

Historical Texas Cemetery Request for Designation, Historical Background (Continued)

On June 10, 1851, Ignatz Wenzel purchased 100 acres of land out of the Francisco Rodriguez Survey 99 southeast of the Comal Creek ⁶ in the newly settled area of Comal, eight miles southwest of New Braunfels and Ignatz began farming the land. On April 25, 1854, Ignatz married Anna Friesenhahn at St. Peter's (now Sts. Peter and Paul) Catholic Church in New Braunfels. Together they continued to farm the land where they raised their large family. In 1864, they purchased an additional 303 acres of land out of the same survey northwest of the Comal Creek. ⁷

Prior to his death on February 2, 1884, Ignatz had requested that upon his death, he be buried on his land and that one acre of land surrounding his grave be set aside as a Catholic Cemetery. Fulfilling his desires, Anna Wenzel, on March 3, 1884, "...for the purpose of putting into effect the desires of my deceased husband, the said Ignaz Wenzel, have granted, sold and conveyed, and by these presents do grant, sell and convey to said Right Reverend John Claudius Neraz, Bishop of San Antonio in the County of Bexar and State of Texas and his successors in office, one acre of land to be used exclusively as a Cemetery, said acre of land being situated in the County of Comal in the State of Texas about seven miles South West from New Braunfels, and being a part of a 60 acre tract sold of Survey No. 99 made in name of Francisco Rodriquez, belonging to the Estate of said Ignaz Wenzel deceased. ..." ⁸ The cemetery became known as the Wenzel Cemetery (named after Anna and Ignatz Wenzel), as the St. Joseph's Cemetery in Comal, and sometimes as the Eight Mile Creek Cemetery. When Anna died on March 27, 1914, she was buried to the right of Ignatz, with their daughter, Elizabeth, in between them. Anna, Elizabeth and Ignatz originally had beautiful cast-iron cross grave markers. Unfortunately these beautiful markers were vandalized and were later replaced by granite tombstones.

On August 15, 1925, Ignatz and Anna Wenzel's son, Eduard, and his wife, Margaretha (nee Reiningner) sold "...one half acre of land to be used exclusively as a cemetery..." to Right Reverend Arthur J. Drossaerts, D.D., Bishop of San Antonio for \$75.00. ⁹ That ½ acre of land is located immediately adjacent to, and on the northwest boundary of, the one acre donated for the cemetery by Ignatz's widow, Anna, in 1884.

Up until approximately 1948, vehicular access to the cemetery was through a narrow lane running from present day FM 482 to the southwest corner of the 1 1/2 acre cemetery. (This is more or less where present day Wenzel is located.) Vehicular parking was within the confines of the cemetery itself and was extremely limited. In approximately 1948, Ignatz and Anna Wenzel's grandson, William Edward (Willie) Wenzel, was approached by members of the community to donate a portion of the field he owned on the southeast side of the cemetery for a parking lot. According to Willie's son, William Ernst (Bill) Wenzel, Willie responded that he would be happy to donate the land for a parking lot and driveway. Thus, according to Bill Wenzel, his father donated the approximately .7 acres of land that comprises the parking lot and the driveway from FM 482 to the parking lot. ¹⁰ No deed record could be found regarding this transfer of the .7 acres of land. However the Comal Appraisal District map, which is attached to this application, shows the dimensions of the cemetery, parking area and driveway almost exactly as the total fenced area is physically located on the ground. Bill Wenzel, who is 83 years old and

more or less takes care of cemetery, has a very keen mind and there is little doubt that his memory of the donation of the parking lot and driveway is accurate.

It is interesting to note that Anna Wenzel's mother, Anna (nee Rinkart) Friesenhahn Syring, is honored with a large cast-iron cross grave marker, more or less in the center of the oldest graves on the cemetery. Anna Wenzel's brother Andreas Friesenhahn and his wife are buried one row west and slightly to the right of her mother; her brother Nicholas Friesenhahn and his wife are buried in the same row on her mother's immediate right; and her half-brother Heinrich Syring and his wife are buried in the same row as her mother, seven graves to her left. Anna's husband Ignatz Wenzel is buried one row east and directly in front of Anna's mother. Anna is buried to Ignatz's right with their child Elizabeth in between them. Therefore Anna Friesenhahn Syring, the matriarch of all Texas Friesenhahns and Syring, is surrounded by four of her children and their wives in their final resting places in Wenzel Cemetery. Her other son who lived to adulthood, Jacob Anton Friesenhahn, and his wife are buried in Selma Catholic Cemetery #1 in Selma. More than one third of the people buried in the Wenzel Cemetery are direct descendants of Anna Friesenhahn Syring and their spouses, and are therefore blood relatives of Anna and Ignatz Wenzel. Many of the graves, especially children's graves, are marked with concrete crosses with no inscriptions.

There were Mexican and Mexican American laborers who were living in the area and were also of the Catholic Faith. Therefore, the northwest corner of the cemetery was set aside for their gravesites. Many of these graves are marked with concrete crosses with no inscriptions as to who is buried in the graves. Some of these graves have tombstones with inscriptions in Spanish.

Since most of the people living in the Comal community during the 1800's and early 1900's were of German descent and spoke the German language, many of the tombstones contain German dates and inscriptions. A few examples: On Anna Wenzel's mother Anna Syring's cast-iron cross grave marker, as well as on several granite tombstones, you find the following words: "Hier Ruht in Gott" meaning "Here Rests in God" above the names of the deceased. On Anna Wenzel's half-brother Heinrich Syring's cast-iron cross grave marker, the following words are cast on the cross: "Kurz im Wort, Gerech die That, Am Rechten Ort, Nach Reifen Rath" which roughly translates to: "Short with Words, The Action Just, In the Right Place, With Mature Judgment." On Madeline Friesenhahn Stanley's tombstone is engraved: "Ein Stolze Dickkopf" meaning "A Proud Head-Strong Person". On the Valentin and Anna Schwab tombstone, we find: "Sie Waren uns Lieb im Leben, Gedenken Wir auch Ihrer im Tode" which more or less translates to: "They were kind to us in life, We also remember them in death". On several tombstones we find "Mutter" and "Vater" for "Mother" and "Father". On Joseph Syring's tombstone, we find: "Wer Gott Vertraut hat Wohl Gebaut" which more or less means: "Whoever trusts in God has built Prosperity".

One Civil War Veteran is buried in Wenzel Cemetery. Andreas Friesenhahn served as a Private in Comal County Militia Company F, 1st Regiment, 31st Brigade, Texas State Troops. ¹¹ Andreas arrived in the Comal Community, as a 14 year old boy, with his mother Anna Friesenhahn Syring, in 1857.

The Wenzel Cemetery in the community of Comal in southwestern Comal County is indeed of historical significance to the German Heritage of Comal County and of the State of Texas. Many of the people

buried in the Cemetery were born in Germany and immigrated to Texas during the mid 1800's. Some, including Ignatz and Anna Wenzel and Anna's mother and 3 brothers, arrived while Texas was still the independent Republic of Texas. Several of them, including Ignatz Wenzel, were present in New Braunfels when that city was founded by Prince Carl of Solms/Braunfels in 1845. These, and other German immigrants and their descendants, were proud to be Americans while at the same time retaining their German language and culture as evidenced by the inscriptions on their tombstones. It is only fitting that St. Joseph's Cemetery, Comal (Wenzel Cemetery) be honored and protected by the Texas Historical Commission as a Texas Historic Cemetery.

Bibliographical References

- ¹ New Braunfels: The First founders, Vol 1, Everett Anthony Fey, 1995, page 593.
- ² A New Land Beckoned, German Immigration to Texas, 1844 – 1847, Chester W. and Ethel H. Geue, 1972, page 94.
- ³ History of New Braunfels and Comal County, Texas, 1844 – 1946, Oscar Haas, 1968, page 61.
- ⁴ Fey, page 562.
- ⁵ Haas, page 257.
- ⁶ Comal County Deed Records, Vol D, pages 70 – 71.
- ⁷ Comal County Deed Records, Vol H, page 21.
- ⁸ Comal County Deed Records, Vol S, pages 141 – 142.
- ⁹ Comal County Deed Records, Vol 51, pages 540 – 541.
- ¹⁰ Conversation between William Ernst (Bill) Wenzel and Clarence Scheel, August 4, 2011.
- ¹¹ War Between the States, Participants from Comal County, Texas, Wilfred H. Schlather, 2009, page 45.