

New Franken in North America

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1 Prehistory of the report

In the summer of 1902, Kilian and Margarethe Maier in Dettelbach, living in Fischergasse, received a visit from a new priest who was completely unknown to them. His name was Conrad Ripp, he had been born in 1877 in Neu-Franken in the state of Wisconsin in the United States, and had come to Innsbruck to complete his philosophical and theological studies. On June 26 of that year he had been ordained to the priesthood. Now he was on his way back to America and took the detour via Dettelbach to introduce himself to the Maiers as a distant relative. Four brothers of the mother of the present landlord had emigrated to North America in the forties of the last century: Johann, Michael, Joseph and Anton Burkart. The latter belonged to the Ripp family. The Burkart brothers had found a new home with fellow Franconians from the Tauber Valley on the western shore of Lake Michigan in Brown County and named their settlement New Franconia. During his visit, Reverend Ripp asked for letters from the pioneer days of the emigrants that had been written to the old home and was given the majority of them. They were to bear authentic witness to a "History of New Franconia," which sought to tell of the fate of the early settlers in the New World.

Until the turn of the century, the correspondence between the siblings in America and Dettelbach had gone back and forth across the ocean, but then broke off. The descendants over there no longer understood German, and the generation at home did not know English. Even the recent visit did not establish any lasting new connections. Even when Reverend Ripp visited the widow Maier for a second time in 1931, it remained with the knowledge of the American relatives. No new contacts were made. Thus the memory faded more and more. The old letters, the last signs of life, were buried in a museum over there, their existence was forgotten, and they remained untraceable until 1994. Perhaps it was this loss that prompted Johann Burkart in Dettelbach to begin research on his grandfather's brothers and their children and grandchildren in Neu-Franken in 1932. If the plan to write a historical account of the origins and development of this settlement had been realized in America, this writing had to be able to provide more precise information. In fact, such a treatise appeared in 1926 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the parish of St. Kilian, to which the emigrants had belonged. He happily came into possession of this source via the shipping company Norddeutscher Lloyd. It was written in English, of course, but it revealed in essence the beginnings and the later fate of the settlement and its inhabitants. Indes did not develop any new correspondence from these findings, nor did they have any personal encounters with American cousins. Nevertheless, over the decades they preserved the knowledge about the origin of their ancestors. The early gravestones of the Burkart brothers in the Neu-Frankens cemetery still bore inscriptions in German: "...born at

Dettelbach, Bavaria, Germany". Chance restored the lost connection to the old homeland. A great-granddaughter of Josef Burkart (+1812), who was among the emigrants of 1847, was looking for traces of her ancestors during a stay in Lower Franconia in 1964. In Würzburg she unexpectedly came across the street sign "Dettelbacher Gasse". Rosina Raymond knew the dedication of the gravestones in Neu-Franken and immediately inquired about the location of Dettelbach, which she suspected was in the nearby area. She found the way -and the local relatives. At first she met with incredulous astonishment when she was referred to the address of Maria Röthlein; née Burkard when asked about "Burkarts" (the family name Burkard/t is found in the ancestral line in both spellings. Also the families in America carry it in both forms).

Her greeting: *"I think I am your cousin from America"* met with considerable doubts. They were then quickly eliminated after the assumption was jointly confirmed from Johann Burkart's records. Rosina, the "American Burkart", was happy and did not let the connection break off. At regular intervals thereafter, she returned several times to the former home of her grandfather and researched the conditions of the past in Germany. She wanted to enrich the history of New Franconia with these findings, and possibly even rewrite it. The next trip to Dettelbach was already planned. But her sudden death in 1989 left the project unfinished. In America, she had invited the descendants of the Burkarts, scattered over half the country, to a family reunion and reported about those in Germany. This not only made new acquaintances among them; some even came over with the family to visit. They wanted their return invitations to Wisconsin to be understood as a promise on our part.

Hedwig Mayer, the youngest daughter of Johann Burkart, had gone to the United States with her husband in 1958 and lives in Chicago; Wisconsin is the bordering state. They led to Mrs. Kris Olson in Green Bay, the town in Brown County closest to New Franken. Here lived her ancestor Michael Burkart, the second oldest of the immigrant brothers. Through systematic research in archives and museums, many records about the Franconian immigrants had come into her hands. Finally, she also rediscovered the lost letters, along with extensive other material. Since then, there has been intensive cooperation with Hedwig in Chicago and her sister Frieda Rütthlein in Schwarzach am Main. Communication today goes the opposite way as 150 years ago: in the home country the German handwriting is deciphered, Hedwig translates linguistically into English, and Kris Olson at the place of the historical past evaluates the contents for further research. Through this interaction, the recent family reunion in Green Bay in 1994 became a special event. More than 600 descendants of the immigrants had gathered, among them for the first time the "newcomers" from Chicago.

We "Germans" made the promised visit to America in 1993 come true and also got to know New Franconia. In the restaurant "New-Franken-Stein" the beer is still tapped in stone mugs, there are even still echoes of the Franconian church festival. The grave monuments with the names and dates of the German pioneers stand in the cemetery, and the parish is still called St. Kilian, just as the now third church is dedicated to the Apostle of Franconia on the site of its predecessors. Even if the scattered estates are modern farms, Neu-Franken has remained a large farming village with only a small number of souls. And still today there live several families with the name Burkart/d.

2 First immigrants from Franconia

The settlement is located in the old Indian land of the Winnebagos and Menominees. Even before the invasion of the "White Man", however, there was most likely no Native American village on the ground of the later settlement, even though Indian long-distance trails tangent the immediate vicinity. The first foreigners before the Frankish settlers were mainly French, Irish, and Dutch. Jesuit missionaries worked among the Indians, admittedly without lasting success. When the immigrants from Franconia arrived, there had long since ceased to exist any closed Indian tribal associations, but the written memoirs of Melchior Schauer (he Schauer was one of the immigrants of 1845 and came from the Tauber region) state that there were still more redskins than whites populating the country. They lived side by side in mutual toleration, even if this relationship was not free of tensions.

There are no compelling personal reasons for the departure of the Franconian emigrants, and why they came directly to Green Bay remains a mystery. They were certainly not adventurers. From the letters it is clear that as farmers they were primarily looking for land for agriculture. On an information board in Tauberrettersheim there is another hint. It says that around the middle of the 19th century a large number of inhabitants emigrated to America because they were driven to do so by economic hardship at home. The first group of New Franconian settlers came from here and from nearby Röttingen, and Michael Burkart from Dettelbach was one of them. He worked as a teacher in Röttingen and was therefore in contact with the emigrants. Perhaps he can even be regarded as the originator of the enterprise. The spirit of the times in the German states at that time demanded greater rights for the citizens. America was considered the epitome of freedom. This could have been another motivation for emigration.

The decision was certainly not an easy one for the refugees, most of whom were leaving with their wives and children for an unknown and questionable future. In addition, they had to convert their possessions into hard cash or borrow money in order to cover their travel and living expenses and to set aside start-up capital for a new beginning. They also faced a long and dangerous journey when they set out on May 8, 1845. One of them reported: *"...as far as Wertheim we traveled by horse-drawn wagon. Here we boarded a ship on the Main River and, with stops in Frankfurt, Mainz, Cologne and Düsseldorf, arrived in Rotterdam in Holland ... after traveling for three days on the Main and Rhine rivers. From Rotterdam we traveled on to Le Havre. Here we had to board an overseas ship, but again had to wait three days before it set sail."*

From the passenger list found, it appears that it was the three-masted sailing ship "SS Venice", which docked in the port of New York on May 24, 1845. From here, the traveling party set out for Buffalo by water. The small riverboat was pulled by horses up the Hudson River and through the Erie Canal until the first stage was reached after six days on July 4. From Buffalo, a steamboat carried the emigrants across Lake Erie and Lake Huron through the Straits of Mackinac finally to Green Bay on the western shore of Lake Michigan. The journey from Germany to this destination took a total of 63 days, according to the book "History of New Franconia." So it must have been July 10 when the story of the Franks in America began.

You have to imagine their situation: they didn't speak English, they didn't find friends or acquaintances locally, and they didn't have a secure income to live on. At first they needed a place to stay until they decided where to settle down for good. They therefore rented a temporary apartment together. For three weeks, the men traveled daily in search of suitable land. Green Bay at that time was a sprawling white frontier settlement. But only a little over a decade earlier had they begun to survey the land that the government had wrested from the Indians by treaty or sale. It offered land at a purchase price of \$1.20 for an acre (1 acre equals 40 acres, or 0.4 ha, or about 2 Frankish acres). Through a local Frenchman, the settlers learned of a purchase property five miles east of town and found it suitable for their intention of gaining farmland. Although the area, which was covered with maple trees and other hardwoods, had to be cleared first, it promised deep fertile soil. On August 2, 1845, according to the deeds, they made the purchase of state land totaling 320 acres at \$1.25 per unit. The acquired property was divided among the Franconian compatriots - probably according to the capital strength and labor capacity of each interested party. Michael Burkart acquired 80 acres, becoming the owner of 160 Franconian acres of land, a property that could only be dreamed of at home.

3 Clearing and construction

Two things were necessary for the establishment of a farming existence: Houses had to be built and fields cleared; work that had to be done at the same time. The Frankish pioneers were lucky. On the new property they found an ownerless rather large log house that had been used by people from Green Bay during the sugar maple harvest. The present owner, despite all the inadequacies, immediately moved in with his family and also granted a place to stay to the bachelors among the immigrants. Michael Burkart also came with them, but left his wife and children in the city until he had built his own house. The following testimony describes how primitively they had to live at first: *"...we lived very crowded together and when it rained our beds got wet. My mother had to bake bread outside the house ... over a coal fire in a covered kettle."* So the most urgent business was to build houses for each family - after all, winter was not far off. The wooden construction made it possible to work quickly, but the nearest sawmill was several miles away. Even if the sawn timber - more than 2000 linear meters were needed - could be transported over a long distance by water, there were still insurmountable difficulties to be overcome. There were no roads on land, and the settlers had neither wagons nor draft animals. When the first snow fell, three houses were ready. Life moved into the original cell of the settlement, but its inhabitants were still farmers without fields.

In the winter they cut down trees and cleared the first parcels of forest. The lumber brought much-needed money, cutting shingles into the night, which sold well in Green Bay. But cold and snow long reigned in these northern latitudes and demanded tremendous efforts from the settlers. Besides spring tilling of the still small fields, clearing continued, interrupted only by the sugar maple season. This tree was quite common in the area and from its trunk the rising sweet sap was extracted by incisions. Thickened into syrup, sugar crystallized last. This additional harvest was an important income for the settlers. as long as they could not produce larger field yields.

Nevertheless, the reports to the homeland must have been quite promising already after the first year, because already in September 1846 relatives and friends of the Tauber Franks arrived as

new settlers, followed by a third group in 1848. The family of Michael Burkarts with their five children, still born in Germany, had already been resident since 1845. He also brought over two of his brothers Johann and Joseph with their families in 1847 and Anton, the youngest joined them. They came by ocean liner directly to Buffalo on Lake Erie, saving themselves the detour via New York. Across the Great Lakes, they also continued to Green Bay by ship. Anton settled in the city as a craftsman, and his brothers settled in New Franconia as farmers. It may be assumed that they were also allotted land from the large acreage of the 1845 Purchase, as they were able to set up in business right away. By 1850 the settlement had grown to 20 families. If one spoke before in the country of the "Bavarian settlement", it was soon called Neu Franken after the origin of most of its inhabitants.

The community in the middle of the wilderness grew rapidly through the enterprise, diligence and perseverance of the pioneers. Close ties of kinship and nationality on the one hand, loyalty to the ancestral Catholic faith on the other, and finally the shared hard work, hardship and deprivation of the early years united the people. Finally, the shared hard work, hardship and deprivation of the early years welded the people together. Most painfully, they were deprived of church and priest. The "History of Neu-Franken" dates the first visit of a Catholic priest to the village to 1847. Michael Burkart writes in a letter home: *"Last Easter the priest came to us, gave us mass and a sermon and administered the holy sacraments". In another place it says: "... we have three hours to church and therefore do not come there so often ..."*.

In a letter from the fall of 1848, another notes that the priest visited the faithful twice a year and said Mass in his house and preached God's word. How arduous the pastoral care might have been for these missionaries becomes understandable when one considers the widely scattered parishes in a huge church district without fixed roads. Distances that had to be covered mostly on foot and with the meter. The construction of a church of their own, even if only as a log cabin, was a pressing concern for the New Franks. A document from 1850 confirms the donation of building land to the diocese with the condition that it be used for church construction and a cemetery in Neu-Franken. Already in 1851, the work was completed by the congregation's own energy and willingness to make sacrifices, because the state did not consider ecclesiastical projects to be its task and therefore did not provide any support. The church and the congregation were consecrated to St. Kilian, the apostle of Franconia. The hope for an independent parish with its own priest was not fulfilled until 24 years later. Shortly thereafter (1868), the wooden church, which had become too small, had to give way to a stone church with a steeple, and the last expansion took place in 1901. Again and again, letters from the 1950s report how happy people felt to be able to practice religious life.

No less important to the German settlers was their own school, in which the native language was preserved. The driving force behind this project was Michael Burkart, who had already worked as a teacher in his old homeland. Although there had been a public school in Green Bay since 1848, it taught only English and French and would have required the children from New Franconia to travel a long way. The authorities therefore approved the school for the German immigrants at their repeated insistence, although they had to pay for the material expenses and

the teacher's salary themselves. On June 24, 1850, Teacher Burkart began teaching in his private school with 21 pupils, ages 7 -14. His "salary" was at first \$12 per month for the time he taught. There was no compulsory schooling in general, and instruction was limited to three summer months because the settlers also needed their children as laborers. The construction of a new school building, which would have stood empty for three quarters of a year, did not seem urgent to the parents, and they also balked at the cost. So the lessons were initially held in a log cabin, which was certainly not very inviting and which was provided free of charge by one of the settlers. At times, the church also had to serve as a teaching hall. But the dedicated teacher Burkart did not give up, and in 1854/55 he succeeded in building the schoolhouse - against a lot of resistance - after he had provided the building land himself. Already in the previous year he achieved the extension of the lessons to 5 months; it did not come to it, because the means for the maintenance of the school and the salaries of the teacher were exhausted before. The fruits of his untiring efforts for the education and upbringing of the children ripened only after his death. He had only just been allowed to teach in "his" new school when a cholera epidemic swept him away. However, the services he rendered to New Franconia and his new home in America beyond his profession may be told by the duties he performed: for four years he worked on the school committee of the district as its secretary, declared and appraised land for schools in the wide area on behalf of the authorities, temporarily held the office of justice of the peace, acted as the first postmaster in his home municipality, performed the duties of a public notary and land agent, and in the last year of his life declared himself willing to run for a "selected seat" in the state parliament.

Today, New Franconia is an evolved settlement with a historical tradition, and Green Bay is a major economic and cultural center of the state. Franconian pioneers made a significant contribution to development here 150 years ago.

4 Fates and disappointments

Did America seem to the emigrants to be a world of unlimited possibilities? Hardly; as farmers they had to know about the difficulties and uncertainty of a new start in a foreign country. After all, they had taken precautions so that the start into the future could be successful by bringing initial capital with them - and even more hope and trust in their own strength. Nevertheless, with the responsibility for their families they had taken a high risk, and they might have suspected that there would probably be no reunion with those who had stayed at home and no return.

Misfortune befell some already on the crossing. Two families from the Tauber Valley, who immigrated in 1846, lost children to an infectious disease. A letter laments with emotion: "... *that my father's little child died when they had arrived in New York harbor and the joy of entering American soil with jubilation was turned into tears. Also to the home died his little Peter on the canal boat from Albany to Buffalo.*" Just before reaching Green Bay, another misfortune struck this group. Their sailboat ran aground on a sandbar and held them for several hours until they could be freed. Their first experience with Indians was also not pleasant. The writer reports an encounter with redskins who had imbibed "firewater," in which he feared for his loved one and fled in the dark.

In 1850, just five years after his arrival, a tragic accident occurred in the family of Michael Burkart. The children were gathering wood waste around the house to burn it. In the process, six-year-old Gertrud got too close to the flames and her little dress caught fire. The girl suffered such terrible injuries that there was no rescue, but her agony did not end for three weeks.

The hardest period of pioneer life seemed to have been overcome, when a heavy blow of fate struck his brother Johann. Death called his 46-year-old wife Dorothea, a née Baumann from Dettelbach, into his realm. She left behind five children, who were also to lose their father two years later. At the beginning of September 1855, a Belgian family of seven had arrived in the settlement and knew of no place to stay. The condition of these people probably challenged the compassion of Joseph, the third of the Burkart brothers: "Surely they can't be left lying in the street! " He had no idea that he had taken in death. Four days later the strange woman died, and immediately afterwards her husband; as it turned out, of cholera. Joseph and his wife Eva, the sister of his deceased sister-in-law, suddenly had four parentless Belgian children in addition to their own six - and even worse: her husband was infected. The epidemic continued to spread like a steppe fire. It first made Eva a widow, and in a few successive days the epidemic also took her brother-in-law Michael and his wife Antonie. It is said of Johann that he died "of a broken heart" the day after his brother's funeral. Only Anton, the last of the four brothers in Green Bay, was spared the great dying, although he had repeatedly gone to the settlement to help during that terrible week. By the end of the month, he had taken upon himself the oppressive burden of taking in twelve of the bereaved children -thereafter, in January, his own wife died because she could not give birth. In New Franconia, Eva had to struggle through life with five children without a father. There is a saying about the fate of emigrants to America: "*Death to the first ...*"

The others were not spared times of hardship before and after that, either, when the producer prices for agricultural products fell into the basement, or when consumer goods could only be bought at an exorbitant price. In one of the first winters, the mill dam broke, and the frozen bay had closed off New Franconia, so that no flour could be procured in the usual way. A child at the time, one recalls, "*.... my brother and I turned grains through the coffee mill for three winter months, and my mother baked bread from them*".

The worst catastrophe fell on the settlers' village in 1871. The winter before, quite unusually, hardly any snow had fallen, and during the spring and summer there was little rain. A fire in the parched land was bound to have devastating consequences. It flared up in several places at once, fanned again and again by hurricane-like storms. From Green Bay, the wildfire ate away at New Franconia. By the first days of October, it had reached the eastern district. Despite the scattered settlement, it made its way to the church. Men, women and children fought desperately against the fire. Finally, a persistent rain extinguished the conflagration. The church was saved, but more than 30 buildings, homes, the mill, and a department store sank to rubble. The fire had devastated a stretch of land 70 miles long in width up to 7 miles. Farmers lost a large portion of their crops, many had no roof over their heads, and livestock had to be decimated despite the losses because there was a shortage of forage.

Whether and to what extent the estates of the widow Eva. and the descendants of the Burkart brothers in Neu-Franken were directly affected by this catastrophe is not clear from the sources.

Nor is it known how Anton fared in Green Bay, which was not spared by the fire. This youngest of the brothers did not own a farm, but worked in his profession. At home in Germany, he had learned the trade of a glazier, but in America he switched to building carpentry, became self-employed in a very short time and built up a respectable business that employed more than 20 people in 1857. In addition, he ran a flourishing furniture business. For a time, he even entered the printing business as a partner, but soon abandoned this venture. Perhaps he had bitten off more than he could chew, or perhaps the profits did not meet his expectations. He was all the more successful in his line of work and brought prosperity through restless labor. He acquired extensive building land in favorable locations, built stores there for his own use as well as for rent, built dwellings for sale on his own land, and participated financially in various projects that advanced the economic flourishing of the city. Considering his domestic circumstances - caring for the surviving children of his brothers, the death of his wife, the large number of his own children from his second marriage - it was a life that must have seemed barely bearable. Several times he had resolved to see his native Dettelbach again, but family and business obligations thwarted his intention.

Then, in 1861, war broke out between the northern and southern states. It abruptly interrupted the steady development in the country until then. General inflation paralyzed the economy, and the high costs of the war and the debts bled the money market dry. The result was an inflationary standstill that wiped out acquired wealth. Anton Burkart wrote in 1864, *"... for I have lost \$27,000 in nine months and all my property, merely my homestead I have still preserved"*.

In addition to the loss of money, he was also severely damaged by a fire: *"... a fire broke out nearby. To the greatest need I could still save the furniture, but my buildings burned down"*.

What depressed the people even more were the horrors and suffering of war. The slavery problem had triggered the bloody confrontation between North and South, but in Brown County it didn't matter anyway, and popular opinion there thought quite differently: "already three years we are in the unfortunate Civil War, and for what? To free the niggers? Just for the sake of appearances! If it weren't for the money, the war would have been over long ago". At any rate, the new Franconian citizens could not muster national enthusiasm. Those who managed to get out of military service preferred to buy their way out of enlistment with money. Thus one of the sons wrote in 1867: *"... workers were scarce after this terrible civil war, where so many thousands were led to the slaughter, where the poor father was torn away from his wife and children. It hit me hard myself three times, but I was lucky enough to make it off with money. Volunteers were impossible to get at all. They paid 1200 -2000 dollars for the man! "*

The plundered country recovered only slowly from the consequences of the war. It took a long time before normal life returned.

5 Alienation in the third generation

Before half a century had passed, Anton Burkart died in 1888 as the last of the then adult emigrants who had moved away from Dettelbach: The children still spoke their native language at home and in German school, but in society, and even more so in business, they spoke English. German-German marriages were often contracted among the descendants, but only rarely did descendants of the emigrants get to know their cousins and bases in the old homeland

personally. How much the "Americans" took part in the events in Franconia may be confirmed by this passage in the letter: "... *there has also been a terrible war with you (meaning the German fratricidal war of 1866) ... there has been great devastation in and around Würzburg ... the call of the needy has also reached us in America ... for collections have been made everywhere ...*".

It is actually surprising that the correspondence between the two sides continued until 1899, even if the news flowed more and more sparsely and mostly related to purely family matters. Among the numerous American descendants of the Burkart brothers and Baumann sisters, three still maintained contact with their relatives on the other side of the ocean after the death of their parents. How difficult this effort must have been is expressed in another letter: "...*You must not resent the young people in all their friendship that you do not get any letters from America, because none of them knows German ... I also prefer to write 10 letters in English than one letter in German ...*".

The prehistory to this report may tie in chronologically here again. In America, as in Germany, people are happy to have found new family ties - and today, in the age of air travel, visits are no problem. The "new relatives" got along brilliantly right away, and new linguistic territory was no obstacle.

SOURCES:

1. **"History of New Franken, Wisconsin"** by N. D. Diedrich and J.B. Gehl.
(without indication of publisher and date of publication)
2. **Letters of emigrants** from the years 1846 -1899 to Dettelbach from J. P. Schauer, the brothers Burkard/t, Anton Burkart II, Sebastian Landwehr (brother-in-law) .
3. **"The Memoirs of Melchior Schauer"** Publication
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4. **"The Paper Trail of John Michael Burkard - A Personal Journey"**
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5. **Genealogical research** on German personal data by Konrad Reinfelder, Dettelbach