

LEO ADELBERT BAUER

Good afternoon, everyone! Lovely day, isn't it? I am Leo Adalbert Bauer. I was born in LeRoy, Wisconsin on April 23, 1893. My father was Joseph Bauer. I was the 2nd son of my father's second wife, Mary Sonnentag. My mother's first son was Leo Edmund, but he lived less than a year, and in the German tradition, I too was named Leo.

When I was born, I already had 3 siblings -- 2 brothers and one sister -- from my father's first marriage to Elizabeth Hinkes. My mother had a total of 11 children, including Leo who died in infancy and Gilbert who died at the age of five. So my father had 14 children overall, of whom 12 lived long lives -- most of them living into their 80's. While my relatives were all successful people with small businesses and farms and even elective office, I only know of one really famous person in the family. My half sister Rose's great granddaughter is Gillian Anderson, the TV and movie star well known for playing Scully in the "X Files."

As is true of most of our ancestors, my grandfather **Franz Bauer** was an immigrant. He came to Wisconsin from Bavaria in 1851. He got a tract of 40 acres which he cleared of timber. He later sold that to his brother and bought a 109 acre farm. And when my father got married in 1883, Franz bought him a 120 acre farm. My father Joseph learned a lot from his father about hard work and how to be successful. Pa farmed, but always seemed to have an eye for how to do the work more easily and more profitably. He was the second farmer in the town to buy a self propelled steam engine with a circle saw. With that he sawed wood in the neighboring area. He had a threshing machine, the first one you had to feed by hand (see the photo on the display over there), also a corn husker and after silos became popular, he also got a silo filler. He and a neighbor Louis Wild in 1909 built the first two concrete silos in town. To support his family of 12, he needed to keep a hand in a variety of enterprises and he passed that down to us kids in the form of entrepreneurial skills.

I graduated from 8th grade in 1907 from St. Andrew's Catholic School in LeRoy. That was the extent of my formal education. Was a pretty good student too. Still

have a social studies test from 8th grade that I got a 92% on. LeRoy was a German community and German was the spoken word, so we also learned German. I was still reading a German language newspaper from Milwaukee into the 1950's.

Now I understand that some of you are wondering how someone raised in LeRoy Wisconsin ended up in Westphalia, Michigan. Well, my oldest brother Alfred took a cheese and butter making course at the University in Madison, worked at a cheese factory close to home, and then moved to Westphalia where he bought the creamery. Now there's a story. He and Lorenz Thelen bought the creamery business on what is now Heyer Street. He bought it from Anthony P. Arens for \$4,750 in December 1910. Mr. Arens agreed to not engage in a competing creamery business. But by early 1912 he had built another plant and was competing with my brother. So Alfred took him to court, and the court ordered Mr. Arens to refrain from operating a creamery within a 5-mile radius of Westphalia. Well, Mr. Arens now had a plant that he couldn't use. And soon the possibility of starting a cooperative creamery began floating through Westphalia. By 1914 a co-op creamery agreement had been signed, and by 1915 Mr. Arens had sold his plant to the co-op.

In 1913, I joined Alfred here in Westphalia to help him with the creamery business, eventually serving as the creamery manager. We continued in business until about 1920, but in 1914, seeing the handwriting on the wall, Alfred and I started a business as cement contractors and silo builders, specifically "Bauer Brothers, Contractors and Builders of Circular Cement Silos." The silos would be circular because previous experience with square ones was that silage rotted in the corners. And cement silos because wood silos had gained a reputation for bursting in the middle because of the pressure from the silage. Now, Alfred and I knew something about silo building since Pa and a neighbor had built the first two concrete silos in LeRoy in 1909.

Our timing was good. Shortly before this, concrete silos had begun being touted as a necessity for the progressive farmer, especially dairy farmers. But very few silos had been built yet. So we ordered the forms needed to build silos on August 3, 1914 and by the middle of the month, we were building our first silo for

Ferdinand Martin on Hanes Road. The next year we built ten more: for Rob Hicks, Charles Halsey, and P. Barnkart of St. Johns; for Ignatz Koenigsknecht, and Joseph Schneider of Fowler; and Mrs. Sturgis and R. Chaffee of Ovid. Over the years, we built as many as 30 silos a year, sometimes using two crews, going as far afield as Mt. Pleasant, Eaton Rapids, Mulliken, and Owosso. My last silo was built for Leon Spitzley in July of 1975. I was in the silo business over 60 years. That's a lot of silos. -

In the beginning, Alfred and I did most of the work, and for two years, my brother Albin came to help. He was great with mechanical equipment such as the old truck we used to run the cement mixer (see photo on display board). But after Alfred moved to Portland to establish his threshing business and later the Bauer Lumber Company, I hired locals to help. In 1926, that included Joseph Fox, Sylvester Fernholz, Victor Cook, and Ralph Bohr. They earned 30 cents per hour. Sounds awfully low, but was close to the Michigan average for farm labor at the time. But it also meant that a silo cost only \$300 to \$500. As they came of age, my sons Gerald, Jerome and Jimmy became members of the crew. Over the years, others who worked for me included Steve Spitzley, Gerald Thelen, Hilary Platte, Jerry Platte, Leroy Spitzley, Robert Spitzley, Delbert Spitzley, Larry Spitzley, Larry Platte, and Steve Felpausch, among others. By 1965, the pay was \$2 an hour, and the cost of a silo was \$1800 to \$3000 depending on its height and width. The earliest silos were 24 to 36 feet tall, but at the end, 64 feet wasn't unusual. In 1975, I billed \$7700 for a 64 footer. The display back here shows photos of a lot of the silos I built. My son Gerald spent a lot of time helping with the silo business and in his later years, his nieces and nephews would take him for drives hunting down some of those silos and taking photos of them.

In addition to silos, we also built water towers and stock tanks. One of the more unusual items we built was the fish pond here in the cemetery. We used the form that we usually used for the roof on a silo as the form for the bottom of the pond. The pond's been refurbished in recent years and really looks great. No fish though.

The creamery business and the silo business gave me a living. In my personal life, I occasionally visited back home in Wisconsin. On one occasion there in 1917, I ended up in the hospital. My wife saved one of the letters I sent her from there. This was while we were sweethearts before we were married. In this day of high health care costs, I am amused by what I wrote. I told her "My hospital bill - for 12 days in the hospital - was \$42.75, had a private room which was \$18, \$8 for the operating room, and \$2.25 for the couch where my nurses slept on. Mother was there the first four nights and Marie [my sister] was there 5 nights and \$.75 for medicine." I guess there's been some inflation in health care costs over the years.

I was a one-week wonder with the army. Got the letter saying I was going to be a soldier beginning at 5 p.m. on March 28, 1918. Got sent to Fort Custer. After severe foot and back pain, the docs said that I suffered from "hallux rigidis" which is essentially arthritis of the big toe: I wouldn't make a good soldier because I couldn't march. The war was almost over and I wouldn't have served for long, but I'm still glad my career ended there because of the flu epidemic that killed so many soldiers that year.

In those early days I lived with my brother Alfred and his family on Westphalia Street on the edge of town. That's how I met my sweetheart Rose Schafer. Alfred's house was right across the street from her. She lived with her Mom, brother Adam, and several sisters on the land that her father, John H. Schafer, had bought. Her dad died in 1907 and the estate was still open while his youngest children grew up. Rose and I married January 28, 1919. Like his father had done for him, my pa bought the Schafer farm for me - at a cost of \$12,646.67 - with a mortgage for me, of course. Now, in addition to being a creamery manager and a cement contractor, I was a farmer with about 93 acres.

And I soon had a family to support. My oldest, Gerald, was born in December of that year. He remained a bachelor all his life. He was followed by Rosemary who married Norm Thelen from Fowler; they moved to Lansing. Next came Alice who married Leo Fox of Westphalia; they also moved to Lansing. Next came Jerome who married Marlene Spitzley of Westphalia. He took over the farm on the edge of town when I was ready to retire. He also bought the farm on Lehman Road

that I had purchased in 1944, now owned by my grandson Stan. Next came my son James who fought and was injured in the Korean War. He too remained a bachelor. Last was my daughter Connie who married Jerome Schafer of Westphalia. I now have 15 grandchildren, 30 great grandchildren, and 19 great great grandchildren. I enjoyed my grandchildren and I think they enjoyed me. I often kept a lot of change on my dresser. I'd see Cindy, Sheri and Joni playing and I'd tell them they could go get "just one quarter" for the three of them and they would take it to town to buy a few pieces of candy for each of them. Whenever I saw grandchildren around, I would invite them to join me: "Wanna come with me to the barn...to the other farm...to the cattle auction...to the silo building site," and sometimes they would join me and sometimes not. It wasn't uncommon back then for children to be seen and not heard, but that didn't work for me. The kids would often join me and learn a lot about farming, silos, and hard work. And I enjoyed their company.

All of my children except Connie are gone now. Rosemary, Gerald, and Jimmy are buried right here, near my wife, and Jerome is over there. Alice died a couple months back and is buried at Deepdale in Lansing. I had a good and long life. Heck, I was still climbing silos when I was 80. I enjoyed my work. I got to work with my sons. My daughters helped take care of me when I needed it. And I got to spend time with my grandchildren. I wish all of you a life as good and interesting as mine.