

Gunzenhausen History



The city of Frankenmuth has a German Lutheran heritage. It was established in 1845 by a small band of Lutherans who, rather than send a missionary to preach the Gospel to the Indians in America, sent a group of Lutheran colonists to show the Indians

Christianity.

In the middle to late 1800's, there was limited correspondence between the German and American relatives. Fifty years later, there was still little, if any, correspondence. By the time Frankenmuth was 100 years old, in 1945, there were few local families that could even identify the town from which their ancestors emigrated. The World War years caused many of the German speaking Frankenmuth residents to be suspect even though their American patriotism was extolled in numerous newspapers. It became unpopular to speak of your German heritage. However, time healed the wounds and when the Bavarian Festival became a welcomed event in the Frankenmuth community, local residents again began to feel pride in their heritage.

When Dr. Marvin Engel, a Frankenmuth veterinarian, returned from a visit to Neuendettelsau, he was filled with enthusiasm for Frankenmuth to re-establish contact with the community and church from where the first settlers came. He presented his ideas to the Lutheran Men's Club and a letter, autographed by members of the local club, was sent to Neuendettelsau. The idea for a pilgrimage to the mother church grew. The exchange of letters showed that a strengthening of faith on both sides would result from such a visit.

In the meantime, the "People to People" program awakened the interest of the Frankenmuth people. Dr. Marvin Engel also had visited Gunzenhausen Bavaria, Germany, another point of origin of Frankenmuth settlers.

An exchange of letters followed after Dr. Engel had suggested Gunzenhausen as a Sister City, and in short order, the council fathers of the two cities gave their official blessing to the adoption and Gunzenhausen and Frankenmuth became Sister Cities under the "People to People" program.

Frankenmuth officially adopted Gunzenhausen Bavaria, Germany as its Sister City in 1962; but also made lasting contacts with Neuendettelsau, Rosstal, and with many other cities and villages in Germany, as a result of an 82 member pilgrimage to Europe in September of 1962. What started out as a pilgrimage to the land of their forefathers snowballed into a cultural pilgrimage, engulfing the "People to People" program and establishing life long connections.

Frankenmuth adopted Gunzenhausen because many of its people came from that area. Gunzenhausen, a small city of over 18,000 residents, and Frankenmuth, had more than the German language in common. They could compare industry and farming, history, culture, and religion. The Gunzenhausen state church is Lutheran. The Frankenmuth people and the mutual recognition of the church have been reinforced time and again since 1962. This partnership between Gunzenhausen and Frankenmuth has become stronger through the many mutual visits of citizens from both cities. The present Frankenmuth Sister City Committee is involved with three major projects: the professional work exchanges, the high school student exchanges, and the annual Germany trip taken by the students in the German program at the high school.

The Medal of Merit of the city of Gunzenhausen was awarded to James E. Wickson and Elmer P. Simon, former mayors of Frankenmuth, as well as to Pastor Phillip Janz, Dr. Marvin Engel, and Judy Zehnder Keller, for their personal efforts concerning the partnership.



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