

"The Merickel Mansion"

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I "met" Maurice Merickel, Sr. (WHS '22) and his two sons, Pat (WHS '50) and Ted (WHS '55) while researching the history of Wadena High School basketball. From that research I realized this was the Merickel family that lived in the Merickel Mansion on Second St. S.W. If you saw the first article, "The Mansion," then you know that Maurice Sr. and Maurice Jr., known as Pat, perished in separate plane crashes, ten months apart, while on hunting trips near their summer home in Sioux Narrows, Ontario, Canada. Since writing that article I have received relevant feedback and consequently I have additional information that adds to this already intriguing story. With this new information I want to expand the scope of the original article. The story gets more complicated because there are more actors and more side stories that at times may seem unrelated. I am hopeful that from a "big picture" perspective it will all tie together at the end. "The Time Machine" can be difficult to navigate. All aboard that's coming aboard.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's I recall Mike Merickel (WHS '62), son of Tom (cousin of Maurice Sr.) and Mary Lou, was a pilot in the United States Navy. On rare occasions word would spread in Wadena that Mike Merickel would be doing a flyover. I was a teenager at that time. Thrilling to anticipate, and incredible to witness.

In 1907 Arthur Jesse Merickel was negotiating with William R. Baumbach to purchase the First National Bank of Wadena. Merickel, a native of Eagle Bend, had a distinguished resume that included farming, lumber and milling, and eventually real estate and banking. At some point in the negotiations Mr. Baumbach indicated there was one rather unusual requirement associated with the sale of his bank. Baumbach insisted that if Merickel wanted to buy his bank he would also have to buy his house, one that Baumbach had built in 1886. Eventually there was a meeting of the minds. A.J. Merickel just bought a bank, and a house. From then on, Wadena had what is still known today as "The Merickel Mansion." Arthur and Pauline Merickel raised their family in that mansion. Not only did Maurice Sr. grow up in that house, he eventually became the homeowner. His children, Maurice Jr. (Pat), Ted, and Mary Lou (WHS '57) were also raised at the corner of Colfax Avenue and Second Street S.W.



In 1946 Arthur Jesse Merickel died at the age of 83. He was laid to rest in the Eagle Bend Cemetery. About that same time in Chicago, Arthur Traube, a police officer with the Chicago PD, had recently purchased a fishing lodge in Canada. In 1951 Traube retired and moved his family to the "Sioux Narrows Fishing Lodge." Diana Traube was 13, had lived her entire life in Chicago, and would now be living and going to school in Sioux Narrows.

As we know, in May of 1959, Maurice Sr., wife Louise, and their daughter Mary Lou were enjoying their time at the summer home in Sioux Narrows. Maurice Sr. and his brother-in-law, Sylvester Neises, were planning a day hunt, by air, and would return later that evening. They never came back and were never found.

Ten months later, in March of 1960, Maurice Jr. (Pat) wanted to go wolf hunting by plane near their summer home. On his way up to the fateful wolf hunting excursion in Ontario, Pat stopped in Wadena to see if his sixteen-year-old second Cousin Mike could join him. Mike's dad, Tom, was in favor of the idea, but Mom was not. Eyewitness accounts claim Mary Lou was adamant that her eldest son would not be going on that hunt. Mike recalls how mad he was with his Mom at that time, right up until news reached Wadena that Pat was missing and eventually found dead in the wreckage of the single engine Piper aircraft.

When the 13-year-old Diana Traube moved from Chicago to Sioux Narrows Ted Merickel was 14. Sometime in 1960, most assuredly after Pat's death in March, Ted Merickel and Diana Traube were married. Diana passed away in 2018, at the age of 80. Ted resides in northern Minnesota.



When Mike Merickel was 16, he was probably not thinking much about what he wanted to do with his life, as an adult. If not for a mother's intuition, or by the grace of God, he would not have had that opportunity. Ironically, as it turned out, he wanted to become a pilot. A U.S. Navy pilot to be exact. The following achievements are quite impressive and would not have happened had he been allowed to join his second cousin on that final hunt. Captain Mike Merickel, United States Navy, flew 102 combat missions in Vietnam, and 240 peacetime patrol flights in the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific. He then flew mission support for shore duty assignments and as an aircrew instructor pilot. All totaled, 3,000 flight hours and over 400 carrier landings.

Thank you, Mike, and thank you, Mary Lou.