

My name is Herman Joseph Geller. My wife, Estelle, and I spent our lives living, working, and raising our four children (Beth, Gene, Ruth, and Irene) in Westphalia, Michigan, a village which we loved.

I was born in Fowler, Michigan on October 1, 1906 to Nicholas and Anna (Fandel) Geller. My great grandfather, John J. Geller, came to Westphalia in 1854 from Ahrweiler, Germany. My father was a partner in the creamery in Fowler when I was born.

My family moved to Carson City in 1912, where my father went into the hardware business. I graduated from Carson City St. Mary High School in 1925 and intended to go into my father's hardware business. However, the sudden death of my father in 1928 set me on a new occupational path.

Funeral Director

In 1929, I decided to become a Funeral Director and hitchhiked to Ionia to become an apprentice. I received my Embalmers Apprentice certificate in 1929. At that time apprentices were not paid a salary. I worked in a shoe store for \$5.00 week, less \$3.00 for lodging.. After working and perfecting my craft at the Bradley Funeral Home in Ionia, I transferred to the Palmer O'Donnell Funeral Home in Lansing, where I was paid \$10.00 a week, plus a room.



In 1933, the Board of the Westphalia Bank approached me to serve the people in the Westphalia area. The prior funeral director, John Gross, had died and the town was looking for a replacement. The Board arranged financial backing for me to establish my business in Westphalia. I agreed and my mother and I moved to Westphalia. I purchased the Gross Cabinet Shop building (now the Trierweiler Insurance Agency). After months of renovation, mostly done on my own, I began a career which was to span forty years. I received my permanent Embalmers License in August of 1934. In 1935 I married Estelle Trierweiler and we spent the next 37 years serving the residents of Westphalia, Pewamo, and the surrounding communities.

As my business became more established, I purchased my first hearse in 1935 to better serve the people. At that time, the local custom was to return the body of the deceased to the family home. There, mourning, visitation, and praying the rosary could be held. While my hearse could be used for this, it might be interesting to note that it ended up serving a double purpose....with it, I was also able to provide a much needed ambulance service for the area. Talk about getting more bang for your buck.

In 1950, we built a new home. This home could accommodate the large crowds at visitation time, so it did not take long for all families to start having visitations at the Geller Funeral home, instead having them at home.

In 1972, I sold my business to Keith Neller of the Neller Funeral Home in Portland. For the first time in over 40 years, Estelle and I had our own home.

During my time in Westphalia, I buried over 900 of my friends and fellow parishioners.

Other Pursuits

To augment my income, I became a Gibson appliance dealer in 1945. However, since the industry was just ramping up after World War II, and there was a materials shortage and I did not take actual delivery of an appliance until 1946. Over the next 20 years I sold stoves, refrigerators, and freezers to many area families.

I also coached the St. Mary High School boys' basketball teams from 1948 to 1954. I campaigned continuously during that time for a new gymnasium with a larger playing floor, but my dream never came to be. In order to prepare my teams for tournaments, I made arrangements with several Lansing coaches to practice against their teams on their larger courts. The highlight of my coaching career was when we won the Class D District title in 1953.

When the village and St. Mary's Parish were planning the 125th celebration in 1961, I collected and organized an antique display. Some of the antiques were objects which had been brought from Germany by the original settlers. This project ignited my passion for antiques that I pursued for the rest of my life. I filled my basement with these antiques, and one of my greatest pleasures was to show people my collection when they stopped into the house.

I was always involved in the town of Westphalia and in St. Mary's parish. I took the lead in designing and building the parish baseball field. I was active

in the construction of the city's new water system. I was also a representative for the consolidation of the Westphalia and Pewamo schools. I was one of the first Eucharistic Ministers at St. Mary's and a lifelong member of the K of C and Saint Joseph Society.

In 1947, I built a hunting cabin near Waters, Michigan. This was my getaway place for many years. I hunted there with my son and many of my close friends for the next 30 years. Over the years, I took many people, especially my basketball players, to this cabin to enjoy the outdoors.

While dignity and respect were my professional watchwords, I did have a good sense of humor. I was known to invite someone to "hop in" for a short ride and end up at the cabin, Mackinac Bridge or even Canada. I was also known for standing in the middle of the street in Lansing and just looking up into the air. It did not take long for people to stop and look up also. Then I would just walk away leaving them trying to determine what I was looking at.

Estelle and I enjoyed traveling and retirement made that possible. Besides visiting our children, Beth in Detroit, Gene in Texas, Ruth in Dewitt and Penny in Fowler, we went to Europe several times, Canada and Alaska. Retirement also gave me unlimited time to collect and enjoy my antiques.

I died on December 27, 1990 and I am buried here in the in St. Mary's Cemetery.