

Pickelmann Family



he original fifteen settlers who traveled to mid-Michigan in 1845 to set up a Lutheran mission colony to convert the Indians to Christianity included John George Pickelmann. He established a family name that now has thousands of descendants. His wife also played a major role in the future of the German community. She delivered more than 800 babies and never lost a mother or a child at childbirth.

John George was born September 21, 1812 in Velden Bavaria, Germany. He was baptized the following day and confirmed in 1825. John became a weaver like his father, but he wasn't content to stay in Velden and take over his father's business.

John George found his calling when he met a Lutheran pastor by the name of Wilhelm Loehe. The minister was organizing a group to begin a mission colony in the Saginaw Valley. He persuaded John to join them.

There was intensive religious training for 15 months prior to their departure. For an entire year Loehe taught the Lutherans doctrine during Sunday church and held weekly meetings. John walked 10 miles from Velden to Loehe's parish and back to attend the sessions. It was during this preparation period that John met Anna Margaretha Auer. She was an orphan who lived in the Loehe household and studied at the Loehe Institute in Neuendettelsau. The two postponed their wedding because laws in Germany required proof of a certain amount of property before a man could marry. But when their ship to America, "The Caroline", ran aground April 21, 1845, the couple was married on board where maritime laws applied.

The journey to America was filled with obstacles. Their ship was blown into the North Sea and had to take the dangerous northern route.

The Atlantic was filled with icebergs. Off the coast of Ireland, an English ship collided with "The Caroline" and the bowsprits of both vessels were broken. Anna was troubled with a toothache along the way and the rest suffered from smallpox or dysentery. One child died. They arrived in New York on June 8, 1845 and had some problems with immigration. Other Germans took care of them so they would not be cheated out of their money.

The fifteen traveled by train, boat and foot to their destination, arriving in Frankenmuth three months after they left Germany. At first all the settlers lived and worked together as a unit in order to survive. Later, John built his own home southeast of the old church cemetery near the river's edge.

John George and Anna had nine children. Their sons were: John George, the first white baby born in Frankenmuth; another John George; John George Leonhard; John George Lawrence; another John George Leonhard; and John. All were farmers. Their daughters were: Mary Margaret, Gertraud M. and Margaret A. All three were housewives. There were 62 grandchildren.

John wrote prayers for the baptisms of his children and these prayers are preserved and kept in the family to this day. John was also one of the three men on the first St. Lorenz Church Council. He held that position until his death June 10, 1865, at the age of 52.

Among the more than 800 babies Anna Margaretha delivered in her practice as a mid-wife and nurse, were all of her grandchildren (with the exception of Harriet Bickel) that were born to John George Leonhard and Mary Barbara Eischer.

In 1878, thirteen years after John's death, Anna married John George List. She died October 18, 1906 at the age of 84.



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