

THIRD TIMES A CHARM

You've heard that old saying, "Third times a charm"? Jamboree was spectacular: Kin-Dig was great! Well, "Annual Conference" was a charm.

On four consecutive weekends I was pursuing my hobby. Some of you will remember seeing me in my sunbonnet and pioneer dress at the 20th annual Southern California Genealogical Society Jamboree, at Pasadena, on April 23rd. Same costume on April 29th for Antelope Valley's 9th annual Kin-Dig.

Last stop was in Modesto for the 169th annual conference of the Old German Baptist Brethren. This time I was wearing my ordinary clothing but I was conspicuously different from the "brethren."

The women wore dresses similar to those worn by their Brethren and Annabaptist ancestors. There were no blue jeans and tee-shirts; every "sister" wore a dress from an identical pattern. Unlike the Danish Festival in Solvang where people dress in native costumes for the weekend, these believers wear their unique dress every day of the year.

The dress has long sleeves, and includes an identical fabric shawl and an identical fabric apron. The distinctive shawl and apron are sewn right into the dress. The hem is an inch—to several inches—below the knee. Dark stockings cover the legs and sturdy simple walking shoes are their footwear. No heels, sandals or tennis shoes!

The beautiful faces were totally free of makeup. The hair was drawn straight back from the face and pinned in a bun. A small white-net bonnet, tied under the chin, covered their "crowning glory." During my two week visit I never saw my hostess (or her visiting mother and sister) without their hair covered.

Most of the men were wearing a distinctive black flat-brim hat. Many wore long beards—especially the older gentlemen. The black "frock coat" is identified with the Old Order German Baptist. At a glance, one might think that these men were Amish or Mennonites but, I'm told, their suites are different.

Why do these men and women wear garments reminiscent of the 17th and 18th century? They live the doctrines of their faith, and modesty and simplicity are important to them. I'm informed that the apparel is not for others to view them and know that they are "different" but as a reminder to the individual, daily, that they are different.

My Frantz grandparents, great-grandparents and great-greats were "Dunkards." My immigrant ancestor, Michael Frantz, and his son Michael, are legends in the German Baptist Brethren history. I find a rich heritage of Frantz—and allied families—were documented in every ^{area} where they lived and farmed.

Modesto is one of the largest Old German Baptist Brethren communities outside the middle west. This Conference brought over 3,000 people from all over the United States. I had the privilege of meeting people from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana—so many families with the surnames in my collateral lines. I was told that I am related to more than half of individuals. With a little more time we might have prepared some pedigree charts and group sheets.

My host for the conference has been collecting family history for over thirty years. He has four file cabinets and a large bookshelf full of data. Their home is a museum of artifacts of an earlier era. They haven't spent a fortune in antique shops; they modestly inform me that "this dish came from Grandma's. This piece came from an Uncle's estate."

With equal modesty, my host apologized for his files. "They're a mess; I haven't had much time to work on them lately." His files were not "a mess"; several years ago he contributed considerable material for The Brethren Encyclopedia; and he has authored two books that I know of. The man, himself, is a walking encyclopedia for German Baptist Brethren family history.

While I spent entire days going through file folders and reading books, my hostess, her sister and mother cleaned what appeared to be an already immaculate house. They prepared a mountain of food (and they had been cooking and freezing for several days before I arrived). About the only time that I was allowed to help was with washing or drying dishes. I was encouraged to "go back to your research." (The ladies lent new meaning to the room deodorizer commercial on television, "Don't you ever stop?" The only time they sat down was at mealtime.)

During the week of conference out-of-state "brethren" came by van and carload for the evening meal. Each evening found several different people spending the night on mattresses in a partitioned area of the "family room." By moving from home to home—and taking meals in various locations—host and visitors "caught up" on events in their lives since last Annual Conference.

I attempted to excuse myself and retreat, with genealogy, to my camping trailer parked by the barn. They insisted that I remain and share in the conversation.

You'd have to experience the genuine warmth and hospitality to appreciate what I found in that home. It's an intangible—hard to explain! The six children were not glued to a television set (they own none). There were no "ghetto blasters" or skateboards. The six children (all under twelve) were courteous and respectful to me and to their parents.

I arrived on my host's threshold wearing jeans, blouse, sandals—and makeup. I talked about television programs that they could not identify with. I shared details about the movie Witness which was aired on network TV less than twenty-four hours before my arrival in their home. I talked about the Shuttle and the impact that the Challenger explosion had on my life and my job. I was an "extra terrestrial" that was welcomed and loved by Old German Baptist Brethren.

Roosters crowed, hens cackled, doves cooed in the barn.. A tractor disced the fertile soil of eighty acres around the house. I was experiencing rural America fifty years ago. How refreshing! How relaxing!

At "Jamboree" and "Kin-Dig" I could pick up books and read about family history. In Modesto I was able to experience family history!

Contributed by Lorraine Frantz Edwards, CSGA individual member.

Articles such as this are great items of interest of which we encourage you to share with all who pick up the CSGA Newsletter. Please submit your articles to: Nancy Keeler Kepley, 19765 Grand Ave., Lake Elsinore, CA 92330

AUGUST 26 / 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
CALIFORNIA STATE GENEALOGICAL ALLIANCE
BOARD MEETING

2314 MARIPOSA ST., FRESNO, CA
LOCATION: ON MARIPOSA BETWEEN "M" &
"N". COUNTY SCHOOLS OFFICE CONFERENCE
ROOM (2nd floor)
OPEN MEETING TO EVERYONE.

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