

Craemer Family



he spiritual leader of the small group of 15 people who left Germany in April of 1845 to start a Lutheran mission congregation in Frankenmuth, Michigan was Reverend Friedrich August Craemer. Reverend Craemer's trip to America was not only the beginning of the settlement of Frankenmuth, it was also the continuation of an impressive career that took him to the presidency of Concordia College and earned him a funeral in Springfield, Illinois, that ranked only second in size to Abraham Lincoln's.

Craemer was a good choice for the religious leadership position in the new American colony. He was born on May 26, 1812 in Kleinlangheim in lower Franconia and was baptized there. He was well educated and became a professor of German language and literature at Oxford University in England. He even taught Lord Byron's daughter English in Devonshire, England in 1843.

In 1844, Craemer heard about Pastor Wilhelm Loehe and his plan to send a colony of German Lutherans to mid-Michigan to convert the Chippewa Indians. The group needed a spiritual leader and Craemer agreed to become their pastor. Pastor Craemer was ordained on April 4, 1845 the day before they left Neuendettelsau. As the shepherd of the little colony, Rev. Craemer led them in daily prayer on the voyage, particularly during the violent storms. The journey was full of hardships. Drinking water was scarce, icebergs made the passage dangerous and almost all of the colonists, including Rev. Craemer, came down with smallpox.

During the pleasant days of the 50-day voyage, Rev. Craemer taught the colonists English. He was proficient in Latin, Greek, French, Norwegian and later the languages of the Chippewas. He fell in love with Dorothea nee Benthien during the passage.

Although the colonists objected (she had a son out of wedlock) they were married on June 10, 1845, the day after they set foot on American soil. Rev. Craemer's years in Frankenmuth with the colonists were filled with controversy. Following his marriage, the settlers found it difficult to respect him, although they admitted he had not failed to do anything that was necessary for their welfare. There were many disagreements over the design of the community and other matters. Rev. Craemer reported all of these things back to Rev. Loehe in Germany. Nonetheless, Rev. Craemer, with the help of an interpreter, set up a missionary school in Frankenmuth for the Indian children. By 1846 there were four boys and seven girls enrolled. His wife faithfully assisted him. By the time Rev. Craemer left the settlement in 1850, he had baptized 31 Indian children. Since most of the Chippewa's had moved from the area by then, the missionary effort died out.

Rev. Craemer went back to university life in 1850 and had an outstanding 40 year teaching career at the Lutheran Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The seminary moved to St. Louis, Missouri in 1861 and again in 1876 to Springfield, Illinois. Rev. Craemer was later named President of the seminary in Springfield.

Craemer eventually adopted his wife's son, Heinrich Gottlieb Benthien. The pastor and Dorothea had four children: Johann Lorenz, Johann, Heinrich Ferdinand and Marie. Dorothea died on November 11, 1884. Rev. Craemer died on May 3, 1891 at the age of 78. Rev. Craemer's obituary in the Daily Illinois State Journal, of May 8, 1891, read in part, "the last sad rites over the remains of the late Prof. August Craemer, President of Concordia College, were performed yesterday and it was the largest funeral held in Springfield, Illinois, since the funeral of President Abraham Lincoln".

