





A BRIEF FAMILY HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AT PENNTOWN

THE EARLY YEARS--FAMILIES FROM SOUTHERN GERMANY

St. John's Evangelical Protestant Church at Penntown was established in 1840-41 by immigrants from southern Germany. Many of its members came from the same parts of Germany that the members of St. Jacob's Church on Blue Creek in the northwestern corner of Dearborn County originated.

Henry Baas, Christian Buehler and Jacob Fenner were elected the first trustees on Sept. 10, 1840. The signers of their 1845 constitution included: Christian Buehler from Baden, Peter Bleistein from Baden, George Oehl, Gottfried Sieg from Bavaria (probably the Palatinate), Adam Schumacher from Bavaria, Jacob Weber, Henry Baas from Winzeln near Pirmasens in the Bavarian Palatinate whose wife Eva Margaretha Reibolt came from Hohensachsen near Wienheim in Hesse, Jacob Peter from France (probably the Alsace) and Peter Klein.

Only a few members of the church today can trace their ancestry back to these founders including Donna Richter McCool, Mike and Rick Dudley, and Mildred Baas Giblin who are descendants of Henry Baas.

The Huber, Hornberger, Hoff, Ziegler and Zimmer families (the 3 H's and 2 Z's of northeastern Adams Township) were members of St. Jacob's Evangelical Protestant Church at Blue Creek. None are mentioned among the founders of St. John's, but they came from the same region, particularly from the towns of Pirmasens and Steinweiler in the Palatinate. Their descendants later intermarried with families at St. John's or joined the church at Penntown.

These families today include the families of Mabel Huber Mosemeier, Carol Hornberger Faulkner, Caroline Hornberger Richter, Virginia Hornberger Richter and Velma Louise Huff Richter.

Likewise some of the Gesell family from Klemme's Corner who originally came from Frammersheim near Alzey in Hesse-Darmstadt also eventually became part of St. John's congregation. They include Clifford Gesell's family and Carol Hornberger Faulkner's family.

The Abplanalps from Brienz, Switzerland, initially attended the German Methodist Church just east of Penntown. Some became members of St. Stephen's Church at Spades. Today descendants of Berdella Abplanalp Hutson are members of St. John's.

The Wiedemans from Lower Alsace in France and the Mosemeiers from the Bavarian Palatinate also have descendants at St. John's today. The Mosemeier descendants include Viola Torwelle, Geraldine McKinney, Delbert Richter, Dot Meyer and Carol Ann Raver.

Likewise the Freyer family descends from Daniel Freyer and Mary Bos Freyer who were both born in Bavaria. The Freyers are also the only known living descendants of the Bos family which was quite active at St. John's in early years.

#### THE TRANSITION TO ENGLISH AND MEMBERSHIP OF FAMILIES WITH NORTH GERMAN ORIGINS

In 1907, English was used in the Church minutes for the first time. Some north German Protestants such as Hermann Nieman and Ed Behlmer married women who were members of the church. However, some north German families were not inclined to attend St. John's at Penntown because they did not speak the high German spoken by the southern Germans in the church.

The low German dialect spoken by north Germans was akin to the Dutch spoken in Holland, and outside of their homes, north Germans often preferred to speak English. St. John's was faced with abandoning the German language for English which more and more people were speaking, or eventually dying out as a Congregation. Some of their own children no longer spoke German or understood the sermons.

In Sept. 1913, a Committee was formed to write a new constitution. It consisted of Sam Wiedeman, Henry Wehrmeyer and Ed Behlmer. They amended the church constitution to eliminate the requirement that only German be used, and allowed preaching in any language to be decided by a 2/3 vote of the Congregation. After that, many more north German families who already lived around Penntown began to attend St. John's.

As a result, today about half of St. John's congregation at Penntown is descended from one single north German marriage! Johann Christian Galle and his wife, Maria Niehaus were born at Buende near Prussian Minden in 1818 and 1828 respectively. They had a number of children, three of whom have descendants who are today members of St. John's.

Hannah Galle married Henry Johann Fruchtenicht, whose daughter, Gesina Fruechtenicht married Louis Bauman, the father of Wilbur Bauman and his family. The Fruchtenichts and Baumans were both from Heiligenfelde (Holy Fields) Parish near Syke in northern Germany.

Hannah Galle's sister, Eliza May Galle, married Louis Richter, the grandparents of Ralph Richter, LeRoy Richter, Lucille Richter Freyer, Mildred Baas Giblin and Robert Richter. The Richters may also have come from either Heiligenfelde or Buende Parish.

Hannah Galle's brother, Christian Galle, Jr. married Eliza Bauman. They are the parents of Ruby Mosemeier.

Thus many families of St. John's today have ancestry in both the vicinity of Heiligenfelde Parish in Hannover and Buende Parish in Prussian Minden. Some may also have southern German ancestors as well.

Two daughters of Christian Galle's brother Heinrich, namely Louise and Hannah, married John Henry and Fred Pohlar. The Pohlars also came from Prussian Minden, and were originally members of Hubbell's Lutheran Church. Today Bud Pohlar's family are members of St. John's.

#### THE FORMATION OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST---A UNIQUELY AMERICAN HERITAGE

Another major change occurred at St. John's in the merger of its denomination with other denominations. It is no longer exclusively a "German denomination". The first merger was that of the Evangelical Protestants with the Reformed Church--a German Calvinist denomination. Later in 1962 they combined with the Congregational and Christian churches which had previously merged. The Congregationalists were the established churches of the New England Puritans, and the Christian churches grew from the Campbellites of Appalachia.

Today there are several families belonging to this church who have little if any German ancestry. Their Celtic, English, and Latin names are not found in the old church records or cemetery, nor at Spades or St. Jacob's. They have become part of the congregation and will add their own family histories and heritage to the church just as the north Germans have done in this originally south German church.

This family history of St. John's points out the important role that families play in the history of a church, as well as the role of language, marriage and interfaith relationships. The membership of the church will continue to reflect the changing nature of the Penntown area community.

Photographs:

Old Frame Church 1840s-1901: The frame church built in the 1840s replaced an early log church erected in 1841. It was located behind the site of the present brick church in what is now the cemetery. The translation of the inscription reads "Evangelical-Protestant German St. John's Church, 1841".

Present Brick Church 1901-Present: The inscription reads "German Evangelical-Protestant St. John's Church, 1901". However, the church is now "St. John's United Church of Christ". This photograph was taken in 1917.

St. John's Evangelical Protestant Ladies' Society at Penntown---1906-07

Left to Right: Top Row: Barbara Krummel, Elizabeth Holwadel, Doris Rohnk, Angela Schuermi, Anna Tekulve, Amelia Heitzman, Lizzie Mosmeier, Magdelene Peters, Becke Adelheid Kammeyer, Woliung, Mrs. F. Sieg, Stella Lowry, Clara Meyer, and Mary Baas.

Seated: Louise Mosmeier, Anna Pohlmar, Anna Eschenbrenner, Sophia Woliung, Emma Bauman, Anna Spreckelson, and Lizzie Meyer.