



There was a time when every rural community had a special gathering place, a hall where people could hold dances, dinners and other community events. On Highway 27 west of Kettle River, there was - and still is - the Star Club.

Incorporated in 1921, the Star Club was formed as a "gentlemen's club" for the area Polish settlers in Split Rock and continues to operate today. Built after the 1918 Fires that burned down the old log church previously used for social gatherings, next week the Star Club will turn 100 years old.

Even with active community support for the Star Club, the new hall was built in stages, and there were setbacks. The basic structure went up in 1921, but a heavy snow load collapsed the roof in the winter of 1926-27.

Men had to work at the hall during events and help with construction to make wives eligible as members. In the early days, members paid 50 cents to join and 25 cents a month for dues. And in the early days, block ice was purchased from Gassert in [Moose Lake](#), in chunks harvested from Moosehead Lake, to keep the beer cold.

A list of active members in good standing from 1930 included many familiar surnames from the area, including Kaspczak, Dunasky, Klejeski, Soboleski, Zelazny, Urbaniak and Kulas. Rent for a hall activity in 1935 was \$8.

But then religion got in the way. A schism developed in the St. Joseph Church in the 1930s and spilled over to the Star Club. The Polish Nationals split from the Roman Catholic St. Joseph group and in time started to worship at the old Michaelson School. Before the split, members of the Star Club were composed of St. Joseph and Polish National parishioners.

A power struggle over the Star Club ensued with each group claiming ownership. Finally, a vote was taken in 1939, stating that new members could come only from St. Joseph Parish in Split Rock. It passed by one vote.

As a result of the vote, the impression in the community has been that St. Joseph's Parish runs the Star Club. It's not true. The Star Club has remained an independent entity, even now with the closure of the St. Joseph Parish.

In 1939, the club members added insulation, wiring and lights, along with extensive interior work. The Star Club was in its heyday starting in the 1940s, and polka was king. Dances were held regularly, with performers such as Whoopee John, Frankie Yankovic, Jolly Brothers, Six Fat Dutchmen, Viola Turpeinen, Polka Dots, Rhythm Kings, Grandas, Jolly Zuks, the Chmielewskis and more.

The late 1940s saw a basement added and a barroom set up downstairs. A kitchen was added and the membership women set up a guild to handle that operation and dinners. A new floor was installed in the 1950s. A drilled well and new septic system were hurdles to face. All these improvements came with lots of dedication by the members and lots of donated time.

The later years became more of a challenge as many of the old families disappeared from the Split Rock area. To encourage new blood, the membership area was expanded from Split Rock to the townships of Silver, Automba, Birch Creek, Beaver and Kalevala and the cities of Denham and Kettle River.

In 1998, a grand total of 10 new members were inducted and the Star Club became a community club. Currently, the club has 40 active members and is supported by a strong group of volunteers from throughout the area, grown from many immigrant roots.

The Star Club continues to be an important part of the local social life. Many of the local families, whether members or not, have had grandparents court there, parents court there and younger generations dance and court there. The club continues to change with the times while still providing a positive place for neighbors and families to gather.

Those 40 members invite everyone to attend the 100-year celebration of the Star Club 2-11 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 9, at 6350 Highway 27 in Kettle River. All are welcome.

There's a cornhole tournament at 11 a.m. (register at 10 a.m.) and cribbage at 2 p.m. From 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., musicians are welcome to do their thing on the open stage. Stories and pictures from the past will be shared in the afternoon as time permits. To cap off the event, The Main Squeeze polka dance band will provide music 7-11 p.m. There will be door prizes throughout the event and food and drinks for sale.

Come celebrate

The Star Club of Kettle River in the Split Rock area celebrates its 100th anniversary Saturday, Oct. 9, with a free event 2-11 p.m. at 6350 Highway 27 in Kettle River. There's a cornhole tournament at 11 a.m. and cribbage at 2 p.m. From 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., musicians are welcome to do their thing on an open stage. To cap off the event, The Main Squeeze polka band will provide music 7-11 p.m. There will be door prizes throughout the event and food and drinks for sale. Contact Ken Halverson at 218-380-1867 to find out more.

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