

St. Paul History

By Linda (Torbeck) Hanabarger

Sasse and Kruenegel families settled in St. Paul around 1865. They migrating south after seven other Dodge County, Wis., German Lutherans came down in 1864. These settlers founded the St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Torbeck family followed Rev. Johann Streckfuss from Ft. Wayne, Ind., to Washington County, and later on to Fayette County when he accepted a call to start a new Lutheran-Missouri Synod congregation in the German settlement of St. Paul.

The Yund family was part of the migration from St. Clair and Madison counties – staking out land one and one half miles south of St. Paul, where a large Elm was the only point of reference on the vast prairie.

The placement of the village of St. Paul was determined by the Lutheran emigrants who first arrived in this area around the end of the Civil War. Soon after 1865 they purchased a 40-acre tract for church, school and cemetery, and thus became the location for the village.

The earliest St. Paul merchant was John Boye, who started with his father and brother in 1872. Two years later, John married the doctor's daughter, Johanna Rheiner, and he built her a fancy 12-room home a short distance east of the church.

In 1887, Jacob Yund, a farmer, was thrust into the role of merchant when his cousin repaid a loan in store goods from a failed venture in Teutopolis. Jacob stored the goods in his barn and chicken house until he could obtain a store building in St. Paul.

Already standing along St. Paul's main street was a two-story brick structure, which formerly served as a hotel. The St. Paul church owned the corner lot adjacent to the hotel, so they sold it to Jacob Yund so he could build a store.

Both John Boye and Jacob Yund had huckster wagons, and their drivers visited the countryside to fulfill the wants and needs of their customers. Both merchants produced monetary tokens which were used in making change for their customers.

Bertram Landhold was the village blacksmith, and Louie Horstmann, whose house was just south of the cemetery, repaired harness in addition to making wooden and leather shoes.

Franz (Frank) Einfalt owned the saw mill, and his brothers, Paul and John operated the creamery. After Paul died in 1905, the creamery was sold to John Boye, who leased the building to Pevely Dairy in 1923.

Telephone service came to St. Paul in 1901, serving 115 patrons on 15 party lines. Ernestine Hinrichs and daughter, Emma oversaw the switchboard operation for the next 50 years.

Normal operation ended at 9 p.m., except in case of emergencies.

Frank Einfalt's son, Elmer, was still working the sawmill on Dec. 18, 1957, when a strong tornado came through and tore St. Paul up pretty badly. It left a path of destruction a block wide and several miles long.

Elmer's house was blown off its foundation and damaged beyond repair, while the Yund Mercantile Store, owned and operated by Leonard and Velva Schaal at the time, was heavily damaged, after which it was closed for good. A number of buildings on outlying farms were also damaged by this severe storm.

On a drive to St. Paul today, one can see the village from a distance, recognizable by the tall steeple of a beautiful red brick church. Beside it on the circle drive is the parsonage, which in years past served as the school teacher's residence.

The "big" school that also stood along the circle drive was built in 1901 by Henry Torbeck, and his father, John Torbeck. It stood for the next 100 years before it was razed and buried on-site in 2001.

The cemetery, which was laid out more than 140 years ago, stands southwest of the church and it is the final resting place of the St. Paul's founders and many of their descendants.

The only business operation in St. Paul these days is Baseball Card Collectibles, a mail-order business, operated by Robert and Mildred (Sasse) Schroeder.

The 1957 tornado wasn't the first – 30 years earlier a similar fate was visited on St. Paul, and the residents were all watching the sky and listening to the weather reports when the 1957 tornado came through.