

Kern Family



The Kern family can be traced back to 1532 at the Kernmühle (Kern-Mill), about two miles north of Rosstal. There they operated a grain mill on the Bibert River and occasionally a distillery. In 1748 the Kerns sold the mill and moved to Rosstal to later establish a general store. The family name appears to be derived from the Kernmühle name. It means “Grain”.

The Kern family consisted of the parents Friederich and Maria nee Winkler and their eight children. Records at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rosstal indicate that the Kern family was contemplating emigrating to Frankenmuth in 1846. However, the first members of the Kern family did not come to America until 1852. They were 18 year old Johann and his 16 year old brother, Peter. They arrived in New York on the ship “Hector” on June 26, 1852. Johann was a miller by trade. He came at the request of John G. Hubinger – the owner of a first class saw mill and flour mill on the Cass River. Hubinger needed a miller and Johann could do that work. Johann also worked a farm on Frank Road. He purchased the first 40 acres on August 15, 1854 from the Federal Government. Then on May 8, 1855 he purchased another adjoining 40 acres on the south side. The farm is no longer owned by the Kern Family.

On November 5, 1860, Johann’s father Friedrich died in Rosstal. The following spring, the rest of the family traveled to Frankenhilf, about seven miles northeast of Frankenmuth. Frankenhilf was another German Lutheran settlement that drew hundreds of settlers in the mid 1800’s. The community is now known as Richville.

The Kern family’s treacherous eight week voyage to America was on the ship called, “The Clara”. It arrived in New York on July 15, 1861. It was

reported that 17 icebergs were seen along the way. The family members at the time of their arrival were: Mrs. Maria Kern, age 52; Kunigunda, age 31; Michael, age 20; Ursula, age 17; Fritz, age 15; Barbara, age 13; and Margaret, age 9; and Kunigunda’s daughter, Maria, age 4.

Shortly after her arrival, Maria was employed for about a year as a housekeeper in the new parsonage of the recently widowed Reverend George Bernthal. Seven of the eight Kern children settled on farms. For most of them, this meant the arduous task of clearing the land and providing drainage of the tillable soil. In order to supplement their farm income, some worked as laborers or did mason work. Others worked in logging camps in the winter. Johann and Michael settled in Frankenmuth. Kunigunda Heinlein, Peter, Ursula Schnell and Fritz settled in Frankenhilf. Barbara Abraham lived in Frankentrost, about seven miles northwest of Frankenmuth. Margaret Arndt lived in Saginaw.

One of the descendants, Lorenz Kern, owned the Commercial House Hotel where the Frankenmuth Historical Museum now stands. Although Theodore Fischer was the first to specialize in chicken dinners in Frankenmuth, it is believed that Mrs. Lorenz Kern was the first to serve the chicken on the famed “all you can eat” basis. She offered it to a bridal party in 1895. The idea caught on and today Frankenmuth’s two major restaurants, Zehnders and Bavarian Inn, serve a combined total of 1.6 million dinners annually – the majority of which are family style “all you can eat” chicken dinners.

The eight Kern children produced 77 first generation American born descendants. At the last Kern family reunion in 1940, 860 descendants were counted. As of 2007, the descendants number in the thousands with the majority living in the Saginaw and Tuscola counties.

