

Frankenmuth History



The history of this community in Michigan dates back to Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau Bavaria, Germany. Loehe was the university-educated pastor of the church at Neuendettelsau Franconia (northern Bavaria). He publicized the need for funds to supply Lutheran workers to America and formed an organization to prepare workers and to continuously gather funds. He sent a small group of people together with their pastor to form a congregation at the place where they would settle. Over a seven-year period, several hundred colonists were delegated to establish a number of Bavarian settlements in Michigan, known as the Franconian colonies. Although Loehe himself never came to America, he is considered to be the founder of the Franconian colonies in the Saginaw Valley: Frankenmuth in 1845; Frankentrost in 1847; Frankenlust in 1848 and Frankenhilf (now Richville) in 1850.

In 1844, Loehe gathered a group of thirteen colonists willing to emigrate and settle in the Saginaw Valley in Michigan to do mission work among, as well as be an example to, the Indians living in the area. During the winter this group met in Bavaria and received orientation for their mission. Under the leadership of Pastor Friedrich Craemer, who spoke English fluently, they left Bremerhaven April 20, 1845 and arrived in New York on June 9th of that year. They continued on to Michigan where they established the settlement of Frankenmuth.

Included among the first settlers were:

Pastor Friedrich August Craemer and his new bride Dorothea Benthien and her son Henry; Lorenz Loesel and his new bride Margaret Walther; Mr. & Mrs. Martin Haspel (their two year old daughter died on the ship enroute); John K. Weber and his new bride Kunigunda Bernthal; John List and his new bride Maria Lotter; John Georg Pickelman and his new bride Margaret Auer; John Leonhard Bernthal; and John Bierlein.

A hastily erected communal shelter, 30 x 30, was ready for occupancy on August 16. Pieces of carpet were to be substituted for windows and doors. During the heavy rains of the following autumn the roof was to offer inadequate protection. The cabin was intended to accommodate the five married couples, the two single men, and the pastor and his family until individual cabins could be built. The colonists occupied their communal house until the following spring when the settlers were able to build their own log houses on their individual properties.

In 1846, about 90 new arrivals from Bavaria joined the colony. Contact was made with the Chippewa Indians and mission work began among them by Pastor Craemer. On Christmas Day 1846, the first three Indians were baptized as Christians, a youth and his two sisters. On Pentecost Day 1848, the nineteenth Indian child was baptized by Craemer. Mission work among the Indians discontinued as the Chippewa's gradually moved away.

"God is a God of Order" is the title under which the Church Constitution laid down the master plan for the settlement. The colony was not only blessed with pastoral leadership but also by the wisdom of the community planners. The constitution made it clear not only that the colony was a Christian congregation but that it had a civic responsibility to God with mutual obligation among the members.

As of 2005, St. Lorenz Lutheran Church congregation, numbering 5000 baptized members and a school enrollment of 600, and the community, reflect this spirit of commitment and determination.



Researched & Compiled by Bavarian Inn Lodge
For copies of Family Histories go to www.bavarianinn.com/familyhistory