

## JOSEPH & ELIZABETH FUGINA & THEIR 1898 HOME



Joseph Fugina was the 4<sup>th</sup> son born to George & Maria (nee Mehelic) Fugina. He was born 3/25/1835 in what is now Slovenia, but at the time of his birth it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was such until after World War I. As the location of his family residence was very close to the border with Italy, and there were many, many changes to the border over the years, in school he was often instructed in Italian or German. His family spoke German and it was this language that he brought to the U.S.



It was the common practice for the eldest son in a family to inherit the father's property. The younger sons were forced to leave home and find a job in a larger city, an apprenticeship, or immigrate to the "new world". Europe was full of steamship line salesmen in the 1800s. They would go from town to town telling of the glory and cheap land to be found in the new United States. Joseph was a willing candidate and he immigrated to the United States in about 1856, when he was 21. He traveled from his place of birth, Ceplje, Gottschee, Krain, Austria to Leibach, Austria where he got train passage to Bremen, Germany and then steamship passage, on the steamer Luiska, to New York, NY.

Joseph arrived in New York, NY June 14<sup>th</sup> 1856 and headed to Chicago, IL, then on to the Mississippi River where he booked passage upriver to Reads Landing in MN Territory. He quickly became an "itinerant peddler", as his grandson, Marvin Fugina, would relate. Joseph had a wide territory in which he peddled his wares, often taking with him a tamed bear, tethered behind his horse drawn cart. By hard work and frugal spending, he was able to help his brother, Marcus, two years his junior to immigrate in 1858.

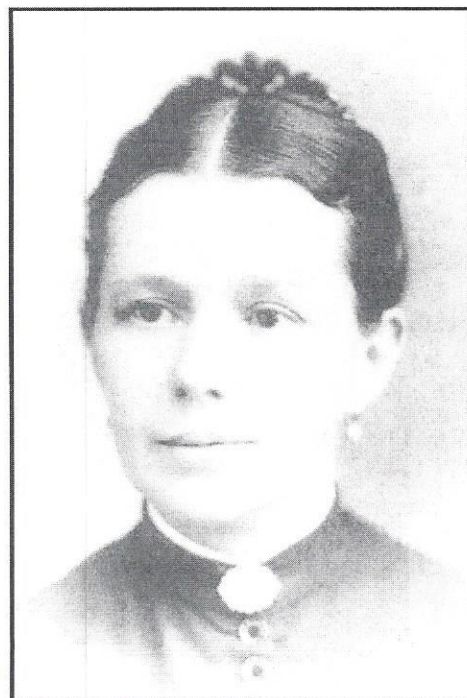
During the next couple of years, while on his travels from farm to farm, Joseph made the acquaintance of young Miss Elizabeth Holzer. She was the eldest of four children, born to Alois and Sophia (Stehle) Holzer. She was born in Bremen, Germany and immigrated to MN Territory in 1854 at the age of 14. Her father was a cooper in Germany, but upon arrival in Minnesota he found little work in that vocation and thus took a claim of 160 acres of wild land in Watopa Township, near Wabasha, MN. It was here that he carved out a fine farm and where Joseph Fugina met his soon to be bride.

Joseph and brother, Marcus, had learned of the rapidly expanding town of Fountain City, WI....on the Eastern side of the river. After some research, they determined that this would be the place to establish their first permanent *Fugina Brothers General Store*.

Joseph married Elizabeth Holzer at St. Felix Catholic Church in Wabasha, MN on Feb. 25, 1861. They traveled to Fountain City, staying overnight at a stage coach inn just South of what is now Cochrane, WI. They settled in Fountain City and started their family. Joseph and Elizabeth would have 11 children, however, losing their first 2 and later 2 more in early childhood.



Fountain City was like a little bit of Germany. It looked very much like the Rhine Valley and it was here that a large population of German speaking immigrants settled. They quickly built their churches, their school, their breweries, their businesses, their vineyards and the best land in the rural valleys quickly filled with robust farm families. It was a time of rapid expansion, when a business in groceries and general merchandise could excel and theirs did.

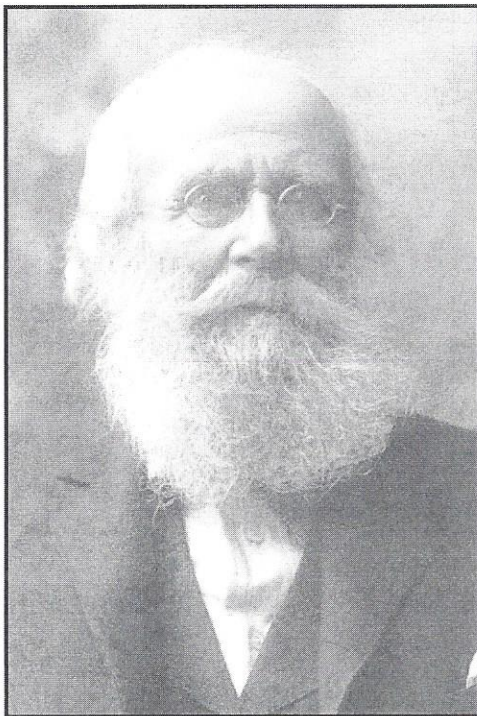




Joseph and Marcus brought over a third brother, Michael, the baby of the family, in 1861. Michael arrived just in time to see the start of America's Civil War. Like many new arrivals, having taken their pledge of allegiance to this new country, he felt a strong need to show his support by enlisting in the Union Army. There were many, many units in the Union Army that were made up of men of a particular ethnicity and language. Michael's unit, the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Company H, of the Iron Brigade, all spoke German. They fought in many battles and Michael suffered a permanent injury to his arm, when he was thrown from an open rail car.

Joseph and Elizabeth were faithful members of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Fountain City. All their children were baptized there and all of their infant children were buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery. These parents were very interested in their children getting a good education and finding success in the business and professional world. Their six living sons, would become a store manager, a riverboat captain, a pharmacist, an attorney, a coal dealer/Post Master and a medical doctor. It was their family tradition or requirement that each child help the next with their schooling costs. So it was that each established older child would send money and letters of encouragement to those still in school learning their profession.

In 1898 Joseph retired from *Fugina Brothers General Store*. At this time the brothers had general stores in Fountain City, Arcadia and Independence, WI. Brother Marcus would retire a few years later and the next generation would take over. It was also in 1898 that Joseph decided to build a new house at what is now 340 S. Main Street. It was a large home, but they still had 6 children living at home. Men often married later in those days and four of the sons, who were still living at home, were in their 30s before they married in the early 1900s. Joseph and Elizabeth enjoyed their new home along with their children. Elizabeth died in 1923 at the age of 80 and Joseph died in 1926 at 91.



As two of the children, son Edward, and only daughter, Laura, never married, the "new house" remained their residence for many years. It wasn't until 1948 that Joseph and Elizabeth's grandson, Marvin Fugina, and his family bought the house from the heirs, remodeled it and continued to live there until the death of Marvin's wife, Alethea, in 2015. The beautiful old house was sold in 2016 after being in the family for 120 years.

(Written by Jeanne Fugina)

