

Bierlein Family



The first group of 15 settlers who arrived in Frankenmuth in 1845 included Johann Bierlein, Sr. Johann Bierlein, Sr. had a deep interest in religion and was called the “lay theologian of the Missouri Synod”. He was always willing to discuss or debate theological subjects.

Like the other 14 in the first group, Johann was recruited for the journey by Rev. Wilhelm Loehe, a mission-minded Lutheran Pastor with his sights set on converting the mid-Michigan Indians to Christianity. According to Loehe’s plan, the colony would serve as a living example of Lutheranism. The Indians would come to know God in Frankenmuth.

Johann was born July 28, 1819, in Rosstal Bayern, Germany and was called “Wasser”. He was a “paechterssohn” (peasant farmer’s son). He made the voyage to America when he was 26 Years old.

“Wasser” settled on land near the Cass River across from St. Lorenz Lutheran Church and became a farmer like the rest of the early settlers. He married Elizabeth nee Frank February 7, 1847.

There are several stories recorded about “Wesser” Bierlein’s years in Frankenmuth. Because he lived across the street from the parsonage, he would go over and read each shipment of books that the Pastor received. The Pastor would go to bed and ask Johann to turn out the lamp when he was finished. Johann stayed until he read all of them.

Pastor Ottomar Fuerbringer had many discussions with “Wasser” on theological subjects. Often Bierlein and Fuerbringer would come to an impasse on certain matters. When Bierlein felt he had presented all his facts and not yet convinced Fuerbringer of the correctness of his position, he would say:

“In der Ewigkeit werts ausfinna, dasz I recht ghat hob!” or “Just wait, in heaven you will find out that I was right!”

On another occasion, probably a church picnic, several young men were watching the young ladies on swings made with long ropes hanging from tall trees. “Wasser” didn’t think it was proper for the men to be standing where they were, so he asked them to move.

“Wasser” and his wife had eight children: Maria Margaretha Rodammer, Anna Barbara Trump, Johann (a farmer and horse trader), Kunigunda (who died in infancy), Kunigunda Haspel, Johann Mattaeus and Johann Michael (both farmers). Another son was “stillborn”.

Johann moved to Richville to farm 80 acres that first had to be cleared. He dug out the stumps and then built a log cabin. One of his grandchildren, Emma Bierlein, was still alive as of the opening of the Motor Lodge in 1986. She was 104. Johann Mattaeus Bierlein lived on the homestead. Two of his children, Erwin and Hedwig, were albinos. They never married. Johann Michael Bierlein died on February 19, 1880 at the age of 27 from typhoid fever. He died in a log cabin after his sister ignored the doctor’s orders that he shouldn’t eat. She fixed him a meal.

“Wasser” died April 4, 1890, and his wife died six years later. They had 26 grandchildren: Mike, George, John, Fritz, Matthew, Otto, Herman, and Richard Rodammer, Hannah Keinath, Lizzy, Fritz, Louis Trump, Margaret Renke, Mary Zeilinger, Anna Schultz, Herman Haspel, John, Louie, Emma, Michael, Herman, Erwin and Hedwig Bierlein, Anna Winkler, Margaret Schnell and Matilda Mayer.

There were a total of 790 descendants in the year 2005.

