

## **"1941 Road Trip"**

**by**

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Major changes were taking place in early 1941 that were impacting daily life in Center Line. War had broken out in Europe in September 1939 and the US began manufacturing war material for use by the Allied countries. New manufacturing plants had been built in Warren Twp. during the preceding two years and housing was tight in Center Line because of the influx of manufacturing workers and their families. After a year of European battles, it was apparent to Congress that the US needed to boost the size of their armed forces. Congress passed the Selective Service Act on Sept. 16, 1940 and the draft began in October 1940, with the first men entering military service on November 18, 1940. During March and April 1941, five local men were enlisted in the Army.

Vincent Schimmel - 14 March 1941

David Kutchev - 16 April 1941

Louis Schimmel - 23 April 1941

Ray Hartsig - 23 April 1941

William F. "Bill" House - 23 April 1941

In May 1941, some of their friends came up with the idea to go on a road trip to visit the recently-enlisted men. Gasoline and tire rationing were not yet in effect, so travel by personal vehicle was not a problem.

These eight friends were:

(1) Evelyn "Ev" Henk (1915-2008); she was the daughter of Joseph and Mary "Mamie" (DeKonig) Henk who moved from Detroit to Center Line in 1916 shortly after her birth. Mamie's three sisters soon followed her to Center Line: Jennie (married Joseph Borsekowski), Anna (married John "Jack" Dandy, who ran the bowling alley up on the 3rd floor of St. Clement School circa 1923-1928) and Antoinette (married Matt Pauli). Joseph was a member of Center Line's first village commission in 1926. He later served on the commission that created the City Charter and was a city councilman from 1936 until 1950. Joseph and Mamie lived at 7299 Gronow and had five children: Delores, Virginia, Irene, Evelyn and Robert. On 22 Aug 1946, Evelyn married Anthony Charles Friedrich (1911-1968) and they later moved to the Atlanta, GA area.

(2) Marie Degrandchamp (1915-1965); she was the daughter of Clarence L. Degrandchamp (1885-1974) and Elizabeth "Lizzie" A. Smith (1891-1969). "Lizzie" Smith was the daughter of Michael A. Smith (1861-

1931) and Catherine A. Wiegand (1869-1952). Marie married Vincent Schimmel (1917-2000) on 18 Nov 1942 in Center Line, MI. He was the son of Anthony and Margaret (Snoblen) Schimmel. At the time of their marriage, Vincent was a US Army soldier. In the 1940 Census he was listed as a bartender at a beergarden.

(3) Francis Schimmel (1915-1942) was the brother of Vincent and Louis Schimmel. Francis would soon enlist in the Army Air Force and by Feb. 1942 he was a Staff Sergeant stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, MO; he would die on 12 Feb 1942 from injuries sustained four days earlier in an auto accident in Macomb County, MI.

(4) Marie M. Smith (1918-1997) was the daughter of Paul E. Smith and Mary (a.k.a. Marie) C. McCrimmon. The 1940 US Census shows Marie living with her father and step-mother, Rose (DeLong) Smith, at 7557 Wood St. Marie would marry David A. Kutchev (1917-1985) on 16 Oct 1941. He had enlisted in the US Army on 16 Apr 1941 and served in the 32nd Infantry Division, at which time was located at Camp Livingston near Alexandria, Louisiana. On 22 April 1942, the 32nd Division sailed from San Francisco, bound for Australia. By the fall of 1942 his unit was fighting the Japanese in New Guinea.

(5) Antoinette "Tony" Wiegand (1918-1942); she was the daughter of Joseph and Clara (Kott) Wiegand. Less than one year later, on 13 June 1942 she would marry Francis Peters, who was the son of Frederick "Fritz" Peters (1890-1958) and Elizabeth Burg (1890-1979). Following an 18 day hospitalization at St. Joseph's Hospital in Mt. Clemens, Antoinette died of typhoid fever on 18 July 1942.

(6) Frederick "Fritz" Peters (1890-1958); he was the future father-in-law of "Tony" Wiegand. Fritz was a new car salesman at Rivard Brothers Ford and also a Center Line Councilman (April 1939 through April 1948).

(7) Anna F. "Ma" (Schleicher) Zott (1882-1951) was the wife of Joseph Zott and the mother of Nelson, Milton and Josephine. In 1928, Joseph and his wife sold their farm at the southeast corner of 12 Mile Road and Hoover and moved to Center Line, where they built the Center Line Recreation. "Ma" was the proprietor of Center Line Recreation, which consisted of a 10 lane bowling alley plus a bar and grill that was located at 25325 Van Dyke. More info here: [https://grobbel.org/centerline/ma\\_zotts.htm](https://grobbel.org/centerline/ma_zotts.htm)

(8) Lucille (Kunath) Grobbel (1919-2003) was the daughter of Mark Kunath (1800-1945) and Helen Kaltz (1900-1990). Lucille married Charles Grobbel (1911-1971) on 22 Oct 1940, at which time both were working for "Ma" Zott, he as a bartender and she as a waitress. Charles was my father's 1st Cousin, Once Removed and Lucille was my mother's 2nd Cousin, Once Removed.

Lucille took (14) photographs during this trip, none of which included her. She saved them in a "Hold-Pat" snapshot booklet with her married name penciled on the inside cover and on the reverse of each photo she wrote down the names, dates and locations.

Using her photo caption information, I reconstructed their trip itinerary and added a stop at Camp Livingston near Alexandria, Louisiana, even though it is not supported by any photos, unlike Galveston, TX. However, I doubt they would have driven past Alexandria to Galveston without stopping there so Marie Smith could see her fiancé, David Kutchey. Also, some of the dates she provided seem to be in error because they would have required considerable back-tracking.

Undoubtedly many of the younger travelers had been taught at St. Clement School by Sister Mary Elaine, O.P. (Elaine Hegeman), and all of the travelers would have known Sister Thomas Aquinas, O.P. (1908-1997). She was born Leona Grobbel to Ferdinand and Apollonia (Wiegand) Grobbel. Leona's sister Cecilia was married to Nelson Zott, son of "Ma" Zott. During the 1940-1941 school year, both nuns were teaching at St. Luke's School in Plain, Wisconsin, so a stop to visit them was included in their plans.

Here are their destinations, with my presumed arrival dates and approximate distances driven.

Depart Center Line on May 9th, drove 560 miles to

May 11 - Paducah, KY; \_\_\_\_\_, TN, then drove 500 miles to

May 13 - Alexandria, LA, then drove 220 miles to

May 16 - Galveston, TX, then drove 330 miles to

May 18 - Mineral Wells, TX, then drove 580 miles to

May 20 - Rolla, MO (Ft. Leonard Wood), then drove 100 miles to

May 21 - St. Louis, MO, then drove 360 miles to

May 23 - Plain, WI, then drove 165 miles to

May 24 - Ft. Sheridan (Chicago), IL, then drove 305 miles to

May 25 - Arrive back in Center Line, MI, Total miles driven = 3,120



Their road trip roughly followed the black line in a clock-wise direction. The white circles along the black line represent the places they visited.

Here are the photos, along with the captions written on the back by Lucille (Kunath) Grobbel:



1) Eve Henk, "Ma" Zott, Marie Degrandchamp and Tony Wiegand, Paducah, Kentucky, May 11, 1941



2) "Ma" Zott, Cotton Ball Courts, Tennessee, May 11, 1941



3) Marie Degrandchamp, Marie Smith and Evelyn Henk, Ferry Crossing, Galveston Bay, Texas, May 13, 1941



4) Marie Degrandchamp and Vincent Schimmel, Fort Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas, May 18, 1941



5) Vincent Schimmel, Fritz Peters, Marie Smith, "Ma" Zott, Marie Degrandchamp and Francis Schimmel, Fort Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas, May 18, 1941



6) Evelyn Henk and Francis Schimmel, Fort Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas, May 18, 1941



7) Evelyn Henk, Rolla, Missouri, May 14, 1941



8) Marie Degrandchamp, Rolla, Missouri, May 14, 1941



9) Ernie Harrick and "Ma" Zott, Naval Base, St. Louis, Missouri, May 21, 1941



10) Tony Wiegand and Marie Degrandchamp, Shrine at Plain, Wisconsin, May 23, 1941 [editors note: this is the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes at St. Anne's Chapel, located behind St. Luke's R.C. Church]



11) Sister Thomas Aquinas and Sister Mary Elaine, Plain, Wisconsin, May 23, 1941



12) St. Luke's R.C. Church, Plain, Wisconsin, May 23, 1941



13) Louie Schimmel, Fort Sheridan, Illinois, May 24, 1941



14) Ray W. Hartsig, Bill House, Louie Schimmel and Laurence Grims, Fort Sheridan, Illinois, May 24, 1941

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