



# Old Franklin Township Historical Society Newsletter

December 2022 - Volume 15, Issue 4

## The Bettinger Hardware Store Legacy

By Mary Frances Bettinger Nachreiner with additions by OFTHS editors



*Left to right: Joseph Voelkel, Francis Bettinger, unidentified man. The building looks like it was the later site of Bettinger Appliances which was at 1150 Main Street in Plain, Wisconsin*

Francis Philip Bettinger, born April 7, 1918, in Madison, was the youngest son of Philip Bettinger and Elizabeth Cavanaugh. In December of 1918, Philip dissolved his 4-year partnership with Cramer Brothers and bought out the general merchandise business located on the corner of Main Street and Alma Avenue in Plain. As a cyclone in May 1918 had destroyed St. Luke's church, the second floor of this building was used for Masses until 1920.

Philip was a charter officer of the Wisco Hardware Company in Madison and took weekly trips there to pick up store stock at 1435 East Washington Ave. The Wisco Store catalog offered a wide variety of products including hammers, coaster wagons, fishing tackle, and farm equipment.



When Francis was 18, he married Mary Cecilia, his Irish bride from the ridge. Mary was born March 16, 1918, in Bear Valley to John McCluskey and Mary Rainey. Since her mother died a week after Mary was born, she grew up in the Frank and Julia (Farley) McCarville household. Francis and Mary's wedding took place on Sept. 22, 1936, at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Loreto. The groom's brother, Rev. Edmund Bettinger, performed the ceremony. After a wedding dinner at the



*Joseph Voelkel employed at Wisco Store*

Hotel Huntley in Reedsburg, their wedding dance was held at the Palace Hall on Wachter Avenue in Plain. As the *Weekly Home News* reported on Oct. 1, 1936, "The groom is a joint partner in the

Wisco store at Plain, and the young couple plan to make their home in that village.”



1940 Chimes page 84

Francis’s partner was his brother-in-law, Joseph Liegel, who was married to Ruth Bettinger in 1934. The Bettinger and Liegel Wisco Store was set up in a vacant store space in the left (west) side of Philip Bettinger’s two-story brick building.



This photo dated 1908 shows Philip’s store when it was known as Cramer Brothers Store. There were two entrances facing Main Street. The arrow marks where Francis Bettinger and Joseph Liegel operated their hardware business in 1936.

Francis wrote his memories in *Genealogy of the Bettinger Family: A Bettinger Family Memoir 1626-1989*: “In 1936...I decided to go into business in partnership with my brother-in-law, Joseph Liegel. I had worked in my father’s store for quite some time and felt that I had had enough practical experience to take over the Wisco Hardware business from Dad. With little capital, I invested in a small way, but never faltered in my ambition to find success in my endeavor. I bought my father’s warehouse, a small storage building which had been moved from another part of town to a vacant lot near the Bettinger Store. By 1942 I was operating the poultry and egg business which I took over from Dad. William Reuschlein, an experienced businessman from Plain, managed it while my partner and I operated a feed



L to R: Francis Bettinger & Joseph Liegel by washing machines. The Wisco Store sign is visible in the window. mill for grinding and mixing feed for farm animals. My brother-in-law took care of the route, and the building was renovated and enlarged for the thriving poultry and egg business. Eggs were collected from all over the south-central part of Wisconsin. They were candled in the store and then taken by Bettinger trucks to the Wisconsin Butter and Egg Company in Chicago where they were then placed on grocery store shelves and sold as fresh eggs to the city customers. The trucks which hauled the produce were always loaded with hardware and returned home with supplies for the store.”

On July 17, 1940, Francis and Joseph opened a second Wisco Hardware Store – in Cazenovia. The venture would last only 6 months when tragedy struck their business and personal lives.



The announcement of their new business in Cazenovia appeared in the *Cazenovia Leader* on June 13, 1940. “Bettinger & Liegel, of Plain, are busy getting ready to open a modern hardware store in the old Fisher hardware building in this village. The interior of the building is being redecorated and the front is receiving a fresh coat of paint. The new business, which will be opened within the next few weeks, will carry a complete line of hardware stock, gas, coal and wood ranges, refrigerators, and other appliances. A stock of poultry

feeds and mashes will also be handled as stock in trade. Mr. Bettinger and Mr. Liegel are experienced hardware men. **They also have a similar store at Plain and will continue to operate that store after the Cazenovia store is opened for business.**"

The July 11, 1940, issue of *Cazenovia Leader* had a larger story and advertisement of the grand opening which took place from July 17-20. "Bettinger & Liegel announce the grand opening of their new hardware store in Cazenovia...The new store is located in the building occupied by the Fisher Bros. hardware<sup>1</sup> for many years...The new hardware store is a member of the Wisco organization which has its headquarters at Madison. This organization is a large group of independent hardware merchants who have joined together for the purpose of mass buying, making it possible to give the public the very lowest prices without having to sacrifice quality...There will be a Philgas Cooking demonstration at the store all day Saturday. Bettinger & Liegel will be the Philgas distributors for this community and they will handle all the appliances for using this famous bottle gas. In addition to carrying a complete stock of high quality, low priced hardware stock, Maytag washers, etc., Bettinger & Liegel will do plumbing and sheet metal work and can take care of all your heating problems..."

From the *LaValle Weekly* of July 10, 1940, "...These two ads announce the opening of Cazenovia's new Wisco hardware store, operated by Bettinger & Liegel, who also operate a hardware store at Plain."



The advertisement pictured here is from the July 25, 1940, issue of the *Cazenovia Leader*.

## Fire Destroys Caz Hardware Building Friday Morning

*LaValle Weekly*, December 11, 1940

Cazenovia—**Fire of undetermined origin completely destroyed the Bettinger & Liegel hardware store** here early Friday morning of last week [December 6, 1940]. Both the building and stock were total loss, partly covered by insurance. When the fire was discovered at about 2:30 a.m. it had gained so much headway that the firemen could not get near enough to the building to play a stream of warm [water] on the blaze, because of the intense heat, until after the frame had collapsed. The building was consumed in about 20 minutes. Firemen and others worked hard to save nearby buildings which included the Daisy Meat Market on one side and the Wm. Moll store on the other. All the furniture of the Fred Grauvogl family was moved from the rooms they occupy which adjoin the meat market, and considerable damage was done in these rooms by heat and water, as well as in the rooms above the Moll store. The intense heat caused the windows to break in the nearby buildings, and also in buildings across the street. The building, occupied by the Bettinger & Liegel hardware store since last spring, was owned by George Fisher of Donna, Texas. It was one of the old landmarks of Cazenovia, and its passing is a blow to the citizens of this community. No definite plans have been made by Bettinger & Liegel. Their loss is a heavy one and they have the deep sympathy of people in this community. **The household goods of Mr. and Mrs. Liegel were also a loss as they were stored in the second floor of the building.**

As Francis and Mary Bettinger stood and watched the Bettinger-Liegel Hardware in Cazenovia, Wisconsin, burn to the ground, Francis looked down, picked up a dime on the ground, and said to Mary, "Guess this is all we have left here." Francis was not only upset about the fire but about the fact that they received no insurance payment. Although he had written a check for the insurance payment and given it to the agent, it somehow never made it to the insurance company.

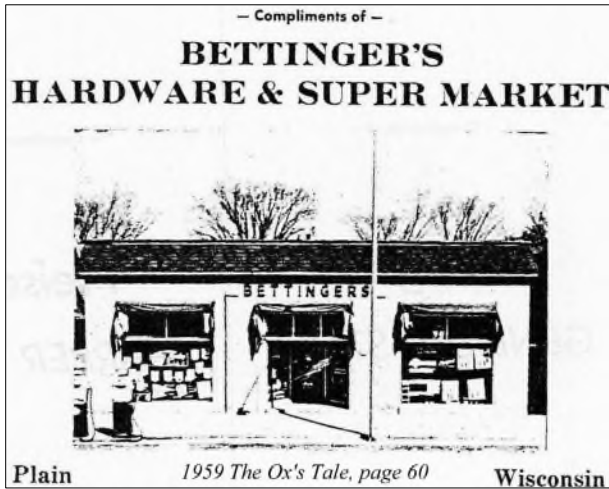
Ruth Bettinger Liegel recalled, "After clerking in my father's store for a time, I moved with my husband and son [James born April 1935] to Cazenovia where my husband managed a hardware store. But good fortune did not smile upon us. My husband contracted polio and soon after, a fire totally destroyed our store."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fisher Brothers Hardware store was a large building that later served as a car agency; in 1983 it was where Gant's Funeral parlor building was located. *Richland Observer*, 3/31/1983, page 8, remembrance by Wanita Frank Jasper. From the Farber Funeral Home website, "In 1929 our firm was established by Willard R. Gant Sr. . . In addition to the Reedsburg location, the Cazenovia Chapel began serving the Cazenovia Area community in 1961. The chapel is located at 111 Main Street, Cazenovia." <https://www.farberfuneralhome.com/our-story>

<sup>2</sup> Ruth's memories, continued from *Genealogy of the Bettinger Family: A Bettinger Family Memoir 1626-1989*: "Although I had found a good night job managing the Badger Ordinance Plant Cafeteria in Baraboo, I had to move with my sick husband to Minneapolis where he

Francis eventually became the sole owner of the Wisco Store in Plain. On January 20, 1945, Herb Liegel sold property to Francis Bettinger in **Block 7 Lot 5**, west of

buildings. Bettinger Appliances may have closed at the same time Francis sold the hardware business.



the Big Store (Phil's store)<sup>3</sup> A mill and garage were included.<sup>4</sup> Remodeling took some time before it was completed, and a grand opening was held in 1951. The new store, Bettinger Hardware and Supermarket, included groceries.

Francis Bettinger recalled, "In 1946 [1940] when my sister's husband Joe opened a hardware store in Cazenovia, I operated the Plain business. Within two years we moved into the hardware section of my father's General Store. After my father was incapacitated by a stroke and found himself obliged to withdraw from active work, I added a line of groceries. Business was thriving and we finally decided to expand by renovating and enlarging the warehouse into an attractive building. In 1951 we had our Grand Opening and named the new business the Bettinger Hardware and Supermarket."



Above is Bettinger Appliances in 1965 and has the current address of 1150 Main Street. It opened for business a few years after the hardware store next door, about 1952-53. There was a fire door between the two

The stores in Plain brought new adventures to the young lives of Francis and Mary. Mary was busy with three girls and a newborn son, while Francis studied to obtain his Master Plumber License. Mary received on-the-job-training, learning to thread pipes for her husband. As Francis would call out the measurement, Mary would cut the pipe and thread it. Rumor had it, Mary could throw the threaded pipe and smoke a cigarette at the same time. She produced product like a pro.

The store continued to carry washing machines and other appliances which are visible in the shop window.

Recognizing customer needs, the store diversified and carried hunting supplies during deer hunting season. For example, hunters could purchase their weapons, shells, and other hunting needs at the store. The annual hunting trip to Northern Wisconsin included a call to Ferdie

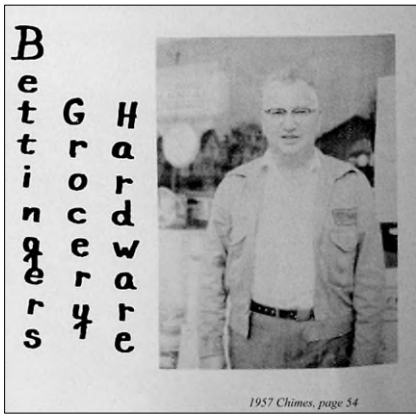
was given Sister Kenny treatments...We converted my father's egg house into a place where I could serve lunches, ice cream, and soft drinks...After my husband's health improved somewhat, we moved to Sun Prairie where we bought a grocery store in which I worked until we moved to Richland Center." [The café where Ruth served lunches was on Alma Avenue behind Diehl's tavern. Phillip Bettinger ran his egg business out of there earlier. After the fire in 1967 which destroyed the former Phil Bettinger building, it was remodeled for Ruth.]

<sup>3</sup> A warranty deed shows Frances Bettinger bought Lot 5 Block 7, Village of Plain from Herbert Liegel, et al, on January 20, 1945. See #268745, Vol. 190, Misc. Deeds, page 482, recorded May 7, 1946, Sauk County Register of Deeds, Baraboo, WI.

<sup>4</sup> The earlier history of the mill and garage building is as follows: In April 1919, Frank Nachreiner purchased a lot west of the Philip Bettinger store from James Ferguson and had a garage built. In April 1921, Anton Hausladen purchased the Frank Nachreiner garage, engaging August Hetzel as his chief mechanic. August Hetzel and his brother Lawrence formed a partnership and took over the garage. They also sold Ford cars. Source: Hildegard Thering, *A History of Plain, Wisconsin*.

Nachreiner for his truck to haul a load of Christmas trees back after hunting. Locals could always count on purchasing their trees at the hardware store.

Francis' plumbing business in the hardware store was an integral part of the community. If a farmer's water pump went out in the middle of the night, Francis and Mary would work on pulling a pump half the night<sup>5</sup>, enabling the farmer to get his milking finished in time



1957 Chimes, page 54

for the milk truck to pick up. Francis was always repairing washing machines, particularly on Monday mornings. Calls would come from folks who were in the middle of washing clothes when their machine broke down. Always

prepared, Francis had a loaner at the ready to deliver for disaster relief on washing day. These satisfied customers loved telling Francis he saved the day for them.

In February 1966, Francis commented on the business outlook in Plain.<sup>6</sup> "One of the community's leading merchants, Francis Bettinger, owner of a grocery, hardware, plumbing and appliance firm, brought in another factor [regarding the decision to close St. Luke High School], 'Plain is not growing. And several retail establishments have been shut down in recent years. There were four grocery outlets here. Now there are only two. The time may be such that we can not support the high school. The village is bound to suffer commercially because of the loss of the school.'"

In 1969, the Bettingers opened a hardware store at 116 W. Jefferson Street in Spring Green. It was a 2-story brick building built by Ferdinand Schoenmann. Various businesses occupied parts of the building. In 1965 there were two businesses on the ground level - Hunts Store



(left side) and Cubbie's (right side). The Bettingers remodeled the building into one business in 1969. Mary Bettinger operated the hardware store where she made many friends and enjoyed the new adventure. But Francis had his heart and soul in Plain, knowing that was where they were going to stay. After much contemplation, they decided to sell the Spring Green store to Frank Doerre of La Crosse in April 1972.

In March 1974, Francis decided to retire and sold the store in Plain to Joseph and Lucille (Lechner) Wankerl and their son Kenneth Wankerl. The grocery line was dropped, and it became known as JKL True Value Hardware. In September 1980, Bob Gangloff purchased the hardware business. In June 1997, Jim and Cindy Liegel were new owners. The site of Bettinger Appliances became the offices of Bettinger & Neider Insurance Company.

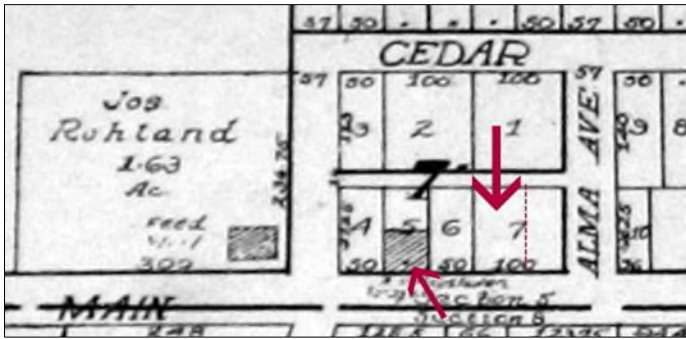


Businesses, from left: JKL Hardware; Bettinger & Neider Insurance Company.

<sup>5</sup> Pulling a pump is highly physical, hands-on, and can be dangerous. It literally involves pulling the pump rods and riser main sections of a hand pump out of the ground to troubleshoot problems on a pump cylinder that is hundreds of feet below ground. It requires a two-person team. Heavy metal parts are over one's head as the sections are pulled and if they slip and fall can hurt one's head, hands, and fingers.

<sup>6</sup> Plain Saddened by Decision to Shut Down Catholic High School by Jerry Ambelang of the *Capital Times* Staff, Madison, WI. February 12, 1966.

The following 1922 map shows where Bettinger businesses were located on Main Street in Plain – all in Block 7 – between St. Luke Ave and Alma Ave.



- Lot 5, 1170 Main Street: Bettinger Hardware and Supermarket; later Wankler's JKL True Value Hardware; in 2017 the Schnitzbank restaurant; in 2020 Roarin 20s Dining and Social Club
- Lot 6, 1150 Main Street: Bettinger Appliance; in 2008 was Anne Marie's Garden Café, in 2017 it was Rocketman Pizza.
- Lot 7: Bettinger-Liegel Wisco store was in the left part of the Big Store (2 stories); building owned by Philip Bettinger (prior to that was Cramer Brothers store). Philip's grandson also named Philip opened Phil's Food Market in the 2-story brick building which burned down in 1967 and was rebuilt, and in 2013 became the Honey Creek Market Co-op until 2020.

Francis and Mary Bettinger (pictured below) purchased a recreational vehicle and became "snowbirds" giving them plenty of time to reminisce where life had taken them - from youth to retirement.



The years of toil, commitment to hard work, and personal sacrifice of Francis and Mary Bettinger benefited the community they both loved. That hard work was tempered with enjoyment, and they never missed a trick if it meant good fun. Out of the tragedy of flames of their first endeavor they persevered and built a successful business and life together. They made an awesome team.

## PLAIN ADVENTURE

By Gloria Derge 2022

Men run with bulls in Pamplona  
 We ran with bulls in a barnyard  
 No less fear  
 But no adult guard  
 Each became Heidi high in the alps  
 Atop a golden straw stack  
 Cheering as we slid down  
 A soft silent luge track  
 We went swinging on rope rigging  
 In a hay mow, in a barn  
 Watching the bale knife  
 Swinging above, warning of harm  
 Pirates we were as  
 We walked the plank  
 Directly into  
 Cow's water tank  
 Grabbing the grey mane of old Bob  
 We escaped Hook and Smee  
 Clomping away yelling  
 "Hee Hee" we are free  
 A rusty windmill had  
 No ringmaster call  
 Death defying spins  
 Around the bars or a fall  
 In our circus parade home  
 As evening drew  
 We road atop elephants  
 That only went "moo"  
 Disneyland may be  
 The happiest place on earth  
 But a Plain dairy farm  
 Had Imagineers first.

About the author: Gloria Oehrlein Derge is the granddaughter of George Hausladen and Lola Pulvermacher. Gloria, now living in California, spent

much time on the Hausladen farm. Much of her youth was spent playing unsupervised with her cousins as shown in the poem. Gloria is a published poet and member of Cobalt Poets. The following painting of the Hausladen farm was provided by Gloria.



## *From the President's desk....*

The December newsletter of OFTHS brings you a most interesting feature article written by Mary Frances Bettinger Nachreiner and OFTHS editors. You will certainly enjoy reading about the Bettinger Hardware Store Legacy which ran from December 1918 to March 1974. You will also enjoy a poem written in 2022 by Gloria Derge, who is the granddaughter of George Hausladen and Lola Pulvermacher.

Please contact us to make arrangements to see our collection by checking the OFTHS website or emailing us at: plainofths@gmail.com

We have enjoyed your visits to the museum this summer and especially during Plain's Strassenfest in October.

Wishing all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Until next time..... Eugene Hausner  
email: eugenehausner@gmail.com

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*Remember me in the family tree; my name, my days, my strife. Then I'll ride upon the wings of time and live an endless life." ~ Linda Goetsch*

### **Gift giving ideas**

Please visit our Merchandise webpage for a number of items that would make great gifts, such as the 1918 cyclone book, Kraemer books, White Mound & Billytown book, St. Anne's Hill book, Hildegard Thering's index, History of St. Luke's Parish, data DVD filled with immigrant genealogy, 1937 movie of Plain, 1955 centennial parade movie, and WWII memories of Clete Ring. More details at:

<https://oldfranklintownshiphistoricalsociety.weebly.com/merchandise.html>

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### **Tell us your story!**



Let us know if you would like to submit a story, memory of the Plain area, and/or photos for upcoming newsletters.

### **Become a member of the Old Franklin Township Historical Society**

Membership per calendar year: Individual \$15; Family \$25; and Sponsor \$100. All monetary donations are accepted. Send to: OFTHS, 915 Wachter Ave, P.O. Box 218, Plain, WI 53577. Members will receive a newsletter by mail and can request copies of specific items in our digital collection.



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