

Wirth Family



he family name Wirth came to America when John C. Wirth (1849-1926) emigrated at the age of 21 years. John was born in Altdorf bei Nürnberg, Germany and was one of six sons born to Johann Matthäus and Elizabeth nee Vitzthum Wirth. All were baptized in the State Evangelical Lutheran Church in Altdorf. When John immigrated to America, he came to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he stayed with an Appel family. Here he met and married Margaret Katherine Schmidt. Margaret Katherine had come to America at the age of one from Kirchenlamitz, near Beyreuth Bavaria, Germany.

Through contact with Marcus Schreiner, who had also come from Altdorf, and a Mr. Stockmeyer, John C. was encouraged to come to Frankenmuth. When he and his wife moved to Frankenmuth, they lived on East Tuscola Street, in a house located in the area of Rummel's Studio.

John C. had served his apprenticeship as a painter and decorator in Rothenburg and Nürnberg Bavaria, Germany. He would sometimes paint phrases with a biblical meaning, such as "Fang dein Werk mit Jesu an" (With the Lord Begin thy Task) on the door-post above a doorway or on the riser of a stair step. John C. was also a good singer and belonged to a singing group that made several trips to Germany to perform.

In 1889 a meeting was held in the Wirth home, which resulted in the organization of a sickness and burial insurance company "Arbeiter Unterstützungs-Verein". The names of 15 members are included in the organization of the group. Twenty years later, the group had 47 members. The company built a house on Jefferson Street. Here the members and their families would gather for relaxation and have picnics and gatherings. The insurance would pay \$3.00 a week for up to 26 weeks when a member was too ill to work. The burial payment amounted to \$25 or \$50, if the deceased left a widow. The monthly payments to retain insurance were 85 cents.

John C. and Margaret Katherine had a daughter who died in infancy. A second daughter, Mary (1877-1947), met and married Rev. Christoph Heidenreich, a pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church across the street from the Wirth home. After six months at St. John's, Rev. Heidenreich accepted a "call" as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Marshall, Michigan, where he remained for 50 years.

Christoph and Mary had six children: Theophil (1898-1977), an employee of Eaton Manufacturing and for many years the organist for Zion Lutheran Church; Marie Hobus (1899-1987); Walter (1902-1997), a dentist in Marshall; Lawrence John (1905-1994), a dentist in Albion; Herbert (1909-1994), a Lutheran pastor serving congregations in Hillsdale and Sturgis, Michigan; and Marguerite (1912-2006), who worked at the Department of Social Services in Calhoun County. When the children were young the entire family spent several weeks each summer with Grandpa Wirth, during which time they became acquainted with many children and adults in the community of Frankenmuth.

One of John C.'s brothers, who died in Germany, left two orphaned sons that were grown young boys. They came to Frankenmuth to stay with their uncle for a while. One of the boys, John F., worked as a painter with his uncle. However, he had been apprenticed as a tailor in Germany so he left Frankenmuth and opened up a tailor shop and clothing store in Clio, Michigan. His brother Herman went to Portland, Oregon and there became a grocer.

Two great-grandchildren of John C. Wirth continued to live in Frankenmuth. Frederick L., a retired pharmaceutical salesman, and his wife Sharon nee Diver Heidenreich, and Katherine Marie Heidenreich, a retired Frankenmuth schoolteacher.