



by Doris Litscher Gasser

Part 1 of a two-part interview

Junior and Donna Sprecher have helped keep Leland alive for 42 years running their tavern in the lowland of Honey Creek situated west of Prairie du Sac just off of PF on Highway C.

The establishments that have survived in the German settlement through the changing times are the church on the east side of town and two taverns on the west end. Other establishments have faded into oblivion and Leland now is mainly a setting for homes for people who enjoy the freedom of country living.

Junior has lived in Leland about all of his life. His father was Edwin Sprecher, who stemmed from the Black Hawk Sprechers and ventured into a different mode of life. Edwin had two brothers, Otto and Amos, and two sisters, Cora and Elda. Junior's mother was Anne Giese, daughter of August Giese who owned much of the land in the Leland area. Edwin and Anna Sprecher had six children, Amos, Verona, Albert, Helen, Clifford and Edwin Jr.

Donna, who always had a story (according to Junior a criteria for being a good bartender), had this to relate, "August Giese married Amelia Mellentine and they had 16 children. And one time she had a baby while she was out in the field shocking oats."

The August Giese family consisted of Clara Priebe, Emelia Treub, George, Herman, Bernard, Ida Krueger, Elbert, Anna Giese Sprecher, Alfred, Magdaline, Selma Giese, Walter, Harry, Eleanora Yanke, Loretta Zarske Moely and Alice Bartz.

Donna continued, "Junior's dad bought this place from a man called Tulock. There must have been quite a few of them because I walked through the cemetery and found quite a few headstones with that name on it. Tulock owned the saloon, then Schmeikel and then Edwin, Junior's dad."

Junior explained, "At first in 1901, my dad owned a grocery store right here in this building (Sprecher's Tavern) and ran it with his cousin, Ben Querhammer. Dad told me he would go to Sauk City to get the merchandise that he sold. He'd bring it out with a team of horses. He'd have three horses. One would walk along behind the wagon and rest and then he'd hook that one up. It took three horses to get the load up Buelow's Hill.

There was no tavern across the street. There was a blacksmith shop where the garage is. Several people owned it. There was a guy by the name of Mueller at one time. Jim Post ran it for a while. We used to play in there and watch them shoe horses. The thing I remember about my youth was that there wasn't any money and it was tough times."

Edwin Sprecher, seeking a better life, decided to head for Sioux City, Iowa, where he ran a grocery store for a time.

Junior recalled, "I was only 4 years old. All I remember is waving goodbye to my friends here. The Posts had eight children and Doug and Leroy were my friends. We loaded the car with the family and an old Chevy truck with furniture. Dad drove the truck and when we got to Highway 60 we couldn't make it up Moseman's Hill so we had to leave some of the furniture there. We were leaving home and it was like going to another country. The Depression hit us in Iowa, too."

Three years later the family was back in Leland with their friends. Junior remembered, "When we came back in 1934 my mother died. I can remember that as one of the tragic moments of my life."

Leland had a post office from

April 1883 to June 1907. In the 1920s there was a branch of the Black Hawk State Bank established which closed in the Depression years.

Junior reviewed, "My first grade teacher was Alice Mallon Wenzel. We walked about a mile from Leland to the school on PF. My classmate was Kenneth Gadie. There were just two of us in the first grade. Noon hours we went out and played ball and games like Pom Pom Pull Away. We had a merry-go-round. The school was a brick building. It still sits there as a summertime home for Ron Galster from Illinois. We had a pond in Leland across the street where we could fish. I loved to fish. We'd catch blue gills and did a lot of fishing during the summer.

"There was a tavern at the other end of town and that later became a grocery store. So, we had two grocery stores here then. When we opened the bar we also had a dance hall. Saturday nights we'd have wedding dances and general dances."

Sprecher's Hall was a center for country fun. Farm families would finish their evening chores, put on a new outfit of clothes and head for the Leland dance hall. It was exciting for wide-eyed youngsters to see car headlights coming from different directions headed for the dance hall.

At the far end of the dance hall was a wooden stage for the band. A favorite band was Larry Mielke and his Rhythm Masters. On the west side of the dance hall were two entrances to the bar. The north and east walls were lined with wooden benches for spectators and tired dancers. Some dancers would go sailing smoothly along, others would bounce up and down the jiggle to the beat of fox trots, polkas and waltzes.

At intermission time dancers would head for the front door for a breath of fresh air or to the bar for a thirst quencher. As the evening wore on tired children would be sleeping all over the Sprecher household, which had an entrance from the bar room.

Junior recalled, "I had a cousin, Robert Giese, at the other end of town and we spent a lot of time together. We'd go to the creek in summer. We'd hunt pheasants and rabbits. That was our recreation for weekends.

"We had Free Shows here in two different spots. Three of us sponsored them: My father, the tavern across the street and the grocery store on the other end of town. One week the show would be at the store and the next week by our tavern."

Friday evenings after dark, during the summertime, families would bring blankets to the Free Show, sit on them and watch the big screen, mostly featuring westerns like Hop-a-long Cassidy, under the stars. Intermission treats would be an ice cream cone at the store for a nickel and 5¢ soda pop or beer at the taverns.

Freddie Schaefer, a florist from Sauk City, brought out the movies for the Free Show and passed the hat. According to Junior there were others before Schaefer who brought our movies for community entertainment.

After graduating from a country grade school, the Prairie du Sac High School seemed large to Junior. He was a popular young man who was elected prom king and was a good athlete, participating in football, basketball and baseball. He graduated in 1945.

As far as recreation is concerned, Junior reviewed, "We liked to dance. We'd go into Plain, Sauk City, Prairie du Sac and Roxbury. I'd always be with friends. I grew up with George Goerks from Denzer. His dad ran a bar in Denzer. We met at church school in Leland. We'd all get in a car, George, his brother Floyd, and the Knuth boys and would all go dancing once or twice a week on Wednesday and/or Saturday nights."

Junior danced his way right into the heart of a blue-eyed, blonde, Donna Strmiska at a New Year's Dance at the Bowling Alley Dance Hall beneath the Bonham Theater. Donna and Edwin Sprecher Jr. were married in 1944. 1949

Donna shared, "I tended bar as soon as I got married. About a year later his dad died and then I really had to work."

Donna's father, Carl Strmiska, along with his siblings George, Joe, Frank and Theresa, and their mother, came to America from Moravia, Czechoslovakia. According to Frank Strmiska they set sail from Holland were stopped at sea for some days while the Kaiser's men searched for his military pursuits. The Strmiskas' father, George, had already settled in America the year before and was working for Louis Racek on a farm on Golf Course Road. Two more brothers were born here, Floyd and John.

Donna's mother, Edna Volbrecht, is a native of Nebraska. Her siblings are Ervin, Laverna, Ruth, Herman, Merle, Melvin, Calvin, Harley and Loreita. Donna has one brother, Robert, in Madison.

Donna recalled, "Dad worked for Don Meiser up in Sumpter and then they moved to Nebraska for three years. I was born in Nebraska. Then, we came back to Wisconsin and worked for Chris E. Sprecher. Chris had a wild horse and he said to my dad, 'I bet you can't ride that horse.' He didn't know my dad used to break horses in Nebraska and dad got up on that horse and rode it right up on the porch. Then we worked for Jake Meyer. That's where the LaFollettes used to come out and see Rose and Jake on weekends. We lived right next door in that big house they called the Schoephorster house right by the creek.

"I went to Cedar Hill School where Hazel and Leroy Schneller live. Fern Tabor was my first teacher and she was married to Ike Hehenberger afterwards. They had that ice cream parlor in Prairie du Sac on Main Street. Then, we worked for Jerry Rischmueller. In 1940 we moved to Madison. Those were the days when the soldiers were at Truax and if anyone got caught shacking up they'd get their names in the paper for lewd and lascivious conduct. Madison is different today.

"Everyone who came to Leland when I first came is all gone. The old ones have died off and we get younger customers. The young people like to talk to someone. So, we have to listen, too, not just talk and entertain. They keep changing the age for liquor. The politicians can't make up their minds. They never ask us in the taverns what we want.

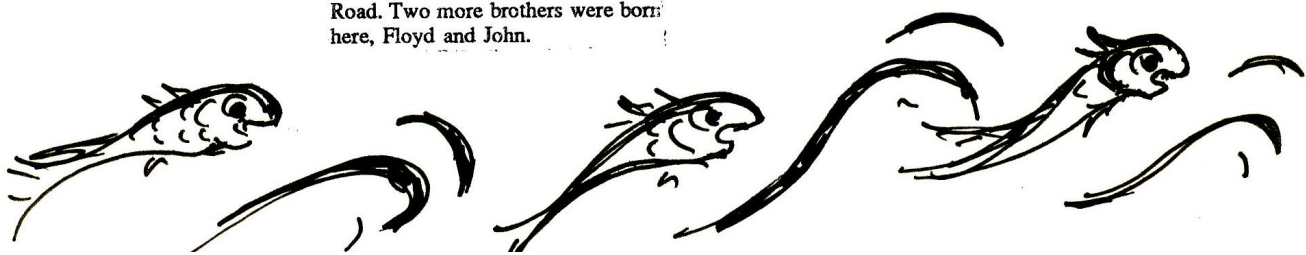
"Johnny Boettscheider was an early customer. He was a dwarf. They said he had a brother who was big and tall. He had a horse and buggy after everyone else had cars. The only place he ever went was here and to the store. Once a year he would go to Denzer to pay his taxes. We never had to worry about Johnny getting home because the horse always knew the way. Johnny lived on what is now called Orchard Road.

"August Derleth would come out. He and another guy came to go morel hunting. George Yanke and Violet Mueller Yanke lived here. They lived next to the church and he worked for the county.

Walter Doll Historical Tapes Leland... Edwin (Junior) and Donna Sprecher

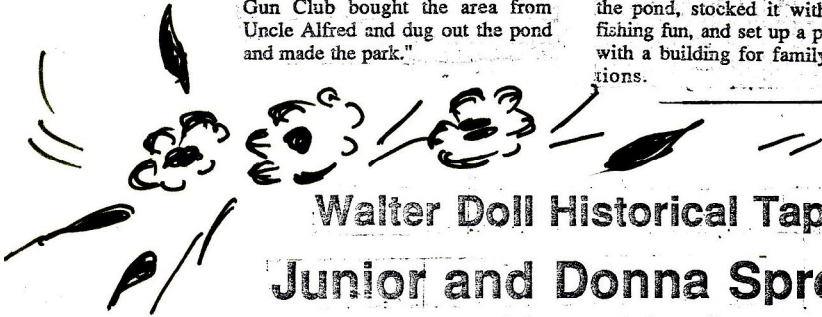
Thursday, May 23, 1991

SAUK PRAIRIE STAR



"When I first came here there was a big hole across the street where the pond is. It was just like a dike. There was a dam. And in this hole everyone dumped their old cans and garbage and when we'd get high waters it would float over on our yard and his Uncle Alfred's pasture. There was a mill. Alfred Giese ran the mill and then when Carl Mielke bought the mill and remodeled it, he put in a diesel. Then the Rod and Gun Club bought the area from Uncle Alfred and dug out the pond and made the park."

Jack Rosenbaum, who was the barber next to Mielke's Store, was a sports enthusiast. He aroused an interest in the people in the Leland and Denzer area in a Rod and Gun Club organization. With multitudes of hours of labor donated by inspired Denzer and Leland citizens and the leadership of Edwin Garske, president; Clarence Denzer, vice-president; and Jack Rosenbaum, secretary-treasurer, a sportsman's paradise was on its way to becoming a reality in 1954. They dredged the pond, stocked it with fish for fishing fun, and set up a picnic area with a building for family celebrations.



Walter Doll Historical Tapes Junior and Donna Sprecher on Leland

According to items collected by Florence Rischmueller, "Cyrus Leland came to the area around 1847, made a dam, started a grist mill and ran a saw mill for a time. The mill changed hands from Leland to Hamilton Gray to Henry Koenig and Michael Pagel to Fred Mallon and Simon to Tschumpert and son. It was then purchased by August Giese in 1889. It was owned for a short time by Ed and Elmer Yanke and then sold to Carl Mielke in 1955."

The mill is now closed. There are plans to reconstruct the dam.

Donna reviewed, "When we dredged the pond the last time the dirt had to be trucked away. The DNR has the say. There are lots of things that we used to do that we can't do now. Across the street from us was a tavern owned by Edwin Garske and Selma Buelow Garske, previously owned by Slim Bettinger. The Garskes had two daughters, Arletta Garske Wachter and Delores Garske Baier, both residing in the Sauk Prairie area."

The Garske girls learned how to tend bar at an early age. According to Delores a highlight was when a crew of ice cutters would come in winter. About ten to 15 men would cut ice from the pond and they would store it in sawdust in the barn for use during the year. Her mother would cook meals for the crew, regular old fashioned dinners with meat and potatoes and gravy. She

recalled, "It was like a refreshing crew. The guys had a good time. My folks were in the tavern business, Garske's Tavern, from 1936 to 1966, 30 years. Since we sold, the tavern has been run by Florian Grauvogl and Darlene Bender Grauvogl, Verlyn and Hazel Boettcher, and today is run by Skeeter and Debbie Pete." Petes offer Leland and the community a menu with a variety of tasty lunches. Dolores added, "Alfred Giese delivered milk every day. Gieses had cows and chickens and everyone bought milk and eggs from them."

Junior continued, "Uncle Alfred and Ewald Buelow had little farms. Uncle Alfred had five milk cows and two horses. Melvin Korb was a mechanic down the road (to the east). He could fix anything. His wife, Viola, is now in Maplewood and his only son, Kenneth, lives in Prairie du Sac. Further east, around the bend, was Mielke's store on the left side of the road. When I was a kid I used to like to go down there for ice cream cones."

Mielke's store had a spacious layout as country stores go. There was a cement porch extending across the front. The wooden building had a door and a screen door for summertime. There were windows on either side of the door with large Coca Cola® and Seven Up ads at the bottom of the windows. Two large windows to the right gave a

sparkling view of the dish department at night. There was a long, narrow trail between dry goods that led to the grocery department at the far end of the store. There were brooms, overalls, shoes, cloth material, straw hats, dresses, pots and pans, a general store. There was a long counter in front of the grocery department with caring Mielke clerks ready to fill the customers' grocery lists. In front of the counter was a line of wooden benches for people who waited, wanted to pass the time of day or share news. To the left of the counter was the entrance to the Mielke home, to the right a door opening to the garage and egg and produce business. Mielke's bought eggs from the local farmers. The egg payment was often exchanged for groceries. Lawrence Mielke and Henry Theis transported the eggs by truck to city areas. During hard times they had the frightening chill

of being hi-jacked on the way to Chicago.

Richard Mielke and Caroline Zimmerman Mielke had four children, Lawrence, Viola, Irene and LaVerne. The two family survivors are Lawrence, now living in Araboo, and Irene, now living in Janesville.

Irene spoke in behalf of the family. "Dad and his two brothers Vernon and Emil came from Germany. They later brought their father here and the family lived on a farm at Happy Hill near North Freedom. My mother also lived on Happy Hill. My father and mother were married and came to Leland."

"At first the Mielke's store was a tavern. When times got dry he opened a store. We were open until ten or 10:30 at night. There were a lot of 'bench stories.' We sold everything from nails to ice cream cones. We sold many a 5¢ ice cream cone. We had two gas pumps serviced by Hagen Oil Co. We had good times. We went with a bunch of friends from Ableman (Rock Springs) to the Park Dance Hall in Denzer."

The dance hall was located across the street from the Free Thinkers Hall east of Denzer. It was torn down in 1940 and now the land in the area is under plow.

Irene continued, "After dad died, mom had a big sale. Mom and I kept things up and took over the store and lived in the house."

Lawrence Mielke built a second store near the same location as the old store. This store was sold to Ernest and Margaret Mable in 1962. It was closed in 1972 and converted into the Mable home.

Edna Rischmueller Ziemke, now of Prairie du Sac, remembers the Mielke Store during her catechism days in the Leland Church, 1917-1918. According to Edna, during the prohibition days, Mielke's had a store upstairs and afterwards they opened the store downstairs. She also reminded that Emma Schroeder, from 'up on the ridge,' was a long time clerk at the store and lived with the Mielke's. Prior to the days of Richard Mielke in Leland, a man by the name of Koop ran a tavern and store. He went to Ableman and started a business there.

Bernice Yanke of Leland remembers Sunday morning, 'Bench talk' at the store. She recalled, "Parents would take their children to Sunday School at the church and go to the store for their morning social hour."

The present Leland Church stands in the midst of the pines on the eastern outskirts of town. According to Roy Mallon the first log parsonage was located on a hillside north of Leland in 1868. The first log church was built in 1869 and was located on the northwest corner of the present cemetery. The first minister was Pastor Wachtel from Germany. The present church was built by the Dresen Lumber Company from Prairie du Sac in 1898. The present pastor is Rev. Dan Odden.

Donna continued, "Mrs. Rau lived right across the street from Mielke's. Her husband and Junior's Uncle Alfred started a muskrat farm. They fenced off a place in the marsh. In spring the posts heaved out of the marsh and all of the muskrats go away. That was the end of the muskrat venture."

Leland holds two special claims to fame. The first is the late Kenyon Giese, an energetic young farmer, born and raised north of the Leland brick school on PF. Kenyon was a state assemblyman in Madison from 1970 to August of 1975.

The second is the Natural Bridge northeast of Leland on Highway C. The bridge was a part of the Richard Raddatz farm for many years. There was a simple trail from the highway through a meadow to the bridge which was in a natural setting in

the hills. It attracted local citizens and tourists as well as archaeologists.

According to Erna Raddatz Offerle Dieterle of Prairie du Sac, her grandfather, Carl Raddatz, came from Germany and her father, Richard, bought the Natural Bridge farm. Busloads of different university students would come to observe and study. Erna and her husband Edgar Offerle farmed the land until his death in 1960. A few years later it was sold to John Carr and Leland Wishop. They later sold it to the state for preservation and protection. The farm buildings are gone except for a log building, which was used for a granary and a little stone building which was originally a smokehouse. The reminiscences of Leland came to a close back at the friendly tavern with Donna and Junior.

Junior reviewed, "Changes have taken place through the years. During the Depression there were lots of fights. Nobody had anything to look forward to. So, people would take out their frustrations fighting."

"Donna remembered, "It was the same in other places. I remember when we were little kids and went to Fish Lake. Everyone would go outside and make a big circle around the fighters and they'd duke it out. This one guy threw a punch and the other guy ducked and it hit my Aunt Mabel right on the jaw and knocked her cold."

Junior added, "I found that as the economy got better people began to get away from that kind of attitude. I try to let people know that if they cause trouble they aren't as welcome. Now, it's as simple here as running a grocery store. Transportation has changed, too. At first there were cars and a few horses and buggies. Then there were cars and now there are mostly pickups. We closed the dance hall about ten years ago."

Donna added, "The last dances we had were my folk's 50th wedding anniversary and Harvey Gieck's 35th."

Junior expressed, "My hobby is guns. We sell guns. We are right out in the middle of the hunting business. The bar is a center for local people, deer hunters and turkey hunters. People come in from Milwaukee and Illinois. A lot of Illinois people own land here."

Junior is an expert at turkey

calls, as he demonstrated, "Yaip, yalp, yalp----duck duck duck---prrrrrrrrrrrrt." Donna added, "The turkeys come to you instead of you having to go and find them. When Junior and all of those guys practice their turkey calls with diaphragms it about drives people nuts."

Family has been an important part of the Sprecher's life. Donna shared, "We have three children, Ann (Mrs. Ron Wiatrok), Baraboo, the oldest. She has four children, one son and three daughters. Amy is a personnel manager at Amoca in Atlanta. And, Mark is a chiropractor in Stevens Point. He's getting married in August in the Leland Park."

As the tape wound into 'Auf Wiedersehen' time, Junior concluded, "Are we happy to be in Leland? We certainly are."

