

## **The Forefathers of North Carolina Pioneer Andreas Killian**

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New Sub-chapter

### **What Language did the Kilians in Mittelfranken speak?**

It is clear from gravestones in America and from the journal of Johann Gottfried Amends that the North Carolina German settlers did not speak standard High German.

The documented Kilians in Mittelfranken lived from ca 1570 to 1732, in what became Germany almost a century and a half later.

Each of the many Germanic tribes that settled in what became Germany, Switzerland and France spoke their own language. In the early Middle Ages the major languages were: Allemanni, Burgunder, Fränkisch, Hessisch, Sächisch (Saxon), Schwäbisch (Swabian), Bavarian and Plattdeutsch (Low German) was spoken in the low countries of the north and western coastal areas. These tribes were mostly confederations of many small related tribes that immigrated from Scandinavia and West Asia, near the Black Sea, centuries before the middle ages began. They subsequently lost their tribal identities by the beginning of the early middle ages in the fifth century.

Standard modern German is now Modern High German. Old High German evolved in the mountains of what is now Bavaria and Austria in ca. 500 AD. High German is not the same as Bavarian, which is a very different language. There are very few written examples of Old High German. One is a translation of the Gospels by Otfried von Weißenburg in 870, six and a half centuries before Martin Luther translated the Bible into Middle High German in 1521.

Old High German evolved into Middle High German in ca. 1050. In ca. 1350 it became Early New High German, which lasted until ca. 1500. This was about a generation before Andreas Kilian's great-great-grandfather Sebastian was born.

There was never a standard Middle High German and there is such a great variation people could not understand other people from a distant region when they spoke their own dialect. This is true even today. For example a person from Hamburg cannot understand a person from Bavaria with speaking their own language. Some of these dialects are so distinct, such as the northern German Plattdeutsch, that they have their own grammar, which classifies them as a separate language, rather than a dialect.

There were at least twelve variations of Middle High German, each with many sub-groups, organized into two major classifications. Bavarian belongs to the group Oberdeutsch (Upper German). Mittelfranken is in the Mitteldeutsch (Central German) sub-region and specifically the sub-sub-region West Mitteldeutsch. This group includes: Rheinfränkisch (Rhine Frankonian), where Margaret Kilian's husband, Michael Price, lived. Mittelfränkisch (Central Frankonian) was spoken where the Kilian's lived.

Early High German had evolved by the time the Kilians lived, but most people spoke their own local dialect. Local dialects were commonly spoken into the 20th century. They are not as prevalent now, because they were suppressed from 1930 until 1946 (the Hitler Era), and everyone in Germany now speaks High German. But regional languages are making a strong

comeback, particularly in rural areas and villages. They never really disappeared in these areas and the local dialect is often still the first language used in every day conversation.

The Kilians probably spoke an evolved version of Mittelfränkisch (Central Frankonian). Michael Price probably spoke an evolved version of Rheinfränkisch (Rhine Frankonian). These two languages were close enough that they probably did not have much difficulty understanding one another. It may have been like an American talking with someone from New Zealand or Australia, where the English language is separated by 300 to 350 years of evolution, although modern media may be wiping out this difference.