

## Sister Claire Weber, CSJ

In 1842 my great-great grandfather, Leonard Weber, Sr., and his family were living in the Diocese of Würzburg, Bavaria. His youngest child, Franz (Frank), had just been baptized. Sometime after that, his wife, Kunigunde Hammermann, died and he married a young widow, Catherine Gotz Reis. On April 15, 1847 Leonard, Sr., along with his wife Catherine and four children, sailed from Hamburg on the brig Heaver with 70 passengers. The children were Leonard, Jr., age 18; Barthel, age 17; Catherine, age 10; and Franz (Frank), age 6. The boat docked in New York on July 14, 1847 and the family went directly to Utica, NY. The German parish of St. Joseph was about five years old, and it was there baby Joseph, baptized at birth by his mother in 1848, died and was buried in the parish cemetery. Leonard, Sr.'s wife Catherine died in 1853.



In 1855 the missionary Father F. X. Pierz wrote to German-language newspapers urging settlers to come to the Minnesota Territory. With his two older boys, Leonard, Jr. and Barthel, established for life at the trade of masons and bricklayers, Leonard took his two younger children, Catherine and Franz (Frank), to St. Joseph, Minnesota a few miles north of St. Cloud in Stearns County. Within a year the Benedictines, newly arrived to build St. John's Abbey, established the parish of St. Joseph. Leonard, Sr. homesteaded 160 acres and built a one-room log cabin, described as one and a half stories, 14 by 18 feet, with two windows and a door. He obtained a deed to the land after improving the property for the requisite five years. His daughter, Catherine, was married in St. Cloud in 1858. Franz (Frank) married in February 1862 and joined the army in August.

After Franz (Frank) returned from ten months of captivity at Andersonville, Georgia, he and his father, Leonard, Sr. sold the homestead in 1866. Leonard, Sr. returned to Utica and died the following year while Franz (Frank) took his wife and newborn daughter further north with three other families to found the community of Millerville, Minnesota, where they built the Church of the Seven Sorrows, a parish that still exists. Father Pierz baptized their third daughter; their second daughter was the first white child born in the area.

The older sons Leonard, Jr. and Barthel baptized a total of 19 children at St. Joseph's Church and remained in the Utica area. Leonard, Jr.'s daughter Elizabeth was the last member of the family to belong to St. Joseph Church when she was buried from there in 1949. Leonard, Sr.'s daughter Catherine and her husband moved to Los Angeles, while Franz (Frank's) children settled in North Dakota and Washington. Descendants of this family now live in over 30 states.

Leonard, Jr. was a mason on the construction of St. Francis de Sales Church in Utica in 1887. Together Leonard, Jr. and his wife Catherine had 9 children. The sixth child, Louis Francis Weber, would become my grandfather. In 1884 Louis Weber married my grandmother, Sarah Mary Agnes McGuire and together they had 10 children. Their sixth child, Clarence Leonard Weber, is my father. Clarence Weber met and married Linda Archambault in September, 1926 in the same St. Francis de Sales Church, my great grandfather helped to build. Later on my father became a trustee, and my brother, Jerome Francis Weber, said his first Mass there. My brother Jerome and I graduated from St. Francis de Sales High School.

