

FRANKENMUTH, MICHIGAN:  
FROM GERMAN SETTLEMENT  
TO  
TOURIST ATTRACTION

by

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First Reader

*Mona Fairies*

Second Reader

*William Meyer*

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## INTRODUCTION

Frankenmuth has long been recognized as one of the prime tourist attractions in Michigan and the United States. Its main restaurants, Zehnder's and the Bavarian Inn, are known throughout the country for their family-style chicken dinners. In addition, one of the nation's largest year-around Christmas stores, Bronner's, is located in Frankenmuth. Add to that an attempt by Frankenmuth to effect a Bavarian style of architecture in its business district, and a desire to present some of its German heritage, one sees a town which seeks to cater to tourists.

There is, however, more to the story of Frankenmuth than chicken dinners, wine stores and curio shops. That is the surface Frankenmuth. Beneath the facade of tourism, there is a fascinating story of a settlement created by Franconians from Bavaria, Germany. In addition, it was one of five such German settlements in the Saginaw Valley of Michigan in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

Then, too, there is the story of Frankenmuth as a successful community, as compared to some German settlements of the era, towns which have never developed into larger, commercial centers.

This thesis will study several aspects of Frankenmuth. Among those aspects will be a comparison of Frankenmuth with other Bavarian colonies in the Saginaw Valley, which, along with Frankenmuth, were founded between 1845 and 1852. Also,

the reasons for Frankenmuth's success as a tourist attraction will be explored. Finally, sections on residents' and business people's reactions to contemporary Frankenmuth will be presented.

The history of Frankenmuth has been very well documented by numerous other writers. The main thrust of my thesis was an attempt to ascertain the attitude of residents toward their history and their city. I expected that there would be some dissension over the path Frankenmuth has taken: from a small, yet busy town in an agricultural area, to a bedroom community that also caters to the tourist's fancy. I expected particularly that older residents would resent the changes more than more recent arrivals. Finally, I hoped to confirm a suspicion that Frankenmuth's development is the result of the influence of a very few people, and that these same people realize it is necessary to conjure up new ideas to keep attracting crowds to the city.

Information about the Franconian colonies was obtained from several sources. Among them were the Flint Public Library, the Saginaw Public Library, Frankenmuth's James E. Wickson Memorial Library, and the Frankenmuth Historical Museum. The staffs of each of these depositories were very helpful. I am particularly indebted to Mary Nuechterlein of the Frankenmuth Historical Museum and Reverend Joel

Ehlert of St. John's Lutheran Church for their advice on people to interview in Frankenmuth.

I wish to thank those Frankenmuth residents who consented to an interview. I learned much about Frankenmuth and the pride residents have for their community.

I am also indebted to Dr. Nora Faires, Associate Professor of History, who served as my thesis advisor and first reader. Her encouragement and shared enthusiasm for the project was most appreciated. I must also thank Dr. William Meyer, Director of Graduate Studies, and my second reader. He offered well reasoned advice on techniques of oral interviews.

## CHAPTER 1

### GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES AND MICHIGAN - AN OVERVIEW

Germans have been a part of the American scene since the seventeenth century. They accompanied French Huguenots to Florida, Captain John Smith to Jamestown, and the Dutch to New Amsterdam. By the time of the American Revolution, almost a quarter of a million Germans were living in the American colonies from Maine to Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

In the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century, the pace of German immigration was slow. The American and the French Revolutions, restrictive decrees by various German states, which limited emigration of certain skilled workers, and the Napoleonic wars were contributing factors to the slow pace.

Eventually the political situation stabilized, laws were liberalized, and German immigration began to increase, at times comprising sizable percentages of the total of immigrants—34.7% and 34.8% during the decades 1850-59 and 1860-69, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Between 1850 and 1930, the period of greatest migration from Europe to the United States, Germany sent six million people to the United States, more than any other nation.<sup>3</sup>

From 1840 to 1852, the span of time during which Frankenmuth and the other Bavarian colonies of the

Saginaw Valley, Michigan were founded, the number of German immigrants totaled 1,039,712. During the period from 1851 to 1860 there were 2,598,214 alien arrivals in the United States, of whom 951,667 were from Germany.<sup>4</sup> By 1972, a census survey estimated that approximately 25.5 million people, or about 12 percent of all Americans, identified themselves as of German descent.<sup>5</sup>

There were many reasons in the mid-nineteenth century to leave Germany. They included crop failure; the feeling on the part of young men that they were liabilities to their parents; the pressure of population increase as a result of thirty years of peace; a mind-set that was reluctant to adopt better methods of farming to meet the demands for food in the rural areas; the destruction of local industries by the introduction of the factory system and the machine; the change in living conditions which threw wages out of balance with costs of necessities; complaints against the growth of pauperism; the bad administration of rulers; and dissatisfaction with religious conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Walter Kamphoefner's recent book, The Westfalians, points out the effects of "protoindustrialization" on emigration from German states, particularly Westfalia. "Protoindustry" refers "to the decentralized, rural, labor-intensive production of goods for a distant market, usually supplemented by marginal agriculture."<sup>7</sup>

Kamphoefner uses as a base the decline of a once flourishing protoindustrial linen industry in Westfalia. The decline of this cottage industry in the first half of the nineteenth century caused severe hardship among landless or land-poor classes dependent upon weaving. The Napoleonic Wars and the Continental blockade cut off German access to Western Hemisphere markets, especially Latin America. Linen production was also becoming mechanized in both the spinning and weaving processes. Also, cotton, which was more adaptable to mechanized production, began to replace linen.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, large numbers of Westfalian "protoindustrial" workers were displaced. Many chose migration to the United States. Chain migration overseas thus began to intensify in the mid-1840s from Westfalia and northern areas of Germany. Southern Germany, though it felt some effects of the decline of rural industry, was not as severely affected. According to Kamphoefner

...the rural lower class--tenant farmers and agricultural laborers--predominated the chain migration. It was above all those who were dependent on supplementary income from rural industry who were pushed out. While this migration was conservative in the sense that regional ties and cultural institutions were maintained, there was little to evoke nostalgia for the rural social order back home. Economic and political discontents were closely intertwined as motives for emigration.<sup>9</sup>



Kamphoefner's study also indicates that virtually whole villages were transplanted, with the assistance of family and friends who were already in America.

For most German emigrants, the United States was their destination of choice. Naturalization laws were simplified. American industrial representatives began to meet ships at the entry ports of the United States, or traveled abroad seeking laborers for the expanding industrial sector. New states vied with one another to advertise the availability of their vast lands. Michigan had a Commissioner of Immigration by 1849, and Wisconsin established a commission of emigration in 1852. Eventually, the western railroads would advertise heavily to lure settlers to their land grants.

In addition to official publicity, Germans were influenced by articles and letters by their countrymen. Gottfried Duden, a German writer who came to America to investigate the New World, lived on a Missouri farm for three years and returned to Germany in 1829 to write of his experiences. He wrote glowingly of his life on the middle western farm. His articles told of the virgin soil, bountiful harvests, and forests which enclosed nearly every farm. Duden's widely circulated letters touted American democracy. Here there were no overbearing princes and clergymen, strutting soldiers and ruthless tax collectors.

The writer failed, however, to mention Missouri's harsh winters, springfloods and crude frontier manners of the state's inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

Duden's accounts and the letters of other permanent settlers helped to draw Germans to Missouri and southern Illinois. With the opening of the Erie Canal, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota also attracted German settlers.

In 1835 various German groups began organizing to unite all of their nationality to formulate plans for a separate commonwealth and to preserve German cultural ideals. A "German Convention" was held in Pittsburgh on October 18, 1837, at which delegates were urged to find ways to

maintain the German language, to sustain the German press, to establish a central normal school for the education of German teachers, and to protest and counteract the efforts of nativistic societies.<sup>11</sup>

Also among the organizations established by German immigrants were those related to their religious preferences. The Lutheran Missouri Synod, for example, was the result of the 1839 immigration of more than 600 devout, well-organized Saxons who were at odds with state authorities over religious practices. In 1847, after evolving a loose congregational organization and finding existing American synods too liberal, they founded the

Missouri Synod. To preserve their faith from outside contamination, they bound it tightly to the German language, proselytized only among German immigrants, and protected their members with a press, a publishing house, and a school system that ultimately included elementary schools, two large seminaries, two teacher colleges, and six preparatory schools.<sup>12</sup>

As the Missouri Synod was solidifying its base, the influx of German immigrants to the United States led Kentucky Congressman Garrett Davis in 1849 to complain about the

myriads who are perpetually pouring into the northwestern states from the German beehives - making large and exclusive settlements for themselves....In less than fifty years northern Illinois, parts of Ohio, and Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota will be literally possessed by them... a nation within a nation, a new Germany....I wish they would turn to South America...<sup>13</sup>.

Of the states Davis mentioned, Michigan had indeed become a target of German immigration by 1849.

Michigan was part of the original Northwest Territory. It was part of the fur trade system of the early 1800s. Settlement of the territory was a slow process. Some reports of the area indicated little land was fit for cultivation; getting to Michigan was difficult, as the main avenue for migration from the east was through Pennsylvania,

down the Ohio River, then up toward the Maumee River and Toledo. Around Toledo was a vast bog known as the Black Swamp. Travel through the swamp toward Michigan was a discouraging chore. In addition, anyone who settled in Michigan with a view to farm and ship produce east soon found such a plan to be unprofitable--freight costs overland for hundreds of miles were prohibitive.<sup>14</sup>

The 1825 opening of the Erie Canal encouraged faster settlement of Michigan. One could now take the canal to Buffalo, then a steamboat to Detroit. The population grew rapidly, and Michigan became a state in 1837. By 1840, the population exceeded 212,00.<sup>15</sup> The state's northerly climate was modified by prevailing westerly winds from the Great Lakes, thereby producing moderate temperatures and permitting a variety of plant and animal life. The forests supplied moisture and swift streams provided good natural drainage. Porous drift formations insured pure drinking water.

Though many complained about a land that encouraged insects (mosquitoes, black flies) and illness, (malaria and ague), the abundance of natural resources continually drew people. There were minerals, ample forests for building materials, marl for fertilizer, and water power. One writer found on comparing the climate of Michigan with that of Germany that "these two climates as far as moisture,

temperature, and sunlight" were concerned "matched very closely."<sup>16</sup>

With Americans and other nationalities, Germans soon began to settle in the southern part of the state. Many of the Germans went to Detroit, Ann Arbor, and the town of Westphalia. In regard to these places, a Catholic missionary, Dr. Klemens Hammer, wrote:

Real German life as it is found in many American states, one can find in Michigan in three places only, for in all other places our people are too scattered to form congregations which might support a German preacher: (1) in Detroit there are two large German congregations The second German Colony and the most prosperous is that near Ann Arbor. the Germans there come largely from Wurtemberg, and are under the Protestant preacher, the Rev. Mr. Schmid.... The third German colony is that on the Grand River, in the neighborhood of Lyons, Ionia County, under the Rev. Mr. Kopp, from Westphalia. The community is called Westphalia.<sup>17</sup>

The Reverend Friedrich Schmid had founded the Michigan Synod of the Lutheran Church in 1840. From his base in Ann Arbor, he was instrumental in missionary work throughout Michigan. New Lutheran churches or German Lutheran settlements in the state were under the auspices of the Michigan Synod.<sup>18</sup>

Settlement of the state began to fan northward. Saginaw County, organized in 1835, became a popular area for settlement. As part of the Saginaw Valley, the county is described in the History of Saginaw County (1881) as having soil that was "all that a farmer could desire."<sup>19</sup> There was

some marshland, but it could be easily drained. Several rivers flowed through the area - the Saginaw, Flint, Cass, and Titibawasse- -all useful for transportation and water power for mills.

Germans, like other settlers, many of them from farms and towns in New York and New England, came to Michigan and the Saginaw Valley. By 1845, there were three Germans reported to be living in the Saginaw Valley.<sup>20</sup> The number of Germans in the area would soon begin to increase steadily. Some of this settlement would be directed by a single individual- -the Reverend Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FOUNDING FATHER

In 1845, the Saginaw Valley became the site of an interesting experiment conducted by a Lutheran minister in Neuendettelsau, a Bavarian village in Middle Franconia. In that year, the Reverend Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, a Lutheran pastor, began the process of founding four unique German settlements in the Saginaw Valley.

Rev. Loehe, a devout and dedicated Lutheran, was born in 1808 in Fuerth, Bavaria, and studied theology in Erlangen from 1826 to 1830. In 1837 he became pastor of the church in Neuendettelsau, and served the parish until his death in 1872.

Shortly after assuming his pastorate, Loehe became passionately interested in the welfare of Lutherans throughout Germany and in the new settlements in America. In 1840, his interest in America increased with his reading of a twelve-page tract which included an appeal for help from Reverend Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken, a Lutheran missionary who traveled through Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, ministering to, and establishing churches for the German Lutherans who had settled in those states. He would be known as the "Father of Lutheran Missions of America."<sup>1</sup>

Wyneken asked in letters called Notruf [Emergency Call] for assistance in the United States. Religious conditions for German Lutheran settlers in America were poor. People were so widely scattered that it was difficult to bring them together into larger groups for the purpose of conducting a spiritual ministry among them on a regular basis. Where congregations had been founded, a traveling preacher could visit only once every three to six weeks.<sup>2</sup>

Kathleen Neils Conzen, author of the entry on "Germans" in Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, adds that

rationalism and anticlericalism had made deep inroads in the religious life of 19th-century Germany. Many immigrants lapsed in practice before arriving in the United States; once arrived, others took advantage of religious freedom to do the same.<sup>3</sup>

Upon considering Wyneken's appeal, Loehe became determined to do his part. Characteristically, Loehe threw his energies into the project with lasting consequences. Through his dreams, plans and activities, Neuendettelsau was converted into a benevolent center which one writer dubbed the "University of Mercy."<sup>4</sup> He began to prepare intelligent young people in "a short and practical manner" to take positions as either preachers or teachers in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The pastors were to safeguard the Lutheran faith among the emigrants. The teachers were to preserve and promote



the German language. Loehe had been distressed to read that many German immigrants soon abandoned the mother tongue in favor of English.

Loehe thus began to work on a way to provide the pastors and teachers Germans in America needed. He devised a plan to create a colony in Michigan. It would have a three-fold purpose. It would serve as a basis for ministering to German Lutherans in the area; it would serve as a mission for Indians; and it would provide a place where German could be spoken without threat of the influence of English. Michigan would well serve as the site, Loehe believed, because it was still more isolated than other areas, particularly Ohio, which was too settled, and where Germans were losing the native language. He wrote,

Perhaps we are mistaken, but it seemed to us as if the somewhat isolated, sea-surrounded location of Michigan was especially favorable for the setting-up and maintaining of a German Lutheran Church; and the lakes and isolated location would help to keep away the English element.<sup>6</sup>

Pastor Schmid of Ann Arbor and a missionary, J. J. Auch, determined that a site fourteen miles from Saginaw on the Cass River would be suitable. The future colony would be located on former Chippewa Indian reservation land. Loehe accepted this location and arrived at a name for the colony, Frankenmuth—"Courage of the Franks".

In Neuendettelsau, Loehe began assembling a group of individuals who would be the colonists. Among them was Reverend Friedrich August Craemer, a thirty-three year old scholar turned Lutheran minister from Kleinlangheim, Bavaria. He would be the spiritual leader of the colonists. Craemer knew Latin, Greek, French, English and Norwegian. His ability to learn languages easily was a decisive factor in Loehe's selection of him as the pastoral leader of the group. He could learn the Indian languages. The others were largely from the small town of Rosstal. They were: Lorenz Loesel, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Haspel and their two year old daughter, Johann Weber, Johann List, Johann Pickelman, Johann Bernthal, Johann Bierlein, and four unmarried, unidentified young women who were to become the wives of four of the men. They would be married by Craemer once they had sailed for the United States. Marriage prior to sailing was prohibited by restrictive marriage laws, which required certain assets before the authorities would issue a marriage license.<sup>7</sup> Four other men were ministerial candidates and would be given charges upon arrival in Michigan.

Before they were allowed to leave, Loehe met with the settlers several times during the winter of 1844-45 to discuss matters relating to the founding of the colony. They were also drilled in Lutheran theology and doctrine, and wrote an eighty-eight paragraph church constitution.

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**Königs Angaben über Raumschiffe**  
 1. Zwei kleine Schiffe:  
 - größtes (Länge 300 Fuß, Breite 40 Fuß, Höhe 10 Fuß)  
 - zweites (Länge 200 Fuß, Breite 30 Fuß, Höhe 8 Fuß)  
 2. Ein großes Schiff (Länge 400 Fuß, Breite 60 Fuß, Höhe 15 Fuß)  
 3. Ein noch größeres Schiff (Länge 500 Fuß, Breite 80 Fuß, Höhe 20 Fuß)



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**MICHIGAN.**

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The constitution would serve as a guide for the settlers' actions in America, guarantee their adherence to Lutheran doctrine, and provide them with a reminder of the purpose of the new colony.





## CHAPTER 3

### ARRIVAL IN MICHIGAN; FOUNDING OF THE FRANKEN COLONIES

On April 20, 1845, Craemer and his group sailed from Bremerhaven. After a voyage of fifty-one days, they arrived in New York. After disembarking, Craemer married a woman who had sailed with another group of German immigrants on the same ship as the Frankenmuthers.

Traveling from New York via boat on the Hudson River, train, and by steamer on the Great Lakes, the colonists arrived in Detroit June 27. Pastor Schmid of Ann Arbor, who had located a possible site for the colony in the Saginaw Valley, met them and introduced them to Pastor Winkler, leader of one of the German congregations in Detroit. To Winkler the group entrusted approximately \$3,000 they had brought. The money was an accumulation of funds the colonists had received from various groups in Germany.

The settlers sailed to Lower Saginaw (Bay City), and then traveled by a small boat to Saginaw City. The Frankenmuthers arrived July 10, 1845, at Saginaw City. Here they rented a house in which all of them would stay, including the missionary from the Ann Arbor church, Auch. Auch had earlier helped to identify the probable site of the colony, and had come to escort the settlers to the area.

After a journey of three months and several thousand miles, the colonists were within reach of their new home.

The colonists were anxious to know exactly how the recommended tracts of land looked. A group of them soon traveled to the site. The land seem propitious; the area that had been chosen was hilly, reminding them of their native Franconia. Moreover, the Cass River flowing through the area would accommodate mills and provide transportation. Consequently, they arranged to purchase 680 acres. As the land was in the Indian Reserve, it cost \$2.50 per acre. Seventy acres of the tract were to be set aside as mission property.<sup>1</sup>

Within days the settlers gathered on the land to construct a first log building, which served all as shelter until other cabins could be built. A second log structure was then built to serve as the mission parsonage and church. This building also became a school for Indian children. Near Christmas time, 1846, the first services for St. Lorenz Lutheran Church, were held in the second building.

Almost from the outset of the colony, tensions apparently emerged between Craemer and the settlers. The pastor's flock did not necessarily approve of his marriage, as his new wife had had a child born out of wedlock. For



his part, Craemer did not seem to believe that the colonists were sufficiently pious.

Another disagreement centered around the design of the the settlement. Reverend Loehe had proposed that Frankenmuth be laid out according to Bavarian custom, with the settlers living in a village and farm land surrounding the town. This was to be a way to maintain the German culture and lifestyle in America. Craemer supported the concept, but the colonists voted to have their own farms, in the American style. The American style consisted of farmhouses located on the owner's land, separate from a village.

After serious thought and discussion, differences were resolved. Craemer allowed the American plan of settlement to be implemented. With harmony restored, the colonists began to work together successfully.

One of the original charges of Frankenmuth was to minister to the Indians in the area. The mission boundaries included a mission at Sebewaing, in the Michigan thumb, on Saginaw Bay. Craemer found he did not like the men running the mission--in his mind, they did not adhere properly to Lutheran doctrine. One of the missionaries, for example, refused to use Lutheran symbols. Rather than trusting the missionaries to instruct Indians at outposts, Craemer

decided to concentrate on recruiting Indian children to come to Frankenmuth, where they would attend school. By June, 1846, he had four boys and seven girls in the school. They had instruction in religion and other subjects. the language medium would be English, though the children would learn some German. When Loehe heard of this, he was upset. In his mind,

"The most natural relation would be if we taught the Indians German and we learn their language. As it is, we are increasing the English, although we want to hold fast to the German.<sup>2</sup>

The problem for Craemer regarding German was that English was the language of the area, and many of the Indians already knew some of it. For those who spoke only Chippewa, English was the language into which it was most commonly translated. Craemer needed an interpreter for the Indians at times, and a German one was difficult to find. Thus, English seemed to him to be the best language to use.

The language question and the implementation of the American style of settlement caused some friction between Loehe and Craemer. Loehe was intensely interested in maintaining the German heritage and preserving the Lutheran influence in America. He did not care to see his first colony deviate from what he felt was the proper path. Craemer felt that Loehe was not being realistic. If conditions in America caused a revision of the original

process, yet the original goal was met, that should be enough.

Craemer was also upset with the Michigan Synod. He viewed its support of the weak Sebawaing missionaries as intolerable. The strain would expand over other issues, and in 1847, led to a break with the Synod. At that time, Frankenmuth joined as a charter member, the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Soon thereafter, the Michigan Synod soon ceased to function.<sup>3</sup>

The original colonists were joined in 1846 by another group of about 100. They, too, came through the sponsorship of Loehe. Most of this group came from the Altmuehl region of Middle Franconia (Mittelfranken). The new arrivals were greeted with joy. However, many of the group were not as dedicated to the religious cause as the first settlers. Craemer complained that it was difficult to get them to go to daily service. Loehe felt that they seemed more interested in the material and economic advantages America might afford them. This caused some problems for a time, but they were resolved as the newcomers adjusted to their new surroundings, and their piety improved.<sup>4</sup>

Frankenmuth's charge as an Indian mission was short-lived. The Chippewa soon moved from the area, and in 1849, the mission ended its activities.<sup>5</sup> Thus, after 1849,

Frankenmuth began to develop into a town no different in layout, architecture or purpose than other American settlements. Its distinguishing characteristics became the use of the Franconian dialect and German, and its continued strict adherence to Lutheran doctrine.

By 1852, Frankenmuth had 345 "souls" in the congregation. A frame church was under construction. Farmhouses dotted the area, and the settlement had a sawmill and a gristmill. A dirt road led to the Saginaw Trail at Bridgeport. The Saginaw Trail was a main north-south road which connected Detroit, Pontiac, Flint, and Saginaw. The settlement also now had postal service to Saginaw .6

#### FRANKENTROST

Shortly after the second group left for Frankenmuth in 1846, Reverend Loehe began to think in terms of another colony. He named it Frankentrost- -"Consolation of the Franks." Its location was to be a site selected by Craemer some six miles from Frankenmuth. Three thousand acres were available for purchase at a cost of \$1,500. The cost was to be covered by an advance sale of lots. Loehe envisioned the new settlement as a complement to Frankenmuth. The name and location were chosen, because, Loehe pointed out,

the first emigrants having had the COURAGE to settle on strange, Indian soil, the successors of these shall take CONSOLATION from these their brethren and rest assured that the same divine favor and guidance are to be their lot likewise.<sup>7</sup>

In the winter of 1846-1847, about eighty individuals were assembled for the new undertaking. The group was led by Pastor Johann Heinrich Philip Graebner, a twenty-eight year old pupil of Loehe. As with the Frankenmuthers, the new colonists were from Franconia. They subscribed to a similiar church constitution as the Frankenmuth group. They also departed from Bremerhaven, Germany. For unknown reasons the colonists left in two separate groups; the first group arriving in Frankenmuth June 24, 1847.

The site chosen by Craemer had been sold before money from the Frankentrost settlers had arrived. Consequently, he selected a second site located seven miles northwest of Frankenmuth was found. This parcel consisted of two thousand acres, which was purchased for seventy-seven cents an acre.

The first structure at the new site of Frankentrost was a 14x24 foot shelter for workers. Once enough ground had been cleared, blockhouses were erected on lots placed north and south of an east-west road. Albert Huegeli indicates that Loehe had wanted the Frankentrosters to use the Bavarian plan of settlement, but, as in Frankenmuth, the American plan was preferred. In this case, a surveyor had

pointed out that the American plan would be less expensive and time consuming.<sup>8</sup>

However, Howard Johnson disputes this scenerio. He claims that the Bavarian village plan was used to a greater extent than others thought. Like Huegeli, he describes the cabins as being on either side of an east-west road. The church and parsonage were to be in the center of the village on ninety-six acres set aside for the pastor, and purchased with a contribution from each colonist equivalent to the price of every twentieth acre of land. Individual farms were to extend in narrow strips away from the village road. Johnson says this pattern was constant as the village increased in size.<sup>9</sup>

The discrepancy is important because if Huegeli is correct, the use of the American plan by the Frankentrosters was another blow to Loehe's attempt to preserve the settlers' German heritage. What may have actually happened is a modification of the Bavarian plan to adapt to American surveying methods. The church, in any case, was the center of the community.

In September, 1847, Craemer installed Graebner as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church. By the end of October, twenty-four families were settled on property they had purchased. Thus, the second phase of Loehe's plan was

complete. Two Lutheran, Franconian settlements had been planted in Michigan soil.

Frankentrost grew slowly. In 1848 thirty families (eighty-one individuals) were reported to be in Frankentrost. By 1852, there were 158. This was a fair increase. But another contemporary observer indicated in 1866 that there were no more than forty families in the community. He attributed the small population to too much swampy land on the tract, and he added that he did not believe Frankentrost was destined to grow much.<sup>10</sup> T. J. Pollen recalled that Frankentrost was basically an opening in the forest and the settlers lived there for ten years without a road to the outside world; there was a path through the woods to Frankenmuth.<sup>11</sup> The 1881 History of Saginaw County, Michigan also points out that Frankentrost lacked a river, and that the land was rich and flat, but swampy.<sup>12</sup>

#### FRANKENLUST

In 1848, the Bavarian Society for Inner Missions decided to form a third colony, Frankenlust (Joy of the Franks). The name was chosen because the new colony would help celebrate the success of the first two. The Bavarian Missionary Society, though not directly connected with Loehe, consulted with him at length about plans for the

settlement. The method to be employed for the purchase of land would be different than what was done in the first two colonies. Previously, funds had been raised through donations or the pre-sale of lots. Though the method worked, monies sometimes had arrived too late to purchase the desired properties (as in Frankentrost). The new scheme was to create a circulating colonization fund "only for Lutherans," which would be used to buy the land for Frankenlust. The land would be resold to settlers in parcels, and the money received from that would be used in other places for the same purpose.<sup>13</sup>

Loehe had hopes that the circulating fund and Lutheran only restrictions would keep German culture and language intact in the Saginaw Valley. The relatively isolated Saginaw Valley was the sole hope for such preservation, as Loehe was convinced that elsewhere in North America the German element was doomed by the advance of English.<sup>14</sup>

Reverend Georg Ernst Christian Ferdinand Sievers was to be the pastor of the new settlement, and also the custodian of the circulating fund. Arriving in Michigan several months before the colonists, he purchased land in today's Bay County, three miles from Bay City. Unlike Frankentrost, the land included two branches of a river, the Squaconning. The site was thought to be a better tract than Frankentrost.



The first sixteen settlers arrived on June 22, 1848. The same day, they established St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Because of a bout with typhoid fever, Siever was not installed officially as pastor until October 31, 1848.

A settlement plan was agreed upon which placed the church and parsonage on a peninsula formed by the two branches of the river. The remainder of the peninsula was for house and garden plots, two to three acres in size. Other houses and gardens would border either side of a state road that ran through the settlement's property.

As they settled on their land, the settlers began to experience problems. They soon suffered from a variety of illnesses, cholera among them. Sievers claimed it was the low plain on which the colony was situated. The European practice of working from early morning to late evening was considered unhealthy in Frankenlust. Linen shirts gave way to cotton because workmen perspired so much that the linen was annoyingly cold against the body<sup>15</sup>.

As changes occurred in dress, there were also changes in work. Frankenlust became only partially an agricultural community. Its inhabitants consisted of blacksmiths, cobblers, tailors, and other craftsmen. Because of their skills, within a few years of the colony's founding, these

settlers' services were in demand in the neighboring towns of Saginaw and Lower Saginaw (Bay City). Filling skilled jobs meant, however, fewer farmers. The colony eventually had to rely on outside sources for its food supply.

Reports indicate the colony grew steadily to 1853, after which time movement into the colony declined to a slower pace.<sup>16</sup> By 1858, author Truman Fox reported in his History of Saginaw County that the settlement was composed of 64 families. A church building existed by that time. Fox applauds the Frankenlust settlement when he says that

Everything here exhibits signs of thrift and industry, and it is a matter of great congratulation to see the accession of our population composed of so industrious a class. Many, and, indeed, a great majority of these Germans belong to families of high respectability and refinement.<sup>17</sup>

#### AMELITH

1848 was a year of upheaval in Europe. Revolutions broke out in several countries. The German states were especially affected, as economic and political distress led to disorder throughout the area. The decline of protoindustry was causing massive unemployment, particularly in north German states such as Westfalia [see Chapter One]. A crisis in agriculture at this time was causing unrest. Many Germans looked at emigration as a way of avoiding the

problems they saw arising in the German economic and political arenas. Ferdinand Koch was among them.

Koch, of Karlshuetten, Franconia, was the father-in-law of Reverend Sievers. He visited Frankenlust in 1850. An expert in mining operations, Koch had run a glass factory. He was impressed with the infant settlement and decided there was need for another similiar settlement in the area. Koch then arranged for the purchase of land, approximately one and a half miles west of Frankenlust. A portion of the purchase was to be used for church purposes. He named the new colony Amelith, after his wife's birthplace.

Amelith was to be a place for Koch's German factory employees to come if the consequences of the revolution of 1848 would ultimately cause the closure of his plants. Such did not become the case, so his employees did not emigrate. Instead, friends and acquaintances of settlers in Frankenlust and the other colonies in the Saginaw Valley populated Amelith.

In 1851, workers from Frankenlust built a log church/shelter for the expected settlers. Two families arrived in the fall of 1851. The following spring others arrived. It may be that Koch established "blockhouses" or "barracks" at Amelith to house the many German immigrants, who were like "serfs," employed on area farms.<sup>18</sup>

In its first decade, Amelith's growth was slow. Thus, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church had no pastor of its own and Sievers assumed the duties of pastor for the settlement. But in 1867, the community had grown large enough ("350 souls and 60 voting members") to support its own pastor.<sup>19</sup>

#### FRANKENHILF

At the same time that Koch was creating Amelith, Loehe's group was completing plans for a fourth settlement, Frankenhilf (Help of the Franks). Loehe was concerned that laws which required proof of ownership of a specific amount of property before marriage were causing couples to turn to immoral practices. The result of these practices was an alarming number of children born out of wedlock. Also, Loehe felt these children were destined for a life of poverty and contempt.<sup>20</sup> Emigration, then, might save those who had fallen.

The new colony was to offer land and a cabin to qualified persons, as well as employment and wages on a regular basis. Industries, such as a matchbox factory, were to help with employment. To qualify for the colony, one had to be penitent of former behavior, declare allegiance to the church constitution of Frankenmuth, and have enough money for the trip to Michigan and sufficient resources to meet

initial living expenses at the new site. The colony, then, was not designed for the poor. A prospective settler had to have some means in order to meet the requirements.

Sievers and Craemer sought out a site on state land. They decided upon 1,592 acres of land on the Cheboyganing River eight miles northeast of Frankenmuth and six miles east of Frankentrost, for \$1.25 an acre.

Loehe commented upon the purchase:

So there is land available for a fourth colony! In the hearts of such as are interested in the cause a thought comes to the surface again, namely, of a colony of poor people who in the fatherland have no prospects to marry. True, those who have undertaken our plan cannot open an asylum to such as are without any means whatever; our poor would have to possess so much at least as is needed to pay their fare to America. But it is possible to let them have a piece of land and a cabin, and on days on which their own land would not need their work, these people could be given employment and so that they gradually could pay off their land and cabin. Over there on the Cheboyganing River there soon may blossom a flower of heavenly mercy.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the "blossom" did not come into full bloom. The first group of settlers who arrived in Michigan broke up. A portion settled in Monroe and Detroit. Others abandoned the party in lower Saginaw and joined other settlements. Only two families and the pastor, Candidate of Theology Herman Kuehn, came to the site of Frankenhilf, arriving in June, 1850.

The families had much trouble fighting poverty in their new home. Kuehn, realizing that only two families could not support him, soon left. He stayed in Frankenmuth until the spring of 1851, then the following year moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Pastor C. Cloeter of Saginaw was sent to the colony to look for a possible location for factories. He wrote to Loehe: "How can these people in Frankenhilf live? Maybe from tree bark, there is nothing more than wild forests, swamps and water holes.<sup>22</sup> Cloeter had been Loehe's original candidate for the pastorate at Frankenhilf. But after viewing the settlement, he decided that he did not like such a crude life. He went to Saginaw in late 1849 and soon accepted a post in the city. He concluded life in Saginaw was greatly preferred to the primeval forest.<sup>23</sup>

By 1853, twenty families were living in Frankenhilf. A log church, St. Michael's Evangelical Lutheran Church, was completed the same year. Four more families were there by 1856. A crude road connected the colony with Frankenmuth, and another one would soon lead to a growing American community, Vassar.

Farming activity was at first limited by the lack of families. Fields were not completely cleared of stumps. The colonists were dependent upon pigs and cows, which were

threatened by wolves. Diets consisted "chiefly of corn bread, milk, edible mushrooms and sometimes venison. They drank a beverage brewed from acorns and beech-nuts."<sup>24</sup>

From such meager beginnings, life in Frankenhilf slowly improved. Eventually the community became a railroad stop and straddled a highway built from Pontiac to Bay City. A road from Saginaw to Frankentrost was extended through Frankenhilf to Sandusky. The colony thus found itself favorably situated. In addition, farmers realized the land was very fertile.

At some point in the nineteenth century, the community changed its name to Richville. There are several versions as to why the change occurred. Walter Romig, in Michigan Place Names says that conductors on the railroad found the name Frankenhilf hard to pronounce. They knew, however, that the land surrounding the settlement contained rich soil. They thus began calling the stop "Richville." The name became so common that the Frankenhilf name was dropped in 1862.<sup>25</sup> Howard Johnson disputes the date of the change. He contends the name was changed sometime between 1890 and 1895. He also believes the name change was a result of too much confusion for postal clerks who had to deal with mail mistakenly sent to Frankenhilf which was supposed to go to one of the other "Frankens."<sup>26</sup>

Frankenhilf was the last of the colonies founded by Loehe. Disagreement over control of the church in the community caused a rift. There was a question as to whether the church should remain under European control or come under congregational control. The conflict widened to include other matters and soon spread to the other colonies. In 1853-54 the colonies and Loehe discontinued their relationship. Loehe decided to turn his attention to similar projects in Iowa.<sup>27</sup>

The Franconian colonies were now on their own. Whether they would be successful remained to be seen.



## CHAPTER 4

### SUCCESS AND STAGNATION

Of the five colonies discussed in the previous chapter, only two, Frankenmuth and Frankenhilf (Richville) enjoyed lasting commercial development. One reason was location. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Saginaw Valley was experiencing the effects of the lumbering boom. Saginaw and Bay City both became centers of rapid growth due to the lumber industry. This growth affected those German colonies nearest the cities-- Frankenlust and Amelith.

Frankenlust settlers found that large scale agriculture was impractical on the land on which the colony lay. Thus, many began to seek employment outside the colony. Work was readily found in Bay City. In fact, Bay City had grown by the 1920s to the point that Frankenlust had lost its identity as a separate settlement.

Proximity to larger Saginaw and Bay City also resulted in few business ventures in Frankenlust. A blacksmith shop, a creamery, a post office, and a saloon were the mainstays. Several general stores were opened at various times, but all eventually closed. Also, a coal mine operated for a time, as did a brickworks.<sup>1</sup>

Still, the church at Frankenlust continued to expand as it added members. By 1920 there were 603 on its rolls. Johnson found that the church "provided the means for

reasserting one's cultural identity and was the strongest unifying element in the colony."<sup>2</sup>

In 1988, all that remains of the settlement of Frankenlust is a group of houses and church buildings on Michigan Highway 84 at an exit of I-75. Businesses at this intersection are typical of other I-75 exits: gas stations, fast food outlets, and a few restaurants. Additionally, subdivisions have been built in the area, making Frankenlust in effect a suburb of Bay City. Other than a historical marker in the community cemetery which describes the significance of the area, one would not know this was once a German colony.

Amelith shared much the same fate as Frankenlust. Its proximity to both Saginaw and Bay City on Michigan 84 resulted in little lasting commercial growth. Koch's plan to import German workers to the colony never materialized. A post office operated in Amelith from 1894 to 1900.<sup>3</sup> In 1920, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church reported 600 souls and 400 communicants.<sup>4</sup> Today one finds basically a convenience store, a marine business and a mobile home sales, a few residences and St. John's Church. Unlike Frankenlust, the community has remained rural. Romig aptly uses the term "hamlet" to describe Amelith in its present form.

Frankentrost, too, did not develop. As previously mentioned, this colony grew quite slowly due in part to its location. During the 1860's the only road from Frankentrost led to Frankenmuth. Farmers in Frankentrost had to compete with already successful farmers in the older community. A plank road from Saginaw reached the colony in 1870. There was hope that markets would thus expand. But the presence of swamp land limited agricultural expansion.<sup>5</sup>

Some commercial growth occurred after 1870. A post office, called "Trosville" operated from 1868 to 1881.<sup>6</sup> Howard Johnson reported that the colony had a blacksmith, cheese factory, tavern, dancehall and a hardware and cider mill. The hardware store and cider mill began operations in 1914, and were the last commercial ventures until 1970.<sup>7</sup>

A traveler on Michigan Highway 46 would scarcely notice Frankentrost today. The only indications of a community are a road sign announcing the community, some residences, a bar (The Stone Pony), a poured cement patio and figurine store which appears closed, and the building complex of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In Frankenlust, Amelith, and Frankentrost, the churches appear to be the single unifying force. They each continue to hold services and maintain schools. If the churches were

to close, whatever cohesiveness the communities still have would probably be destroyed.

Frankenhilf/Richville experienced a different pattern than Frankenlust, Amelith, and Frankentrost. Growth was very slow (35 persons on the church rolls in 1874), but the settlement had several advantages over the others, that eventually spurred its development: it was not near a larger city, and its farmland was good. By the mid-1870s, second and third generations of Frankenmuthers and Frankentrosters began to settle in the area.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it had road connections to several other towns, and a railroad eventually came through the community.

Hence, after 1874, the population began to grow. By 1892, St. Michael's reported a membership of 908.<sup>9</sup> Howard Johnson indicates that between 1856 and 1920 at least twenty-two businesses were in operation. Aside from the usual blacksmith, there was also an undertaker, photographer, a bank, three hotels, a millinery shop, and a firehouse.<sup>10</sup>

Today, Richville is a small community. It does not appear to have grown much after the 1920s. The "downtown" is just off the intersection of Michigan Highways 46 and 15. At the junction of the two roads stand two restaurants which, according to their signs, are famous for their food.

St. Michael's Evangelical Lutheran Church is in a contemporary structure. A grain elevator stands beside the railroad tracks.

The first colony, Frankenmuth, has enjoyed the greatest commercial success of any of the settlements. Its location, like that of Frankenhilf, has been of great help. Roads leading to Saginaw and Flint either came through the town or were nearby. The Cass River provided the opportunity for saw and flour mills, and eventually breweries. In addition, the land surrounding the site proved to be fertile.

By 1875, twenty years after the founding of Frankenmuth, there were twenty-five businesses operated there. They included the afore-mentioned mills, a brewery, four general stores, a furniture store, three hotels, a combination woolen and cider mill, two cheese manufacturers, several slaughter houses, and the workshops of various craftworkers.<sup>11</sup>

A state census of 1894 reported 1,982 inhabitants in Frankenmuth township (created in 1854), with approximately 530 of that figure living in the town of Frankenmuth. St. Lorenz Evangelical Lutheran Church boasted 405 members, and owned a church building, a confirmation house, seven school buildings and "just as many homes for teachers and approximately seventy acres of land."<sup>12</sup> Carl Hansen,

curator of the Frankenmuth Historical Museum says that Frankenmuth grew at the rate of

100 people per decade between 1850 and 1930 (village population in 1930 was 996); 233 per decade between 1930 and 1960 (1,705 population). However, from 1960 to present [1979], the growth has been 950 per decade, resulting in a 1979 population of approximately 3,650.13

It is clear that Frankenmuth had become the most viable of the Franconian settlements. Perhaps it was due to it being the first. More likely, in the nineteenth century, Frankenmuth became successful because of its location. Its proximity to the more usable Cass River gave the town an advantage over the others. Also, the farmers in the area had become quite successful, and Frankenmuth was the center for the sale of some of their products as well as the place where they purchased necessities. As an agricultural center, then, Frankenmuth was doing well. The approaching twentieth century, however, would see a diversification of the economy. Frankenmuth would begin to move toward a different economic base. It would be a decisive era for this German settlement.

## CHAPTER 5

### TRANSFORMATION: FROM "HICK TOWN" TO "CHICK TOWN"

This chapter will show how Frankenmuth experienced several changes: from a successful nineteenth-century agricultural center to a late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century hostelry center for businessmen in the Saginaw and Flint area; then to a twentieth-century mecca for lovers of chicken dinners.

As the previous chapter indicated, Frankenmuth had developed into a sizable town by the turn of century. Although it was very much German in its ethnic make-up, there was no indication architecturally that this place was any different from other American towns of the same era and size. A casual traveler through the town would not note anything distinctive, except for a large preponderance of Germanic names of the business owners on many of the stores. The business district looked like any other small midwestern town center, and the same could be said of the residences. William Zehnder, Jr. remarked that the town looked just like any western town, but that in the back rooms of the hotels "nobody could speak English."<sup>1</sup>

Hence, though the town was American in looks, it still had a Germanic flavor in the use of language. Many of the residents still spoke German to each other and in the businesses of the town. Each of the life-long residents I

interviewed (age range: 67 to 77) recalled German spoken much of the time in Frankenmuth when they were children in the 1920s and 1930s. They also mentioned that they spoke German at home, that religious instruction was in German, and that they learned English as children. Clearly, then, consciously or not, there was an effort to maintain the German heritage of the town's founders.

This effort has long roots in the settlement. Earlier in the century, this desire by Frankenmuthers to maintain the community's Germanic integrity extended even to the rejection of an offer to run a railroad line through town. According to Herman Zehnder, the reasoning was that the railroad might have brought with it "riff-raff and undesirable people."<sup>2</sup> Instead, it was built through a settlement four miles to the north, Gera. The four miles thus was to serve as a buffer. Oddly, though, a feeder track was laid by the Saginaw-Detroit Railway Company from Frankenmuth to the Bay City-Detroit electric interurban on Dixie Highway. It was therefore easy for anyone to arrive in Frankenmuth by rail.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of the effort to maintain its ethnicity, Frankenmuthers found that English was an essential business tool. It had to be used not only by the storekeepers who ordered wares from Detroit, Flint, Saginaw, Bay City, or other American cities, it was also becoming necessary for



the hotel industry of the town, an industry of increasing importance to Frankenmuth's economy. By 1900, Frankenmuth could boast of five hotels: Union House, Exchange Hotel, Commercial House, Stahl's Eagle Hotel, and the Henry Goetz Hotel. These were not hotels in the modern sense--they were essentially boarding houses which provided food and lodging for travelers and their animals.<sup>4</sup> Because Frankenmuth was located approximately three hours distance from both Saginaw and Flint, it was a convenient stop for traveling salesmen who had business in the region. The town was viewed as a quiet place from which to branch out into the area, and the Frankenmuth establishments were known to treat their customers well.

In 1884, Theodore Fischer purchased the Exchange Hotel and ran it for four years. He found business so good that he sold the building and built a new hotel, the Union House, across the street. The Union House was better known as "Fischer's Hotel" by the local residents.<sup>5</sup>

Although the lodging industry was strong at the turn of the century, a pronounced decline in the hotel trade began in the 1920s and continued for about thirty years. This was due to the building of roads which by-passed Frankenmuth. The hostelry function thus all but died out. The Exchange Hotel, which had had several owners since Theodore Fischer, closed about 1923. The William Zehnder, Sr. family bought

the boarded up building in 1928. Although they knew little about the restaurant business, the elder Zehnder thought money could be made. The name of the establishment was changed to Zehnder's (also seen as Zehnders).

To make their hotel and restaurant businesses viable, both Fischer's and Zehnder's used family members as part of the work force. William "Tiny" Zehnder, Jr. recalls having to come home from school as a child to "wash dishes, cook chickens, kill chickens, gut chickens."<sup>6</sup> Saturdays and Sundays were also days for family members to work.

Fischer's was the first of the two establishments to become popular for what was to become a staple of Frankenmuth fare--chicken dinners. Rudy List, a life-long resident who worked at Fischer's as a youth, and then later for William Zehnder, Jr. explained that one of the Fischer boys, Herman, worked in the 1920s as a mechanic for an automobile dealer in Saginaw. He fixed the cars of many well-to-do Saginaw residents. He would either drive people to Frankenmuth or suggest a trip to the town for his family's excellent family-style chicken dinners. Originally, a chicken dinner at Fischer's cost seventy-five cents.<sup>7</sup>

Herman Fischer eventually took over the operation and, with his wife Lydia, ran the business until 1941. They then

passed it on to their son Elmer and his wife Marcella, who ran the establishment until 1950.

The Zehnder family also specialized in chicken dinners. Business went quite well, and the building was enlarged in the 1940s. Fischer, in competition, also began to enlarge his building. Rudy List recalls that the Fischer addition was opened bit by bit, as construction progressed. Tables set up in partly finished surroundings must not have bothered customers too much. Photographs in Frankenmuth: Michigan's Little Bavaria, a tourist guide published in 1988, includes a 1940s photograph of patrons lined up outside Fischer's waiting for their turn to have a "Frankenmuth all you can eat" chicken dinner.<sup>8</sup>

Through the 1940s and 1950s, although the restaurants were attracting tourists, especially on the weekends, there was nothing else in Frankenmuth to keep visitors there. They came for dinner and left. Many people--my parents among them--came on special occasions, or as part of a day devoted to touring the "thumb" area of Michigan. Thus, when dinner was finished, they would either head home or motor on to the next destination.

Competition between the Fischers and the Zehnders ended in 1949 when Elmer Fischer decided to leave the restaurant business after a disastrous Thanksgiving Day. The weather

that day had been very bad, and few had come to the restaurant. Fischer was left with thirty turkeys. Unable to store this large number of birds, he tried to give them to different social groups. Discouraged, Elmer Fischer talked to William Zehnder, Jr. about selling the business.<sup>9</sup>

Negotiations ensued, and in 1950, Fischer's became the second business for the Zehnders.

William Zehnder, Jr., who had bowed out of the other restaurant to run the family farm, returned to run the Fischer hotel. He recalls that the building was in need of repair, and that he spent \$8,000 to restore the roof and remodel the interior. Even after making these repairs, he ran the business under the name Fischer's Frankenmuth Hotel until 1958.<sup>10</sup> Zehnder hoped to capitalize on the popularity of the the Fischer name among those loyal to that restaurant.

By 1956, there were 25 full-time employees and 75 part-time workers employed by the Zehnders. Frankenmuth: Michigan's Little Bavaria reports that in 1956, a chicken dinner cost \$2.65 on a weekday and \$2.85 on the weekend. Most of the business was on weekends and holidays.<sup>11</sup>

Partly because of the weekend emphasis, and partly because of the change in ownership (as people became aware of the change in management, they thought the Zehnders did

not have the same touch with food that the Fischers had), the second restaurant did not prove as profitable as the Zehnder family had hoped. The years 1956 and 1957 were particularly bad for the Fischer restaurant. The business lost money both years. In 1958, the Zehnders decided something had to be done. This circumstance set the stage for the transformation of Frankenmuth from agricultural center to a tourist attraction.

William Zehnder, Jr. says that the question of what to do consisted of several aspects. One problem was finances. With the losses at Fischer's, there was little money for anything. Then there was the name, Fischer's. It no longer worked for the Zehnders. A new one was needed. Finally, there was a feeling that the restaurant needed a face-lift. But again, money was needed for that.

A name change would not be difficult. But what kind of name to choose? Finances and a face-lift were the two major problems. Nevertheless, the family was determined to do something.

The idea of a face-lift soon changed to a decision to add on to the restaurant. What style should the addition be? Mr. Zehnder had seen an advertisement for an architect named Lederer, who had won a national award for the design of a Penney's restaurant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1958,

he contacted Lederer about architectural changes. Lederer agreed to come to Frankenmuth for \$100 to inspect the facility. Zehnder describes what was, in retrospect, the momentous meeting with Lederer in these terms:

So he came over, and he looked at the place, and we talked to him and he said for \$400 he would make a drawing. He said, "I went up and down this town. It's a German community; but there's no German [architecture] - all the places are either colonial or all the places look like a western town."

It was no different. And so he said, "my God, I would add on this Bavarian addition." For \$400 he would make a rendering. So we had a meeting, and I said ok, if the company hasn't got \$400, I'll give him \$400. Let's put that much into it. So he went back and he came back with that in color....Our family was impressed.<sup>12</sup>

The only thing in town that remotely resembled German, or, more appropriately, Bavarian architecture, was the Rupprecht Sausage store. The exterior of the building had been remodeled in 1948 into a Bavarian motif. No other stores had taken this lead. Ironically, the idea of a Bavarian village on the outskirts of the town had been suggested earlier in the 1940s by a Frankenmuth resident, Edmund C. Arnold, a former Frankenmuth News editor, but his suggestion did not catch on.<sup>13</sup>

Lederer, for \$2,000, would design an addition that would resemble a Bavarian farmer's house. He would also design the tablecloths and the restaurant bar in the Bavarian theme. The Zehnders, after consultation with their

banker (he was related to the family) decided to risk the addition. The name of the restaurant would be changed to the Bavarian Inn to reflect the new look.

Upon completion of the \$90,000 addition in 1959, William Zehnder, Jr. borrowed \$5,000 to publicize the new look. The result was a week-long celebration that ended on Memorial Day. Billboards, advertisements, German bands, and townspeople and employees in Bavarian garb, dirndls and lederhosen, helped to draw people.

The public relations effort succeeded beyond the wildest dreams. Mr. Zehnder says that the week of that grand opening was extremely busy. From serving 100 people a day, business jumped to 200 a day. After that, business remained good because the Zehnders had "the food, and people wanted that German atmosphere and schmalz." Since that time, as many as 5,600 meals have been served on a single day at the Inn in the fall.<sup>14</sup> The grand opening celebration became an annual affair called the Bavarian Festival. It has been a June fixture for Frankenmuth for thirty years.

Because of the efforts of the Zehnders, the chicken is king in Frankenmuth today. In 1981, the Bavarian Inn alone used 193,635 chickens, or approximately 531 chickens a day. By 1987, The Bavarian Inn expected to use over 650,000 pounds of chicken annually.<sup>15</sup>

Zehnder's produces enough meals to make it the eighth largest restaurant in the United States. The Bavarian Inn is the tenth.<sup>16</sup> Both still serve all you can eat chicken dinners, but the price has risen to about ten dollars. The Bavarian Inn expects one million guests in 1988, a year touted as the 100th anniversary of the establishment.<sup>17</sup> (Actually, it is the 100th year that a restaurant has stood on the site.)

The Bavarian Inn and Zehnder's both have expanded since 1958. In 1967, a Glockenspiel tower with a thirty-five bell carillon were added to the Bavarian Inn. Carved wooden figures act out the legend of the Pied Piper of Hameln three times daily. Recent additions to both restaurants have enlarged seating capacities and increased retail space for souvenirs and food items. Both restaurants produce baked goods for sale in their respective shops.

Zehnder's and the Bavarian Inn have also spawned other restaurants. A Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce binder, Michigan Host, lists 15 food establishments within a two mile area of the larger restaurants. Not all of these serve chicken dinners, of course. It is hard to compete in that area with the "Big Two" [One large restaurant, Aldrich's, closed early in 1988, a testament to that]. Instead, one can expect to find more fast food, less expensive fare, or items for people who do not like chicken.



Clearly, by the 1980s, Frankenmuth had made the transformation from "hick" town to "chick" town. Additionally, the Frankenmuth that once served as a weekend stop strictly for chicken dinners is, in the 1980s, a place that can attract people on a daily basis.

## CHAPTER 6

### FRANKENMUTH IN THE 1980S

Frankenmuth today has become a city which may be viewed in two ways. It is first a cohesive community, known for its German heritage, its cleanliness, and its residents' religious devotion. Its proximity to Saginaw and Flint have made it a bedroom community, especially since the opening of the I-75 expressway in the 1950's. A reputation for good schools has also drawn people to the city. In 1988, the population of the city is approximately 4,000.<sup>1</sup>

The growth in Frankenmuth's population from 1,705 in 1960 to its present size has led to the expansion of a segment of the business community devoted to servicing residents. This is an expansion somewhat unrelated to the tourist industry, and is visible in terms of a strip shopping center on the north edge of town. It was built in the 1970s, expanded in 1987, and houses a Ferry Drug store, IGA-Ben Franklin store, an Italian restaurant, and several other shops. The fact that Frankenmuth has become a bedroom community to both Saginaw and Flint has aided in this type of business expansion.

A drive through the streets of Frankenmuth, both in the business area and in residential areas, confirms Chamber of Commerce reports that the city is extremely clean. Litter is rarely seen in the business district, and most lawns are

kept well manicured. Reportedly, one of the silent laws of Frankenmuth is that homes and property are to be constantly maintained; if a lawn gets too long, the owner hears about it, or may read a complaint about it in the newspaper.

The community currently supports several churches. There are two Lutheran churches, one Missouri and one Wisconsin Synod, a United Methodist congregation, a Bible Church, and a Roman Catholic church in the community. The original church, St. Lorenz Evangelical Lutheran (Missouri Synod), remains the largest in membership. The retired Pastor of St. Lorenz, John Deterding, says there are approximately 3,400 communicant members, of which about 1300 "addresses" (families) are active. Attendance on a Saturday and Sunday at St. Lorenz averages 1,700 for three English services and 100 to 150 for a single German language service.<sup>2</sup>

The second way in which to view Frankenmuth today is as a tourist attraction. The tourist aspect is directly a result of Zehnder's, the Bavarian Inn, and Bronner's. They serve as the magnet which draw visitors to Frankenmuth. Since the 1960s, their success led other entrepreneurs to realize that there were possibilities for other kinds of businesses which would appeal to tourists. Soon, former private homes on Main Street became shops.

Today, tourist-oriented businesses line Main Street from Weiss Street on the south, to state route 38 on the north. They involve remodeled homes or store fronts. Even an old high school building has been converted into a series of shops under the name "School Haus Square."

As the 1980s began, the Zehnders continued to expand their buildings and their holdings. A covered wooden bridge, known as the "Holzbruecke" spans the Cass River next to the Bavarian Inn. The bridge was built by the Zehnders in 1980. It connects the Bavarian Inn on one side of the Cass River to a large parking lot and the Bavarian Inn Motor Lodge (opened 1986) on the other side.

The Bavarian Inn Motor Lodge is also part of the Zehnder family operation. It currently has 100 rooms and indoor facilities such as a pool and recreation area. In September, 1988, the Inn announced an expansion plan which will include ninety-eight more rooms.<sup>3</sup> The new rooms should be open sometime in 1989.

Other business ventures operated by the Zehnder family include a city tour bus service, the "Folkswagon;" the Schnitzelbank Shop, a wood-carving store; Frankenmuth Cheese Haus, a specialty food store; The Covered Bridge Gift Shop; and the Leather Shop.<sup>4</sup> Each of the stores is located in a Bavarian-style building.

The success of the Bavarian Inn also caused others to look more closely at the Bavarian style of architecture. Mr. Zehnder felt that this aspect of Bavarian heritage was something on which to capitalize. He encouraged others to remodel or build in the Bavarian motif. Before too many years passed, other businesses did just that. Zehnder believes that this architectural style is aesthetically pleasing, but he likes to mention one particular advantage to Bavarian style buildings - the sloped roofs are much less of a headache than flat roofs; they leak less and are easier to maintain.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1980's numerous buildings had the Bavarian theme. The city's banks built new structures in the late 1960s, which were in the Bavarian style. Bronner's, a firm specializing in Christmas decorations, has a large building on the southern edge of Frankenmuth. It is the first Bavarian style building most travelers from the southern approach to the city see. Other businesses which incorporate the theme include a strip shopping center on the northern edge of the city, Satow's Drug Store, and numerous small shops and food stores.

Even McDonald's, a national chain uses the Bavarian theme in the design of its Frankenmuth outlet. The design integrates the restaurant with the buildings near it. In addition, it harmonizes the presence of such an

establishment and, the McDonald's managers presumably hope, creates good public relations with Frankenmuthers.

Curiously, intermingled with the Bavarian theme, one finds standard American architecture from the 1800s--the typical "western town" buildings Zehnder had mentioned earlier. Zehnder's Restaurant has expanded several times, but it has always maintained a Mount Vernon look. The reason for this is a desire to maintain some distinction between the Bavarian Inn and Zehnder's. The Village Store, next to Zehnder's, is in standard nineteenth-century style. Shops in houses which line Main Street have not gone to the Bavarian theme. They have kept their original designs, although the trim may now be in a Bavarian blue, or they may display hex signs. This allows for a partial Bavarian identification without major expenditures.

In addition to architectural style, there are several things that some Frankenmuthers like to point out in regard to the German heritage of the city. In particular, they mention the Bavarian Festival which occurs in June each year. A week-long festival, it features parades, polka bands, singing and dancing, German food and drink, chicken barbeques, and varied arts and crafts exhibits. The festival attracts approximately 200,000 people a year.<sup>6</sup>

In July, after the Bavarian Festival, a ten- and twenty-kilometer race called the "Volkslaufe" takes place. Begun in 1976, it has become an annual event.

The Frankenmuth odessey continues. Currently, the city can claim to be the only city in Michigan with two breweries. G. Heileman Brewing Company, a national corporation, now operates what was once called the Frankenmuth Brewery. In addition, in the spring of 1988, the Frankenmuth Brewing Company opened, operating on the site of the former Geyer Brothers Brewery. Part of a trend toward "micro-breweries," the Frankenmuth Brewery produces beers according to traditional German methods and recipes.

It is clear that in the 1980s, Frankenmuth continued to refine its tourist-based economy. Its former role as a service center for area farmers has been usurped by a larger economic fact: the more tourists and the more tourist operations, the better the local economy. Tourism is now a fact of life for Frankenmuthers. Now one must ask, how well is this fact accepted by area residents?

## CHAPTER 7

### FRANKENMUTH--FROM ONE MISSION TO ANOTHER?

As indicated in the previous chapter, Frankenmuth continued to make great strides in the 1980s toward a tourist-dominated economy. As Reverend Loehe had purposefully planned the Franconian colonies in Michigan, contemporary Frankenmuth's pursuit of tourists is also deliberate. While Loehe's Frankenmuth was to serve the Indians and German Lutherans, modern Frankenmuth serves tourists.

What has this change in goals meant to the local residents? I felt the changes from an agricultural economy to a tourist-based economy must have had some effect on them. I suspected that many residents would resent the changes, particularly as they relate to life-long residents and the individual's desire to maintain a normal lifestyle.

I thus constructed a questionnaire that would elicit information of a general nature, and also provide information of a more exact nature. The major thrust of the questionnaire was to discover to what extent Frankenmuth residents support what has happened to their community since 1958, and who they felt was responsible for Frankenmuth's change from an agricultural economy to a tourist economy. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendix.

Once the questions were constructed, a sample of residents was needed. In order to obtain a variety of



opinions from the community, I decided to divide the residents into two groups: group one consisted of long-term residents who have lived in Frankenmuth all their lives, or at least prior to 1958, the year remodeling began on Fischer's Hotel. Group two involved residents who have lived in Frankenmuth since 1958. A third group, business people, was also to be part of the interview process.

#### PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE FRANKENMUTH LEGACY

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that all the residents and business people interviewed had at least basic knowledge of Frankenmuth's history. Anita Boldt (77), Lawrence Nuechterlein (67), Rudy List (71), and William Zehnder, Jr. (69) were extremely well-grounded in area history, and were able to tell interesting stories of the Frankenmuth of their youth. These same people also gave very similar descriptions of the same events.

The older, life-long residents all had learned German at home (mostly Franconian dialect), and continued to use it when they attended the St. Lorenz Lutheran school. In fact, several of them had known no English when they started school, and thus learned it there. Anita Boldt, Lawrence Nuechterlein, Rudy List, and William Zehnder, Jr. all speak with a trace of a German accent.

Among the other interviewees, three could not speak some form of German. One, Annette Rummel (28) of the Chamber of Commerce, was taking German lessons. Reverend Deterding (66) said he could understand German better than he could speak it; yet he occasionally leads the German service at St. Lorenz Evangelical Lutheran Church.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the interview process, I learned that the German spoken in the Frankenmuth area consists of Franconian [Frankisch], a dialect found in the upper eastern Franconian [Franken] area of Bavaria from which the first two settler groups came. Some Frankenmuth residents refer to the dialect as "Birisch," [Bayrisch] a general term for the dialects of Bavaria. According to Renate Born, a professor of Germanic Linguistics at the University of Georgia, Frankenmuth seems to be the only place in the United States where the dialect exists. She also believes that the dialect is in danger of extinction in Frankenmuth because of urbanization, the influx of English speakers, and general upward mobility.<sup>2</sup>

It may be paradoxical, then, for the Frankenmuthers I interviewed to speak of pride in their heritage, to pattern buildings after the Bavarian style, and to advertise the community as a German "Little Bavaria," when the commercialization itself could be a leading cause for the decline of one of the assets of the area--a rare dialect.

I was told by several interviewees that the Frankenmuth schools were dropping German in favor of Spanish. The contention seems to be that Spanish will be more useful to students, because of the prevalence of that language among a large portion of United States residents. Those who discussed this were descendants of the two original groups of settlers. They were sad to see this happen, as it spelled the end of another tradition in the community.

Although German may be disappearing, all those interviewed are proud either of their own German heritage or the German heritage of Frankenmuth. Reverend John Deterding, retired pastor of St. Lorenz Evangelical Lutheran Church, stated that "I never learned to appreciate the [German] heritage until after I got to Frankenmuth."<sup>3</sup> The older residents like to remind themselves of their heritage by occasionally attending the German service at St. Lorenz.

Pride continues to exhibit itself in the schools. Frankenmuthers of the nineteenth century had a high regard for their school systems. Contemporary Frankenmuthers continue to share that pride in the public and Lutheran schools. Jan Reinbold, 46, said that the schools were a primary reason she and her husband moved their family from Saginaw to Frankenmuth in 1968. They feel the schools have given their children an excellent education.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to loyalty to the school systems, Frankenmuthers are loyal to area businesses. When asked where they shop, all said that they try to buy as many of their goods as possible from local businesses. They will buy outside of the community only if the item is not available, or if they happen to be in Saginaw or Flint. They feel fortunate that most needed items are available in Frankenmuth.

#### DISGUST OR SATISFACTION?

As stated earlier, the main thrust of the interview process was to ascertain the feelings of residents toward the economic changes Frankenmuth has experienced. Consequently, I asked the respondents specific questions as to whether tourist activities interfered with their religious practices on Sundays; whether tourist activities bothered them on weekdays; whether any of the interviewees felt the changes in Frankenmuth since 1958 were not good; whether they were basically happy with Frankenmuth as it is today; and who they felt played crucial roles in the economic development of Frankenmuth since 1958 (see appendix). I hypothesized that many of the interviewees, particularly the older residents, would resent the changes, and that they

would regard Frankenmuth as a tourist trap. That hypothesis was not confirmed.

Carol McClellan, 42, a Frankenmuth proprietor and resident since 1984, did say that she felt many residents see Frankenmuth as a tourist trap, "But," she contended, "[Frankenmuth] is not my definition of a tourist trap." She explained:

A tourist trap is when you come to an and there is absolutely nothing else to do but buy a souvenir....People come here to shop. They're not trapped in this spot because there's nothing else to do. They just came on a day trip, so they didn't even have to come in the first place. [People] know what they're coming here for. If they don't want to buy, they don't have to.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, all of the interviewees felt the same as Carol McClellan. Not one of them was negative toward the changes which have occurred. There was, to be sure, some regret over the increased traffic in the area, but all felt that the "new Frankenmuth" was good, and that it was an economic necessity.

Anita Boldt pointed out that many Frankenmuth residents simply avoid the tourist strip (Main Street) on a weekend. Mrs. Boldt also said that on a Sunday, many tourists may come to the churches for service. This was confirmed by interviews with Reverend Joel Ehler (50) of St. John's

Lutheran Church and Reverend John Deterding. The feeling is that the tourist aspect is tolerable when there may be a soul saved or a person helped.<sup>6</sup>

Such an attitude clearly shows that the interviewees are not sabbatarian in their religious practices. Sabbatarians objected to work and to commonality on the Sabbath. The Frankenmuthers' acceptance of Sunday business operations and work continues the social pattern of anti-sabbatarians of the nineteenth century.

Reverend Ehlert said he was basically happy with Frankenmuth as it is today because it "is a town with a real spirit, a friendly spirit; it has a community spirit that everybody is willing to pitch in and work together for a good community."<sup>7</sup>

Anita Boldt commented on the change in the economy and people working in the restaurants:

Our people would not be where they are today, if it had not been...from way back--the old Haus-fraus [housewives], that was an honor to go down and cook.... They got out of the kitchen at home and they worked...a whole week's work down there. But they were amongst people; they laughed, they enjoyed it. They earned good money. The girls, a lot of them, made enough money, not only from Frankenmuth--from all over.... working here in Frankenmuth for the summer months; get a room to sleep in, nibble enough at the hotel, and earn enough for the college. So they had helped a lot of young people and older people to make things go.<sup>8</sup>

Lawrence Nuechterlein, a 67 year old retired electrician, agrees that the tourist economy in Frankenmuth has been a good thing for him. As a former proprietor, (Nuechterlein Electric), he pointed out that it not only fosters tourist business, it also extends to the regular businesses in the city. They are recipients of the need for services and the desire of many residents to spend their paychecks in local establishments.<sup>9</sup>

Rudy List, 71, also feels that the tourist economy aspect is good. It kept him in a job his entire working career. He worked for both the Fischer and Zehnder families, doing a multitude of chores from farming to bartending, cooking, sweeping, and repairing furniture. List hopes that the current Frankenmuth economy will help keep the city's youth in the area. The only way to do that, he believes, is to provide jobs that will allow young people to support themselves.<sup>10</sup>

List and others tended to avoid a direct answer to the question, "were there times when you thought the change to a tourist economy didn't look like it would be successful?"

Reverend Deterding's reply was typical:

I don't think so; I don't know to what extent there was a deliberate plan to make it a tourist thing. There was a deliberate plan to serve the finest food that could be purchased anywhere; there was a deliberate plan to provide the finest merchandise, business and good service. But the

development of a tourist attraction as such - I suppose somebody might have had it in the back of his mind - but I think it grew in response to the kind of community, the kind of people, the kind of business, and the kind of pride the people took. And particularly when that pride extended itself to architecture, landscaping, and parks, it became something unique.<sup>11</sup>

"Unique." Other interviewees used the same word or a similar word to describe Frankenmuth. Curiously, that term could also describe the 1846 settlement of Frankenmuth. Perhaps Frankenmuth has come full circle: from a "unique" nineteenth century settlement of Germans with a mission to serve the Indians and Michigan Lutherans; to a typical midwestern farm town; and now to a "unique" twentieth century city with a mission to serve the tourist.

Who began the present mission? Who is responsible for the change in appearance of Frankenmuth--the "new Bavarianism" since 1958? All the interviewees mentioned William Zehnder, Jr., owner of the Bavarian Inn, as a major force behind the transformation of Frankenmuth. He and his family have had a lasting impact on the future of the city. They have invested heavily in this future as the owners of several other businesses in Frankenmuth (see Chapter Eight).

Some interviewees also mentioned Wally Bronner, owner of Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland, a large Christmas decoration store. In business since the early 1950s, Bronner's attracts over 2,000,000 visitors annually. <sup>12</sup>



Interviews indicate that the restaurants and Bronner's were the first major tourist attractions in Frankenmuth, and they desired to create an atmosphere in Frankenmuth that would make the city more than a weekend pleasure trip.

Tourism is the topic of the day in Frankenmuth. One tends to forget that the community originally had a religious foundation. In that regard, the two ministers had interesting closing comments. Reverend Ehlert says that he feels strongly that Christianity has had a great influence on the history of Frankenmuth and the surrounding area. "It doesn't mean everybody here is perfect or a saint - nobody is - but I think it has a tremendous influence on the people and the spirit you find in Frankenmuth."<sup>13</sup>

Reverend Deterding said that although the church was the heart and center of Frankenmuth for the first century of its existence, such is no longer the case. The church is still important to many residents, but it is not the heart of social life.

When people think of Frankenmuth today, they may think more of beer and chicken and Christmas ornaments, and even of the Pied Piper, of the wooden bridge....The church and the role of the Christian faith in the community may be relegated to the background or perhaps thought of as just somewhat of a footnote of how things used to be.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that Reverend Deterding recognizes a change in the importance of the Lutheran Church to the community as a

whole. Once known throughout Michigan as a tightly knit German Lutheran community, one gives little thought to that aspect of Frankenmuth today. The secular manifestations of the tourist economy have superseded Frankenmuth's fame as a religious community. The mid-twentieth century influx of non-Lutheran residents has also caused a change in religious focus. Certainly, one cannot say that the Frankenmuth community is not religious today--all those I interviewed are dedicated to their respective faiths and churches, and two families moved here for its more religious ("Christian") atmosphere--but it is more diversified. Frankenmuth is no longer only Lutheran. Thus, as Reverend Deterding states, tourists tend not to see or think of twentieth century Frankenmuth as a "unique" religious community.

## CHAPTER 8

### BUSINESS IN FRANKENMUTH: "GOOD FOOD AND GOOD PEOPLE"

Just as residents find Frankenmuth a good place to live, businesses feel it is a good place to operate a business. That, at least, is the consensus of three people I interviewed who operate or operated businesses in Frankenmuth. That is also unsurprisingly the opinion of Annette Rummel, Director of Tourism for the Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce, an opinion echoed by a 1987 study conducted formally by the Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce, the City of Frankenmuth, and Michigan Bell. Among this study's objectives were to conduct interviews with 204 chief executive officers of business in the Frankenmuth community; develop a data base and profile of businesses in the area; and gain an understanding of the business community's views of Frankenmuth's economy.<sup>1</sup>

One section of the study, "Major Findings," contains a synopsis of the information gathered in the work. Of the 204 firms mentioned in the objectives, 177, or 87%, replied to a questionnaire given to them after interviews by volunteers. The data in the "Major Findings" section is quite enlightening. Of the commercial/retail firms doing business in the Frankenmuth area, forty-eight (33%) started business in Frankenmuth during the previous seven years. Sixty-three percent of the firms had been established in the last seventeen years. In contrast, according to the survey

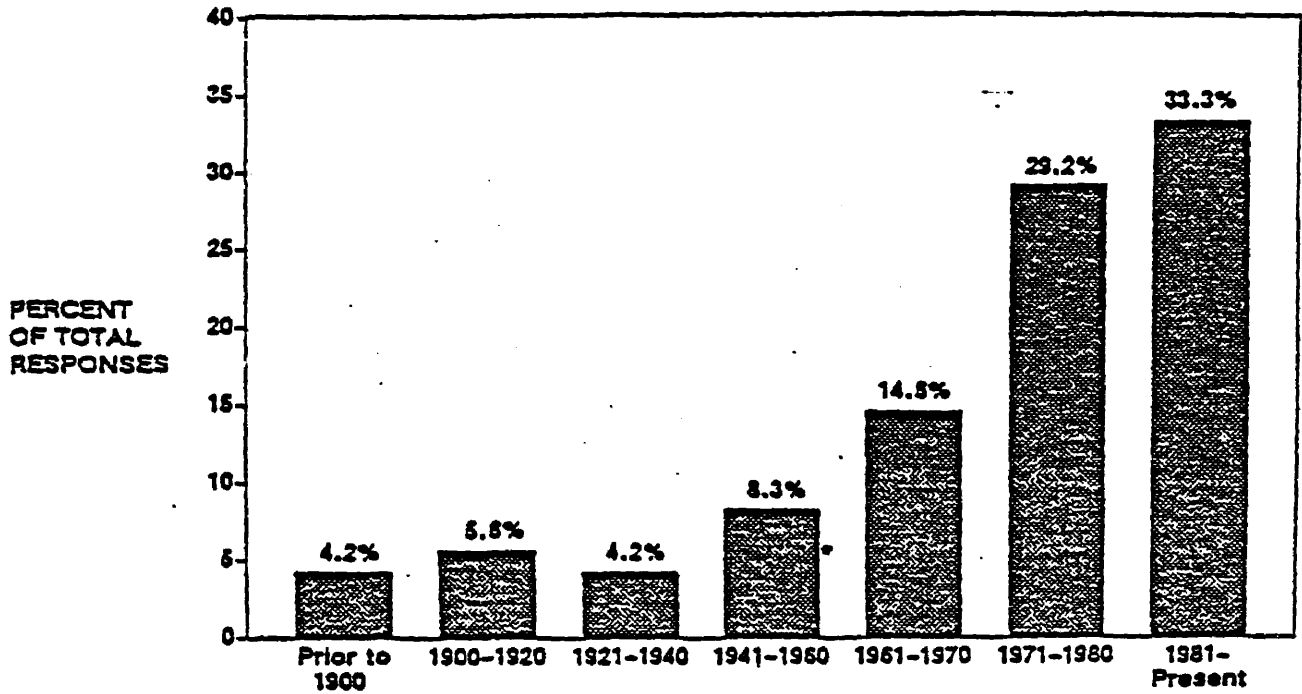
of thirteen manufacturers and construction firms, seventy-seven percent were established before 1977 (figure 1). Only three industrial/manufacturing firms have started in the last nine years.<sup>2</sup>

The study found that the majority of Frankenmuth area businesses are small in size. Sixty-nine percent of the firms interviewed had ten part-time employees or less and sixty-four percent had fewer than ten full-time employees. Approximately forty-six percent of their employees resided in the 48734 [Frankenmuth] zip code.<sup>3</sup>

Another area of the "Major Findings" section had to do with recruiting employees and quality of life. In this respect, the study found that the greatest positive aspect of the community was the quality of life, while the most negative aspect was property taxes (figure 2).<sup>4</sup> Ninety-five percent of the respondents rated the Frankenmuth area as "excellent" to "good" as a place to do business (figure 3). "The primary reasons cited for this favorable rating was the spirit, support, and cooperation of the community. The major negative aspect of the community was the fact that the economy is too seasonal."<sup>5</sup>

"The spirit, support, and cooperation of the community" is exactly what brought Carol McClellan and her husband, Gary, to Frankenmuth. They lived in Sault Ste. Marie,

**YEAR FIRM ESTABLISHED (Commercial/Retail)**



Source: "Frankenmuth," Michigan Business Retention and Expansion Program, Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce, City of Frankenmuth, Michigan Bell, 1987.

Figure 2

**COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTES**

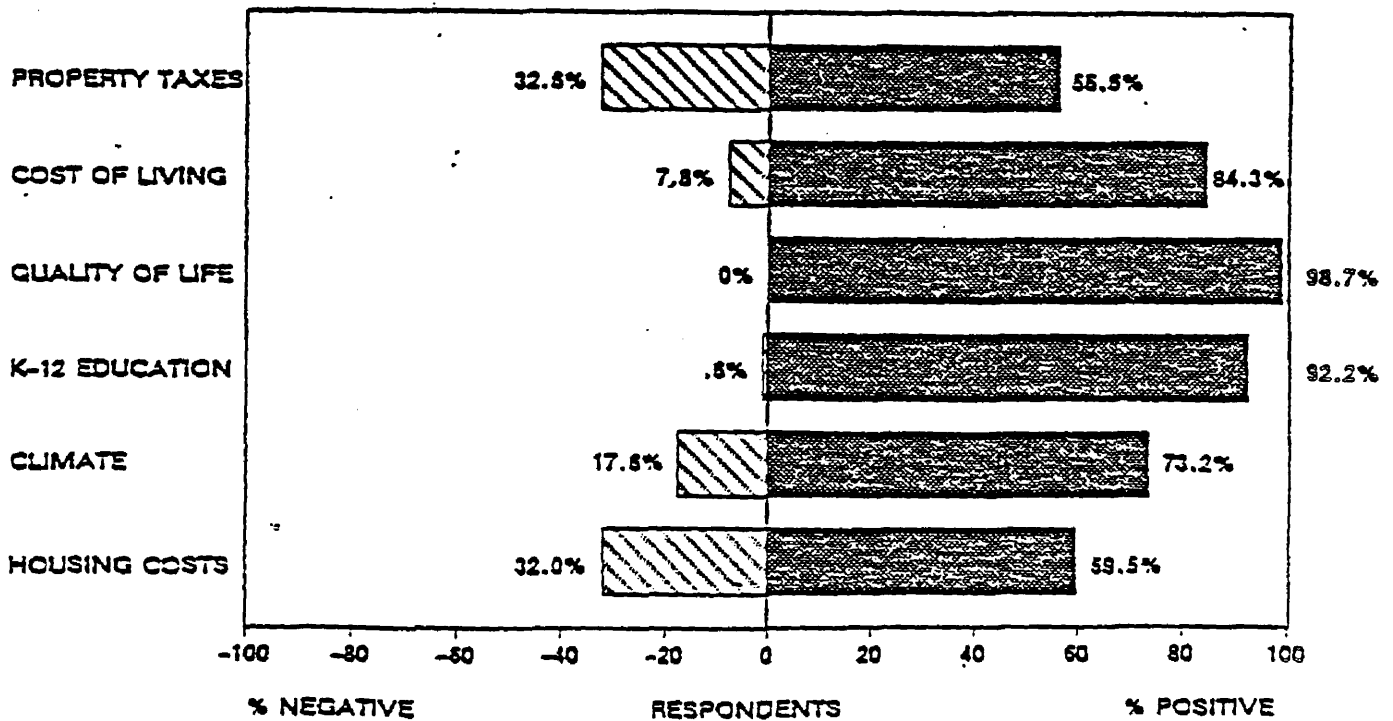
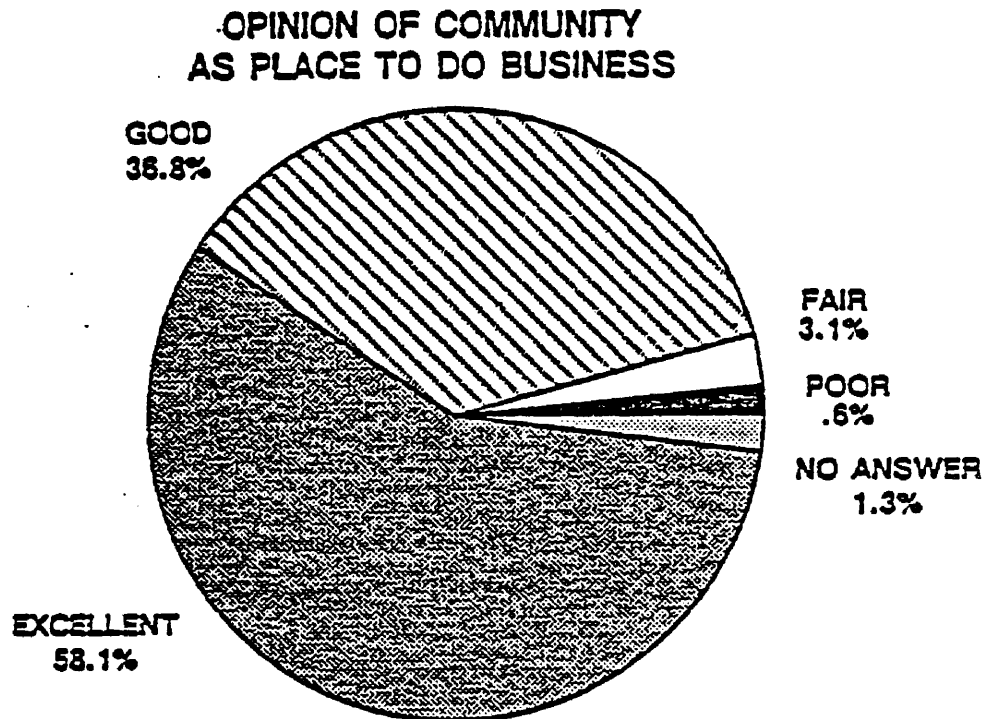


Figure 3



Source: "Frankenmuth," Michigan Business Retention and Expansion Program, Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce, City of Frankenmuth, Michigan Bell, 1987.

Michigan in the 1970s, where they owned a fudge shop. The McClellans opened a fudge shop in Frankenmuth in 1975, then moved to Frankenmuth in 1984 from Sault St. Marie. They now have 13 fudge-based businesses in tourist areas throughout Michigan. They presently operate five businesses in Frankenmuth, all on Main Street in the tourist area of the city: the Frankenmuth Woolen Mill, the Frankenmuth Fudge Kitchen, Jaami's Jams and Jellies, the Frankenmuth Candy Kitchen, and the Bavarian Kandy Haus.

They chose Frankenmuth as their center of operation because it had potential for year-around tourist business. More than that,

We've decided this is a wonderful place to live. We like it for the business aspect, but more important than that is a wonderful school system; it's a very Christian community, which we really like in which to raise our children, and it's relatively safe.<sup>6</sup>

The McClellans have become enamoured of the German heritage of Frankenmuth. Gary McClellan has studied German for two years. Carol, though not studying the language, has picked up some of the Franconian dialect by listening to the employees of their Frankenmuth Woolen Mill, who speak the language.

Although the German heritage is important for Frankenmuth residents, Carol McClellan believes that people don't come to Frankenmuth for the German heritage anymore:

I think they come here for something else. I think it's an added plus when they meet someone who really speaks with a broken English tongue, or can speak German or to hear it. I think they come to Frankenmuth for a clean, quaint kind of atmosphere.<sup>7</sup>

Annette Rummel echoes Carol McClellan's feelings that people come to Frankenmuth for the atmosphere.

Additionally, she feels that a business is welcome in the city if the owner is willing to contribute to the community. There is no desire to have people who come to make a quick profit and leave.<sup>8</sup> Those who do attempt this are not accepted by the community. An example of this is Aldrich's, a German restaurant that closed in 1988, after approximately four years of operation. The restaurant was owned by outsiders who had no experience in the restaurant business. What irked some residents is that Aldrich's referred to its food as "famous" in its advertising. Some also felt that the restaurant did not prepare food properly.

For Lawrence Nuechterlein, the retired electrician, people like the McClellans provided him with work. He said that by the time he left his business, the need for electrical work for firms and the community had grown to the point that new electrical contracting businesses were set up in Frankenmuth. His business clearly profited from the expansion of the Zehnder businesses and the other businesses that came as a result of the new, tourist-oriented economy.



Moreover, he took advantage of the residential growth the community experienced in the 1960's and 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

For William Zehnder, Jr. and his family, Frankenmuth has been a very good location to do business. A third generation has become active in the various family enterprises. Zehnder cites cooperation of the city government and community leaders with the family as one of the most important aspects of the community. He, in turn, has contributed to the development of the city through gifts of funds or materials for civic projects. Zehnder is proud of his accomplishments, but he is also extremely proud of his community and its German heritage. For him, it is that heritage as well as his businesses that he wants to continue to promote.<sup>10</sup>

Neither Zehnder nor McClellan could fault the city government for lack of cooperation. They are in favor of regulations which would maintain the Main Street business district. They feel that chain businesses, while an inevitable thing, should be kept away from the main tourist shopping area. To date, this has occurred. Zehnder and McClellan are also proud that in 1977, the city designated part of Main Street as an Historical District, which encourages preservation of existing architecture and use of "Bavarian" architecture in new construction.

The tourist economy of Frankenmuth is seasonal, as Annette Rummel, Carol McClellan, and William Zehnder, Jr. were quick to point out. Carol McClellan said that the tourist season begins at Easter and ends at Christmas. January, February and March are slow months. It is during the slow season that Zehnder's and the Bavarian Inn offer a variety of dining discounts or a dinner theater program. Motels offer accommodation specials. McClellan and Zehnder cite billboards and other promotional programs for helping to bring in business, and both appreciate the help of the Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce in planning promotional materials and events.

Carol McClellan may have summed up the attitude of business best in her response to a question on what makes Frankenmuth unique:

We like to tell our employees that they are the reason Frankenmuth is what it is. I think that's true because people come back again and again telling us how friendly people are. And we don't have a waterfall and we don't have the locks and we don't have rivers and lakes people can enjoy and vacation on. We have nothing here except good food and good people.<sup>11</sup>

She is right--Frankenmuth has no natural features to attract people to the area. The Cass River is no Rhine or Danube. Nor are there awesome man-made wonders to bring visitors. There is no Empire State Building, Capitol Building or other massive, impressive structures. What

brings people--by the thousands--to Frankenmuth must be the good food and good people plus, I believe, a good time.

## CONCLUSION:

### A DREAM ON A WING

In essence, Frankenmuth has been a successful story of survival. It has been a tale of adaptation, an ability which the community possessed to a greater extent than Frankentrost, Frankenlust, Amelith, or Richville/ Frankenhilf. Finally, it has been opportunistic, with the consent of the community at large.

That consent has created a mixture of senses in contemporary Frankenmuth. The Main Street tourist area appeals to the senses of smell, taste, sight, and sound. Smell is in the marvelous odor of food surrounding Zehnder's and the Bavarian Inn, and in the aroma of beer brewing at Heilmann's or the Frankenmuth Brewing Co. Taste is in the well-prepared food in the restaurants, and the baked goods, sweets, and other food items available in several stores.

Sound is the German music played in several stores, or an impromptu accordion concert in Willi's Sausage Shop. It is the noise of diners in dining rooms. Sight is the view of hundreds of people waiting in line at the two major restaurants any day of the week, and the sight of hundreds more walking up and down the shopping district, oohing and ahhing over this item or that. Sound and sight combine in the Bavarian Inn's Glockenspiel as it plays and performs the Pied Piper story.

It is those senses that gives Frankenmuth part of its character - a highly visible, finely-tuned image designed to attract tourists. It is an image which the tourist is to see, smell, taste, and enjoy. Frankenmuth has created a tourist-based economy, an economy that evolved slowly at first in the early decades of the twentieth century, then at a faster pace in the latter decades of that century. It does very well at promoting itself for this cause.

Clearly, the promotion of Frankenmuth has involved several individuals. The Zehnder family, led by William Zehnder, Jr., played an integral role in the change of Frankenmuth from an agricultural community to a tourist attraction. Wally Bronner, of Bronner's "CHRISTmas" Wonderland, a store which claims to have the world's largest year-round Christmas display, also played an important part in the city's economic development.

The tourist aspect aside, Frankenmuth clearly has another character. It is also a community dedicated to maintaining a clean, safe, pleasant lifestyle for its residents. Along with that dedication is the desire to maintain some of the German heritage of Frankenmuth's founders. Frankenmuth is, then, a community proud of both aspects of its character.

Character notwithstanding, the problem with Frankenmuth is that few take the time to see the non-tourist aspect of the community. They see the Bavarian Inn and Zehnder's, Bronner's, and the shops on Main Street. Tourists, as a rule, don't visit St. Lorenz Lutheran Church on their own. They miss the Church's beautiful interior and its panels of stained glass windows that depict the story of the founding of the community in 1845. They fail to see the old German cemetery across the street from St. Lorenz which contains not only the graves of several of the original founders, but also has tombstones carved in German, many with German epitaphs. Tourists miss seeing the well kept homes on the side streets and in the subdivisions of the city. They don't learn enough about the history of Frankenmuth, or about its connection with the other Franconian settlements in the area. Tourists seldom meet "real" Frankenmuthers, who take great pride in their city's history, and who are willing to tell stories about themselves, their friends and their ancestors.

Those "real" Frankenmuthers surprised me. It wasn't their friendliness that amazed me; it was their support of the Frankenmuth economy. As I stated in the introduction, I had expected that those I interviewed, especially the older residents, would have criticized the changes to their city. Such was not the case. Instead, they viewed the

changes as a way to maintain Frankenmuth's integrity as a community, and as a way to keep the young people from leaving. The tourist economy provides jobs. They felt, therefore, that the traffic on Main Street, particularly on weekends, was a small price to pay for the community's well-being.

Most surprising to me were the reactions of the Lutheran pastors, Reverends Deterding and Ehlert, on the subject of the tourist activities on Sundays. Again, I had expected them to be upset over the crowds and the open shops. They were not angry. They realized that catering to tourists on a Sunday has been a long standing part of the Frankenmuth economy, and both mentioned how many tourists had come to their respective churches for services.

Surprises aside, Frankenmuth seems to have accepted its present role, and pursues it with skill. Barring unforeseen problems, the community will continue to develop its tourist based economy. How much of its true German heritage can be preserved is another question. The Frankenmuth Historical Association and Museum is dedicated to that purpose, enlisting the support of residents to maintain displays and creating programs which are intended to keep the German heritage alive. One hopes the effort will succeed.

It may be possible to preserve the German heritage, but it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the unique Franken dialect of the original settlers. The older people still use it to some extent, but the younger ones do not. Therefore, an effort will have to be made to try to preserve the language.

The intriguing story of Frankenmuth's development will continue. New businesses, expansion or improvement of existing enterprises, and healthy doses of publicity will aid the effort. Perhaps the tabloid, "Frankenmuth: Michigan's Little Bavaria," stated it best in a 1988 article about the Zehnders and the Bavarian Inn:

...they've come to a simple conclusion about their business. In Frankenmuth, Michigan you can build a dream on a wing and a prayer.

Certainly others in Frankenmuth are praying that they catch some of the meat from that wing.



## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE

Of particular help in determining the questions to ask were a series of articles by Harriet Pawlowski, in Polish American Studies, titled, "The Questionnaire as an Aide to Community Studies." The articles, which appeared from 1950 to 1954, contained a variety of information-gathering questions, some of which I used in the questionnaire.

#### FRANKENMUTH PROJECT ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

The following questions were asked of a selection of Frankenmuth residents.

##### Residential

Have you always lived in Frankenmuth?  
When did you move here? Why?  
Where did you live before you moved here?  
Do you have any relatives in this area?  
Where do/did your parents live?  
Where do your children live?

##### Neighborhood

Do you know your neighbors? (Next door right?  
left? Across backyard? across street?)  
Is this a friendly neighborhood?  
Is it friendlier now than it used to be?  
What do you think is the best thing about the  
neighborhood?  
Does the neighborhood have any problems? What?  
How has the neighborhood changed since (pick  
something specific)?  
Do you plan to move from the area? Why? Where?

##### Work

Where do you work? (employment history)  
What was your first job?  
Have you worked for a Frankenmuth business?  
Which one? How long?

##### Religion

Do you go to church around here? Where?  
How long have you gone there?  
Where did you go before that?  
Do your friends/relatives go to the same  
church?  
When did you join the church?  
Do you attend the German service at St. Lorenz?

Does the tourist activity in Frankenmuth on Sundays interfere with your religious practices? How?

Does the tourist activity in Frankenmuth interfere with your normal activities on other days?

#### Social/Cultural Patterns

Are you related to the original settlers?

What is the relationship?

Do you have any mementos of your ancestors?

Are there any traditions from the early settlers you or others in Frankenmuth still practice?

Do you speak German? Regularly? To whom?

Does your family speak German?

Do your friends speak German?

Did you have German in school?

When did you leave/finish school? (Why?)

Do you go out to eat? Where? How often?

Do you eat at Zehnders or the Bavarian Inn? How often?

Where do you shop--for groceries? for food? for Christmas presents?

Do you shop the stores near Zehnders and the Bavarian Inn? How often?

Do you shop at Bronners? How often?

#### The Town

Are you aware of the history of Frankenmuth?

Are you aware of the history of the other German settlements in the Saginaw Valley (Frankentrost, -lust, -hilfe, Amelith)?

Do you have any histories or printed material of early Frankenmuth and the other colonies?

What has been the reception of later immigrants or settlers to Frankenmuth by the old ones?

Have any family names, once prominent in this area, disappeared?

Are there any sayings about people or places that seem to be used only in Frankenmuth?

To your recollection, has Frankenmuth always been a tourist attraction?

Are you happy with how Frankenmuth is today? Why? Why not?

Is Frankenmuth a close-knit community? Are newcomers allowed to take part in activities?

When would you say that Frankenmuth began to

change to what it is today?  
What would you say began the change in Frankenmuth?  
What things happened after that? Was there an order  
in the way changes took place?  
Is there any person or persons you think were  
especially responsible for the change?  
Were there times when the changes didn't look  
like they would be successful? When?  
When was it clear to you that the changes would be  
a success?  
Were there times when you thought the changes were  
not good? When? Why?  
Do you think the changes are good today?  
How do you feel about chain businesses in Frankenmuth,  
such as McDonald's, Dawn Donuts and Little Caesars?  
Has the business community opposed chains?  
Are there zoning laws for businesses and residents?  
How do you feel about Zehnders distributing products  
in other places?

FINAL QUESTION

Have we left out anything you think is important?

The total number of interviews was to encompass ten to fifteen individuals. I obtained the names of several individuals from the Frankenmuth Historical Museum and St. John's Lutheran Church. As I contacted residents on the lists, only two would not allow an interview. They did, however, suggest names of others to contact. I was able to interview eleven individuals as residents, and three individuals as business people. All the interviews were taped.

The ages of those interviewed ranged from 28 to 77. All the residents were of the Lutheran faith. One business woman was Catholic. Only one of the interviewees was of an ethnic background other than German. Nine had worked in or

were working for Frankenmuth businesses. One retiree had owned his own business. Two were in the Lutheran ministry— one the current pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church; the other retired from St. Lorenz Evangelical Lutheran Church.

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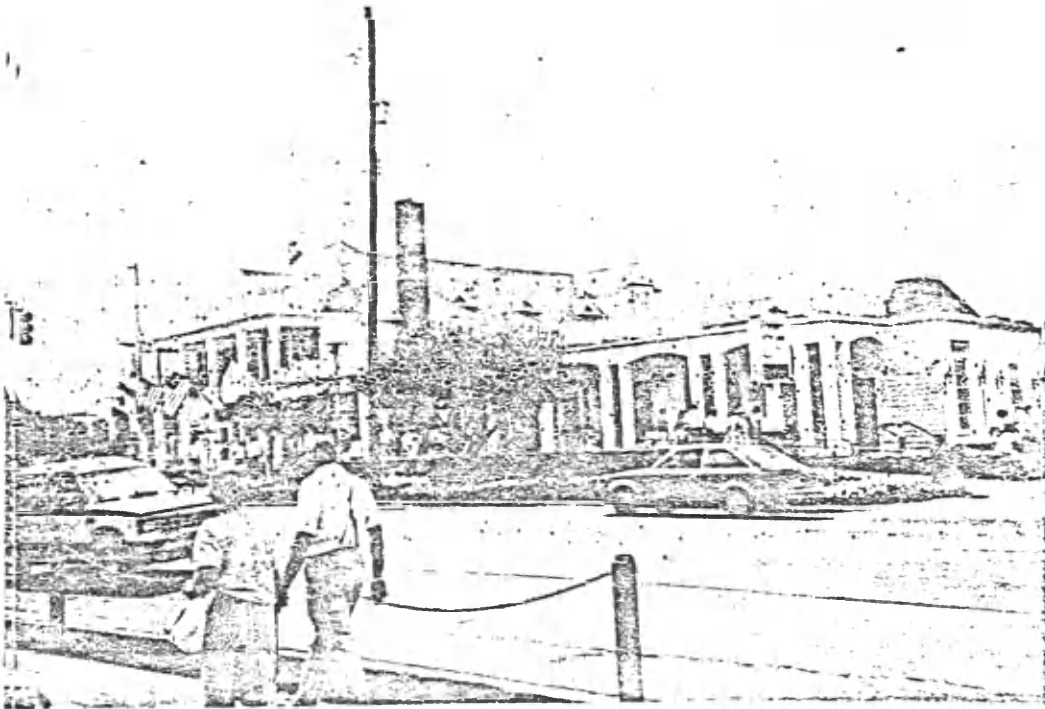


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Frankenmuth



Bavarian Inn



Lehndorfs



LORENZ LOESEL  
1817 — 1880



FIRST VOLUNTEER

"GIVE MYSELF!" WAS THE REPLY OF LORENZ LOESEL, SERVANT TO DR. WILLIAM LOEHE, IN NEUENDELLESAU, GERMANY (1841) WHEN THE GREAT MISSION FOUNDER PROPOSED THE SUPPORT OF A COLONY OF LAY CHRISTIANS (NOW ST. LORENZ CONGREGATION), IN BRINGING THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST TO THE INDIANS OF MICHIGAN. "HERE AM I, SEND ME" (LUK 6:9)



JOHANN ZEILENDER

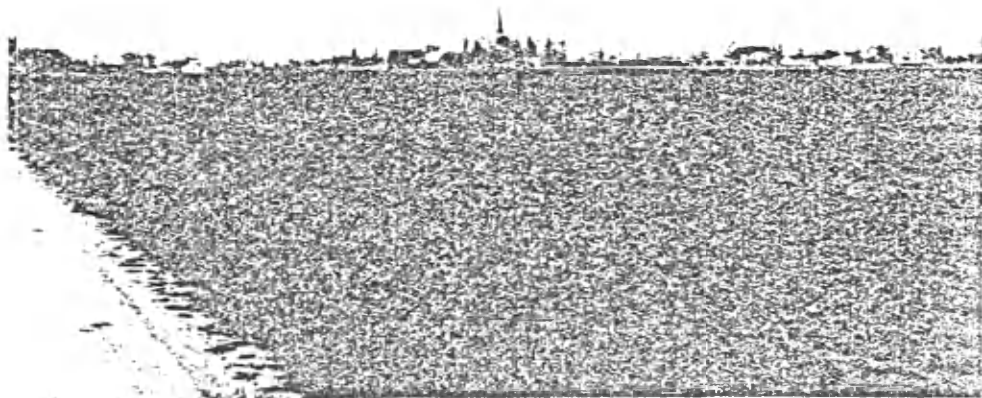
geb. am 30 März 1876

in Althausen  
Geldel 10 Markt

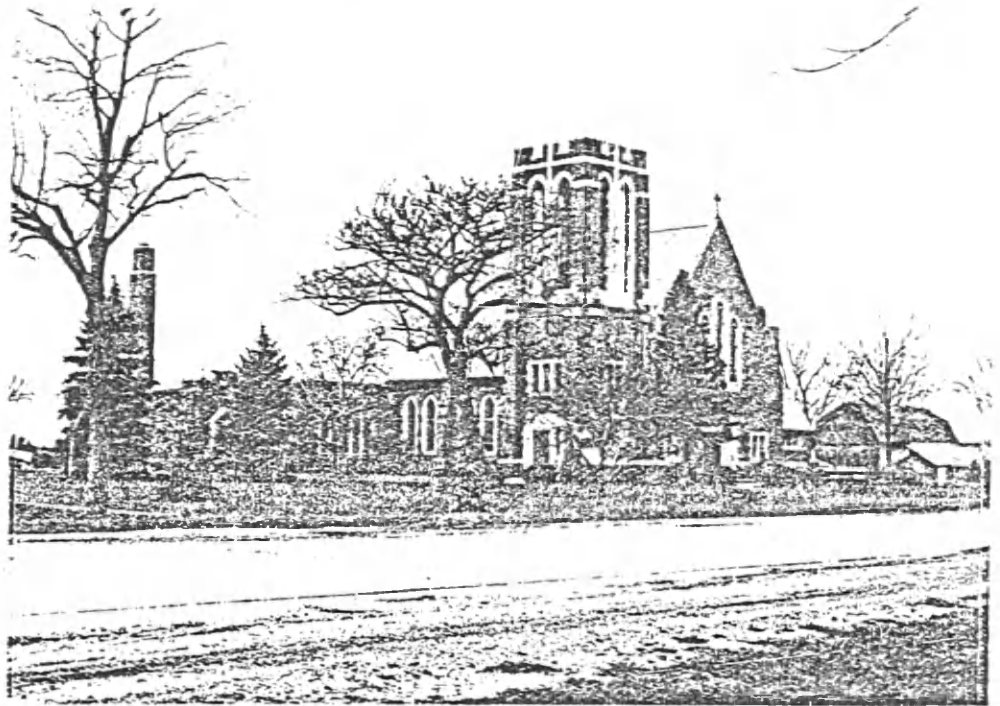
*Small, illegible inscription at the bottom of the monument.*



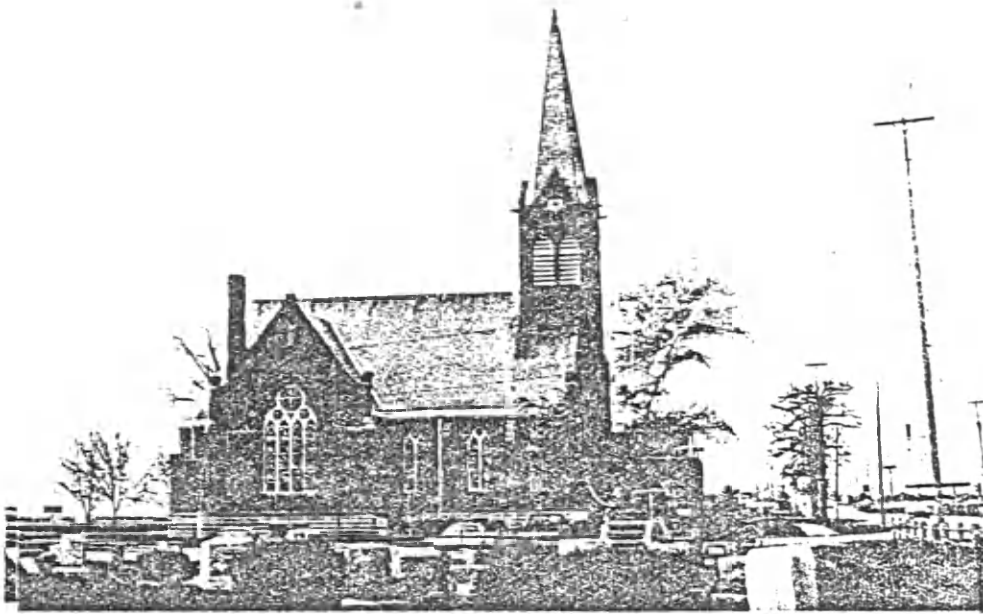
St. John Lutheran Church



Frankenordet

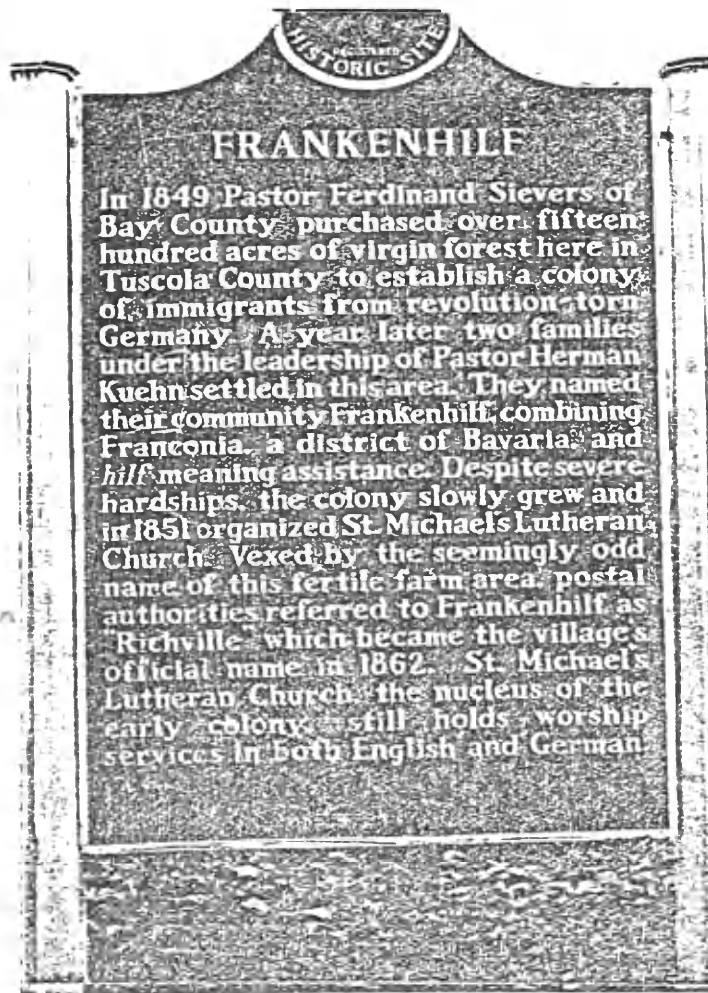


Immanuel Lutheran Church

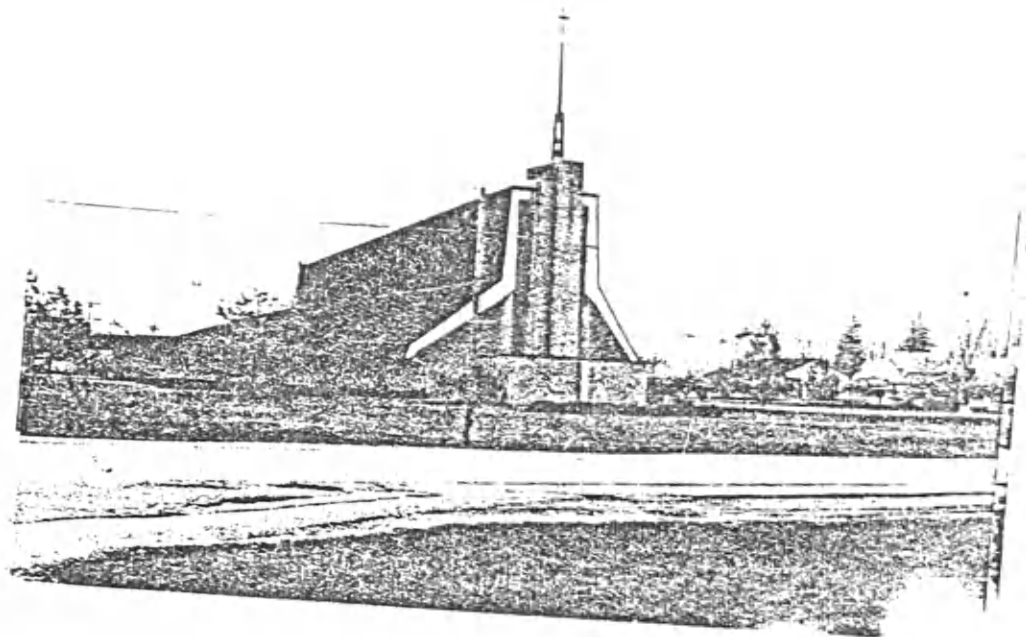


St. Paul Lutheran Church





Frankenhilf/Rothville



St. Michael Lutheran Church

