

Sonntag Family



The community of Frankenmuth was founded as a mission to bring the Lutheran faith to the Chippewa Indians who lived in mid-Michigan. Parochial schools and religious education have been part of Frankenmuth's heritage from the beginning; thus, a Lutheran school for the German immigrant children was quickly established. The emphasis on religious education in Frankenmuth still exists today. About 525 students, as of the year 2005, in grades Kindergarten through eighth, attend St. Lorenz Lutheran School – making it one of the largest Missouri Synod Lutheran Schools in the country.

Herman Sonntag was a prominent teacher in the Lutheran School system in Frankenmuth. He was the son of Carl and Marie nee Roscher and was born in Lichtenstein, Germany on September 7, 1889. He was baptized at St. Laurentius Church there.

At first he worked in his local city hall but felt the need for more Christian Companionship. He decided to become a Lutheran school teacher. A friend helped him get accepted at Addison Teacher Seminary in Illinois and he left his family in 1905 to begin classes there. His good basic education in Lichtenstein allowed him to enter the college as a sophomore instead of a freshman; he completed the course in four years instead of five.

Herman began his teaching ministry serving the South American Missions in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He taught grades five through eight and was also the organist, choirmaster and secretary. Two years after he arrived, his fiancée Minnie Caroline Abramowki followed him. They were married in Porto Alegre on April 20, 1911.

The couple left South America in 1914 after Herman got typhoid fever. In the United States he served congregations in Jacksonville and Prairietown, Illinois as well as Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

On July 15, 1923 he was installed as the teacher of the Southeast District of Frankenmuth. At the time the Lutheran Church operated several one-room schoolhouses in the area. The St. Lorenz congregation did not support the schools directly out of the congregational treasury. Instead "church school districts" were formed. Members of the church living within that district voluntarily contributed funds to run the school. Each district set their own salary scale for the teacher who was called by the voting body of the entire congregation. The teachers taught both English and German.

In 1927 the district schools were consolidated and a brick school was built on Main Street. In 1957 the existing modern St. Lorenz School opened at 140 Churchgrove in Frankenmuth.

Herman Sonntag taught for 38 years at St. Lorenz. He was also secretary of the faculty, organist, choirmaster and the congregation's memorial-wreath secretary. Later he was an organist at St. John's Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth.

Herman and Minnie had seven children. Their only son Martin was a Lutheran minister. Their daughters were: Gertrude Zehnder, Renata Ott, Cornelia Frahm, Irma Glover, Eleanor Frahm, and Hildegard Bisbey. The couple also raised two of Herman's nieces, Ruth Manners and Charlene Fentner.

Herman died February 16, 1980 at the age of 91. His wife Minnie died July 8, 1987 at the age of 96. They are buried in St. Lorenz Cemetery. As of the year 2005, the Sonntags have 71 other descendants, including 17 grandchildren, 43 great-grandchildren and 4 great-great-grandchildren.



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