

Reminiscences of Charles Jules Michelet, Jr. (1891-1980)

Early Wilmette

After finishing the grade school in Wilmette, the Central School, I went to New Trier High School. I graduated from the Evanston Academy of Northwestern University. Since my father was a graduate of Northwestern in the class of 1880, I decided to go to Northwestern. I was pledged and initiated into the Sigma Chi Fraternity. My sister Gertrude was two years ahead of me at Northwestern and she was initiated into the Delta Gamma Sorority. My first job after college was with International Harvester Company. Also, I had engineering positions with Peoples Gas Light & Coke and Sears. Later, I had my own company, Fuel Engineers, Inc. Of course, the First World War interrupted my career. At the close of the First World War I was in the Aviation Text Writing Unit at Columbia University for the Navy.

I am a charter member and past Commander of Wilmette Post #46 and have belonged to the Post 54 years¹. I am a member of the Half Century Club of Northwestern University. In 1937 I was married at St. Marks Church, Evanston, to Faye Fullerton. We have one daughter, Michelle Michelet Boyer, and two grandchildren, Amy Boyer, age ten and little Michael, now five years old. As a retired Naval Officer, I am a member of the Naval Militia Officers Mess in Chicago and the Glenview Naval Air Station Officers Club. I am also a member of Illinois Society the Sons of the American Revolution through my mother's family, the Warders of early Virginia. Through my father's lineage I am a member of the Huguenot Society with 15 generations of provided births, marriages and deaths. My last position was with Acme Steel Company, now Interlake, from which I was retired in 1955.

On my first day at kindergarten in 1895, my mother walked with me along the high wooden sidewalks that were built high because of the wet weather. The sewers that did exist had no drain manholes at the four corners of the streets. My kindergarten teacher was Miss Clare Ueke. The principal was Mr. A.E. Logge and the janitor was Tonie Iden. That first day at Kindergarten I was a little frightened but got along alright. The second day I walked in with my older sister and my cousins Edith and Lillian Michelet daughters of Dr. W.E.J. Michelet who lived next door. The girls had made a path diagonally across the three square blocks through the woods from our house on Sheridan Road between Forest and Elmwood and on to the corners of the Butz and Flentye houses at 8th and Lake Avenue².

When I was a very small boy just able to remember parts of my parents' conversations, I recall my father telling my mother at the breakfast table about the talk on the station platform. Some of it was on general conditions which we now call "The

¹ Wilmette Post #46 was the local post for the American Legion.

² Walter and Alvin Butz lived at the corner of 8th St. and Lake Ave. house no. 802 (1898 directory); H.L. Flentye lived at the south east corner of 8th St. and Lake Ave shortly after (1903 directory)

Economy.” One man who was building a new house (and it is still considered a beautiful house) said, “I don’t know about how much you doctors and lawyers make, but I am a printer and I manage to knock out ten dollars a day.” Another man who was a doctor and wore beautifully tailored suits with large slanting pockets in front had a habit of jingling the silver dollars in his pockets and when a comment was made about the jingling sound the doctor said, “Oh, my patients pay for their office calls with a silver dollar.”

There were only two early grocery stores; Max E. Mueller and Frank Smith³. Later on there was King and Schultz on the east side of the tracks. In what was known as Gross Point at that time, there was Klinge & White.⁴ These stores had a team of horses and an express wagon which was driven down to South Water Street in the early morning before dawn to pick up supplies of fresh vegetables, fruits and staples to assure their customers of the best choice. Due to lack of telephones, it was customary for the store’s most pleasant clerk to take a delivery horse and wagon and drive around to their best customers and tell the “Mrs.” About the very fine vegetables and produce they had to sell. Very few were able to drive to the store to shop. Some families had what we called a hired man, and others had a coachman which we termed then “the carriage trade.” There, of course, was a butcher shop, one that I will call by name was Vollmans,⁵ but these shops changed from time to time. King & Schultz⁶ had a butcher shop in their grocery store. The building on the north east corner of Central and 12th street is still standing. The drug store was Sexauers⁷ and it was very much the same type as the West Side Drug Store was until recently. It has been changed to another store. The same building still stands which has only been resurfaced. It is across the street to the south of the old building now called the Cross Roads Restaurant. This was from the very earliest day, the Max E. Millers [sic] Grocery. The Frank Smith Grocery Store was torn down to make way for the Ford Co. addition to the old original Foster’s Garage.⁸ One other store I must mention was Henry McDaniel’s for newspapers, cigars, candy and school supplies. Its original location was just north of the Ford Co. used car lot. The first Post Office that I recall was located on the north part of where the Ford Co. original Foster Garage building now stands. Jennie Shantz was the first postal clerk. Oh, yes, Peter Borre had one of the earliest butcher shops in Gross Point. His first small store still stands where eggs are now

³ The Frank Smith Grocery (originally built and run by W. H. Kinney) stood at what was later 607 Green Bay Road, directly across from the 1873 depot, which then stood on the west side of the tracks. Max E. Mueller opened a general store on the northwest corner of Wilmette and West Railroad Avenue (later Green Bay Road) in 1888; the building still stands (2014).

⁴ The Klinge & White Grocery was located at 821 Ridge Rd.; the building still stands today, and traces of white paint spelling out the grocery’s name can still be seen near the roofline.

⁵ Vollmans Butcher Shop

⁶ The King & Schultz Grocery stood at the corner of Central Ave. and 12th Street (ad. In 1903 directory).

⁷ The Wilmette Pharmacy at the southwest corner of Wilmette Avenue and what would become Green Bay Road, in a building (still extant and numbered 1209 Wilmette Ave.) built by developer Charles Brethold, was first owned by druggist Samuel Sexauer. H. K. Snider was proprietor from 1903 to 1909. Snider later went into business with Ernest Cazel in the Cox Building on the southeast corner of Wilmette Ave. and Central Ave.

⁸ The old building that had housed William Kinney’s and Frank Smith’s store was not torn down when that block was cleared for Wil-Shore Ford in late 1953, but was instead moved to Evanston, where it still stands at 2120 Emerson. We are indebted to the researches of Michael Kelly of Evanston for this information.

sold.⁹ I believe that some of the Borres still run the freezer lockers in the old Borre building.

In very early Wilmette, the village had a volunteer Fire Department, and the first piece of equipment was a small hose cart pulled to the fire by volunteer firemen. I may say that many of the calls were for vacant lot fires. Later, the village arranged to pay the first horse and buggy, or horse wagon, to reach the fire station to pull the hose cart. Many grocery wagons and other horse-drawn vehicles arrived at about the same time. However, I recall that Clow, the plumber, was most often the first to arrive. But it was not too pleasant to see that he whipped or coaxed his horse to a gallop with the plumbing buggy which had a box of tools on the back and pulling the hose cart.

In the early days of the North Shore, many people purchased both groceries and other items at the Chicago stores of Siegel & Cooper, the Fair, the Boston Store, A.M. Rothschild and Hillmans. These stores appreciated the suburb business so much that they delivered all orders the next day to their customers on the North Shore at no extra cost. I will include this service to Glencoe and Highland Park. These orders were handled by the delivery companies who picked orders at the store and in their large wagons drove along the street car tracks in winter which were swept clean of snow by the street car rotary sweepers. At the north limits of the city there were barns where the merchandise was reloaded into horse-drawn sleighs. I recall that when the deliveries were made to my house as a small boy I would talk nicely to the driver and he would let me ride standing on the runners of the sleigh as he made the deliveries up north. When the load was diminished the driver allowed me to get into the sleigh and on exceptionally cold days I would cover up with a blanket until on his way home to the barns, the driver would let me out at my house.

The only real farm in the Wilmette area was the large Mahoney farm. It had dairy cows, horses and barns, hay stacks, and a nice farm house. The Mahoneys raised the standard farm crops—corn, wheat, oats. The Mahoney Farm extended north of 10th Street along the lake into what is now Kenilworth, and back almost to Chestnut Avenue in Wilmette.¹⁰ There were numerous truck farms in the west part of what is now Wilmette. All kinds of vegetables were for sale at these truck farms.

When I was a freshman in Engineering at Northwestern University, I worked during the summer of 1910 for George and Norton Foster. The Fosters had bought the Penniman¹¹ house which I have described as the only house in the early days of the Inverness Subdivision of Wilmette. The Foster boys had secured the Hudson Automobile Agency and they wished to build a garage opposite the Northwestern Railroad Station. I suggested a building having lattice wood construction for the roof beams with no post at

⁹ Peter Borre's butcher shop was located at 336 Ridge Rd. Fred and Dorothy Phlaum ran Phlaum Quality Eggs and Butter for many years at the same location; the building was torn down to create a strip mall in 1982.

¹⁰ Part of the old Mahoney Farm is now a park in Kenilworth on Sheridan Road. Daniel and Bridget Mahoney are buried at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Wilmette.

¹¹ 803 Michigan Ave.

all supporting the roof. The President of the bank, S.A. Wheelock and Mr. Sykes¹² were reluctant to give the Fosters a mortgage for the new garage, saying, "How do we know that this automobile business may be only a flash in the pan?" However, the garage was built and the automobile business prospered.¹³

Dr. Chapin and Max Dusham were considered the strongest swimmers at the Lake Beach when the Lady Elgin broke up off Wilmette Beach before 1900.¹⁴ Dr. Chapin and Max Dusham saved many people who floated in toward shore on parts of the ship. People floating in on boards were safe until they reached the breakers near the shore. Then if they did not get help or if they could not swim, they drowned. Dr. Chapin was so conscientious in feeling that if he did not try to help those who needed it, they would drown. He continued until he overdid himself and ruined his health. He retired from practice and moved to California.

At some time, when the park was established across from the Wilmette Country Club which later was the Shawnee Club and now Michigan Shores, some organization gave to Wilmette an old brass cannon on two large wheels. This was set up not far from the edge of the lake bank pointing out to the lake. Either purposely or maliciously, somebody drove a spike nail into the fuse hole at the breach back of the cannon. A boy in Wilmette who is now dead and two others with whom I played, got the idea of drilling out the plug in the fuse hole of the cannon and loading it with black powder and newspaper rammed into the muzzle of the cannon. I assisted with the tools to drill out the fuse hole. The others in some way secured a fuse and as I recall it was almost 50 feet in length and one of the other boys arranged for the powder and newspaper ramming so that when it did explode it would make a noise. This was arranged for a 4th of July celebration which was a secret to everyone except those I have mentioned, all now deceased. Strange to relate, with the little knowledge the boys had about ordinance, the loading and fusing was very successful and the noise it produced was most satisfactory to everyone who heard it.

As I recall the North Shore along Lake Michigan at my very early remembrance, there was a house and barn which still stands today at the head of Hill Street, now renamed Maple Avenue, and Sheridan Road. The house I am referring to is on the northwest corner, the next house was the Teufel mansion owned by Mr. Teufel, owner of the Jewelry store, Teufel & Kirchberg at State & Washington in Chicago¹⁵. The Teufel Mansion was on the lake side of Sheridan Road opposite the present Baha'i Temple. In comparatively recent years the mansion has been torn down. From there onto Lake Avenue was what was called Inverness Subdivision. It was mostly prairie land and was used for custom hay farming. There was only one house in Inverness known as the Penniman house on the northwest corner of Washington Street and Michigan Avenue. This house was torn down many years ago. North of Lake Avenue between Forest

¹² S.A. Wheelock lived at 822 Central Avenue, L.P. Sykes lived at 825 Lake Ave. (1903 directory)

¹³ The Foster Garage was at 611 W. Railroad Ave. (now Green Bay Road).

¹⁴ The Lady Elgin sinking, the worst open-water disaster in the history of the Great Lakes, occurred on September 8, 1860.

¹⁵ The Teufel Mansion stood at 512 Sheridan Road, the first house north of Bryan Avenue.

Avenue and North Avenue, now Elmwood Avenue, there were only two houses—the house of Dr. W.E.J. Michelet¹⁶, my uncle, and my house, the home of my father Charles Jules Michelet, Sr., a lawyer.¹⁷ North of the Wilmette reservation line which extended on the center line of North Avenue of Elmwood and from Sheridan Road on to the lake was known as Wilson’s addition to Wilmette. Wilson’s Addition extended up to Chestnut Avenue. From there on to Mahoney’s farm or to the beginning of Kenilworth, the area was called Gages Woods. There were only two houses along the lake bank just north of Elmwood Avenue, the Max Dusham house and a small one further north where Michigan enters Sheridan Road, known as the old man Dusham house. Just north of Chestnut Avenue on Sheridan Road was the pressed brick mansion of the Henry Gage family¹⁸. This house was on the west side of Sheridan road. The only houses from the early days still standing are the two Michelet houses and the one at the head of Maple Avenue. The Dr. W.E.J. Michelet house has been owned by John Bell for 20 years. The Charles Jules Michelet, Sr. house has been the home for four generations of the same family.

In addition to the early houses on the lake shore there were those nearer the village; the Horace and Edwin Drury¹⁹, the Panushka house²⁰, Tommy Brooks²¹, Cramers²², Shantz²³, Doig²⁴, John Page²⁵, Louis Pierson²⁶; also there was the house at 820 Lake Avenue where my uncle, Dr. W.E.J. Michelet lived before he moved and established the house south of our house. The Dr. Chapin house on Lake Avenue in the ten hundred block, across from what was the Methodist Parsonage, was also one of the early Wilmette houses. It seems most important to add the Dr. Byron Stolp house.²⁷ Dr. Stolp was Wilmette’s early doctor and with the help of Mrs. Belknap, delivered “yours truly.”²⁸ These houses I have mentioned were on the east side of the tracks and all are still standing. In the early 1900s there were so many new houses built they would be too numerous to mention.

Very few people now living in Wilmette realize that not too many years ago the lake washed up to the bank just east of Michigan Avenue and south of Lake Avenue and around what is now Bahai Temple. In other words, there was no Gilson Park. There was no land at all from Michigan Avenue to the present lake banks. When the Sanitary District Canal was dug the earth was carried by narrow gauge small railroad dump cars pulled by a small steam engine and dumped into the lake to make the land for the park.

¹⁶ Dr. W.E.J Michelet lived at 1016 Sheridan Rd.

¹⁷ Charles Jules Michelet lived at 1028 Sheridan Rd.

²⁵ The Henry H. Gage House stood on the northwest corner of Sheridan Rd. and Chestnut Ave.

²⁶ Edwin Drury lived at 1128 Greenwood Ave.; Horace Drury lived at 622 Central Ave.

²⁷ William Panushka lived on the southeast corner of Forest Ave. and 11th St. (1898 directory).

²⁸ Tommy Brooks’ house stood on the north side of Forest Ave. in the second house east of 10th St. (1903 directory)

²⁹ Howard Cramer’s House was addressed 913 Forest Avenue. (1903 directory)

³⁰ Joseph Shantz lived on 229 Wood Ct. (1903 directory)

³¹ John P. Doig’s House stood on the northwest corner of Greenleaf Ave. and 11th St. (1903 directory)

³² John Page House?

³³ Louis Pierson’s House stood at 810 Lake Ave. (1904 directory)

³⁶ Dr. Byron Stolp’s House stood on the southwest corner of Forest Ave. and 13th St. (1903 directory)

²⁸ This may well refer to Lucy T. Belknap (b.?-1905), wife of John Belknap and mother-in-law of murderer H. H. Holmes. The Belknaps moved to Wilmette in about 1888.

Then later when the eight foot relief sewer was dug in Sheridan Road from Winnetka to the drainage canal, the earth was taken by narrow gauge cars to what is now Gilson Park. One would hardly believe that such a beautiful park could have been developed in comparatively few years and by this ingenious method.

In the very early days of Wilmette the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad did not stop at Wilmette but did stop at Winnetka. My father, Charles Jules Michelet, Sr., and my uncle, Dr. William E.J. Michelet loved to tell the story about Henry McDaniel and Frank Westerfield. McDaniel and Westerfield²⁹ were coming back from Chicago where they had bought a sack of flour. They didn't want to have to carry the sack of flour back to Wilmette from Winnetka, so Henry got down on the lowest step of the last car and when the train slowed down a little for the Wilmette crossing, Henry McDaniel dropped it off close to the ground. Frank Westerfield said to Henry, "How is it?" Henry shook his head and said, "I don't know Frank, she's a dustin'."

C. J. Michelet, Jr., 1977

Our thanks to Jack Bliamptis for his assistance with the annotations to this essay.

³⁷ Both were sons of village founders. Frank Westerfield (son of John) lived at the southwest corner of Sheridan Rd. and Lake Avenue ;Henry McDaniel (son of Alexander) lived on the south side of James street in the first house west of W.R.R. Ave.