

a dress of quiet colors and no veil, but a bonnet or hat if they had one. They did not, of course, receive the nuptial blessing. Many of the early settlers married young, which accounts for their large families.

Weddings were usually small and celebrations took place in the home of one of the parents. Beer barrels were rolled out, the floor cleared, and the Meyer Band would frequently play its same selections over and over again — like: *Over the Waves*, *Our Director*, *The Village Tavern*, and the *Sharp Shooters March*. Sometimes a baseball game, to work up the men's thirst, preceded the dance. For a large wedding the crowd would be invited to the Granite City Coliseum.

Prohibition did not hurt the wedding celebrations or parties. "We ate, drank lots of moonshine at \$.10 a drink. There were stills all over the place."

Sometimes a priest charged more for a large wedding:

We had a big wedding, a beautiful wedding. The priest, Fr. Joseph Kreuter, OSB, saw this and said, "It costs \$5, but I'll charge you \$10. That's all the money my husband had in his pocket."

To a German-American monastic community and parish, speaking *Deutsch* and remembering Old World customs has continued into the 1970's. In 1972 the parish gained a pastor, who though raised in the Bronx and bearing an Irish name, speaks German fluently and tosses an occasional phrase into his homilies. During World War I the parishioners who spoke German endured some harassment. Father Valerian recalled a scene of sixty years ago:

World War I

. . . a student at St. John's during the Great War, described the suspicion German-Americans felt in the schools: World War I, couldn't speak German in school. Had to speak English. Unpatriotic, you had to sign a pledge.

At times a language barrier caused difficulties for both pastor and parishioners. Mrs. Gertrude Meyer told this story:

The Reisingers lived next to the people who lived where Paul Reisinger now lives. When the mother bore a son and seemed near death, Anna Reisinger was so troubled that she ran as fast as she could to St. John's to get a priest. It was St. Joseph's Day, March 19, and she met Mrs. Johanna Fruth, then at church, who was Polish but also understood German. The sick lady knew only Polish, so a priest and Mrs. Fruth came to her. The priest would ask questions of sins that might have been committed. Mrs. Fruth would interpret this and the sick lady would then press or not press the priest's hand which she held. The language hurdle was overcome. The lady received the last sacraments and died soon after.

*German
sermons*

German sermons were part of the parish liturgy for decades. The pastor on September 1, 1937, said:

At a meeting of the school trustees last Thursday, the following arrangement was accepted. A German sermon will be preached at the early Mass on the first and second Sunday of each month. The sermon at the high Mass will be in English to accommodate the children who do not sufficiently understand the German sermons, and the visitors who attend the community services on Sunday.

I went to church and I saw Mike pacing back and forth. It was high Mass and the sermon was before Mass in English. I said to him in German, "Why don't you go in?" He said in German back to me, "I can't understand a word of English." You know, he used to be in the jury where they spoke only English.

By 1938, the parish ceremonies were divided, half German and half English. "At 2:30 p.m. Way of the Cross in German. Friday after high Mass, Way of the Cross in English." By 1930 there were "Too few in high Mass. Come late when you do. If not more come, I shall drop the German sermon." In the 1970's children of the third and fourth generations may understand the language but perhaps do not speak it. There is a pride in the old who know German. The past is in the proud heritage of speech.

Although speaking *Deutsch* was no longer a patriotic issue during World War II, the parish, as the country, suffered much heartache during those years. On Pearl Harbor Sunday the pastor reminded the people to pray:

World War II

Patronness of our Country. Pray for peace, pray for our boys. (December 7, 1941)*

Pray for our Holy Father. Pray for peace and charity among nations. Pray for our boys in the army and navy. (December 28, 1941)*

Working the farm during the war was especially difficult:

When World War II started we had to get more cattle. My order number was forty-one, one of the first ones. He had to get more cows. You had to have fifteen cows, or so many units. Then he had an excuse for not going.

Thirty-four young men in the parish served in that war. The parish prayed for them Sunday after Sunday through novenas, litanies to the saints, and special Masses. A few days before the war's end, a parishioner was killed in the Philippines. The St. Cloud *Daily Times* reported:

Collegetown: T.4 Robert S. Pueringer is the first war casualty of St. John's Parish here. He was killed in



Clement Meyer



Joseph Knoblach, Armor Himsl

Adolph Meyer



Robert Pueringer



action on Mindanao, Philippine Islands, on June 19, 1945.

The traditional love of a German-American for *lager* and *schnapps* was not suppressed at Collegeville during the "great experiment." When prohibition became law in the United States on January 17, 1920, the law was taken lightly in Collegeville. Fr. Godfrey Diekmann, OSB, explained prohibition and the relationship it had on the parishioners and the abbey:

*Prohibition
and
Minnesota 13*

During the prohibition era, Collegeville was an internal part of the Stearns County "heartland" that produced what many considered the best moonshine in the country called "Minnesota 13." Only after prohibition did it become known that one of the probable reasons for the excellence of the moonshine was that it was produced in good copper stills, made by Brother Justus of the abbey. He was the St. John's tinsmith and himself coming from a poor farm family of the area and sympathizing with their hard way of life and now the new and beckoning opportunity of moonshining, spent many a night compassionately producing the stills to help farmers make a few extra dollars. Incidentally, this helped to better relations between the abbey and the neighborhood farmers.

The Germans thought that prohibition and the Volstead Act was nonsense. It was too much of their tradition to give up drinking beer. Father Valerian remembered: "At lunch we used to get a quart of beer and two pieces of black bread."

Collegeville parishioners continued the fine art of making beer and whiskey despite prohibition. Stills were plentiful as was the knowhow on keeping an arm's reach away from the law:

Frank hauled in sugar into St. Cloud, and there was so much smoke (by the still) he was afraid that he would get caught. Never put the still on your own land, then there is nothing they can take away from you. Put it on someone else's land; then you can say that you don't know. Sometimes the law would stop you regardless where you were, to tell you: "This is a raid." The first thing a guy came up to me and stops the tractor. He said: "Why don't you just quit everything and come up to the house?" And I said: "For what? I am busy." He said: "This is a raid." I got in his car and by the time I got back to the house they were jumping around like bees. Old man Pflueger came out and said: "You might as well quit. I chopped them up." He had it (the still) in his chicken coop.

The still was right behind the barn. The smoke blew right into the yard. The still got blown up more than once. The federal agents were up there all the time. He had cancer. I think it was from the rot gut he drank. He had a red rag covering his mouth because his skin was all gone.

The Collegeville parish reflected both the German traditions and those of the universal Church. Mission groups, German sermons, Church support, and basket socials all were part of parish life.



Oscar Bruggman home, 1975

Frank Salzer home, 1974



- 1856 First free school in Stearns County.
- 1884 Third Plenary Council at Baltimore.
- 1925 Parish school opened.
- 1951 Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, OSB, St. John's sixth abbot, blessed on March 29.
- 1953 Bishop Peter Bartholome, fifth bishop of St. Cloud.
- 1967 Parish school closed.
- 1974 School building razed.