

Deaconess Anna Lutz and her Charitable Works in North America

The register book of the deaconess house in Neuendettelsau contains a strange entry: the name of deaconess Anna Lutz is recorded on page 117. The details are noted down in a matter-of-fact manner: "Name: Anna Barbara Lutz, born November 12, 1849; place of birth: Schwabach; home and place of residence: Detroit in America; began studies as deaconess: January 1, 1873; admitted and consecrated as deaconess: May 10, 1874; remarks: travelled away on May 25, 1874."

The home and place of residence of Anna Lutz is unusual: Detroit, the thriving metropolis in the state of Michigan. Why did a woman from the USA come to Neuendettelsau to train as a deaconess? Anna Lutz emigrated to North America from Schwabach in Central Franconia in 1855, together with her parents, the saddler Johann Lutz and his wife Barbara (née Hoenicka) and five other brothers and sisters. Their destination was Dubuque, Iowa. From there they travelled on to Detroit. Anna Lutz and her family were thus among the large number of emigrants who left Germany for North America during the 19th century to start a new life. The interesting thing about Anna Lutz's biography is that she returned to her former homeland to be trained there as a deaconess. There are various reasons why this took place at the deacon house in Neuendettelsau: since the early 1840s, parish priest Wilhelm Löhe had spent much time with groups of emigrants from Central Franconia, so his name was familiar to American Lutherans. In Neuendettelsau and also in Nuremberg he trained so-called emergency helpers who would not only serve as priests for German emigrants to America but also provide them with practical assistance. The four Franconian settlements in Michigan – Frankenmuth, Frankenlust, Frankenhilf and Frankentrost – all date back to Löhe's hard work and commitment. There were also many personal contacts via the training that the emergency helpers and later missionaries had received in Neuendettelsau. For instance, Johann Jakob Schmidt, the brother-in-law of Anna Lutz, knew Löhe personally, because he had also trained at the German missionary school.

In 1854, in Neuendettelsau itself, Wilhelm Löhe founded the first deaconess house in Bavaria, which would serve as "a centre of education for the female sex in the service of the under-aged and the suffering". The upheavals of the 19th century had brought a vast number of social problems in their wake. The deaconesses' work was fundamentally aimed at combating these social evils. The very first deaconess house in Germany was founded in 1836, in Kaiserswerth near Düsseldorf, by Theodor Fliedner, and the idea soon spread from Germany to other countries of Europe. The deaconesses received training as nurses and teachers, and worked in hospitals, child centres and community nursing homes.

Anna Lutz had decided to become a deaconess very early on, but was unable to fulfil her ambition at first because the educational opportunities in North America during the 19th

century were few and far between. This is why a group of North American pastors formed in 1868 to form an American mother-house. They had approached Wilhelm Löhe with this idea in April 1868 and asked him to support the project. In a detailed letter to Neuendettelsau in the summer of 1868, Johann Jakob Schmidt also mentions the social irregularities in his new homeland, adding that "suitable people... are lacking for charitable works," and also complaining that educational opportunities for young women were non-existent. The planned deaconess house was to be adjoined to the Protestant orphanage in Toledo, Ohio, which had been opened there in 1861. Over the next few years the negotiations on plans and conditions became bogged down, however, with no constructive solution. During this period Anna Lutz had always been hoping that a mother house or a branch of the Neuendettelsau deaconess house would be built in Toledo, so that she could fulfil her professional ambitions in the USA. In the summer of 1872, after it had become clear that training as a deaconess in America would be very difficult, Anna Lutz asked her brother-in-law Johann Jakob Schmidt to ask the deaconess house in Neuendettelsau whether a course of study in Germany would be possible. There were no objections to the idea, and travel preparations were promptly made. On November 9, 1872, father Schmidt was able to announce the impending departure: "My sister-in-law Anna Lutz will, God willing, be leaving New York on November 21, on a Hamburg steamship. Our blessings go with her, and she remains in our prayers." He also mentioned the hopes that the American community had placed in her education: "Our deaconess's most important task will be the internal administration of the orphanage, and the education and upbringing of the children, so thorough training will be very necessary in that respect." On January 1, 1873, having arrived in Germany, the 22-year-old Anna Lutz enrolled as a student in the deaconess house, Neuendettelsau, to begin a course of training that would last 17 months. Her main task, apart from spiritual edification, was the education of children. The training course was complemented by familiarization with other areas of a deaconess's work, such as tending the sick or the physically handicapped. In the spring of 1874, her course in Neuendettelsau came to an end. "On May 10, [1874] ... she was made a deaconess, together with Sister Elise Hensolt, in our hall of prayer. On Monday, June 8 she departed and on Sunday the 27th she is due to board ship in Bremen." When she arrived in North America, deaconess Anna Lutz took over the running of the orphanage in Toledo. Just before Christmas 1874 she sent a first detailed report about her work to Neuendettelsau. "The orphanage is located approximately 2 miles from the town centre, to the east of the Maumee River... The orphanage is three storeys high. All the boys sleep on the first floor, and the girls on the second... together with the teacher and her assistant."

Anna Lutz ran the orphanage until July 1877. During that time she met her future husband, so that in August 1877 she wrote to Neuendettelsau asking to be relieved of her duties. The end of Anna Lutz's work also marked the end of the connection between the

deaconess house in Neuendettelsau and the Toledo orphanage. We have no record of what happened to Anna Lutz in her later life.

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Sources and literature

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