

## **My Festina Roots & Recollections**

**by Alma (Hageman) Meyer**

Recent church bulletins have been seeking recollections of Festina to commemorate the upcoming 175th Anniversary so In honor of my father and grandparents, I felt compelled to respond to this opportunity.

My dad, Ignatius Hageman, was born in 1905, the youngest son of Frederick & Catherine (Wenthold) Hageman, who were lifelong members of Our Lady of Seven Dolors Parish. I recall knowing that my dad would walk to attend the Festina grade school from the family farm located off of the Old Military Trail (now US Highway 24) near Fort Atkinson and accessed by the present day Lake Meyer Road. He truly “walked five miles one way to school” across fields sometimes meeting with other Hageman relatives and neighbors at the power plant, near present day Sandy Holthaus’ farm adjacent to Highway 150. Adult travel at that time was predominantly done by horse, buggy and sleigh.

When it was too difficult to walk to school due to weather, Ignatius would spend the winter months at the large Festina convent, operated by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. It was common that some of the residents in Festina or the FSPA Sisters would board many of the rural school children at the convent upstairs during the school week. Ignatius completed six years of school which wasn’t an uncommon practice for the education of males at that time. Later years, our family would dine at the former convent when it was converted to a private residence and public restaurant known as The Lariat.

My family has always had a deep respect for the clergy, religious, and for the fortunate upbringing in the Catholic Faith. On my maternal side of the family, there were the two Boeding priests, and my maternal aunt, Sister Frances (Ludovica) Kuennen, served as a religious in the FSPA Order, serving most of her years as a nun at the motherhouse or at the St. Joseph’s Villa, LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

My parents were married in 1928 and they recalled seeing from their farm when the wooden St. Aloysius Church in Calmar burned during renovation that year, 90 years ago. They joined St. Al parish when the new brick church was being built. (The Calmar parish is celebrating their church’s milestone this year)

I never knew my dad’s parents because grandpa had died in 1937 and my grandma died in 1946 but I did know where they had built there house in Festina, (Pete & I considered moving there our first years of marriage). I always also knew where my paternal grandparents were buried. Their monument location was near the Lourdes Grotto in the NW corner of the Festina cemetery.

Predominantly all my relatives were either from the Festina, Fort Atkinson area or nearby St. Lucas parish, where my mom, Elizabeth A. Kuennen was raised on a farm, south of St. Lucas. This area had many descendants from Germany. My parents frequently spoke the German language at home but changed to English when my oldest brother started school, and were advised not to speak German in public after

World War I.

My other fond recollection was my dear Aunt Mary Buchheit, dad's oldest sister, widow of Dominic Buchheit, who lived directly west of Festina. She would stay over at our home several times a year and have baking days - making all kinds of baked goods for my parents and eight siblings. I was the youngest so have limited specific recollections.

Over the years, I have attended many joyful events at the Festina parish - weddings, ballgames, March fish fries, Catholic Order of Foresters breakfasts, Celebration of Hope fundraisers for CFS Schools, and for many years the annual Fall Parish Festival Dinner traditionally held in early September. Festina Parish was always known for its excellent food, especially their good potato salad, egg brewed coffee and some unique food offerings such as turtle soup or veal, plus family fun activities of country store, bingo, paddle wheel, fish pond, cake walk, etc.

I've also attended some sad Festina funerals of young persons, students, accident victims, relatives and friends. When my high school best friend's mom died, Rosemary Bockman, her loss as a young mom left quite an impact on her family, me and the community.

I do recall signing up members for the Calmar American Legion Auxiliary in the Festina community, and working with Bud Rothmeyer and Merle Thuente on establishing the Avenue of Flags for the church cemetery. The Festina Parish women have always been gracious hosts to occasional Deanery and ACCW (Dubuque Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women) retreat and meetings.

Our three children attended their primary years at the consolidated CFS Catholic School at the Festina Center, and fondly remember the first communion students leading the living rosary at church in May. We attended many 4-H meetings at the St. Mary's school basement. Both of our daughters had their wedding receptions at the current parish events center. In the past decade or so, the Festina's Fourth of July parade continues to expand and has become a new community tradition.

I've always been amazed how the community has bonded and supported one another as one big family. As your former school district nurse, Depot Board Rep, and Pete as long time Fire Chief, we respected, supported and have cared a lot for the residents in the Festina community.

Congratulations on your heritage and 175 years of faith and my wish for many more blessed years.

~Alma (Hageman) Meyer of Calmar/Marion, IA