



Franklin County
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St Peter's Catholic Church

Franklin County, Indiana

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On August 15, 1833, a number of German immigrant families arrived at Baltimore, Maryland aboard the ship, the Weser. The majority of these families had been from Großwallstadt, Bavaria, Germany and wished to take up land together in the New World and form a new community. Among the ten or so families who formed the community of Neuwaldstadt in Highland Township, Franklin County was that of Michael Ripperger, Henry William Geis, Ignatz Ripberger, Mathias Fussner, Franz Alois Bauer, and Conrad Weiler.

Father John A. Kohlman in his 1919 Directory of St. Peter Church described Neuwaldstadt: "In those days the entire region was a vast stretch of wild, virgin forest, into which, as it appeared, only a casual settler here and there found his way. However, these brave and courageous young men, undaunted and undismayed at the hazardous undertaking of attempting to establish their homes and seek their fortunes in the heart of an immense forest, where probably only beasts of prey had hitherto trodden, and where the axe of the 'invader' had not yet left its mark, forthwith assumed the arduous task which a guiding Providence has outlined for them."

The new settlers, having purchased government lands, went about the task of building single room log cabins. As these first homes were being constructed, additional families from the Old World were already arriving to take their place along with the first Neuwaldstadters.

In the midst of this, the people of Neuwaldstadt turned their attention to their spiritual wellbeing. Having been accustomed to the availability of both Catholic Church and priest in their Old World homes, they found the forests of Indiana in this regard severely lacking. In the spring of 1834, two German Catholics, Mr. John Heimburger of Yorkridge and Mr. Ripperger of Neuwaldstadt were met by Father Joseph Ferneding, "The Apostle of the Germans." It seems their meeting took place by chance as the two gentlemen were on their way to a mill on the Whitewater River. Looking across the river, the men saw a man on horseback who they thought looked like a priest. Hearing the men speaking German, Father Ferneding asked if there were any Catholics in the vicinity. The men informed him of Catholics in the surrounding areas and the noble Father promised to go back with them. The next day he celebrated Mass at the home of Mr. Heimburger with the promise that in the future he would return to the same village and also pay a visit to the Catholics at Neuwaldstadt.

In the meantime, the Neuwaldstadters decorated a large, hollow tree with various icons and religious emblems and fastened a large portrait of the Blessed Virgin Mary within. The tree acted as sacred place where the people could gather to pray and sing. These devotions were usually directed by Michael Ripperger. In addition to this, the people also made pilgrimages to New Alsace in order to attend Mass at the church in that location.

As early as the summer of 1834, Father Ferneding visited Neuwaldstadt and said Mass in the homes of William Geis and Adam Ripberger. Father promised to return and encouraged the congregation to commence the building of a house of worship. In 1835 the erection of a simple log church was begun. Land for the church was deeded to Bishop Bruté by Michael and Margaret Ripperger, Regina Ripberger and son John, and Margaret Geis and sons. On October 23, 1836, Ignatz Ripberger, one of the original founders, died. He was buried beside the church in what was to become St. Peter's Cemetery. In July, 1838, Bishop Bruté blessed the completed church and dedicated it to St. Peter. The new church having been named St. Peter caused the surrounding community to be known by the same.

With the new church in place, Father Ferneding increased the regularity of his visits and came once a month from 1839 until February 1842. After Father Ferneding left the service of the diocese, Father Michael O'Rourke of Dover assisted until 1844. Father Charles Oppermann celebrated Mass occasionally at St. Peter until Father William Engeln was appointed the first resident pastor of St. Peter in 1844. In 1852, Father began collecting funds for the building of a new brick church. In 1853, the present church was completed and dedicated by Bishop de Saint Palais. Upon the departure of Father Engeln in October of 1855 the church became a mission of the other local parishes. The priests which administered to St. Peter at that time included Father Joseph Rudolph, Father Weber, Father Beerschneider, Father Henry Köring, and Father Januarius Weisenberger.

In 1859 Father Leo Osrenkar, O.F.M., was appointed as the second resident pastor. Father Leo did much to enhance the beauty of the church by purchasing two bells, a high altar, and a fresco painting. In 1875, Father provided for the educational needs of St. Peter's youngsters by building a new school house and soliciting the teaching skills of the Sisters of St. Francis at Oldenburg, Indiana. The Sisters stayed as teachers until 1971 when the school was closed. After twenty-three years as pastor of St. Peter, Father Leo died in May, 1882. He is buried in St. Peter Cemetery among the many who he shepherded.

Father William Kemper succeeded Father Leo and was responsible for building the present rectory in 1883. He remained until July, 1886, when Father Ferdinand Hundt took charge. The pastorate of Father Hundt marks a turbulent time in the history of St. Peter parish. Father Hundt had a disagreement with members of the St. Peter school board and a petition was circulated asking for his removal. In response, the Bishop removed Father Hundt and officially closed St. Peter's from Easter 1889 to November 1891. During this time the parishioners went to church at Oak Forest, St. Mary-of-the-Rock and St. Leon. The children were likewise schooled at these locations. In time St. Peter reopened and has since been a vital parish. The succeeding pastors of St. Peter have been:

Father Joseph Fleischmann, 1891-1908

Father Charles Wagner, 1908-1912

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Father William Wack, 1912-1917
Father William Knapp, 1938-1941
Father Joseph Laugel, 1950-1962
Father George Saum, 1868-1975

Father John Kohlman, 1917-1938
Father Sylvester Bloemke, 1941-1950
Father Louis Schumacher, 1962-1968
Father David Senefeld, 1975-unknown.

Record of Contributors for the St. Peter Church Building Fund, 1853-1860:

Franz AMBERGER	Phillipp ARIENS	Simon BATH
Aloys BAUER	Felix BAUER	Franz A. BAUER
Valentine BAUER	Georg BECKER	Paul BERNINGER
Matheas BUN	Franze BUSALD	Catherine BUSHALD
Amos CRIST	Valentine DIILL	Valentine DIILL
Heinerich DILL	Heinerich DILL	Joseph DIRKHIISING
Maria DIRKHIISING	Rudolph DIRKHIISING	Joseph EISEMANN
Joseph EISEMANN, Jr.	Nicolaus EISEMANN	Wendel EISEMANN
Christian ELLERICH	Rev. Father John ENGELN	John EPPICH
Klara & Katherine EPPICH	Martin FAUST	Augustin FECHER
Peter FECHER	Joseph FEHLINGER	Michael FRIES
Michael FRIES	Joannes FRIOHL	Anna Maria FUSSNER
Joannes FUSSNER	Joannes FUSSNER	John FUSSNER, Jr.
John J. FUSSNER	Margaretha FUSSNER	Matheas FUSSNER
Sussanna FUSSNER	Adam GEHRICH	Steffan GEIGER
Ignatz GEIGERICH	Georg GEIS	Ignatz GEIS
J. Adam GEIS	Matheus GEIS	Michael GEIS
Frederick GLASER	Michael GROSS	Johan HENZLER
Peter HERGENROTHER	George HILBERT	Gerhard HILBERT
Heinerich HILBERT	Heinerich HILBERT	Maria HILBERT
William HOFMAN	Matheas JACKLE	Peter JACOB
Joannes JOHLER	Sussans JUNG	Joseph KLOTZ
Franz KNECHT	Joannes KNECHT	Ignatz KOHLER
Adam KRAUS	Aloys KRAUS	Joanes KRAUS
Joannes A. KRAUS	Jacob KUNTZ	Adam & Phillipp KUNZ
Nicolaus KUNZ	William LINDER	August MESSERSCHMITT
Fridolin MESSMER	Ida MESSMER	Georg METZ
Stefan METZ	Andreas MEYER	Anton MEYER
Anton MULLER	Joannes MULLER	Jacob NUSZBAUM
Janson PARRONS (?)	Heinerich PETER	Anton PFLUM
Margaretha & Walburga PFLUM	H. RAUCH	Louis RIESELMANN
John RIPBERGER	John Adam RIPBERGER	Peter RIPBERGER
Adam RIPPERGER	Aloys RIPPERGER	Georg RIPPERGER
Isador RIPPERGER	Michael RIPPERGER	Michael RIPPERGER
Herman ROSFELD	Adam SAM	J. SAM
Adam SCHMITT (J. SENEFELD)	Maria Anna SCHMITT	Stephan SCHMITT
Elizabeth & Francesca SCHNEIDER	Gregor SCHNEIDER	Jacob SCHNEIDER
Markus SCHNEIDER	Magdalena SCHUCK	Theodor SCHUCK
Theodor SCHUCK, Jr.	H. H. SCHURBRUCK	Georg SEFERIN
Godfried SEIBEL	Nicolaus SEIDER	Balthazar SELM
Franz J. SELM (Katherine WAGNER)	Franz Joseph SELM	Antonius SIEFERT
Franz STADELMAN	Andrew STALLMAN	Maria STALLMAN
Aloysius STEHLIN	Anton STOLL	Michael STOLL
Konrad STRASSBURGER	Joseph STULB	Meinhard & Wilhelm STURWOLD
Blassius TEGLE	Pauline TEGLE	Nicolaus WAGNER
Conrad WEILER	Michael WEILER	Michael WIPPEL
Adam WISSEL	Conrad WISSEL	Joannes WISSEL
Sebastian WISSEL	Franz WITTMAN	Heinerich WITTMAN
Sibilla WOLFERT	August ZERFES	Joseph ZIX (ZIN)

Those individuals who desire more information on the history of St. Peter or who believe their families attended this parish are encouraged to contact [David J Endres](#).

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