that Rasch had paid for this land in November 1873
- (9) John Herman Hueser of Huntington, Indiana gave Power of Attorney to Father G. Guerster to allow him to settle land disputes. This superseded other Powers of Attorney.

TIDBITS OF TIMES PAST

(Lauderdale Times, September 3, 1872)

We understand that the Catholics bought a large tract of land near this city - the Wilson tract on the Military road.

(Florence Times-Journal, August 27, 1873)

Glad to see our friends from St. Florian, trading in Florence. By the way, we have had, lately, several new subscribers for St. Florian. Let our merchants make a note of this, to use when we call upon them for fall advertisements. (Note the spelling of St. Florian as Florian. This spelling also occurs in some land records which have the name Florian Rasch as Florian. Also, three articles in the Times-Journal on October 29, 1873 have the spelling Florian. Could this be the reason for the pronunciation of St. Floreen rather than St. Floryann?)

(Florence Gazette, Saturday July 1, 1877)

Mr. A. Zulauf will give a dance and festival at St Florian, next monday (sic) night, in honor of his fine new brick store, which he has just gotten in dancing order, and which is a credit to him and the thriving little village of our German friends.

Florence Gazette, Wednesday September 12, 1877

We regret to hear that the health of the Rev. Father Gabriel, Preist (sic) of St. Florian, continues to be very poor, and that it is probable he will return to his Monastery, and another pastor be appointed for St. Florian. It is feared that Father Gabriel has consumption.

THE ST. FLORIAN PARTY

(Florence Gazette, Wednesday June 4 1878)

On Monday, that genial german, Adam Zulauf, gave a big dance and supper at his residence. Of course some of the town boys were invited and knowing Adam's reputation as a w hole-souled host they couldn't resist the temptation to go.

Adam was in his glory, with a smile for everybody, and his amiable wife and beautiful daughters made everybody feel pleasant and comfortable.

Wm. Martin and his accomplished lady were on hand adding to the pleasure of the occasion. Martin, with his jolly, roaring laugh, is a *whole team* of himself.

The rain poured all night long but it did not affect the joy of those inside the house. The dancing went on all the same. And, oh, how the lager did flow. Novel, peculiar and unique in the extreme was the "Yoolsetter Dance" and the "Barber Dance". We will not try to describe them, they need to be seen to be appreciated.

We left about 4:30 a.m. and still merry feet kept time to the music of Burtwell's splendid band.

The night was one long to be remembered. Success to our jolly german friends. Long may they live and prosper.

(All errors appeared in the original. Ed.)

(North Star, Thursday July 24, 1884)

Mr. W. W. Kilburn has established a distillery at St. Florian and will begin making brandy in about two weeks.

(North Star, Thursday July 31, 1884)

Rev. Joseph Keller, the priest at St. Florian, has been moved by the church authorities to Savannah, Ga. Father Keller was greatly liked by his congregation and they regret to give him up.

(Florence Gazette, Saturday July 10, 1886)

Mr. Wm. Kilburn, of St. Florian, was tried here Wednesday, before U.S. Commissioner C.A. Womble, of Tuscumbia, on the charge of illicit distilling; and bound over, in the sum of \$150, to appear at the next term of the Federal Court. We hear that the evidence in the case was very slight.

(Florence Gazette, Saturday April 16, 1887)

Mr. Frank Wolfinger, of St. Florian, last year raised 200 bushels of sweet potatoes on 1 acre of ground, which he sold here recently, at 75 cents a bushel, or \$150 aggregate. Don't this beat "bumble-bee" cotton?

ST. FLORIAN IN SPEAKING DISTANCE
(Florence Times, Saturday May 13, 1893)

St. Florian is now connected with Florence by the telephone. The line was completed Tuesday, and St Florian has again shown its progressive spirit. The headquarters at St Florian are in Mr. Peter Schaut's store. Hello, St Florian, The Times sends congratulations! [This is not the first message, but it is given with a hearty good will.]

Entertainment at St Florian (Florence
Times, Saturday May 20, 1893)

There will be a supper given at the St Florian school-house Tuesday, May 23, for the benefit of the St Florian brass band. There will be plenty of refreshments served. Band will furnish the music for the occasion. Everybody cordially invited. Doors open at half past seven p.m.

Jacob Kasmeier
Pres. Of Brass Band

(Florence Times, Saturday July 22, 1893)

Our people were disappointed in not hearing the St Florian band last Saturday. The band arrived late, after the convention had assembled and some of the members left town before it adjourned.

THE FOURTH AT ST. FLORIAN
(Florence Times, Saturday July 1, 1893)

The people of St. Florian are preparing for a grand gala day on the glorious Fourth. The celebration of the occasion will open with special religious services consisting of high mass and sermon at 9 o'clock. The entire congregation will then march to the picnic grounds and proceed to the enjoyment of the various amusements provided. Dinner and supper will both be served, while ten pins, quoits and other games and dancing will enliven the interim.

Some quite distinguished visitors will be guests of the occasion, including Rev. Abbot Benedict and other Doctors of the Catholic College at Cullman, Ala. Everybody is invited to be present and celebrate the Fourth in the old style.

CITIZENS OF ST. FLORIAN RAISE SERVICE FLAG

(Florence Herald Thursday, July 18, 1918)

There was a great patriotic meeting at St. Florian last Sunday afternoon on the occasion of the raising of a service flag containing twelve stars representing twelve young men of St Florian who are at the front or in training in the army for the defense of liberty and the right. At five o'clock practically all of the people of St Florian and very many from the surrounding country were gathered on the church lawn. Patriotic songs were rendered by the choir and the Sunday School children, and addresses were made by Mr. W. H. Mitchell and Father Thomas. As the flag was raised amid a burst of song the scene was intensely impressive and many eyes were filled with tears. Everyone seemed proud of the boys and of our country's aims.

The program was arranged and conducted by Father Alphonse, At the conclusion of the public meeting Father Alphonse invited the speakers and a few other friends to his home, where a most delightful hospitality was dispensed.

MEMORIES OF SCHOOL DAYS

(The following are reminiscences of a group of former students at the St. Florian/St Michael's School. They were recorded on June 11, 1998 and transcribed by the editor.)

Before school began, the Catholic children were expected to go to mass and afterward to catechism. After catechism the bell rang and everybody entered the school for classes. After the first half-hour, which was catechism, Catholic students and public students were all alike and treated alike by the nuns and the students made no distinction among themselves.

When there was a ninth grade, the ninth graders had to attend school for one month longer than the rest of the students, i.e., they had to go nine months while the rest of the students went only eight months, to qualify to enter public high school the next year.

John Beumer started the fires every morning during the winter months so that the school would be warm when the students entered.

There were no inside bathrooms and no running water for many years. For drinking water there was a well and each student brought their own cup to school to use. A cooler was placed in the hallway for students to get drinking water inside the school.

At first students brought their own lunches, but later there was a cafeteria "under the floor down on the east end of the school where the parking lot is now." Lunches were brought in paper bags and consisted of the foods they had at home but it always contained one piece of fruit. Sister Eugenia started making soup and bringing it over to the school. The cost for a bowl of soup was 5 cents. That was predecessor of the cafeteria. The cafeteria was begun in 1939 or 1940.

When the nuns lived in what had been the original church (and which they called "The Ark"), if you got sick, they wouldn't let you go home but would send you over to the parlor of the convent and let you lie down on a couch, it was like a daybed, until you either felt better or it was time to go home.

Alvin Burgess was the first bus driver. When the bus was purchased, it came as a chassis and motor only and that had to be driven over to Georgia to have the body added. The county supplied the bus and paid the driver.

The nuns were also paid by the county for instructing the non-Catholic students. At some times there were two grades in one room with only one instructor at other times there was one instructor per grade. In addition to the nuns, there were also, at times, lay teachers. Miss Marshall was one. One nun kept the convent for the others and taught only when needed.

There were organized ballgames and there were boxing gloves and boxing was an exercise. Earlier in the schools history, recess was not so organized. The girls played softball, there were swings, volleyball, teeter-totter, merry-go-round (near the present sign of Riverhill), a chain maypole, the girls jumped rope, played jacks, the boys played marbles. If someone was injured the parents were notified and it was their responsibility.

There was no telephone at the school nor at the rectory but there was one at the store on Jackson Highway.

The building in which the gymnasium is located was intended to be used as an all-purpose room for gatherings as well as containing three classrooms and the cafeteria.

A screened-in sleeping porch on the second floor was added to the west end of the original (1872) church when it was used as a convent so that the nuns would be able to sleep a little cooler than inside the building.

The original church was used first used as a church, second as a school, and third as a convent.

Most of the students walked to school. Some, the Meckes, as much as four miles. Later some came on the bus. There were some who rode horses. After the road was paved in 1928, a couple of children even skated to school. Some parents took turns driving their own and the neighbors' children to school in a wagon. Those students who lived across certain creeks could not get to school when the creek flooded. Even when the creek was normal, they had to wade or cross on a foot-log holding on to a barb-wire fence for balance. When the weather was particularly bad, some students stayed with relatives who lived close to the school.

Some students lived close enough to go home for lunch. Once the cafeteria was in place that practice was no longer permitted.

A bridge that had been built by WPA was dynamited and a charge that was too heavy destroyed the bridge and also blew out most of the windows of a house near the bridge.

Religious Christmas programs were held but not specifically for Catholics.

The Primer grade (this was what the first semester first graders were called) and the First grade were in the same room. (When you came back from Christmas holiday, you were no longer in the Primer grade but were in the First grade.) One of the nuns would take the class down to some blackberry bushes which were near the picnic grounds. She would cup her hands and the children would pick the blackberries, put them in her hands, and, when enough had been collected, they would have a picnic. There were about eight or ten children in each class.

During the 1930s, there was not enough money to fund the school for the full year and so it only lasted four or five months.

There was a period called "Cotton Picking Time" during which school would be suspended for about six weeks so the children could go out and pick the cotton. This started sometime during the late 1930s or early 1940s and ran into the early 1950s.

There was summer school for a couple of years with a tuition of \$1.00 - this was in the early 1930s.

How to count money was not learned until about the Fifth grade because money was so scarce there wasn't any need to know how to count it.

Leonard Eckl recited an episode that occurred to him. One weekday Mass he misbehaved and Sister Edith made him move back to her pew and he had to sit with her every day after that. One day Leonard's mother came to Mass and saw him sitting with Sister Edith. When he got home, she wanted to know why he was sitting with the nun and when he told her he had misbehaved, his mother gave him a licking. The next day he asked Sister if he could go back to sit with the other children and she said yes - but it was one day too late for Leonard.

Every year a big flatbed truck would appear at the school, everybody would climb aboard, and off they would go to the farm of Dr. Stutts on Dr. Stutts Road for the annual school picnic. Dr. Stutts had quite an unusual collection of animals, including peacocks, to intrigue the students - and probably even educate them a little.

DENNIS BREThERICK REMEMBERS SCHOOL DAYS

We started our school days late in the summer of 1946. A little rag-tag group of six year-olds who, for most of us, had never been that far away from our home before. Some had older brothers or sisters who looked after them and those who didn't were more or less adopted by other, older, kids or relatives who looked after their interests.

World War II was just ending. We had spent our formative years during a time of the most devastating and horrible war ever fought on the face of the Earth.

There were those of us who had spent these years with grandparents while Dad was off to war and Mother was working in one of the cotton mills making cloth for uniforms.

Sister Mary Thomas was our first teacher and this woman of the cloth, who had dedicated her life to working for God and teaching, had on her hands the monumental task of making good students of us. The Almighty God of the Universe was with her for she was more than equal to the task.

In a few short days, we were a group of disciplined kids who could play together, sing together, go places as a group, and be orderly.

The good Sisters slowly molded us together as a family. We came to act as though we had always been together. There were squabbles and fist fights but they were always broken up quickly by the teacher who never missed anything.

These were happy years for all of us. There was always a trip to the lake or perhaps a picnic being planned.

There were kids of all religious beliefs in school together - and I can't remember there ever being any hard feelings by any of us. The Sisters taught the Catholic kids about their faith but they did not push it on the rest of us.

I remember the boys having a real good Softball team and the Sisters and coaches teaching us the fundamentals of the game. We played games together with the girls and there was never any question of sexual harassment. The boys knew better - and besides some of the girls could fight as well as we could.

I fondly remember these years and will always hold this school and kids I attended with very near to my heart.

There are those in the class who could not be located and they are missed. Some have passed on into the spiritual realm and they are both missed and mourned. (Sam Leon Engle, Betty Ruth Evans, Donnie Zhand). Also dear to our hearts, missed, and mourned are those of our teachers who have passed away.

Our teachers were as follows:

Sister Mary Thomas, First Grade	Sister Antonio, Second Grade
Sister Mary Paul, Third Grade	Sister Josephine, Fourth Grade
Sara Ruth Marshall, Fifth	Sara Ruth Marshall, Sixth Grade
Sister Louise, Seventh Grade	Sister Cornelius, Eighth Grade

Classmates, you are growing old if you remember these days:
our teachers taught us the things kids needed to know and use when they became adults;
every kid hurt for the one who was sick or had a death in his family; boys carried a handful
of marbles, three feet of string, a pocket knife, and maybe a small frog or green snake in his
pocket; girls played with dolls, jack rocks, and hopscotch and the Nuns joined in; the Sisters
taught all of us how to set a table, play musical instruments, knit, and other wonderful
things; we would go on nature hikes, take a lunch with us and enjoy and appreciate the
beauty of nature; and even sometimes be required to write several hundred times, "I will
NOT do_____ " (and you can fill in the blank!)

MY MEMORIES OF ST. FLORIAN SCHOOL
1938-1941

I started school in 1938. I was still going in 1941 when World War II broke out. Sister Edith, Sister Johanna, Mr. Rasponi, Mr. Kowalski, and Sister Eugenia were my teachers during those years.

I remember Sister Edith was very good at teaching music. She taught us to sound different tones. I thought alto tone was so pretty sounding and especially so when she put it with soprano. One day she made a xylophone using bottles of colored water filled to certain levels make tones for an eight note scale. Using a mallet, we learned to ping-pong out certain tunes using the eight notes. I really enjoyed that. One day one of the boys got a little hefty and broke one of the bottles. That was the end of our little homemade xylophone.

One of my teachers (I can't remember which one, either Sister Johanna or Sister Edith) gave us a lesson assignment. She reminded us to learn it well for we would have game using it the next day. So the following day she took us down to the concrete dance floor which was used in earlier picnic dances. There we played the semblance of a baseball game. We chose up sides and the batter had to answer questions from the lesson. If he answered correctly, he moved to first base. At the end of the class period, the scores were tallied to find the winner. This was so much fun that I studied real well and knew all the answers!

Basketball was not my favorite game. I seemed every time the ball was tossed between an opponent and me, they were much taller or could always jump much higher than I could. I was too short and the fun went out of that game. However, I did well in tennis. I remember Mr. Rasponi stopping by one day and watching while I was jumping all over the court. He said, "Thatta girl!" and that really made my day.

Sister Eugenia was my algebra teacher in the ninth grade. One day while teaching us equations, she said she talked about them in her sleep. She also said one day, in our English class, that she often wondered why our written English was so much better than our spoken English. I guess they must have had a hard time with us country, hill folk. We were already speaking in a pattern that was real hard to break. Even to this day, I still revert to my old grammar.

Here is something funny - on me. I had front teeth that jutted out so much it was hard for me to keep my mouth closed properly. I could force my lips together, but when I relaxed them, they would come apart forming a small smacking sound of which I was not aware. One day Thelma McClure and I were sitting together so we could share a book. It came her time to read aloud, but she got tickled and couldn't stop laughing. I asked her what was the matter. She said, "Stop smacking!" It was embarrassing then, but funny now.

(Well, since then I have had my teeth "fixed" and now have a great smile, can keep my mouth closed, and have stopped smacking!)

During these years, we had outside toilets. Drinking water was brought in and poured in a five gallon cooler with a spigot for dispensing. In the winter, someone would already have the fires built and coal would be brought in to keep it going.

The church bell would ring at 12 noon. This signaled our lunch time. Some days it seemed I could hardly wait for it to ring so we could eat. My stomach would growl and seem to shrink so much it felt like it was growing to my backbone!

I am sad to say I never went on to get my high school diploma. But to show how well I had learned in my years at St. Florian School, I took my GED test at age 38 without any extra studying and passed it! I received my certificate and entered Calhoun Tech School in Decatur, AL to train to be a practical nurse. I finished and was licensed by the State Board. My husband, parents, and children were so proud of my achievements. I worked 23 years in this very rewarding profession.

As of this writing, I am retired but very active. I would very much welcome hearing from former classmates.

Exine Richardson Dickerson
(256) 757-3693

SCHOOL DAY MEMORIES

I attended St. Florian School 3 years, completing the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades during 1935-1936-1937. Sister Mary Donahue was the principal at that time. She was kind but very strict. Very few would dare to test her authority as a teacher. We need such authority given back in our schools today.

One pastime the boys enjoyed was playing marbles for "keeps" during recess. I would usually carry more marbles home than I brought to school.

We also played touch football. One day I tried to catch a pass and the football jammed the first joint of my right forefinger. I will always carry a reminder, as my finger never completely straightened out.

One event that stands out in my mind very vividly happened in 1936 during our school's intramural sports event. The boys were running the 50 yard dash. As was expected, Robert Harrison came in first. James Grisham was in second place. Third place was a tie among James Muse, Louis Zierer, and me, William Richardson. Once again we ran to determine third place: and again we hit the tape at the same time. We tried the third time and James Muse edged us out for third place. It took three trips to determine the third place winner in the 50 yard dash. Lois Zierer and I had to settle for a tie for fourth place.

William "Hop" Richardson

ROBERT MUSE ' PERSONAL EXPERIENCES & ANECDOTES
1936-1945

While in the fifth grade, we would collect all the tin cans from the cafeteria and take them down to be recycled for the war effort.

During recess the boys played marbles. I played a pretty "mean" marble game. John Locker said that I won lots of marbles for him. When I didn't have marbles of my own, he would lend me his to shoot and I would give him those that I won. On Rainy days, the boys would stay inside in Sister Mary Charles' room and box. If any of the boys got into a fight, the Sisters would have us put on the gloves and "go at it" so no one would really get injured.

During the winter months, I would cut kindling after school and place some in each classroom so that Joe Beumer would have it to start fires in the stoves before school each day. As I recall, Joe took over this job from his brother John. I received \$1.50 each month for this job. Sister Mary Charles had a little store (candy, etc.) In the closet in her room. I had a "charge account" with her until I was paid at the end of each month.

During the summer months, I would work in the Sisters' garden and received \$2.00 a month for this task.

When the cafeteria first opened, I got to leave class five minutes early each day to go empty the garbage from the cafeteria. For this chore, I received free lunches. Lunches were five cents in those days.

In the eighth and ninth grades, each student had to sign his or her name on the blackboard if he or she wanted to be "excused." (We had "outhouses" then.) I would sign my name and leave the classroom, then Jeanette Stumpe would sign her name and leave the room and meet me on the back steps of the school. Sometimes she would sign out first. We would talk and hold hands for a few minutes before going back into the classroom. We wouldn't sit down on the steps because we would have to be ready to run just in case one of the Sisters saw us. Sister Eugenia never caught us, but Sister Mary Charles did! She sat me down and gave me a good talking to. I don't think she ever said anything to Jeanette. Jeanette was my first "puppy love." I wasn't the only one with "stars in my eyes." Eugene Holland also had a "crush" on Jeanette.

In my eighth grade year, Sister Mary Charles was furthering her education during the summer at St. Bernard College. She had to reconstruct the skeleton of an animal as one of the requirements in science. She wondered where on earth she would get an animal. Well, one of the boys (I don't remember who) brought in an OLD cat for us to chloroform and "put to sleep." Afterward, one of the boy s (again, I can't remember who) helped me skin the cat. Sister Mary Charles cleaned the bones, separated them and reassembled them with wires. She had the skeleton on display the next school year.

Now for the famous MOUSE incident I was in study hall supervised by sister Eugenia. I had just been to the cloakroom to sharpen my pencil and had returned to my seat on the outside row next to the wall. I placed my pencil behind my ear. All at once I saw a little mouse running along the edge of the wall. I took my pencil from behind my ear and flopped it toward the mouse. The sharpened point pierced the mouse behind its left ear and killed it. I yelled, "Look what I did!" All of the students in the room then jumped up to see what had happened and started laughing. Sister Eugenia said, "Robert Muse, what have you done now??" I've met up with former classmates who would bring up the incident. One former classmate even told my mother about it when they met a few years ago at church in Columbia, South Carolina.

All the Sisters believed in strict discipline, but they were always fair, kind, and caring. I shall always have fond memories of them and of my classmates and I cherish the time spent at St. Florian.

TWO MEMORIES OF THOMAS BILLINGSLEY
1939-1949

A Boy and His Teacher Meet Jesus

I received my elementary and junior high schooling at St. Florian during the school years of 1939 through 1949.

One cheerful spring day our class went for a field trip into the countryside. We marveled at plants and insects as they put on a show for us. The world was renewed and we were young.

When we came to the St Michael's Cemetery, everyone went inside the fenced area. Students read some of the headstones and looked around. My classmates then ran ahead as I approached the life-size crucifix.

I stood at the foot of the cross and felt some of the pain as I looked up at the one who was hanging there. The sight of the nails and crown of thorns pierced a small boy's heart in the quietness.

Our teacher, possibly Sister Mary Catherine, approached and put her arm around me and we stood there in silence; captured by the awesome moment, which would remain with us for a lifetime.

Go Fly a Kite

On a windy afternoon in March, students at St Florian School were flying kites, because it was our annual kite day. This was in about 1945 and we were pretending that these were planes and doing all the kinds of dreaming that young people do. One of our objectives was to see whose kite would fly the highest

Frankie (Francis Alfred) Foster, my good friend, was flying his kite when it took a nose dive and crashed to the ground and broke the cross support. We thought about setting the kite on fire and sending it out in a blaze of glory. However, we changed our minds and decided to patch it up and try again. We took some string and a small stick and made a splint on the broken cross support. The kite was launched again and away it went, climbing and climbing until it was at an altitude higher than any of the others.

Hurray! The crippled kite had become the winner of the contest. We had dreamed about history and dabbled in aerodynamics, but most of all we had learned a valuable lesson in perseverance.

And, so went another day at the school where learning was often disguised as play.

MEMORIES OF SCHOOL DAYS (DAZE)
1936-1943

My memories of St. Florian School are about happy days - as my mind travels back to school in elementary and junior high.

The school buses started in 1934-35 to bus children to school. This was my year to come to St. Florian School. I was in the third grade. Sister Hildegard was my teacher. I attended until 1943 finishing ninth grade.

Some of my memories are of the sand tables at the back of the rooms in elementary school. We could build Indian villages. Civil War displays, set up displays of other places we were studying in history and geography. Seeing is learning and, with no television, we had only still pictures and so the sand table made everything more real. In a child's mind, we were there when we could see the sand table displays.

I have so many great memories of those days. I have so many it would be hard to write them all. Being brought up and taught by the Sisters at St. Florian School has been so rewarding.

I know I am late in saying, "Thank you, St Florian School and Sister Hildegard, Sister Edith, Sister Julianna, Mr. Hough, Sister Eugenia, Sister Stanislaus." They were the background in my education and I will always carry a special place in my heart for them and the school.

Another memory was the childhood plays and programs we had at Christmas and at other time during the year. How many hours Sister Edith put in teaching us words and music. These things mean so much to a child as well as all the love and concern of all the teachers shown to all the children alike.

This is like the television program "Happy Days." That is the way I picture St. Florian School.

Ann Gresham Barnett

WORK OF THE ALTAR SOCIETY CIRCA 1947

by
Dorothy Eckl

The Altar Society, in 1947, elected but two officers, President and Secretary/Treasurer.

The church was cleaned and the altar linens were washed by the married ladies of the parish. Assignments were made in alphabetical order. The pastor made these announcements at Sunday Mass as there were no printed bulletins. The church cleaning was assigned to one lady per week. She was to sweep and dust and take care of altar flowers when we had them. (Many years some of the Sisters were willing to do the flowers, and perhaps the candles as I don't remember ever seeing to them.)

Washing of the altar linens and washable items of the priest's vestments was assigned by two's, as needed. It depended on whether flowers soiled the altar cloths or whether candle wax or wine dripped on them. (When there were funerals, Father's vestments always got red clay on the bottom - especially if it was a rainy day - because there was no artificial grass covering the fresh dirt at that time.)

The ladies usually did two general cleanings of the church each year. (Like Spring and Fall housecleaning in the home.) Sometimes Mr. Henry Stumpe would come clean the high cobwebs that the ladies couldn't reach. He used a feather duster on a very long handle.

During Father Sylvester's tenure a hard floor covering was put over the wood floors. We then exchanged the "when-needed" oiling of the wood floors for waxing of the new floor covering.

The two elected officers chaired the two picnics. This was dreaded by all of these officers as they had to oversee everything from donations to final cleanup and counting of the money. There were not many things for the picnics under roof at that time, and it was really bad if it rained. Also, picnic kitchen equipment was in short supply and so we brought our own large pots, pans, and the other utensils needed to serve the many, many plates. Because very few events such as this occurred at this time, many people came and spent the whole day eating, talking with friends, playing games, and, in many instances, even staying for the dance. Most people just listened to the music and did not usually dance until late. (Of course, then they begged for "just one more tune" - over and over.) We usually hired a local band to play. (They could stay later!)

In preparation for the picnics, some ladies usually consented to take home a bag of potatoes which they peeled and used to make potato salad but using their own ingredients. Family's that kept chickens usually donated some cleaned and drawn hens for the stew, although sometimes they would offer hens but couldn't clean them. This task, too, fell to the two officers - or anyone they could get to help.

Sometime during the pastorate of Father Damian, he suggested that the picnic jobs be divided among committees thus making less work for the (by this time) three elected officers, President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The work was then divided by have a donations committee, a cleanup committee, a chicken stew committee, and a barbecue committee. Serving and selling was divided into four shifts of 3 to 4 hours. This lightened the load tremendously.

Eventually the Altar Society began having monthly meetings, began the Sunshine Committee and began working with the Northwest Deanery. (The Sunshine Committee was suggested by Father Fabian to provide a gesture of sympathy after a death.) We eventually elected four officers and joined the Northwest Deanery - though I can't remember exactly when.

About the time that St Michael's School closed and the parish children began attending St. Joseph School, it was decided that there should be a picnic chairman. This relieved the Altar Society of any responsibility for heading the picnics. Thus ended an era.

THE DUTIES OF ST. ANN'S ALTAR SOCIETY IN THE EARLY 1950s

by Clarissa Meyer

Our elections were held in January each year. Dorothy Eckl and I volunteered. There was much talk against two young people taking the office. They thought that only older women could do it, but we went ahead.

Our first duty was to be hostesses at the Forty Hour Devotion supper in the first weekend of Lent.

Father Sylvester, our pastor, invited 14 priests and the Abbot for the supper. He requested sirloin steaks and all the trimmings. We borrowed a portable grill, which was on wheels and was the size of a wagon, to cook the steaks. My husband, Butch Meyer did the cooking.

When the meal was ready, the Abbot came in and said he didn't eat a full meal before speaking. So the housekeeper, Louise Hoernig, fixed a large milk-bucket full of cream of chicken soup which was enjoyed by all.

After this steak supper, we went to clear the table and nearly all the steaks were untouched!

Most of the elderly priests didn't have any teeth and couldn't eat steak!

Our next big project was the July 4th picnic. That year the people wanted to build a convent for our nine nuns. We got a list and contacted each person in the parish. Their generosity was unbelievable. One man gave four hogs. Another gave a \$100 bill. Everyone pitched in.

Martin Peters was the cook-in-charge of all the meat. He was a large man who worked from early the morning before the Fourth, all night, and all day on picnic day until afternoon when everything was sold out. After that, he asked Butch if we could take him to our home so he could take a shower and put on dry clothes. After he dressed, he came out and asked me if I would lace and tie his shoes. He said he could not reach the floor. He apologized that he had to ask me to do it. I told him I didn't mind. He said his girls always did it for him.

When we counted our profits, we had cleared \$2,300 - the most of any picnic to that time.

The convent was built that year with no debt. All the labor was donated including carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and brick masons.

THE BARN

by John Beumer

I was asked to relate an event from my younger years that reflected the spirit of the people of St. Michael's. My first thought was of how everyone in the Parish helped our family in our hour of need about 60 years ago. In the 1930s one of the most important things on a farm was the barn. About 9:00 p.m. on January 2, 1939, our barn was blown down in a freak winter storm.

It was 40 feet by 100 feet, was facing west, and a strong wind flowing from the south pushed it to the ground. A barn, at that time, was a very important and necessary part of a farm. This was before tractors were a part of every farm; people had to take care of their mules and horses. A farmer also had to have a place to store his hay and feed.

That night there was a dance at Mrs. Peters' house which was across the road from our house. My mother awakened me and told me to go over there and see if the Buffler and Stumpe boys would come over and help get the cows out from under the timbers. The ones I remember coming were Ed, Frank Jr., Alfred, and Beck Buffler and Frank, August, George, and Henry Stumpe.

The barn had been built by my grandfather, Ed Rasch. He used big heavy posts and timbers. Some of those timbers fell across the animals killing them instantly. We lost one mule, one horse, two milk cows, and three yearlings. The men worked until about midnight that night and released two cows and two calves that were not hurt too badly.

We didn't know what we were going to do. Early the next morning, at about daybreak, we looked out and saw several neighbors in the yard. They had claw hammers, crow bars, and wrecking bars. They told Daddy they were ready to work. He told them he would like to take the barn apart, saving enough material to build a smaller barn. I believe that every family in the Parish was represented before the barn was finished.

Several groups of men started taking the tin roof off, passing it down to a group who stacked it according to size. Another group started taking the outside boards off, passing them to another group who pulled out the nails and stacked the boards. Most of the outside boards were 1"X12"X16" poplar. Another group followed the tin removers and took off the 1"X4" sheeting strips. These were mostly oak. As soon as the boards were out of the way, Mr. Frank Jr. (Slick) Buffler took his team of big mules, "Doney" and "Ida", and pulled the dead animals out where they could be loaded on a truck and hauled away.

It was amazing to see how everyone found a place to work and knew how to do so many things. Just about everyone had, at one time or another, built his own barn and outbuildings. Mr. Conrad Gruber volunteered to be the foreman over the construction. He said he would make the roof line like the barns in Wisconsin, where he came from. After the boards were out of the way, Mr. Joe Zierer brought his mule-powered hay baler and all the loose hay was baled.

The new barn was staked out. There was enough good lumber to build a barn 30

feet by 50 feet Large limestone rocks were used to put the posts on. In present day building, a form would be built and poured with-concrete, but this was before the modern concrete truck was invented. I believe that the strongest man I have ever seen was Mr. Alex Locker. He picked up a huge limestone rock - it must have weighed at least 400 pounds - held it about waist high for a few minutes, then threw it down and said, "We need three men to carry this rock."

A crew of men helped Mr. Gruber cut and stack the rafters while some were making mortise and tenon joints on the posts and plates. They were fastened together with wooden pegs. The pegs were made of oak trimmed to a size just a little over 1/2-inch in diameter and hammered through a 1/2-inch hole in a steel plate. This made a uniform size peg that worked very well.

As soon as the plates and posts were ready, they were raised in place and braced from all sides. Some of the men started nailing the boards on the outside to hold the walls steady. Then it was time to raise and fasten the rafters. Next, it was time to nail on the 1"X4" strips about 16 inches apart for decking. I asked my Uncle Bud (E. J. Rasch) if I could help him. He was nailing decking on the steep part of the roof. It was about a 10/12 cut. He was always particular about anything he did and I enjoyed working with him. Some of the men started nailing tin on as soon as the decking was on. We turned it upside down and had very few leaks. We were fortunate to have good weather for about two or three weeks and this gave us enough time to complete the barn.

Since our mule and horse were killed when the barn blew down, Mr. Frank Buffler loaned us a mule named "Bess" and Mr. Alex Locker loaned us a horse named "Dead Man." They were both good workers, but "Dead Man" would buck you off as soon as you sat down on him.

Many things have changed during the last 60 years, but I believe the people of St Michael's still have the same generosity of spirit that was shown to our family in 1939!

THE JOSEPH AND URSULA ECKL FAMILY

Wendelin and Mary Locker Schaut came from St. Mary's, Pennsylvania bringing their unmarried children. (The year that they came is unknown.)

Joseph and Ursula Eckl (she was the daughter of Wendelin and Mary Schaut) came from St Mary's, Pennsylvania to St. Florian sometime between 1877 and 1879 bringing their three children, Mary, Anna, and Barbara. After settling in St Florian, eight additional children were born to the couple: Edward (born October 22, 1879 - died October 30, 1879), Edward J., Wendelin P., Rose, Josephine, John A., Joseph P., and Francis A.

In 1889, they bought a house and 80 acres that was originally a part of the Claibourne Plantation. This property is located on St Florian Road, west of Highway 47 (Jackson Highway). The house has been remodeled extensively through the years. It became the home of John A. Eckl and is presently (1998) owned by his son, Leonard.

Much hard labor, trust in the Lord, and love of the land through four generations has made it a prosperous farm.

Ruth Eckl

May 1998

THE JOSEPH AND TERESA BUFFLER FAMILY

Joseph Buffler, in his short life, 1834 - 1879 (45 years), saw and touched as many historical events in the 19th Century as any of his descendants did in the 20th Century. He immigrated to the United States as a very young, single man having been born and raised in the village of Lilkirk Wittenburg, Germany. His ancestral home is still there to this day. It is so near the Swiss border that you can stand on the front lawn and see Lake Constance, which is on the border.

He married another young German immigrant, Teresa Schmitt from Chicago. They settled in Nauvoo, Illinois where the Mormons stayed for a few years before they (the Mormons) left on their trek all the way to Salt Lake City.

My father once recalled how the Mormons were treated by the other settlers in Illinois. He said that if anything came up missing, like a pig or some other minor loss, they were likely to say that the Mormons took it, as we used to think that Gypsies would steal when they came through.

When the Civil War occurred, in the early 1860s, Joseph Buffler was called three times by the draft and was always able to send a substitute, which you could send for \$300 if you could find one. In early 1865 in the waning year of the war, he was called again and went to the large nearby city of Cairo to find a substitute. But none could be found and so he became a soldier in the Grand Army of the Republic.

He saw service in Virginia and Tennessee and liked the land of Tennessee and Virginia. So in the early 1870s, he left Illinois by steamboat to Memphis and then overland to southern Middle Tennessee. He settled and bought two farms in Lawrence County, Tennessee. He hauled the first load of stone for the foundation of St. Joseph's Church.

They only stayed in Tennessee a short time because the house that is still standing, next to the St Michael's cemetery, is the house where my father was born in 1877. Joseph Buffler only lived in the South for a few years. He died in 1879. His death was attributed to jaundice.

It was said of him that he was a good man.

Teresa Schmitt Buffler grew up in the German cathedral city of Cologne. She recalled doing the family laundry in the River Rhine. About the age of twelve, she was stricken with the disease of curvature of the spine. She would have been a tall person were it not for this affliction. She and Joseph Buffler had six children, four boys and two girls, between 1861 and 1877. When Joseph Buffler died in 1879, she was left with no visible means of support but the 40 arable acres of land that were on their home place.

Those were desperate times for the South. While the rest of the country experienced a boom time, the South was shackled with economic sanctions and the region remained an impoverished area well into the 20th Century. And so, when Teresa Buffler was widowed with six children to support, she sent two of them, Elizabeth (age 10) and Lawrence (age 8) back to her people in Illinois. They went to separate households and Lawrence in particular had a difficult time in the household of his Uncle Jake - not particularly from

Jake but from Jake's wife and her mother.

Teresa petitioned the government early on for some pension on behalf of her minor children. But to no avail. They always replied that she had too much land, the 250 acres in Alabama and the two farms in Tennessee. But only 40 acres of her land was tillable.

The oldest son, John, married in his early twenties so Teresa was left with only two young boys. One daughter had died at age 19 in 1886 and the two children sent to Illinois came back home soon after. Teresa's mother, Anna Marie, had come to stay with her daughter as soon as she was widowed and stayed with her until her death in 1891 at the age of 88. She is buried in St. Michael's Cemetery, possibly one of the oldest persons buried there. She was born in Germany in 1803.

Teresa was a woman of some courage even though crippled. One time three masked men rode into her front yard and she went out to meet them. She told them, "I know who you are and if you do not leave, I will sic my dog on your horses and if you still will not leave, I will take my cane and beat on your horses until you do leave." They left

She managed to raise all of her children. Her son August attended T. B. Larimore's school in Mars Hill (now Mars Hill Bible School.) August later taught school at St Florian but I don't know for how long.

When she was about 60, Teresa divided her farm land between August and Lawrence and gave my father, Frank, \$2500 because he did not farm in his youth but was a carpenter. Teresa died in 1926 at the age of 90 years.

She had to have been a good manager to have supported her family during those perilous times in the South.

Mary Buffler
May 1998

REMINISCENCES OF MARY BUFFLER

John Wilson was the owner of most of the land around what became the early settlement of St. Florian. His brother, Matthew Wilson owned the adjoining plantation south of St. Florian, nearer the city of Florence.

The residences of both of these brothers were intact at the time the German settlers came. The John Wilson home was owned by the Rasch family and the Matthew Wilson house was owned by the Locker family. It stood until the late 1940s. The John Wilson home was a large house located near a spring where the Jackson Military Road and Butler Creek Road met (a location then-known as Wilson's Crossing.) In this house, there was evidence of the deaths that resulted when the criminals attempted to elicit information from John Wilson about the location of his gold. Although they burned him to death with lighted newspapers, he never told them where his gold was buried. The renegades also killed John Wilson's nephew who was taking care of his sick uncle at the time.

(Later, when some of the early-settler families came to Alabama, they stayed with the Rasch family in the old Wilson house until they could build their own homes.)

When there were several Catholic families here, but as yet no priest, they would gather together on Sunday and pray and have Scripture reading. The first John Baptist Locker was the leader of these gatherings.

The first pastor, Father Michael Merz, was a secular priest, the nephew of Mrs. Annie Schaut. In 1876, a smallpox epidemic swept through this young settlement. He came down with it and died from the smallpox as did a great many people in the ensuing weeks. The Wolfinger family, whose legacy to St. Michael's enabled the parish to build the present church, lost all three of their small children. Could anything be worse than to lose all of your small children?

Then, in the midst of the pestilence and death, came the financial crisis which, in an indirect way, brought the Benedictine order to Alabama. From 1876 until St. Bernard Abbey in Cullman was established in 1894, the abbey in Pennsylvania supplied St. Michael's pastors. In addition to serving this parish, the priest also rode into Florence once a month and celebrated mass for the few Catholics there.

These early pastors did indeed work and pray. They supported themselves by raising grapes in a vineyard just east of our present parish plant. From the grapes they made wine that they sold for use as sacramental wine to parishes across the South.

The church was the great unifying force in the settlement. All the German families were Catholic except one who soon converted to Catholicism. There was one Irish Catholic family in the early days, otherwise the Germans were the only ethnic group. They all came from various locations in the North. Most had been in this country at least twenty years before they moved here but they came originally from many different sections of Germany which was not even a unified country at the time they left. My own grandparents came from four different sections of the old country: Wittenberg, Rhineland, Silesia and Bavaria. In these early days, there was a distinct division between the high German and the low German but in this day I hardly believe anyone could recall who is high or who was low.

Some few families were interrelated before they came here - but not many. The Lockers, Schauts and Eckls were related; Joseph Buffler, my grandfather, was the half-brother of Lawrence Specker and there were a few other ties in kinship from the beginning but most of the people were strangers to each other.

Perhaps in that age people were more sociable than they are today. The matrons would visit each other for a whole afternoon. Everyone conversed together on Sunday afternoon after Vespers. They were much more educated musically than today's generation. There was a brass band and my mother recalled how the elder Mr. Mecke could sing a high mass from the musical score.

Mrs. Annie Schaut was the one who organized all the musical talent after St. Florian was settled. She had no children and she and her husband had a store with the post office located in the store. This was a large brick building located across from the present White's Restaurant. The Brick House, as we children called it, stood until late one night when I was a small child my brothers came in shouting, "The Brick House is on fire!" It was in the Brick House that the early dances were held and, because it was the post office, it was a sort of meeting place for all the surrounding area.

I once heard one of the older residents lamenting that St. Florian people had not settled in the Bend of the River area where the land is level and much more fertile than in these rocky hills. But the historian, Arnold Toynbee, sees all history as a challenge and response. If life had been easier perhaps the people would not have worked as hard as they did. In the first instance, the soil here had been depleted by the one crop system of agriculture, cotton growing, for 40 years. When the settlers came the land was in brambles and briars because it had not been tilled for several years - in part due to the war and the emancipation of the slaves.

The first year they settled here the men were able to work outdoors in their shirt sleeves. They began to think they had come to a paradise indeed. But that year was a rare exception and many hard winters followed.

Not every man who came here was a farmer. In the old country, it was required that everyone who was not educated beyond a certain fundamental level learn a trade. As a result, there were many carpenters, some were masons, some iron workers, etc. The carpenters joined together and worked together in the construction of many of the Victorian houses in Florence and Sheffield. Mr. Matt Stumpe, who was one of the head carpenters, would usually rent a house where they all lived together during the work week and then they would come home on Sunday. His oldest daughter, Mrs. Krieger, was the housekeeper for this crew at times.

The families which supported themselves with farming had to learn a new way of farming from that which they had used in the North. They were not acquainted with raising cotton but they slowly began to grow some. Many raised vegetables which they peddled in Florence to supplement their income. Potatoes were always a staple of their diet and some were marketed too. In much later years, my brothers shipped potatoes to the North by the carload. Of course, there were the usual cows and poultry. These products, too, were sold in Florence. Corn had to be grown to feed the livestock and these people were among the first to plant wheat, oats, and other cereal crops in this region. After a few years in farming, they developed a system of double cropping where they would raise grain and after it was harvested they would plant a second crop for hay or any late plant that would mature before frost

In addition to farming, some also showed their industry by operating saw mills around the county, for there were still numerous trees and a great demand for lumber in this growing land.

Some of the young women in the early days were hired out as servants to the more affluent families in Florence. They boarded with these families and did everything that the black maids had done before that time. The families of these young women got the greater part of their earnings - which were not much to start with.

At that time the young men who had been born in the United States did not have the most fundamental aspects of education. My maternal grandfather rode a horse to Florence and attended Florence Normal when he was 21 years of age to learn to read and write, etc. Later the younger people, who went to school first at St. Florian, went to the Florence Normal and some of the young women went to the Sisters school in Tusculumbia and boarded with the Sisters while they were at their school. Most of these young women became teachers with many of them teaching at St. Florian. Before them the school had been taught by some Brothers, some pastors, and whoever they could find.

At that time it was arranged so that if the weather turned bad while the children were at school, they would stay over night with the families living near the church and school. In my own family, the Speckers stayed at the Rasch home, the Henkens stayed at the Buffler home, and I am sure some of the others who lived far from the school stayed with other families.

Even though the economic condition of the South was terrible for many years following the Civil War, after the help from the Benedictine Society, no family in St. Florian ever lost their farm or homestead. And, no serious crime was ever committed here.

The Germans were received graciously by the local population. They were not looked on as Yankees but, I think, because they did not speak the language, they were considered German immigrants. My grandmother who was widowed at a young age with two small girls to support found kindness from the gentry and was able to support herself by keeping a boarding house for the workers at Lock Six in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

For at least two generations, St. Florian was an almost exclusively German Catholic community. Its members intermarried among the families settled there. Weddings were always an occasion of great celebration. A dinner was usually held after the morning ceremony and that evening a dance was held for all the younger people. They had a portable dance floor which was set upon the lawn of the home of the bride. One of our local high school teachers, who was not a Catholic but who lived in the neighborhood, fondly recalled how she had danced all night at my aunt's wedding until there was not a dry thread on her. Later, when the newly-married couple retired and some time had passed, the local hooligans would come and raise a din which was called a "shivaree."

The German language was the one used in the sermons in church. I don't think this ended until World War I. At that time the community suffered from some prejudice for being German and so English has been used ever since.

The school was taught by either our own teachers or by the pastor, and the parents longed for the Sisters to come. I think they came about 1915 and were very happily received. There was a young Sister, named Sister Elizabeth, who was beloved by kids, parents, pastor and all, but, unfortunately, she died at a very young age. We had a unique arrangement in our school system when the new school was built. The Sisters taught but the school was a public school. We had our religious period before the school day proper began and then we had regular classes with the same books used in the public school. There were usually three or four non-Catholic students from around the community. They were always well-received and their people held the Sisters in high regard. Our students always excelled when they went to high school in Florence.

In speaking of the early settlers and agriculture, I forgot to mention that they always had large orchards and vineyards. They had wagonloads of apples to make brandy and St. Florian was noted for its wine. This commerce had to stop in the 1920s when Prohibition came into effect

During World War I, of course, all eligible young men served in the military. When they returned, there was a spate of marriages. On the other hand, during the depression years of the 1930s there were very few marriages in the community. But, with the onset of World War II, everyone was ready to take the final plunge. As I indicated before, in most of the marriages both parties were Catholic. Some married people from the Catholic communities in St Joseph, Loretto, Lawrenceberg, and Cullman and mostly within their own ethnic group. Mixed marriages, as they used to be called, did not occur until the present generation. One reason for that was because the intermarriage of the original families had brought about so many ties of kinship that it was almost prohibitive.

After World War I, the young women no longer were ever servant girls but became secretaries, teachers, nurses, etc. At the time of World War II, many of them left for Civil Service jobs in Washington, D.C.

Farming remained the main source of income for the people until World War II when various industrial plants located in the area. Some men had worked on the construction of Wilson Dam but that ended when the dam was completed. In 1933 the Roosevelt administration passed the TVA bill and some people found employment with TVA. But, after Reynolds, Union Carbide, Ford, and the plants in the industrial park came, they became the chief source of employment and income and so, at the present time, St. Florian is no longer a farming community. Only one or two families now depend on agriculture as their chief source of income.

MORE BUFFLER FAMILY HISTORY

In the spring of 1950, a letter addressed to Joseph Buffler, Florence, Alabama arrived. Fortunately, Joseph Buffler (son of the original St Florian settler) was living at that time although he died shortly afterward. The letter was from Lilkirk Wittenberg, Germany and was written by a Leonard Buffler.

In the letter he explained how he was going through some old letters found in his attic and among them he had found several letters from Joseph Buffler (my grandfather.) In these letters, Joseph Buffler was pleading with his brother to let him hear from the family. But, Joseph Buffler died in 1879 without ever hearing from his family. The letter from Leonard Buffler was an apology for the lack of response to Joseph's pleadings. Leonard went on to explain that his grandfather was just the sort not to reply and, he said, it was not surprising to him that the letters had not been answered.

Leonard wrote that the last communication they had from America was when Lawrence Specker died in 1900. (Specker was a half-brother of Joseph Buffler.) Leonard asked in his letter, "Are you still Catholic as were your people in Germany?" He went on to explain that he lived in the Buffler ancestral home which is in the province of Wittenberg near the Swiss border, in fact, you can see Lake Constance from the lawn of the home. Since the knowledge was received that there are still Bufflers there, many family members have visited the area. Surprisingly more of the "Baby Boomer" generation have gone than we old codgers. It surprises me because I would hardly have known they felt any kinship to us.

When my nephew was on a tour of duty in the Army in Germany, he went there often and he and his wife became close to a young couple in Munich. When Larry Specker, Jr. was working for the State Department straightening out property lines and claims in East Germany after the collapse of communism, he went to visit the German Bufflers and took some letters from his grandfather. But they were unable to translate them because the letters were written in such formal language. A hundred or more years makes a difference in all things.

When Lawrence Specker and family immigrated to the United States, they first settled in St. Mary's, Pennsylvania and then moved to a rural town in Ohio. As a result, when my grandfather, Joseph Buffler, immigrated, he got to the town, but, being a complete stranger in a strange country and speaking only a foreign language, he did not know how to locate his brother. He thought, however, if I wait until Sunday he will be at Mass. And so he waited and, sure enough, his brother was located in this manner. What they said, I do not know. What they did was, after Mass, they went out to celebrate, bought a bottle of whiskey, and drank it.

Joseph Buffler (the elder) married another immigrant, Teresa Schmitt who had been born and raised in Cologne and they settled in Nauvoo, Illinois. Nauvoo is the town where the Mormons stopped for a few years on their trek west. The local people did not receive them very hospitably. In fact, my father said that if any theft occurred, the people

would say the Mormons did it. It was in this atmosphere that they did not stay long but moved west

My grandfather was still a young man in the 1860s, at the time of the Civil War. He was called by the draft three times and each of those times he was able to find a substitute which you could send in your place by paying \$300. On his fourth call up, he went to the neighboring town of Cairo to find another substitute but he could not find one. So he went off to war without going home to tell his wife and children. His wife was very angry with him but in her old age she said, "But now I get a dollar a day." (This was from the pension paid Union Veterans and was said about 1916.)

During his time in Army service, he was in Virginia and Tennessee and liked both of them. As a result, in 1870 after he was discharged, he, his family, and stock took a steamboat to Memphis, Tennessee. They then proceeded overland to St Joseph, Tennessee. He bought a large farm there and he hauled the first load of stone for the church at St Joseph. He must have stayed there only for a year or two because they were among the first residents of St Florian. He built the house that is still standing next to St Michael's Cemetery today (1998). My father was born in that house in 1877.

Joseph Buffler died in 1879 leaving Teresa Buffler widowed and with six children. She sent two of the children, Lawrence and Elizabeth, to live with her people back in Illinois and her widowed mother came to live with her. No doubt that it was terribly hard just to survive in such times.

My father was a very willful man. He was even a willful child. He quit school in the third grade and even though his mother whipped him, he refused to go back. Once he told how as a boy of twelve, he would ride a mule carrying a sack of shelled corn all the way to Pruitton, which is up Butler Creek Road almost on the Tennessee border. He would stay while they ground the meal and then would ride back. He said it would take all day.

They must have had a lot of cornbread in his mother's home because he always wanted cornbread for breakfast. My mother, however, had been raised under more affluent circumstances and refused to serve cornbread for breakfast.

When my father was an old man, he had diverticulitis and you are not supposed to eat cornbread because of the roughness of it. I would not bake any cornbread for him but he got around that by making his drivers stop at the small cafes on the way to Center Star, where he went daily, and he would send them in to get cornbread muffins for him. He was still willful.

In his youth, my father learned the carpenter's trade. He worked with a group of Carpenters from St. Florian who built many of the wooden houses on Wood Avenue and other streets in Florence. They also worked in Sheffield and other local areas. They built Dr. Stutts' home near Greenhill, the old Mars Hill Church, and many other structures in this locale.

Mr. Matthew Stumpe was the head of this construction crew. He would rent a house in Florence and all the workers stayed there all week and only went home for Sunday. My father told the story of how one day he came back to that house a little early

and found Mary Stumpe (the oldest daughter of Matthew and who later became Mrs. Krieger), who was the housekeeper, sitting at the table crying. My father asked, "What's the matter?" She replied, "I have nothing to do!" Such was the work ethic in those days.

My mother had much the same bent for she felt she always had to be busy and when she couldn't find anything else to do, she would patch my father's overalls. One day, when he was an old, old man walking bent over and with the help of two walking sticks and wearing those patched overalls on the sidewalks of Florence, a lady saw him and came up to him holding out a dollar bill. "What's that for?" he asked. She looked at him with compassion and replied, "I just thought you looked like you needed help." So, not to discourage her, he took it

When St. Florian was a farming community, I think we prayed more earnestly. When the rains did not come in season, we prayed for rain. When it rained too abundantly, we prayed for seasonable weather. Farming is a gamble at best but we are all dependent on the products of agriculture.

One prayer, Father Albert said so many times was, "Oh, God, in whom we live and move and have our being, grant us seasonable rain so that we trusting in thy mercy ... may with more confidence strive after the things which are eternal."

These younger people have never faced the hard times that we did in our youth. I do not think that they realize that we lived in a time without public welfare or Social Security. It was root hog or die - or go to the poorhouse.

I had occasion to ride to Lone Cedar with a couple whose father had worked for us in his later years. On the way home, he said, "You know when my family was young I always thought I would have to depend on my children to care for us in our old age. But now I own my own home, have a car, and have a steady income. All due to Social Security." Whether that system will hold up for the coming generation is in doubt, but I think we should all remember the last line of a medieval essay I once read. It ended with these words. "We put our trust in God, our only security."

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All of the personal notes and reminiscences included are those submitted in response to the requests of the 125th Anniversary Celebration Committee to all parishioners and students of the St. Florian School and St. Michael's School.

The following documents were consulted in the compilation of the 125th Anniversary of St. Michael's Catholic Church:

100 Years 1891 - 1991 Saint Bernard Abbey, Cullman, Alabama

One Hundred Years of Work and Prayer, 1898 - 1998, St. Joseph Catholic Church, Florence, Alabama

St. Michael's Parish...a hundred years, 1973, St. Florian, Alabama Diamond

Jubilee of St. Michael's Parish, 1873 - 1973, St Florian, Alabama

History of St. Florian Told to Florence Rotarians by Fr. Albert (Hilger), Monday, June 10, 1940

History of St. Florian by Marianne Bernauer (a Master's thesis) 1965

History of the Windows (of St. Michael's) recollections collected by Marianne Bernauer

List of Donors of the St. Michael's Windows by Janet Ragland

Letters to L&N from people who formerly lived North, 1912 -1913, (a book published by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to attract settlers to the area served by the L&N)

Celebrating 125 Years (author unknown) County Deed Books from 1872 through 1879

Lauderdale County Deed Packets, Box C (deed from Fr. Hueser to Benedictines)

Various Florence newspapers (as cited in text) Letters and Articles submitted by parishioners and former students of the school

(as cited in text)