

Schaeff Family



The Schaeff family name can be traced back to Johann Leonhard Schaeff, a blacksmith in Weidenbach, Germany, born in 1593. In the next 300 years, the descendants of this man founded some 23 blacksmith shops in what is now southern Germany.

The first Schaeff to come to the United States was Ernst Michael Schaeff, born in the village of Obererlbach in 1897. He was the fifth child and second son of Johann George Schaeff and Marie nee Graf. He was of the third Schaeff generation to be born in Obererlbach, a village ten kilometers northeast of Gunzenhausen.

Ernst M. Schaeff's formal education ended when he was confirmed at the age of 13 and became a blacksmith apprentice. He first worked for his father, then in various metal-working factories in Nuernberg. During World War I, he was involved in military action on both the Eastern and Western fronts as a mortar man. Near the end of the war, he was captured by the Allied Forces and sent to a POW camp in France.

In 1923, at the age of 26, Ernst M. Schaeff had the opportunity to come to America. Promising his parents he would return in three years, he left Germany in the late fall. Due to a bad storm in the North Atlantic and a three day stay on Ellis Island, it took Ernst 23 days to reach Frankenmuth from Obererlbach. Ernst had initially made plans to travel to the Bay City area however no job was available for him there. A Lutheran pastor in Bay City informed him that his cousin, Ernst Bickel, a farmer in Frankenmuth, needed a hired hand.

Ernst worked as a farmhand on the Bickel farm, located on the Saginaw/Tuscola county line. In those days farmhands usually lived with the owner's family and were accepted as part of the family. After three years in America, learning that the business climate in Germany had not improved, Ernst wrote his parents and told them that he was going to stay another two years.

In 1930, Ernst, having left Germany seven years earlier, sent a letter to his parents informing them he was getting married to his employer's youngest sister. Ernst Schaeff never did see his parents again.

Ernst and Ann R.C. Bickel were married November 30, 1930. They bought a farm ten miles northwest of Frankenmuth in the Frankentrost area. The couple was blessed with six children: Ernest J., Hildred M., Wilmer G., Lorraine Kueffner, Arlene Stern and Harold F. In addition to the six children, Ernst and Anna's descendants number 18 grandchildren and, as of the year 2005, 41 great-grandchildren.

In 1962, almost 40 years after leaving Germany, Ernst and Anna journeyed to his birthplace to visit relatives and friends.

Anna died at the age of 83 in 1979, and Ernst followed her in death in 1983 at the age of 85. Both died at their home and are buried in St. John's Cemetery in Frankentrost.



Researched & Compiled by Bavarian Inn Lodge
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