

Waldmünchen's fifth twin town: Plain, Wisconsin(USA)

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On December 13 of last year, when all members of the town council raised their hands under agenda item 3, it was official: Waldmünchen has a new twin town! a new twin town! What a town. And with what depth. German history is omnipresent in Plain, Wisconsin. The street names are bilingual: Hauptstrasse and Main Street. Wiesenweg and Meadow Lane. Honigbach-Weg and Honey Creek Lane. The flags remind us of emigrants from Irlach, Untergrafenried or Zillendorf: Kraemer, Liegel, Soeldner... The names on the gravestones: Frank, Hutter, Bindl, Ringelstetter, Meixelsperger, Hetzel ... The local butcher's name is Straka, the domestic engineer's name is Nachreiner ...



Proud heritage: the names of the settlers, the year of emigration, and their home village are written on flags in the streets of Plain.

Let's travel back in time to the year 1843 (!) to trace the roots of this connection. In January of that year, an association "for the welfare and prosperity of the settlement" was founded almost 7,000 kilometers from the old district. A document from this association has been preserved, which was intended to provide the new arrivals helpful information and knowledge. Among other things, it explains how the emigrants could get land. Initially, they did not have to purchase it, but were given a right of first purchase through cultivation. The wave of emigration began around 1780 due to hardship and misery. Most of the emigrants came from the lower classes. Among them were many women with illegal children who set off for a new life because they could not live with the fathers of their children in their old homeland because they could not afford to marry. They were therefore unable to start a family. The association's handout is also a promotional brochure.



The landscape is reminiscent of our own - one of the reasons why the emigrants from the region around Waldmünchen settled in and around Plain.



The Kraemer families (Kevin, Marty, and Tom) took care of all three cemeteries and restored them. The names: predominantly German.

Almost poetically the beauty and abundance of fish in the Wisconsin River ("full of the tastiest fish") and the soil ("very fertile") were described. Good to know: "Almost all fruits that are grown in Germany also occur here at best." This is one of the main reasons why the emigrants from the old district of Waldmünchen (in addition to the prospect of prosperous economic opportunities) settled there: it looks and feels like "home".



The area around Plain is characterized by agriculture, even if many of the cheese dairies for which the town with a population of around 750, were closed.

The first important visit by emigrants from Waldmünchen in the footsteps of their ancestors is dated back to 1929, followed in the 1980s by numerous Americans with roots in Irlach, Tiefenbach, Untergrafenried or Treffelstein. Back to the year 1929: on a three-month trip through Europe, Barbara (Pfeiffer) and Georg Hetzel made a stop in Bavaria. In Ast they ordered a copy of the

picture of the "Mother of God of Ast", which was sent to them by post in January 1930. They donated it to the St. Anna Chapel in Plain, where it still hangs today. Looking at it is one of the most touching impressions of a visit to the new twin town.

The connection between the two towns really took off in 1990, when the young American Paul Weiss, son of Joan Ringelstetter and Robert Weiss, visited Waldmünchen during his time as a student in Germany. He brought Hans Stautner with a chronicle of Plain (Hildegard Theiring book, *A History of Plain*), who took it to his English course. In a way, this was the initial spark, because in June 1993 the first group trip to the USA started with 37 Waldmünchners. They stayed with host families from Plain, and the first friendships had long since been forged. In October 1994, the return visit from Plain also lasted three days. In 2000, a group even spent a whole week in Waldmünchen, many of them again with ("their") host families.

The trip of the Ast church choir in 2005 can be seen as another milestone. Their procession, including the candle from Ast and the song "Mother of God of Ast" sung in St. Ann's Chapel remain unforgettable. Further group trips were organized in 2010 and 2012. The visit from America planned for 2016 had to be canceled due to the terrorist attacks in Paris. Then came the pandemic. It was not until October 2022 that a group around Father John Silva was able to spend at least one day in Waldmünchen on a trip to Europe.

In addition to the group trips, a large number of family and friend and friendship visits illustrate the importance of the shared past and the close ties on both sides of the Atlantic. There are people who cherish them and preserve the treasure - for fear of forgetting someone, we refrain from mentioning them by name. However, a few names should be mentioned that played a major role in the relationship between the towns: Joe Wankerl, in the early years local spokesman of Plain and to this day supporter, mediator, and motor of the connection. Ken Kraemer, meticulous genealogist and writer, frequent visitor to Waldmünchen, passionate advocate of the idea of the town twinning and author of the twinning certificate. The Tom Kraemer family, active from the very beginning, idea-giving and financial supporters for all visits and activities of Waldmünchners in Plain.

The members of the Historical Society of Plain, who run the wonderful Emigration Museum, maintain it, and enliven it with a regularly published newsletter. Georg Ederer, the late Waldmünchen genealogist who traced the family relationships and recorded them in countless family trees, which often resulted in rolls several meters long. He was always the first port of call of American visitors and is still held in high esteem in Plain and beyond. On the German side, we should also mention Christa Senft, who never tired and will never tire of receiving and accompanying visitors, maintaining contacts, translating texts and reports - in other words, putting her heart and soul into her work. Like Lissa Laubmeier, who won the hearts of the Americans with the music she arranged for the Americans and was always instrumental in ensuring that the guests felt at home during their stay in Waldmünchen.



Christmas market, street festival and Oktoberfest (with exactly these names!) show how proud Americans are of their Bavarian roots.



Mayor Markus Ackermann attended the crucial town council meeting in Plain online in the middle of the night (German time). "A unique experience" he commented.

The idea of entering into an official partnership had therefore been brewing in people's minds for some time. Then, in 2022, everything came together. Ray Ring, Mayor of Plain and convinced of the importance and the chances of such a "sisterhood" and local historians with a deep awareness of their German roots, they pushed once again. And they found open ears and hearts among the people of Waldmünchen, above all Mayor Markus Ackermann, who lobbied the town council for the sealing of the deal. The committee in Plain initially voted in favor of this in November, and on 13 December the unanimous decision in Waldmünchen was then the "marriage". With Marie Lins the new twin town already a "committee chairwoman" in the new twin town. Here in Waldmünchen an "interest group" has met twice to explore structures and possibilities. By 2025 at the latest a trip to Wisconsin is to be offered. In the meantime, they will try to organize a smaller exchange, preferably of young people. The fact that the spark has long since been ignited, is shown by the detour of the two "boys" Jonas Dietl and Christian Liegl, who used a stay in Wisconsin in the spring to pay a visit to the new twin town. The two boys were often astonished about many things and events during their stay in Plain. But one thing is certain: Plainers and Waldmüchners have one thing in common: pride in their homeland, their origins, their identity. An excellent basis town twinning because they have common roots.



The church in Ast has always been a place of longing for every Plainer. In the chapel in the twin town hangs a replica of Our Lady of Ast.

NOTE: This article presents a history of interactions behind Plain and Waldmünchen becoming "twin towns." It appears in Waldmüchnner Heimatbote, Issue 57, December 2023. The Heimatbote, or hometown book, is produced annually and chronicles the town's history. An article about the history of interactions from the Plain side can be found in the OFTHS Newsletter, September 2022, Volume 15, Issue 3, "Bavaria-Plain Exchange Visits – Groups and Individuals" by Ken Kraemer and Debbie Blau.

The article written by Petra was Translated by Ken Kraemer using: www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)