

Petzold Family



The Petzold family was not involved in the founding or early development of the colony of Frankenmuth. Like some other well-known German-Lutheran families now living in the eastern Saginaw Valley area, they were part of a later wave of Germans who were drawn to Frankenmuth and its German Lutheran heritage.

It was people like the Petzolds who flowed through the community (which for a time served as sort of a German-Lutheran Ellis Island) pushing out from Frankenmuth to find farms and homes. For these later arrivals, Frankenmuth, however, remained their ethnic, religious, commercial and cultural “home base”.

Wilhelm Petzold, a farmer in Prussia, came to this area via Canada, living first in the wilds of Ontario and later near Winnipeg Manitoba, Canada before crossing the border with his family into North Dakota. The Petzolds settled in a small rural town called St. Thomas, where they farmed and where some of their descendants and relatives still do so in 2005.

Both Wilhelm and a young daughter died there and are buried in the cemetery of the small Lutheran church he helped to found there. His sons Otto and Paul, daughter Anna and her husband Adolph III, continued living in St. Thomas for a time and then moved to North Carolina where it was warmer.

It was in North Carolina that Otto read in a Lutheran Church periodical about a German farming community called Frankenmuth. Wishing for his family to be closer to ethnic and religious ties, Otto sent his brother Paul and brother-in-law Adolph to Michigan to investigate.

The two arrived by train at Gera on New Year's Eve 1900. They walked to a small hotel in Frankenmuth, (later Tiffany Biergarten) where they met a “Mr. Ziegler”. Ziegler, in typical hospitality, took them home to spend the night, promising to help them locate farms in the region. Soon Paul and Adolph sent word to Otto to bring the rest of the family.

With Ziegler's help, the three families found small farms they could afford south and east of Frankenmuth near a developing little town called Millington. In this rural neighborhood, Otto and his wife Elizabeth raised eight children: William, Edward, Ernest, Oscar, Herman, Gustav, Henry and Ottilie. A daughter died during the first bitter winter. Otto's brother Paul and his sister Anna raised equally large families.

The three families were among those who founded a new Lutheran church at Millington. An old farmhouse on Otto's farm served as the little congregation's new school in 1904. From 10 pupils this school has grown to be one of the 10 largest Lutheran schools in Michigan.

As of 2005, there are about 400 to 500 descendants of the Petzold family living in this region. Through marriage, church affiliation and commerce, they remain closely linked to the community of Frankenmuth, which first welcomed their ancestors years ago.

One of the better-known members of the current generation of the Petzold family is Rudy Petzold who for 25 years was publisher of one of Michigan's leading weekly newspapers – The Tuscola County Advertiser. It serves a large segment of the eastern Saginaw Valley, including Frankenmuth. Rudy served as president of the Michigan Press Association, was a well-know Lutheran churchman, and was a regional civic leader.



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