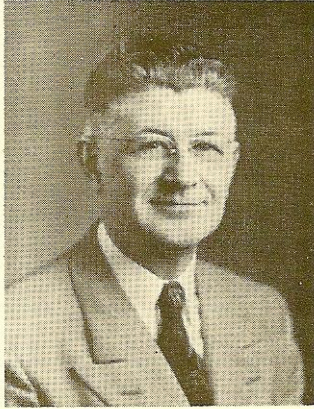


Michael J. Zobel, Jr.

The "Spirit" of St. Louis



EDWARD A. RICK

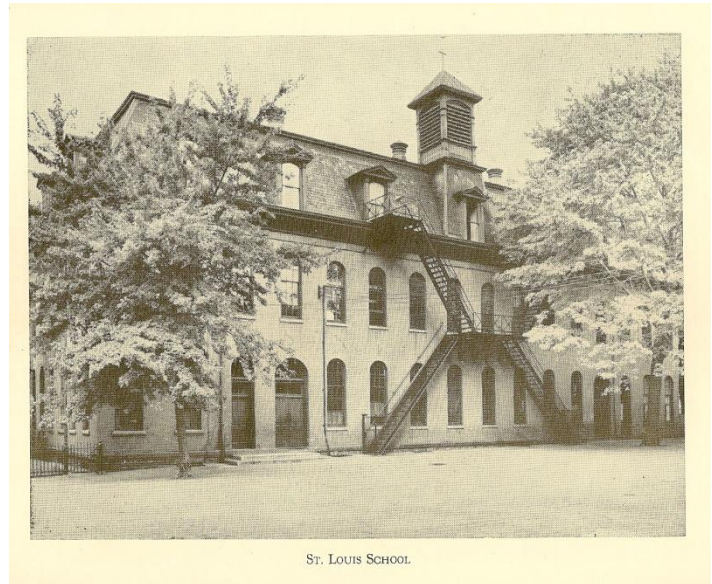
My maternal grandfather, Edward A. Rick, Sr., is watching over me. Although he's been gone for 35 years, I sense his presence every time I enter St. Louis Church, where his spirit is still very much alive. A life-long St. Louis parishioner and father of four, he was a person of great dignity who esteemed tradition. He was especially loyal and devoted to his work and family, but if you spent just ten minutes with him, you'd quickly learn that his true passion in life, as others before and since, was St. Louis Church.

As a member of the old Board of Trustees during the 1950's, he conscientiously performed the duties and applied the principles of that office which were wrung out during the time of *Interdict*, nearly one hundred years before. He reveled in speaking of that contentious period in St. Louis' history and was especially vociferous in vaunting the eventual outcome, wherein the assets of St. Louis Church remained under control of the Trustees and were not, as in all the other parishes, turned over to the Diocese as the Bishop demanded. He was tremendously proud of his long service with that prestigious group of seven lay trustees and he cherished that honor his entire life.

Some years later in 1979, in ill health, aware of the Trustees tenuous position and concerned for his church's well being, it was of great relief that my grandfather met Monsignor William J. Schwinger, a caring, sensitive man, who as Pastor, would guide the parish through that difficult time. Comforted by the Monsignor's kind words of assurance, my grandfather spent his final months on Earth in peace, knowing that his beloved St. Louis would be in good hands. As I watched the story unfold through my grandfather's eyes, bearing witness to the smooth and successful transfer of church assets, I too discovered a personal and inexorable link to St. Louis and it gradually became an important part of my life as well.

My initial St. Louis experience came years earlier following a weekend overnight at my grandparent's home at 1041 Ellicott Street. Shortly after awakening, without the health concerns of today, I had an unforgettable breakfast of Quaker Puffed Wheat cereal in fat-rich heavy cream from Hagner's Dairy! Later that morning we attended Mass at "Grampa's" church. I remember making a grand entrance into the St. Louis school yard, as we slowly rolled past the heavy iron gates aboard his formidable, black 1947 Packard

“boat.” Thinking back, for this six year old from Tonawanda, the sight of the towering Gothic church, the neighboring old school house with rooftop cupola in the French style and fire escapes hanging precariously from its exterior; surrounded by those massive brick walls, it must have felt like being dropped in the middle of a street scene from *Les Miserables*.



True to his roots, my grandfather kept his “pew rent” current, a concept he briefly explained while leading me down the center aisle to identify and reaffirm the Rick family’s exclusive right to use a certain numbered pew, since forgotten, just beyond the pulpit. I never dared question him then, but with so many seats available, I wondered why in the world would anyone pay extra to reserve one. Besides, with my grandfather attending to his duties as an usher and my grandmother wishing to be nearer to her “lady friends” in front, we didn’t even sit there! Yet today, with a nostalgic nod to tradition, I’m happy to report that pew rent is still accepted at St. Louis Church.

After Mass we stopped by the Trustees Room in the old school, where the offertory collections, then mostly coins, were separated, counted and wrapped for deposit. The proceedings in the back room were not to be disrupted for introductions, but my grandfather’s usual comrades, the Mssrs Hardick, Kolb, Rembold, Albert, Ludaescher and Reinagel were certain to have been around.

My grandfather also spoke frequently of the Dramatic Circle, which by this time existed strictly as a social organization. It was begun, I later learned, as a means to raise money for a new church after the devastating fire of 1885. His uncle, Otto Rick, was an original member, and as a youth, my grandfather took parts in many stage productions. In later years he delighted reciting some of his lines verbatim, always crediting a certain Christian Brother from St. Louis School, whose teaching techniques, though bordering on mayhem, effectively taught him the art of elocution. As a lad, I loved his stories and especially appreciated rediscovering their veracity years later in the chapters of *Gothic Grandeur*, the “must read” history of St. Louis R.C. Church written in 2003 by friend and fellow parishioner, C. Eugene Miller, Ph.D.

In the thirty-five years since my grandfather’s passing, now myself a registered parishioner, I believe I have come to understand something of his great love for St. Louis

Church. From *our* usual pew, the one my wife Carol and I select each week, immersed in the warmth of a shared faith, in the midst of friends we have grown to care about, we experience and value the wonderful sense of true belonging. So too, in quiet moments of reflection, lost in the awe inspiring splendor of the place, we are able to spiritually reunite with loved ones, who bless us with precious memories.

God bless you, "Grampa" Rick and may God bless all the ardent men and women who built this church and faithfully preserved its tradition. Thank you for committing your lives to St Louis Church and thank you especially for passing your spirit and love down to all of us here today. Your dedication and deep Faith are our inspiration. Going forward, we are as one.