

GERMAN HERITAGE

Driving Tour of 19th and 20th Century Settlement and Farms Washtenaw County, Michigan

GERMAN HERITAGE OF WASHTENAW COUNTY

One of Michigan's first and largest German settlements was established in western Washtenaw County. German immigrants from Württemberg, Westphalia, and other areas formed an independent, rural farming society, whose social structure was defined by the common language, heritage and functional needs created by an agricultural livelihood. The settlement thrived from the 1830s to World War II, when technological advances and the unpopularity of the German language at the time led to the inevitable process of assimilation.

The story of the German settlement provides a glimpse into 19th and early 20th century ethnic and agricultural history. The German Heritage tour features historic resources such as houses, barns and outbuildings, farm fields, and roads associated with members of the German community.

GERMAN SETTLEMENT HISTORY

The settlement started in Ann Arbor, but by the second half of the 19th century, the community expanded south and west towards Saline and Manchester, with a small group situated north of Ann Arbor. The initial settlers arrived looking for economic opportunity. They convinced kin and others to join them, and called for a German pastor, who established churches to provide focal points for the community.

Much of the land occupied by the Germans was purchased second hand from pioneering Yankee settlers. Thus, features surviving from the early settlement period are similar to those in neighboring English-speaking areas. They include the network of roads, buildings in the Greek Revival architectural style, and roadside cemeteries.

The mid-19th century was marked by growth and prosperity of the community. Additional Germans arrived, again pulled by kin, economic opportunity as well as recruiting efforts by the State of Michigan to populate the area as quickly as possible. Most

WASHTENAW ETHNIC HERITAGE

Initial immigrants to Washtenaw County were descendants of English pioneers who had settled in New England, New York, and Ontario. They began arriving in Michigan in large numbers after the Erie Canal opened in 1825.

At the same time as German immigrants began arriving in the 1830s and 1840s, Irish immigrants were purchasing land in Northfield, Webster, and Dexter Townships (see J. F. Thayden 1945).

A few smaller ethnic groups settled in Ann Arbor itself, including two separate Jewish settlements (1850s and 1890s, respectively) and a Greek community (early 20th century). African-Americans settled in the mid-19th century in Salem Township, and again in the mid-20th century in the Ypsilanti and Willow Run areas.

members lived as self-sufficient farmers, owning their own farms consisting of brick farmhouses, barns and multiple outbuildings; clearing rectangular fields while maintaining some wood lots; and attending one-room schoolhouses and churches. Community members traveled to Ann Arbor, Saline, and Manchester to conduct business.

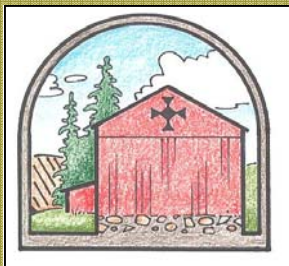
The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century marked the peak years of the German settlement, and the beginning of its decline. By the end of World War II, most residents adopted the English language, and German culture became a recreational activity rather than a way of life.

RESPECT, PLEASE!

The historic resources depicted herein are **private property** and are not open to the public. Please respect the owners' privacy and do not trespass.

The tour is intended to be enjoyed from the public right-of-way only.










GERMAN HERITAGE

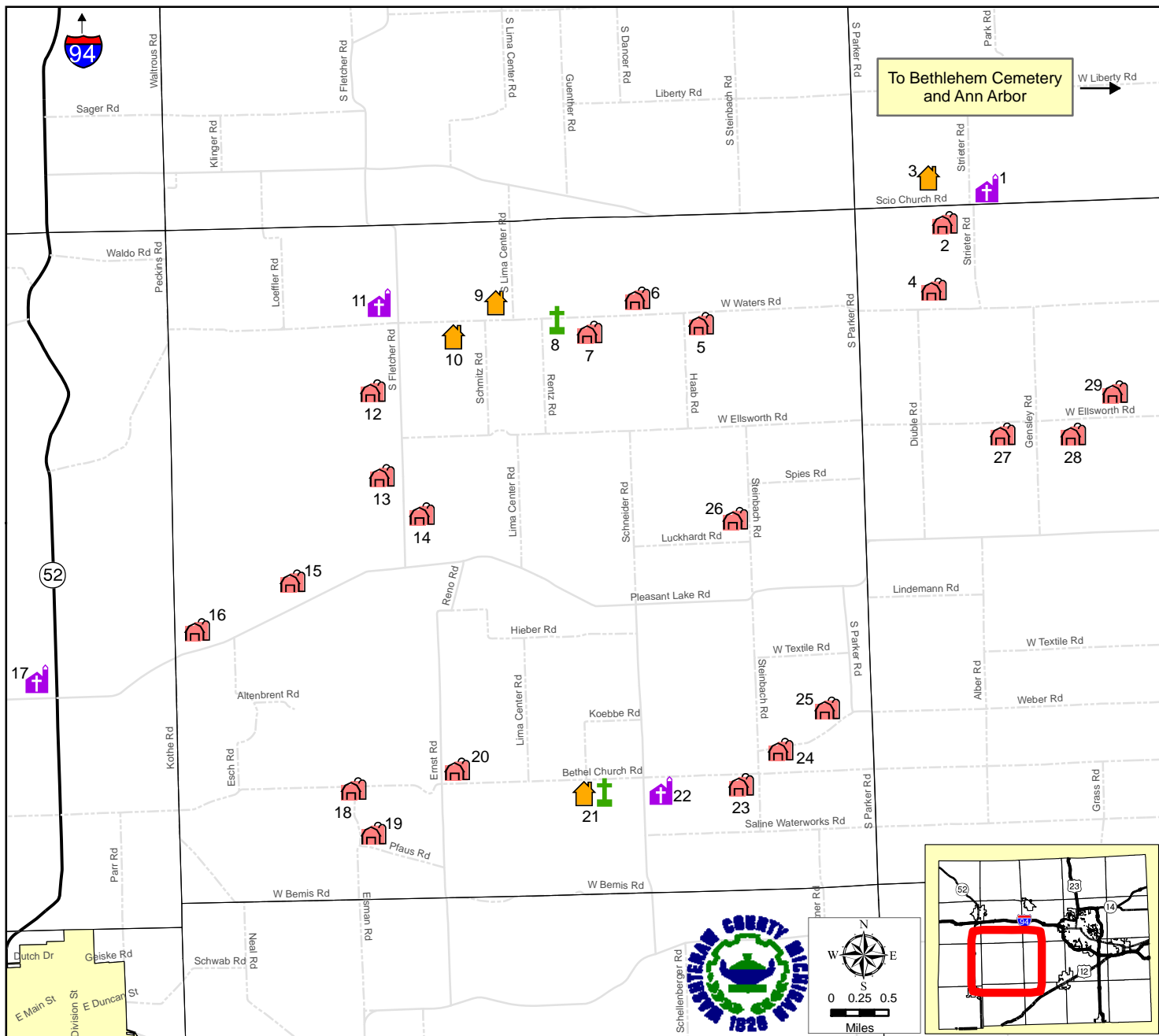
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LEGEND

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------|---|--------------------|
|  | Farm |  | House |
|  | School |  | Church |
|  | Cemetery | 7 | Site Number |

Site No. and Address

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 7474 Scio Church Road | 10 11911 Waters Road | 20 12100 Bethel Church Road |
| 2 7465 Scio Church Road | 11 3050 Fletcher Road | 21 11007 Bethel Church Road |
| 3 7570 Scio Church Road | 12 3590 Fletcher Road | 22 10425 Bethel Church Road |
| 4 7800 Waters Road | 13 4250 Fletcher Road | 23 9505 Bethel Church Road |
| 5 9821 Waters Road | 14 4465 Fletcher Road | 24 9351 Weber Road |
| 6 10390 Waters Road | 15 13450 Pleasant Lake Road | 25 8890 Weber Road |
| 7 10955 Waters Road | 16 14324 Pleasant Lake Road | 26 4908 Steinbach Road |
| 8 11000 block, Waters Road | 17 19980 Pleasant Lake Road | 27 7285 Ellsworth Road |
| 9 11516 Waters Road | 18 13011 Bethel Church Road | 28 6665 Ellsworth Road |
| | 19 7501 Eisman Road | 29 6290 Ellsworth Road |



“...[After traveling from Ann Arbor] out the Territorial Road [Jackson Road]...for a distance, then [taking] a side road into the enclave of Swabian settlement...we passed the district school, by itself in a lonely stretch of forest. A few more miles and we saw the church, also isolated in a remote place. We came to the shoemaker's modest dwelling, and then the tailor's. We were crossing a village that was spread out as if viewed through a microscope, all intervals greatly increased.”

—Johann Georg Kohl, 1855

19TH CENTURY RURAL CEMETERIES

Older cemeteries in Washtenaw County are one of the few historic resources remaining from the



Site 1: Salem Lutheran Church Cemetery

19th century cultural landscape. In rural areas, church-affiliated cemeteries are generally larger and have a more systematic layout than the many small independent cemeteries scattered along the country roads.

In western Washtenaw County, the German settlers tended to use church-affiliated cemeteries, while the smaller independent cemeteries are generally associated with the earlier Anglo-American immigrants. Selected examples of the 19th century cemeteries include:

Rural Roadside Cemeteries

- Site 8: **Freedom Cemetery**
- Site 17: **Gillett Cemetery** (west end)

Rural Church Cemeteries

- Site 1: **Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery**
- Site 17: **Salem United Methodist Church Cemetery** (east end)
- Site 21: **Catholic Cemetery**
- Site 22: **Bethel United Church of Christ Cemetery**
- **Koebbe Cemetery**, corner of Ellsworth and Lima Center Roads, Freedom Township

For information on these and other cemeteries in Washtenaw County, see *Directory of Cemeteries of Washtenaw County, Michigan*, 2nd ed., Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County, 1997.



**Site 21:
Catholic Cemetery**

PASTOR SCHMID CHURCHES



**Friedrich Schmid
(1807-1883)**

Pastor Friedrich Schmid arrived from Europe in 1833, and would over the next fifty years establish over 40 German Lutheran Churches in the area. A smaller group of Germans attended churches affiliated with the Catholic or Evangelical Association (now United Methodist) faiths.

Pastor Schmid (photo at left), who was a native of Württemberg, Germany, held his first service in a "schoolhouse in the center of this rather widely distributed group of Germans" three to four miles west of Ann Arbor. Schmid estimated 40 to 46 German families were scattered in an area 10 to 13 miles wide. The school-

house was quickly replaced by a log cabin, which became a focal point for the early German community (photo below). It stood in today's Bethlehem Cemetery, 2801 Jackson Road, Ann Arbor. The congregation was named "Die 1ste Deutsche Evangelische Gesellschaft von Scio."

The congregation moved into Ann Arbor in 1849, and its direct descendants include the Bethlehem United Church of Christ on Fourth Avenue and Zion Lutheran Church on Liberty Street in Ann Arbor.

Schmid also founded the Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church (Site 1) in 1833. Schmid himself lived across the road (Site 2) until 1849, when he moved into Ann Arbor. However, he continued to serve both churches as well as establishing 23 others in southern Michigan. Of these, several congregations and their descendants are listed below. Dates given in parentheses indicate the date the congregation was first established.

Not all Germans attended the Lutheran Church. There was a Catholic congregation in Freedom Township (Site 21), and Methodist congregations in Sharon Township (Site 17), Freedom Township and in the city of Ann Arbor.



Schmid-related Churches on this tour include:

- Site 1: **Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church** (1833)
- Site 11: **Zion Lutheran Church, Freedom Township** (1865) [founded by members of St. Thomas Lutheran Church, listed below]
- Site 22: **Bethel United Church of Christ** (1840)

Other Schmid-sponsored Churches in Washtenaw County include:

- **St. John's United Church of Christ** of Rogers Corners, Freedom Township [off-shoot of Zion Lutheran Church, also in Freedom Township]
- **St. John's Lutheran Church**, Bridgewater Township
- **St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church**, Northfield Township
- **St. Thomas Lutheran Church**, Freedom Township
- **Emanuel United Church of Christ**, Manchester

SITE 1. Salem Evangelical Church
7474 Scio Church Road, Scio Township



Built in the Gothic Revival style for \$14,000, the 1870 church replaced an 1836 frame structure, which served the congregation under the direction of founding Pastor Friedrich Schmid. The current structure maintains its original walnut and butternut interior.

The east wing was constructed in 2000. Behind the church is the 1894 stone vault and the cemetery graced with a decorative cast iron fence.

SITE 2. Laubengayer-Renz-Feldkamp Farm
7465 Scio Church Road, Lodi Township

The gable-roofed barn is typical of the 19th century before many barns were rebuilt with a gambrel roof to provide for additional hay storage. The farm is the site on which Pastor Friedrich Schmid lived while serving his churches during the 1830s and 1840s.



SITE 3. Strieter House and Farm
7570 Scio Church Road, Scio Township

The house is one of the finest examples of Italianate-style architecture in the area. Characteristic features include segment and round arched windows, decorative hoods, double brackets, dentil molding under the eaves, and the use of brick. Completed in 1874 by Charles Hertzell, the house and farm were sold to the John J. Staebler family sometime between 1875 and 1889. They and their descendants, the Strieters, owned and operated a general and dairy farm through the 20th century.



SITE 4. Graden Farm
7800 Waters Road, Lodi Township

The farm is distinctive due to the large barn with cupolas and the deep set back from the road. The Italianate-style brick Upright and Wing farmhouse with segment-arched windows also portrays elements of the Greek Revival style: cornice returns and frieze windows.



SITE 5. E. Fiegel Farm
9821 Waters Road, Freedom Township

John G. Fiegel established this farm by 1856. By 1864 the 80 acre farm was passed on to Jacob Fiegel. He was followed by Emanuel Fiegel at the turn of the 20th century. The farm includes a mid-19th century barn, a Queen Anne house, and a gambrel-roofed barn.



SITE 6. J. F. Stierle Farm
10390 Waters Road, Freedom Township

The designated Centennial Farm includes a side-gable Greek Revival-style house, a stone smokehouse, a hip-roofed garage from the early 20th century and two bank barns. The smaller barn with gable roof and diamond-shaped gable cut-out dates to the mid-to late 19th century. The larger barn with gambrel roof and attached milk house served the 20th century dairy operation on the farm.



SITE 7. Schenk Farm
10955 Waters Road, Freedom Township

J. Schenk owned this 80-acre farm beginning sometime before 1856. At its peak, the farm grew to 175 acres, and included land on both sides of Rentz Road. The typical brick Upright and Wing farmhouse dates to the mid-19th century.



SITE 8. Freedom Cemetery
Waters Road, Freedom Township

This is an excellent example of the vernacular roadside cemetery of the early 19th century. The tombstones have primarily English or American surnames inscribed. Those buried include members of the Rogers family, who were early settlers near Fletcher and Waters Roads. The intersection is still known as "Rogers Corners" although most of the English-speaking settlers moved out as the Germans settled in. For more information, go to: <http://members.tripod.com/~deemamafred/cemfree.html>.

MYSTERIOUS CROSSES



One of the distinctive characteristics associated with the 19th century German farmstead is the diamond-shaped cross cut-out in gable roofed barns.

The origin and meaning of the diamond cross cut-out is not known. They appear in numerous gable ends of barns frequently seen in the German community (Sites 4 and 6 [inset] pictured below, for example). This feature is also found in non-German areas of Michigan and the Northeast. It is always found on barns and outbuildings dating to the mid-19th century. Some barns have two and even three crosses in the gables. Historians do not know if the cross had a symbolic meaning for the German settlers, but this feature remains as an indicator of mid-19th century outbuildings unaltered by modern materials.



SITE 9. Jacob B. Eschelbach Farm
11516 Waters Road, Freedom Township

Jacob Eschelbach purchased 80 acres from neighbor John Schenk before 1854. According to family records, the barn was built in 1860. It displays the medium-pitched gable roof and fieldstone foundation typical of the time. Descendant William Eschelbach built the current farmhouse in 1921.



SITE 10. Roller Farm
11911 Waters Road, Freedom Township

John Roller was a Württemberg farmer and stone mason, purchasing this farm sometime after 1856. He and wife Catherine raised at least six children in this 1860s house. Note the off-set front entry suggesting two rooms on the main floor, a feature favored by earlier German immigrants.



SITE 11. Zion Lutheran Church
3050 Fletcher Road, Freedom Township; and
Former Parsonage, Zion Lutheran Church,
2905 Fletcher Road, Freedom Township

This church was constructed in 1867 in the Gothic Revival style. Characteristic features include the use of brick, Gothic-style windows, and a tall steeple. An addition was added in 1909. The church was established in 1865 by members of the St. Thomas Lutheran parish who wished to have a church in their corner of the township. The accompanying parsonage was built in 1889 and 1890, and was rebuilt in 1917 after being damaged by a tornado. The parsonage stopped being used in 1954, and today serves as a private residence. It is designated as a Washtenaw County Local Historic District.



SITE 12. Niehaus Farm
3590 Fletcher Road, Freedom Township

Early settler S. S. Peckens purchased this farm before 1856. The farm was subsequently owned by German emigrants A. Hauck, George Wacker (or Walker), and by 1895 by Herman Niehaus. The farm buildings consist of a collection of 19th and early 20th century barns and outbuildings that supported first a general farm, and later a dairy operation.



SITE 13. Kuhl Barn, a.k.a., "A. Dowhal and Sons"
4250 Fletcher Road (just north of 4354), Freedom Township

This mid-to-late 19th century barn is unusual, in that its bank and main entry were constructed at the gable end rather than along a side elevation. It stands on land owned during the 19th century by Henry G. Kuhl, who emigrated from Prussia in 1840.



SITE 14. Schaible Farm
4465 Fletcher Road, Freedom Township



The farm has been owned by German families (List, Breitenwischer, Kleinschmidt, and Schaible) since the mid-19th century. The upright and wing house dates to the third quarter of the 19th century, while the dairy and hay barns reflect the early 20th century.

SITE 15. Dresselhaus-Kress Farm
13450 Pleasant Lake Road, Freedom Township

The farm was established on the south side of the road by the Dresselhaus family, who arrived from Germany in 1842. The original house was replaced with an Italianate-style Upright and Wing on the north side, while the barnyard remained on the south side. Neighbor Paul Kress purchased the farm in the early 1900s. The dairy barn shows off the white cinder block milk house typical of the mid-20th century.



SITE 16. L. Uphaus Farm
14324 Pleasant Lake Road, Freedom Township

The Uphaus Farm is situated along the western edge of the township, in an area that was still "English" in the mid-19th century. By 1874, however, the farm was owned by a German family named List, followed by Henry Dresselhaus.



Neighbor Lambert Uphaus, whose ancestors emigrated from Germany in 1855, purchased the farm by 1915, developing an approximate 145 acre farm that is still in operation today.

SITE 17. Salem United Methodist Church
19980 Pleasant Lake Road, Sharon Township

Built in 1874, the Gothic Revival church served the German Methodist community. To the west of the building are two cemeteries. The older one is the Gillett cemetery, consisting of head stones of early settlers of Yankee (New England/New York) origin. The younger cemetery immediately adjacent to the church contains mostly ethnic Germans.



ARCHITECTURE



Site 20: Goodyear-Blumenauer Farmhouse

In the German settlement area, the architecture of farmhouses constructed from the 1830s to the mid-1850s was typical of the Greek Revival style. While some structures are relatively plain, others are quite stylish, and include prominent frieze boards, cornice returns, and frieze windows.



Site 19: John Alber Farmhouse

From the 1840s to the 1880s, the typical German farmhouse was an "Upright and Wing" with a gable roof, and a front porch tucked into the ell between the upright portion and side wing. Often a rear third wing was added. In many cases (and less so in the rest of the county), the farmhouse was constructed of brick, and had arched window openings characteristic of the Italianate architectural style. However, there are also frame Upright and Wing houses, with Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, or no stylistic detailing at all. Houses dating to



Site 26: Noyer Farmhouse

the turn of the 20th century include two-story structures with Queen Anne styling, or simpler cubes and smaller one-story bungalows built from mail order kits.

SITE 18. M. Alber Farm: "Alber's Orchard"
13011 Bethel Church Road, Freedom Township



Michael Alber of Germany established an orchard on this 75 acre farm in 1890. Alber and his descendants planted many varieties of apple trees. Although no longer in the Alber family, the orchard and cider mill remain in operation and are open to the public each fall. Previous owners of the farm included Jacob Slimmer (see Site 19) and P. Schenk, one of whom built this 1872 barn.

SITE 19. John Alber Farm
7501 Eisman Road, Freedom Township

This farmstead was originally part of the M. Alber property (Site 18). It evolved into its current form by 1895, when John Alber owned 101 acres on both sides of Eisman, and included this and the farmstead to the east at 12800 Pfaus Road. Today the farm consists of the homestead with a modern addition (and which was previously owned by Jacob Slimmer) and numerous outbuildings (see photo above).

SITE 20. Goodyear-Braun-Blumenauer Farm
12100 Bethel Church Road, Freedom Township

Henry Goodyear from Connecticut owned this farm in the middle of the 19th century. It included the two-story Greek Revival-style farmhouse whose solid massing and decorative elements stand in contrast to the Italianate-style brick Upright and Wing farmhouses typical of the German settler (see photo at left). Goodyear's farm was valued at \$25,000 in the 1860 population census. A blacksmith shop and a school house once stood to the west of the house. The farm was purchased between 1864 and 1870 by Jacob Brown (Braun), a Württemberg farmer who emigrated in 1850. G. H. Blumenauer purchased the farmstead in the early 20th century.

SITE 21. St. Francis Parsonage and Catholic Cemetery
11007 Bethel Church Road, Freedom Township



The St. Francis Catholic Parish, established 1839, built a church on this site in 1858 at a cost of \$3000. The brick parsonage was added in 1873 to the west, and the cemetery was developed to the east. The church no longer stands, but the Italianate-style parsonage is now a private residence.

The cemetery is maintained by St. Mary's Church in Manchester. For more information, see:

<http://members.tripod.com/~deemamafred/cemstfran.html>

SITE 22. Bethel United Church of Christ
10425 Bethel Church Road, Freedom Township

The Evangelical German Bethel Congregation of Freedom [Township] was established in 1840 by Pastor Friedrich Schmid. The congregation settled on this spot in 1849, first building a log cabin, and then in 1857 a frame structure. The current stone structure was built in 1909 and received an addition in 1965. The parsonage to the east was added by 1858. The property is listed in the State Register of Historic Places.



SITE 23. Kramer-Kuebler Farm
9505 Bethel Church Road, Freedom Township

The Kramer-Kuebler farm was owned by A. J. Andress in 1856, consisting of 80 acres including a large wetland area in the center. A farmstead is first depicted on the higher grounds near the main road on the 1874 plat map. The property was owned at this time by Adam Kramer, Jr. and the wetland had been drained. Adam's father had emigrated in 1836, and operated a nearby farm. Adam, Jr., worked on his father's farm until purchasing his own not long before 1874. The Upright and Wing farmhouse and connected outbuildings were probably built during the Kramer tenure (Adam, Jr.'s brother, Joseph, was a carpenter) or by the C. Kuebler family, who owned the farm for much of the 20th century.



“EXCHANGE PLACE” IN MANCHESTER

Manchester’s Main Street, historically known as “Exchange Place,” developed between 1853 and 1940. Germans constructed several of Manchester’s commercial buildings and operated many of the retail and banking businesses there during the 19th century. The area continues to maintain its historic feel with numerous shops and restaurants.

SITE 24. J. Stabler Farm, 9351 Weber Road, Freedom Township



To this day, the Stabler Farm includes its original 160 acres. It was owned by the family from Württemberg as early as 1856, when the farmstead was situated in the SW corner of the property. Between 1864 and 1874, Friederich Stabler built a new house of brick in the Italianate-

style near the center of his farm, fronting Weber Road. He also constructed a brick smokehouse. Several barns, corn crib, and outbuildings were built across the road.

SITE 25. Fritz Farm 8890 Weber Road, Freedom Township

Like the Stabler Farm described above, the Fritz Farm has also experienced little change over the years. Paul Fritz owned the 120 acre farm by 1856, arriving from Germany in 1837. The farmhouse, built during the 1860s or 1870s, is a typical German Upright and Wing. The barns and outbuildings date to the early 1900s.



SITE 26. Noyer Farm 4908 Steinbach Road, Freedom Township

The land on which this farm sits was part of an 80 acre farm owned by M. Heimendinger by 1856. Subsequent owners were also of German origin, and owned only the east 40 acres of the original farm. Fred Noyer purchased the farm by 1915. Both the house and main barn were built at about this time, undoubtedly replacing their 19th century counterparts. The barn, in particular, is an excellent example of the early 20th century dairy barn. The house is built in the American Foursquare style, most likely purchased as a kit (see photo at left).

SITE 27. Henry Feldkamp Farm 7285 Ellsworth Road, Lodi Township

This Queen Anne-style home was the long-time residence of Henry Feldkamp. Prior owner F. Stollsteimer maintained



his farm complex on the south side of the road, and kept an orchard on the north side. By the late 19th century, Feldkamp’s farm had more than doubled in size, and included the current barns on the north side.

SITE 28. Wiedmayer Farm 6665 Ellsworth Road, Lodi Township

This farm includes the Italianate-style Upright and Wing farmhouse, the large gambrel-roofed dairy barn with attached white milk house and silo, and numerous smaller outbuildings, including a very old smaller barn, corn crib, wash house, and tool shed. Unlike many of the German farmsteads, the buildings on this property are set back from the road, and the



house was not built of brick. The Blaess-Weber school house was situated on this property by the road. The school house has been subsequently moved to the Saline School district grounds.

SITE 29. Laubengayer Farm 6290 W. Ellsworth Road, Lodi Township

The Laubengayer Farm is represented by the prominent, brick Greek Revival-style house. Its large barn with silo was situated to the northeast of the house. The 80-acre farm was owned by G. Laubengayer in 1856, and by J. G. Laubengayer in 1864. The latter expanded the farm to approximately 150 acres by the third quarter of the 19th century. At the turn of the century, the farm was owned and operated by George J. Herter.



HISTORIC RESOURCES OF INTEREST

—Open to the Public—

- [Rentschler Farm Museum](#) (see below).
- [Waterloo Farm Museum](#), 9998 Waterloo-Munith Road, Waterloo Township, Jackson County, www.waterloofarmmuseum.org.
- For an urban “German” experience: **Bennett-Kempf House**, now [Kempf House Museum](#), 312 South Division Street, Ann Arbor, www.kempfhousemuseum.org.

[Rentschler Farm Museum](#) (not pictured on map) 1265 East Michigan Ave., Saline

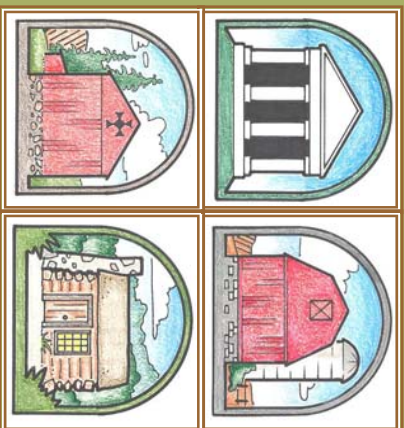
Owned by the city of Saline, the Rentschler Farm Museum depicts family life on a farm during the first half of the 20th century. The Rentschler family purchased this property in 1901, and developed it into its current appearance during the course of the 20th century. The property contains the 1906 Queen Anne-style farmhouse and eleven outbuildings, including some that were once common but are now scarce on the landscape.



The buildings are: two large barns, a sheep barn, an equipment barn, a workshop, a hog house, a henhouse, a corn crib, an ice house, a shed, and the windmill. For more information, look up Rentschler Farm at:

<http://www.salinechamber.com>
<http://salinehistory.org>
[sites&content=rentschler_farm](http://salinehistory.org/sites&content=rentschler_farm)

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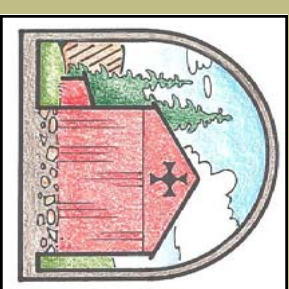
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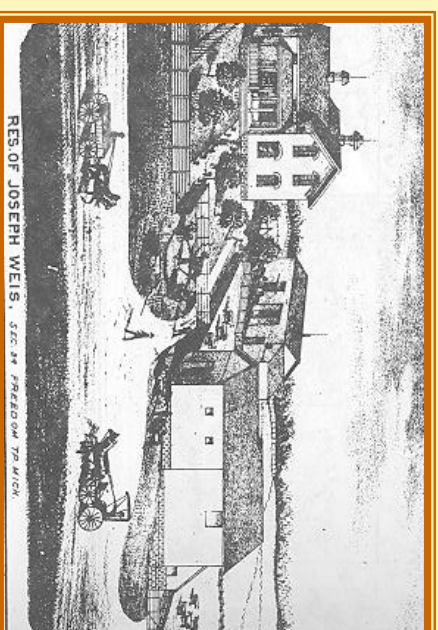


GERMAN
HERITAGE

TOUR 4

A

Washtenaw County,
Michigan
Heritage Driving
Tour



J. Weis Farm, 11101 Bethel Church Road,
Freedom Township