

# Loeche Family



he founding of Frankenmuth is to the credit of Pastor Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loeche. Although he remained in Neuendettelsau and never made the trip to America, it was his idea to establish a Lutheran mission colony in central Michigan to convert and educate the Indians who lived there.

Wilhelm Loeche was born on February 21, 1808, in Fürth, Germany, the son of Johannes (1764-1816) and Maria Barbara nee Walthelm Loeche (1770-1853.) He was one of thirteen children, only six of them surviving childhood. His father was a businessman in Fürth, a city near Nürnberg, Germany. Loeche was only 8 years old when his father died. Through the Christian piety of his mother he was influenced to study for the ministry. He studied theology at the universities of Erlangen and Berlin. In 1837 he became pastor of the church in the little village of Neuendettelsau in Franconia, Germany. He served there until his death on January 2, 1872.

Loeche organized a foreign missionary society in 1841 and recruited volunteers. After reading the appeals of help from the German Lutheran brothers and sisters in America, he assembled a group of 15 volunteers to start a new settlement in mid-Michigan. They held weekly meetings to discuss doctrine, drilled hymns and church liturgy. Rev. August Craemer was chosen as their spiritual leader. They set sail April 20, 1845 and arrived in Frankenmuth August 18, 1845. Frankenmuth, "courage of the Franconians," was chosen as the name of the settlement. A second group of nearly 100 volunteers arrived the following year to secure the success of this colony.

Loeche continued gathering volunteers and established three more settlements here in Michigan. In 1847 he sent a group to establish Frankentrost, about ten miles northeast of Frankenmuth. In 1848 the third colony was settled near Bay City, called Frankenlust.

Finally another one was established about ten miles northeast of Frankenmuth in 1851. This was called Frankenhilf, the name later changed to Richville.

Loeche kept in close contact with these settlements as he continued his pastoral duties in Neuendettelsau. He married Helene Andreae (b. 6-27-1819) on July 25, 1837. They had four children: Ferdinand (1838-1906), Marianne (1839-1906), Gottfried (1841-1916) and Philipp (1843-1844).

After six years of blessings, Helene became ill with typhoid fever. She died at the young age of 24 years old. The burden of responsibility that fell upon Loeche was great, but he received help from his mother and others. He did not marry again.

From the time he became a minister, Loeche gained a reputation in the region for his powerful sermons. He used his talents in the pulpit to establish numerous missions on three continents. He sent 82 men to assist the Franconian colonies. He founded the Lutheran Church-Iowa Synod, which later became the Lutheran Church in America. He assisted the Lutheran Church in Australia and sent missionaries to New Guinea. In Germany he built a mission house, a medical school, two hospitals, an asylum, an old people's home and a school for young girls. Several charitable homes that he founded in Neuendettelsau are still operating today.

Loeche was also a "cross-bearer" in a physical sense. He was only 47 years old when he had to rest for a month due to illness. At age 55 he was very ill but continued to carry a heavy workload. He published 60 books.

Loeche sent a farewell message to the colonists August 4, 1853 and continued his work in Germany and elsewhere. In 1863, he suffered a stroke. He died January 2, 1872 and was buried in Neuendettelsau.



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