

# Two Enterprising Young Men Built Store/Dance Hall that Hosted Social Events for Decades

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It seems no small town is complete without a tavern where the locals can congregate, quench their thirst, swap stories, and catch up on the day's news and/or gossip. In New Melle, the building at the corner of Hwys. D and F, currently Liz's Bar and Grill, has served in that capacity to various degrees for over 75 years.

The building was built in 1926 by Edwin Paul and Florence Joerling — two enterprising young men of the day who operated a nearby garage/repair shop, ran a local trucking business, and who are credited with providing the first electricity to the town of New Melle.

In those early years, Mr. Paul and Mr. Joerling operated a general store in the front of the building on the first floor, and used the back of the building



Edwin Paul with one of the trucks used on his produce route. (Photo provided by Dera Mae Rehmeier.)

as a warehouse/trucking terminal for their local truck route. They went around to various farms and picked up produce and livestock, hauled them to the city, and brought back supplies, furniture, etc. for local businesses and residents.

In 1930, Florence Joerling moved to western Missouri to be closer to his wife's family, and sold his interest in the store to Edwin Paul's nephew, Arlie Welge. By the late 30s and early 40s, the trucking business expanded to include routes to stores in Dutzow, Marthasville, Holstein and Treloar. Some of the route drivers included Oscar Lippold, Ewald Toedebusch, Lester Brakensiek, and Lonnie Cunningham, as well as others.

According to an undated historical essay which is believed to have belonged to Myron Welge, "The first garage (in New Melle) was built by Florence Joerling and Edwin Paul, and they furnished the first electric lights for the town in 1921. The dynamo used left little light for use after 10 each evening. It seemed that the women on one end of town washed and ironed one day, and the other group did their wash on the following day so that there was enough power."



(L-R): Elmer Welge, Unknown, Florence Joerling and Edwin Paul, standing in the door of the garage/repair shop that housed the electric generator that provided electricity for the town of New Melle. The building stood where the new Blair Feed and Grain building now stands, and faced Mill Street. For a time, it served as a County Road Maintenance Shed. (Photo provided by Dera Mae Rehmeier.)

The second floor of the Paul and Joerling (later Paul and Welge) building served as a dance hall and auditorium until the New Melle Community Club was built in the 1960s. The hall featured a stage at one end and was used for public dances, weddings and anniversaries, school functions, the New Melle "Stunt Fest" which was part of the early festival celebrations, and community meetings.

The first meeting of the New Melle Recreational Association, predecessor of the New Melle Community Club, was held in that hall, as were the organizational meetings for the New Melle Volunteer Fire Department. Mildred Schnarre of Foristell remembers the public school holding a Halloween Party there in the early 50s, before Daniel Boone Elementary opened in 1955. Her son, Keith, won first prize in the costume contest.

Adele "Delie" Welge of Hwy. T remembers attending the first dance that was held in the hall on September 25, 1926. She was 15 years old at the time. Several people recalled that there was no alcohol allowed upstairs in the hall during dances. If you wanted to drink, you had to go downstairs to the bar in the back of the building, or to your car. Clarence "Pete" Joerling remarked that

people used to gather under the porch of the feed mill across the street and drink from a "community bucket."



This photo shows how the upstairs dance hall looked inside. People sat on benches along the wall and danced in the middle of the room. Notice the coat hooks near the ceiling, and the pressed tin wall covering -- the same pattern that still covers the outside of the building today. Pictured are Elsie (Joerling) Welge, Emma (Paul) Welge, Lillian (Paul) Belker, Delia (Paul) Schultz, and Delia's son Eldon Schultz. (The photo is believed to date in the late 40s or early 50s, and was provided by Barb Welge.)

Pete also remembered the first day they got draft beer in town. The tap was installed in the back of the Paul and Joerling Store. (Florence Joerling was Pete's uncle.) Pete said "I

was just a 'little shaver.' I can't tell you how much beer they drank, but I remember I got to go along with my Dad to town that day because they were getting beer in town. It was a big deal at the time."

Sam Joerling remembered selling field dressed rabbits to Arlie Welge for \$.25 each. Arlie then hauled the rabbits to St. Louis, along with chickens, eggs, and other produce to be sold at farmer's markets or in city stores.

Arlie Welge bought out Edwin Paul's interest in the store in 1950, and continued to operate it until 1970 when he sold the building to Kenny and Adele Bruns. The store closed for a short time in the mid seventies, then was purchased by Ruth Nolkemper in 1976. Ruth moved the bar to the front of the building, started offering soups and sandwiches for lunch, and carried a limited supply of groceries. During Ruth's ownership, Bob Curti opened a small barbershop in a back room, which he still operates on Wednesday and Thursday evenings from 6-9 p.m.



*This photo was taken in March of 1967 the day Van Dyke beer became the official beer on tap at Welge's Store. Van Dyke officials visited New Melle by helicopter and took this aerial photo.*



*Arlie Welge (left) and Edwin Paul sit by the gas pump that used to be at the corner of the front porch.*

Liz Hollaway purchased the building in 1996. She remodeled the upstairs, which had been converted to living quarters years earlier, and installed new windows, a new furnace and air conditioner, and a new cooler. She did some additional remodeling downstairs, added a char-broiler and deep fryer, expanded the menu, and added hard liquor.

Today, this local landmark is still a favorite spot for people to come together, enjoy each other's company, engage in conversation, and catch up on the day's news and/or gossip. And oh yeah...quench their thirst.



*Dera Mae (Paul) Rehmeier leans on the post in front of her dad's store. Her sister Eunice and Vernon Thiemann are sitting on the step at right. Others in photo are unidentified. Dera Mae was the first New Melle Festival Queen -- before the club was incorporated under the New Melle Community Club name. (Photo provided by Barb Welge.)*

## Who's Who....

**Y**ou might wonder how Edwin Paul, Florence Joerling, and Arlie Welge were related to Pauls, Joerlings, and Welges of New Melle today. Edwin Paul is the father of Lelan Paul, Eunice Thiemann, Dera Mae Rehmeier, Roger "Dickie" Paul, Burton Paul and the late Vivian Joerling. He married Meta Prior in 1923, and together they built and raised their family in the house where Little Lamb Day Care is currently located on Hwy. D.

Florence Joerling was a brother to John Joerling, who is the father of Clarence "Pete" and Sam Joerling of New Melle, Laura Becker of the Femme Osage area, the late Lawrence "Boots" Joerling, and the late Verna Brakensiek of Wright City.

Arlie Welge and his wife, Olga, had two sons, Wayne and Myron. Wayne married Barb Heil and together they had three children: Missy Opfer, Scott,

and Brian. Wayne and Barb lived for several years in the building at the lower right hand corner of the aerial picture above -- where the New Melle Towne Square is now being built. Wayne served for several years on the New Melle Board of Trustees/Aldermen and was active in the Army National Guard. He died in May, 2001.

Myron Welge was instrumental in getting the New Melle Recreational Association started in the late 1940s. He also maintained a private library in the upper floor of the Welge building after it was no longer used as a dance hall. The essay that mentions the electrical generator in the Paul and Joerling garage is believed to have come from his collection. He never married, and died in 1960 at the age of 32.

Adele "Delie" Welge, who is mentioned in the article, was married to Arlie's brother, Clarence Welge. She lives off Hwy. T and helped identify the gentlemen in the garage photo.