

St. Michael Historian

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Father Valentine Schiffrer *Saint Michael's priest*

by Evelyn Roehl

In 1876 Archbishop John Ireland of Saint Paul established De Graff, Swift County, Minnesota as the first of several "Catholic" colonies in Minnesota. He was also responsible for appointing priests and bishops in Minnesota. In 1900, during a recruitment trip to Yugoslavia, he selected six young men to attend Saint Paul Seminary to study for the priesthood. One of those students was Valentine Schiffrer.

Valentine Schiffrer, son of Joseph Schiffrer and Frances Jeravnik, was born February 12, 1881 in Stražišče, which was in the Austrian Empire. In the summer of 1902 he boarded the French steamer *La Savoie* in LaHavre, France, arriving at the port of New York. In 1918 the village of Stražišče was in Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia). Today, it is located to the north of Ravne na Koroškem in the Carinthia region of northern Slovenia.

After his studies and consequent ordination in 1906, he was assigned as an assistant priest at Saint Francis Catholic Church in Saint Paul. Two years later he became the pastor in Redwood Falls, Minnesota, which was his residence when he became a naturalized citizen on July 27, 1908 at the U.S. District Court in Ramsey County, Minnesota.

The 1910 census of Redwood Falls city listed Valentine Schiffrer* as age 29, born in Austria, language Slovenian, and year of immigration 1902. His occupation, of course, was priest for Catholic church. Also in his household was the housekeeper, Henrietta Hornpesch, age 33, single, a native of Germany. In August of that same year, he obtained a passport.

When the U.S. federal census was taken in January 1920, his residence was Madison city, Lac Qui Parle County, and his housekeeper was his sister, Antonia, age 28, also born in Yugoslavia. On June 23, 1921, he renewed his passport, this one with the explanation for his travels "to visit mother." In his application, he described himself as 6 feet 1 inch tall, dark brown hair, blue eyes, high forehead, straight nose, medium straight mouth, medium chin, and round face.

They both went back to Yugoslavia for a visit, then returned to the United States on the steamship *Berengaria* from Cherbourg, France, arriving at Ellis Island on October 17, 1921. Accompanying them was their cousin, Anton Schiffrer, also a priest, who was born in Stara Loka, Yugoslavia in 1885 and had been the pastor at Rock Springs, Wyoming, and later at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Reverend Valentine Schiffrer's next pastoral assignment was at Saint Boniface Catholic Church in Saint Bonifacius, Carver County, in 1930. The federal census that year listed his housekeeper as Susie Bohnen, age 53, single, a native of Illinois. He stayed there about three years, then went to serve parishes in Faribault, Rice County, for five years.



*Father Valentine Schiffrer in 1920
photo from passport application*

* His surname was misspelled on the indexes of Ancestry.com and/or original censuses of 1910, 1920, 1930, and 1940, as "Schiffen," "Schiffier," "Schifferes," and "Schiffer," respectively.

SAINT MICHAEL SERVICE

Sometime in the late summer of 1938, Valentine Schiffrer became the parish priest in Saint Michael. One of the first marriages he performed here was for my parents, Carola Kasper and Edward Roehl, on October 5, 1938. (He also baptized one of my brothers in 1941.)



*Roehl and Kasper wedding party, 1938
Photo courtesy of Evelyn Roehl*

The 1940 census showed F. Valentine Schiffrer in Saint Michael village, and his housekeeper was Johanna Miks, age 55, single, also born in Jugo-slavia. She was a surviving sister of the late Father Anton Miks, who had been Saint Michael's parish priest from 1904 until his death in 1937.

As Bob Zahler explained in his *Faith, Family, and Farming: A History of St. Michael, Minnesota*, Father Schiffrer helped facilitate the building of a new school in town to replace the overcrowded and outdated parochial and public schoolhouses, as well as provide larger, modern facilities for church and community events. The new structure was dedicated on October 20, 1940, with Archbishop John Gregory Murray of the Saint Paul diocese in attendance. The bowling alley, a unique feature in the building, became a popular destination for the community.

[Steve Barthel checked the microfilms of the parish and found that Val Schiffrer performed the ordinances for the following time periods:

***Baptisms: 7 August 1938 through 25 June 1944
Marriages: 7 September 1938 through 3 June 1944
Burials: 24 November 1938 through 25 June 1944]***

LATER ASSIGNMENT

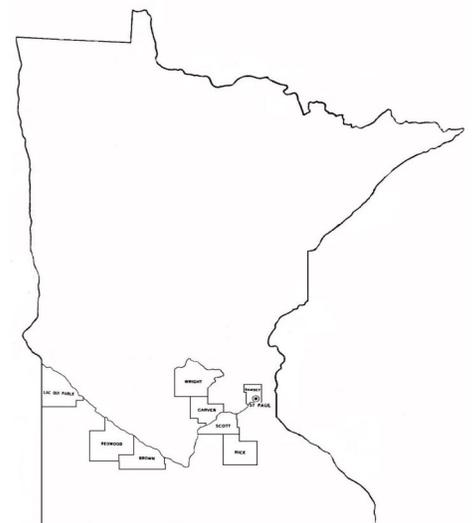
Valentine Schiffrer was next appointed to be the parish priest at Saint Mark's Catholic Church in Shakopee, Scott County, where he served from 1944 to 1948. He then went to Holy Trinity parish in New Ulm, Brown County, until 1951. He was the Dean of the deaneries of those two parishes during his tenure.

His last pastorate was at Saint Raphael parish in Springfield, Brown County, about 35 miles west of New Ulm, from 1951 until October 30, 1954. For the next several months, he stayed at Loretto Hospital in New Ulm. His poor health did not improve, and he died there on April 8, 1955, with medical causes of multiple cerebro-vascular accidents (one year), hypertension (five years), and arteriosclerosis.

THE FUNERAL

Services for Father Valentine Schiffrer were held at Saint Raphael Catholic Church on Tuesday, April 12, 1955. The Mass, conducted by Archbishop Murray, was assisted by six priests from New Ulm, Sleepy Eye, Saint Paul, and Shakopee. The pontifical funeral was also attended by Monsignor Joseph Trobec of Elk River, nearly 100 other priests, and about 800 parishioners, friends, and family members.

Besides his sister, Antonia, who married Minnesota native Joseph Kranz and moved to Flint, Michigan, Father Schiffrer was survived by a younger brother, John Schiffrer, of Waukegan, Illinois, and at least ten nieces and nephews.



During his priesthood from 1900 to 1954, Reverend Valentine Schiffrer served parishes in eight counties in Minnesota: Ramsey, Redwood, Lac Que Parle, Carver, Rice, Wright, Scott, and Brown.

The corpse was transported to and buried at Saint Mark's Catholic Church Cemetery, also known as Shakopee Catholic Cemetery. His tombstone reads:

REV. VAL SCHIFFRER
BORN FEB. 12, 1881
ORDAINED JUNE 12, 1906
DIED APRIL 8, 1955
REQUIESCAT IN PACE

A photo of the marker, taken by Ellen Sorenson, can be seen on www.findagrave.com (Memorial # 68415714).

2013 Daze and Knights Parade



Photo courtesy Clarence Eull

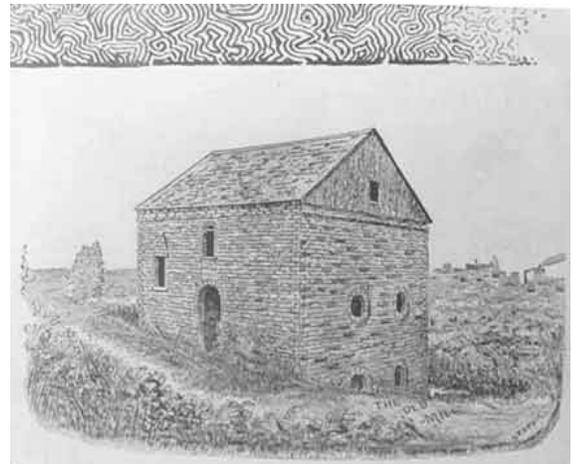
The historical society's parade unit in the 2013 Daze and Knights parade in August included board members Earl Vetsch "driving" an antique tedder restored by Clarence Eull. The tedder was used by farmers to fluff up newly cut hay so that it would dry more quickly. Clarence and Earl made the horses that disguise the lawn tractor driven by Clarence in the parade. This was one of two units the society sponsored in the parade. The society also sponsored the St. Michael Fire Department's antique fire truck.

Ayd Mill Road's St. Michael Connection

by Bob Zahler

Traveling north on I-35, just before the interstate begins to run in a more easterly direction at about Randolph Avenue, drivers can exit onto a two-mile stretch of road that will take them northwest to Selby Avenue and then to Snelling Avenue and I-94. This road is Ayd Mill Road; named in 1993 in honor of John Kaydon Ayd (or Aydt) who was an early settler of both St. Paul and St. Michael. The story of John K. Ayd in St. Paul was researched and written by Donald Empson and published in the Fall 1974 issue of *Ramsey County History*. In his article "John Ayd's Grist Mill And Reserve Township History" Empson relates how John, his wife Bernadine, and his brothers Theodore and Edward came to St. Paul in 1851 from Piopolis, Illinois where John and Bernadine had settled in 1840 after immigration from their home village of Ersingen, Baden, Germany. In 1851 St. Paul was still a very young settlement and John was able to claim 160 acres in an area now bordered by Randolph and St. Clair avenues and Victoria Street and Lexington Parkway.

It was in September 1854, shortly after John paid the government for his St. Paul claim, that he and his son Leonard traveled up the north fork of the Crow River and selected claims in Frankfort Township in what was to become the City of St. Michael. Although he met all of the preemption requirements and paid for his Frankfort claims, he did not immediately make Frankfort his permanent home. Instead, he built a grist mill in St. Paul in 1860 along what would become Jefferson Avenue. In 1860 his real estate investments were valued at \$10,000; John K. Ayd was a wealthy man.



The Ayd mill in St. Paul
Photo Courtesy Bob Zahler

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.stmhistsoc.org

Meetings held on the second Monday of the month at the St. Michael City Hall in the Gries and Lenhardt Public Meeting Room adjacent to the library.

This newsletter is published quarterly for the benefit of the members of the Saint Michael Historical Society. Reprints of this or any other newsletter by the Society are not permitted without the express written consent of the Saint Michael Historical Society.

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Stephen Barthel

For reasons unclear, though, in 1864 he sold the southern 60 acres of his St. Paul farm (between Randolph and Pleasant avenues) and subdivided the remaining 100 acres among his sons and sons-in-laws: Edward, Leonard, and Rudolf Ayd and John K. Zachman and Peter Schmitz. John and Bernadine Ayd then moved to St. Michael where John died in 1867 becoming one of the first to be buried in the cemetery alongside St. Michael's Historic Catholic Church. While the Ayd Mill was sold in 1866 to Charles Kamberath, descendants of the Ayds and Zachmans would continue to live in both St. Michael and St. Paul to this very day. In the early 1880s the Short Line Railroad purchased the property containing the mill stream that powered the water wheel and thus eliminated any future profitability of the mill. The old mill soon fell into ruin and was demolished around the turn of the 20th century. The house that John K. Ayd built in St. Paul stood until 1966 when it was razed for the coming construction of I-35E.



J.K. Ayd tombstone at St. Michael cemetery. Church records indicate actual birthdate of 29 December, 1799, in Ersingen Germany.

Photo courtesy Bob Zahler

2014 Dues Notice

It's that time of the year again when we ask our members to consider supporting our mission for another year. Since the inception of the St. Michael Historical Society in 2005, our annual dues have been \$10 for individuals and \$25 for businesses, and we're happy to say they will continue to remain that way for the coming year. Our current membership now numbers over one hundred and our website garners thousands of visits each month. One way we are able to keep expenses low is that all board members and staff serve on a volunteer basis.

Enclosed (or attached, if you receive your newsletter by email) you will find a copy of our MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL FORM. Please fill this out and submit with your check so we are able to keep our records up to date. **If you are already paid up for 2014, there will be no renewal form enclosed or attached.**

Currently, about twenty five percent of our members receive their quarterly newsletter by email. If you are receiving a hard copy through the mail and wish to convert to email (or vice versa), please fill out the appropriate line on the renewal application so we can adjust our records. Some of the advantages of receiving the newsletter by email are: 1] Photos will be in full color (unless submitted in black and white). 2] You can still print your own hard copy from the computer copy. 3] You will help save trees. 4] You will help us continue to keep costs down by saving on postage and printing.

Your email address will remain safe and confidential and will not be passed on to any other organization.