

Professor Frank Loehner

Hello everyone! I'm Frank Loehner. Maybe your parents or your grandparents talked about a Professor Loehner. Well, I'm that man. I consider myself one of the lucky ones. God answered my prayers and brought me from Germany to this town – Westphalia, MI.

I was born in the 1853 in Mendan, a city in the Sauerland area of Westphalia, Germany. I was an orphan. My parents, Peter Joseph Loehner and Franziska Lillotte, died when I was five years old. The only family I had was an uncle, a priest who raised me to manhood. I believe raised by a priest gave me my love for playing the organ. It also gave me the opportunity to attend the “Royal Teacher's Seminary” in the nearby town of Burem.

I graduated from the University of Leipzig and I am proud to say I had an exceptional rating as an organist. I was given an assignment by the government to teach. I did this for 2 years. During the summer of 1875 I served in the Prussian Army. Every teacher was required to serve. Then I was told that in order to teach, I must teach subjects the way the government wanted them taught. The subjects were contrary to my beliefs. I refused.

If you're a history buff, you'll know that in the 1870's Otto von Bismark was known as the “Iron Chancellor of Prussia.” Many religious institutions, especially Catholics, were forbidden to teach. It was at this time that Blessed Mother Pauline was forced to close her schools in Germany. When she received a request from Father Reifert for teachers, she sent 3 of the Sisters of Christian Charity to Westphalia, MI.

I was not allowed to teach and I was forbidden to emigrate to America. But I was determined to leave Germany. Now my friend came to help me. He was a young priest in Norway – my classmate who had been deported for not serving in the military. Secretly he arranged for my escape by way of Norway, through England, up into Scotland.

Many times I feared I would be picked up and returned to Germany, but I finally arrived in Scotland. I could not speak English so I was provided an interpreter. I was very fearful of him. I knew he carried a gun but so did I. We had, I guess, a mutual understanding.

We boarded a ship in the port city of Glasgow for New York. But here my journey was not finished.

My priest uncle had made arrangements for me with Father Schiller in Scranton, PA. I took a train from New York City to Scranton and I was given the job of church organist in Father Schiller's parish.

Now you may ask, how did ^Iyou get to Westphalia, MI? I came here in reply to an ad in a newspaper. I read that an organist was needed in St. Mary's, Westphalia. So it's Scranton, PA to Westphalia, MI where I was hired the church organist and music director. The parish priest, Father Reifert, had just purchased a new pipe organ – it was joy to play.

I soon became acquainted here, and after some months I met a beautiful young girl named Elizabeth Thome, the daughter of August Thome and Elizabeth Doll. Elizabeth Thome and I were married in February of 1880. After a year or so, we decided to return to Scranton, PA where I was again the organist in Father Schiller's parish. Our first two children were born in Pennsylvania, Augusta in Scranton and Anthony in Wilkes Barre.

My wife was very lonesome in Scranton. She missed her family and friends in Westphalia. So we left Scranton and came back here. I had no difficulty getting my job as church organist and music director – a job I held for 40 years – and I was glad to know the village was to be my permanent home.

Our home was a few steps from the church on North Westphalia Street. I understand that part of our house is now the home of Mabel Thelen.

I was Westphalia's postmaster for 35 years and I was a merchant in town. I sold items like books, stationery, religious goods, and tobaccos

all in the building that is now the Westphalia Telephone Co. In the adjoining building my son, Frank Jr., had an ice cream parlor, a photographer's studio, and the switch-board for the telephone company was in that building. Regina Thome Messeau was the switch-board operator, and I was the manager of the Telephone Co.

When my son Bernard was less than 2 months old, his mother, Elizabeth, died. Now I was a widower with 8 young children. But it was my good fortune to meet Anna Kasper Fedewa. Anna and I were married in November of 1899. The girls were born to that marriage.

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As I look back to my time in Westphalia, I am very thankful. I had a good life. My children did well. Augusta, my oldest, married Anthony Martin. She was the post-mistress in Westphalia for 23 years. Anthony was a pharmacist in South Haven, MI. Joseph was married and lived in Detroit. Eugenia joined the Sisters of Christian Charity and took the name Sister Frances. My son Ernest was married and lived in Ohio. Cecilia remained single and stayed in Westphalia. Frank Jr. succeeded me as Westphalia's postmaster and was an accomplished trombone player. He married Mary Miller and they lived in Detroit. My youngest son, Bernard, was ordained a priest. He was a well-known author and a professor at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. My daughter Anna married Isadore (Pro) Miller. She was a telephone switch-board operator for the Westphalia Telephone Co. Margaret married Robert Droste. They lived in Lansing. Lilliam married John Ball and they lived in Detroit.

Yes, I can thank God for bringing me to Westphalia. It's a blessing to be a part of this community. With that I'll say auf wiedersehen.