

LaVerne Revisited

by Lorraine Frantz Edwards*

Were my bifocals playing tricks on me? I couldn't believe my eyes! On the fragile 128-year-old page was my fourth great-grandfather's obituary.

I was carefully handling the deteriorating pages of *The Gospel Visitor*—a monthly publication of the Church of the Brethren. Tears welled up in my eyes as I read the following:

Died in Clark County, Ohio, February 11, brother MICHAEL FRANTZ, aged 68 years, 4 months, and 22 days. He was a deacon in the church for 40 years, and having obeyed the Master's call early in the morning of his life, he may well be said to have borne the heat and burden of the day, and we hope, he is gone to rest from all his labors, and his works will follow him. Funeral text: II Samuel 3:38 and Hebrews 11:4.

Farewell, dear father! thou art gone,
And we are left for thee to mourn,
But still our loss is thy great gain,
For thou art free from woe and pain.

O may we all prepare to die,
That we from grief and woe may fly,
How many friends are gone away,
With whom we used to sing and pray.

How sweet was their communion dear,
But we shall no more see them here.
O Lord! help us to watch and pray,
Until from earth we're call'd away.

And then we'll meet our friends above,
And sing of sweet Redeeming love:
Glory to God the great I AM!
Glory to the victorious Lamb!

D. F.

The most amazing circumstances preceded my perusal of the yellowed pages. I was in LaVerne, California, to seek out and photograph the cemetery plot of my Frantz grandparents.

Without any forethought—totally unexpected—I decided to phone Louise



A view of one small part of the LaVerne, Calif., Cemetery with Frantz stones in the foreground and Lorraine's trailer in the background. Credit: Lorraine Edwards.

Larick, retired librarian for Wilson Library, University of LaVerne. (Although it had been my intent to contact her many months earlier, we had never corresponded nor conversed.)

"Ms. Larick?"

"Yes."

"My name is Lorraine Edwards. My maiden name is Frantz."

The words were hardly out of my mother before Louise's warm response. "I know you! I've read your stories in *Mennonite Family History*."

I received a cordial welcome from Louise in her cozy apartment at Hillcrest Homes (a Church of the Brethren retirement community). It was as though we'd known one another for years.

The conversation was rapid and exciting. Although a "babe" in the field of genealogy, I could relate to people, places, and events discussed by this veteran of Brethren history. We're distant "cousins" through the Trout family.

Out came the books: *Early Clark County, Ohio, Families Vital Statistics*. (There are a total of 77 pages with Frantz information. Bingo!) Next, Louise produced the bundle of 1860 *Gospel Visitor*.

She wanted me to see the abundance of obituaries that (to her knowledge) had not been reprinted for genealogical reference. I didn't look at every page; it hadn't been her intention for me to "examine" the contents. I glanced at some pages, skipped over many.

My eyes were focused on my hostess as I talked (or listened) to Louise. I glanced down at the bundle laying open on my lap: I couldn't believe my eyes! Was that really my fourth great-grandfather? A quick check of my ahnentafel chart confirmed that this actually was my Michael ancestor. (I always travel with my pedigree chart and the index of 5,000-plus names in my computer.)

Can you believe my good fortune? It really happened! And there's more...

I shared with Louise my earlier comedy-of-errors while attempting to locate the LaVerne Evergreen Cemetery. She slipped away to her bedroom again and returned with a stack of handwritten pages.

During frequent walks, Louise had documented every name and detail in the cemetery. It has been her desire to see the information published for the benefit of Brethren family researchers.

I had to pinch myself several times during the one-hundred-mile drive back to Lancaster. Was I awake? Did I dream the wonderful events earlier that evening? No, I hadn't imagined the visit; the 44 handwritten pages of cemetery information were lying on the seat next to me.

As an act of faith and trust, Louise sent her valuable original documentation home with me. I've had the privilege of entering that data into my computer and now it is available for purchase. (See the book review on page 35 in this issue.)

God's love for me—and my computer/genealogy hobby—was obvious on that Saturday, December 10, 1988. Next to the gift of His dear son, Jesus, I cherish my new-found "cousins" and genealogy friends.

*Lorraine Frantz Edwards, P. O. Box 2076, Lancaster, CA 93539-2076, has authored a number of other articles in *MFH* and other publications. A review of her and E. Louise Larick's new *LaVerne Evergreen Cemetery Tombstone Inscriptions* is on page 35 in this issue.