

Gottlieb Burchard Dangers



Gottlieb Burchard Dangers was born October 11, 1811 in Langenhagen, in the Electorate of Hannover, which later became part of the German Confederation. Burchard, as he was called, was raised in a life of privilege in a noble family. He was well educated in the classics, literature, mathematics, and music. He played the piano and was known for composing his own musical scores. As a younger son, Burchard would not inherit his father's wealth, land, or social position. He would have to pursue an honorable, "gentlemanly" profession.

So, in 1829 he entered the University of Göttingen for a classical education. Later he was accepted to the university's divinity school, where he received a Doctorate of Divinity. Subsequently, he was ordained as an Evangelical Protestant, or Lutheran, minister.

Reverend Dangers was a minister in the city of Hannover when he met Sophie Louise Mathilde Max. Mathilde was born in Hannover on December 31, 1822, also to an upper class family. She was also well educated, a lover of music, and a devout Christian. In the summer of 1845, Burchard and Mathilde married.

It is unknown whether the Adelsverein recruited Reverend Dangers before or after he got married, but sometime around that time he was commissioned to serve as pastor for the German settlements in the Republic of Texas.

On October 10, 1845, Burchard and Mathilde were in Bremen, a major port of embarkation for the Republic of Texas, about 80 miles from Hannover. There, they boarded the ship Johan Dethardt, with, among other things, a grand piano, handwritten music scores, and a leather bound bible. Mathilde's older brother Georg Max was also on the ship.

On January 12, 1846, the ship arrived in Galveston. Here, Reverend Dangers established a parish and conducted religious services, marriages, and baptisms for six weeks. Galveston was a bustling city, and immigrants from everywhere were arriving. There were no land accommodations to be had, so the passengers had to live aboard the ship at anchor until they could be ferried in smaller vessels to the shallow port of Karlshafen. Apparently, at this time, Georg took advantage of the "guaranteed passage back" clause, because there is no further record of him in Texas at that time. He did, however, come back in 1849. At the end of February 1846, Burchard and Mathilde were finally transported to Karlshaven. For 21 weeks, Burchard had a congregation of 700 parishoners, all suffering from deprivation and disease. He and Mathilde had to be shocked at the conditions they had arrived in, but they provided hope and spiritual comfort to the colonists. Still, the goal was to move further inland to the land promised them and for Burchard to fulfill his ministerial contract there.

The war between the US and Mexico was brewing down on the Texas/Mexico border at the time, and Texas oxcart drivers were making a fortune hauling freight for the US government. Even for those immigrants who brought extra money with them, finding transportation out of

Karlshaven was difficult. Being an intelligent fellow, Burchard had brought extra money with him from home, not relying on what he was owed from the Adelsverein. Eventually he found a driver to take him, Mathilde, the piano, the music scores, and the bible to New Braunfels.

Once they set out, the roads were almost impassable because of the mud. Their journey of 150 miles took them eleven weeks.

In New Braunfels, Burchard took a job as a day laborer to help ends meet. It was 1847 before he finally got some of the money owed him from the Adelsverein, and he also received some money from home. This allowed him to buy 16 acres in Seguin, where they established a farmstead. It was also around this time that Burchard was again able to focus on his role as pastor. And on March 16, 1848, Mathilde gave birth to their first child, a daughter, Theodore.

In the summer of 1849, Pastor Dangers was asked to serve as minister in Fredericksburg. The family arrived there that November, and Burchard took over as pastor of the Vereins Kirche. You can see a recreation of that building in Fredericksburg; it's part of the Pioneer Museum in the middle of town. He established careful records of all church activities. From his records, we know that between 1849 and 1869 he married 187 couples, baptized 1061 babies, confirmed 525 Christians, and buried 256 people. In addition to attending to spiritual matters, Burchard and Mathilde often entertained the community with four-hand piano concerts. They performed familiar classical pieces, as well as music composed by Burchard. They also established a children's choir for the church, and Burchard formed a male singing quartet. Later, during the Civil War, Pastor Dangers also taught school at the Vereins Kirche. In fact, in 1867, he was among the first in Gillespie County to receive a teaching certificate.

In addition to their first daughter, Theodore, born in 1848, Mathilde gave birth to Minna in 1850, Mathilde in 1853, Franziska in 1855, Burchard in 1857.

In early 1861 a diphtheria epidemic roared through Fredericksburg. On February 9th, little Mathilde died. On February 13th little Burchard died. On February 15th, Theodore died. And on March 13th, Minna died. Only Franziska, my great great great grandmother, was left. People in town spoke for years about what meaningful words Pastor Dangers spoke for his own children's funerals. Then, a couple of weeks later, on April 3rd, 1861 their last child was born, a little girl named Augusta.

For twenty years, Burchard Dangers was a significant figure in the community. He touched countless lives with his work in the church, education, and the arts. Then, in 1869, while walking back home from a wedding he performed, Burchard was caught in a rainstorm. He developed pneumonia and died that November 12th. He is buried in the Fredericksburg City Cemetery.