

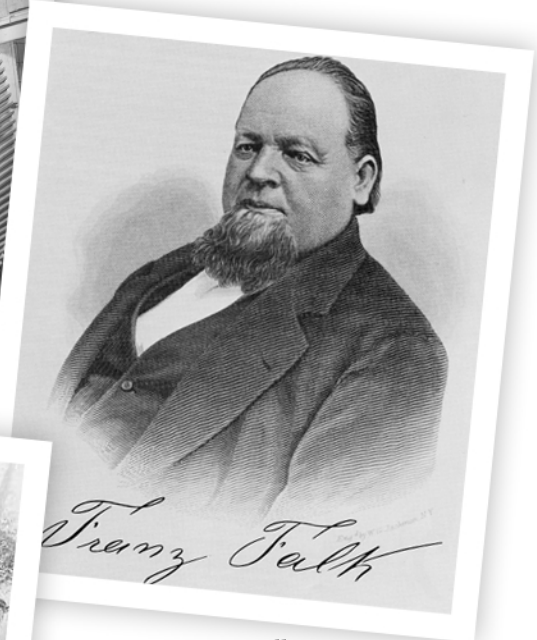
# The aking of ilwaukee Stories

Historical Time Period : 1848-Present

## The Industrious Falk Family



*Falk Corporation  
Big Gears and Man*



*Franz Falk*



*Falk Corporation Workers in 1880*

### Connecting to “The Making of Milwaukee”

Video Chapters: #6 - City of Industries & #8 - Machine Shop of the World

Curriculum Chapter: Gr. 5-12 - Working in Milwaukee

# *The Industrious Falk Family*

## **Pt. 1: Building a Milwaukee Brewery**

In 1848, at the age of 25, Franz Falk decided to leave his home in Bavaria, a state in southern Germany, and immigrate to the United States of America. Franz first traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, but soon moved to Milwaukee. Franz felt very much at home in Milwaukee because approximately 35% of the people living there in the mid to late 1800's were also German. There were German churches, schools, and gymnasiums. Newspapers were printed in German and German operas were performed. The German immigrants in Milwaukee loved being able to speak the language of their mother country. They also honored other German traditions such as brewing beer.

Franz and his friend Frederick Goes decided to start their own brewery. Milwaukee was a great place to make and sell beer so Franz and Frederick set a challenging goal; to become the largest brewery in Milwaukee. The friends purchased land in the Menomonee Valley and named their business the Bavaria Brewery. Franz and Frederick had numerous competitors because many other German brewers had also settled in Milwaukee. Those other brewers included Valentine Blatz who developed the Blatz Brewery; Joseph Schlitz, who created the Schlitz Brewery and adopted the slogan, "*Schlitz: The Beer that Made Milwaukee Famous*"; and, Captain Frederick Pabst, who married the daughter of another successful brewer, Philip Best. Pabst beer won a blue ribbon in the 1870's and so they called their beer Pabst Blue Ribbon. Another brewer, Frederick Miller, founded the Miller Brewing Company. Miller products are still produced in Milwaukee by the MillerCoors Company.

At one time in the mid 1800's, there were over 20 breweries in Milwaukee, most of them owned by the Germans. There were so many successful breweries that Milwaukee became known as the "beer capitol of the world".

Even though Franz Falk had a lot of competition, he was a hard worker and the Bavaria Brewery eventually became the fourth largest brewery in Milwaukee. Franz died in 1882 and two of his seven sons, Louis and Frank, continued the family brewing tradition. But on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1889, disaster struck! A fire destroyed part of the Bavaria Brewery. Beer spewed out, ankle deep, into the Menomonee Valley. Despite this fire, Louis and Frank did not give up. They rebuilt and reopened the brewery just three months after the fire. However, their dreams were dashed again when another fire devastated their business. This time the sons of Franz Falk did not rebuild. In 1893, they sold the Bavaria Brewery to Captain Frederick Pabst. As a result of this acquisition, the Pabst Brewery Company became not only the largest brewery in Milwaukee but also in the entire United States.

## **Pt. 2: The Falks "Gear Up" for another Dream**

Not all the sons of Franz Falk made it big in the brewery business. Herman Falk, the fifth son, dreamed of becoming a mechanic. In 1892, he opened a machine shop and eventually bought part of the old Bavaria Brewery to expand his business. A machine shop is a business where metal is cut, shaped and made into parts for products like cars, bicycles, tractors, stoves and other machines. Herman was a machinist, an inventor and an entrepreneur. He and his family became most famous for producing gears; gears of all types and sizes. (*A gear is a wheel with "teeth" cut into it. The teeth fit into other gears. When the gears turn, they help change the speed or direction of motion.*)

Over the decades, the Falk Company created and produced gears of all sizes; from tiny gears for watches and clocks, to large gears for boats and engines. Falk even made the gigantic gears used to open and close the gates of the Panama Canal. This ship canal is fifty-one miles long and connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Digging and building the canal was one of the largest construction projects in history. It opened in 1914.

During World Wars I and II, Falk gears were used in U.S. military ships. The Falk Company employed many workers and had to “gear up” to meet America’s rapidly expanding military needs during these wars.

Herman Falk was not the only Milwaukee industrialist to create a “metal bending” business. Milwaukee was a city full of machine shops. Some were small, others vast. Among the largest was Allis-Chalmers. Early on, the Falk brothers collaborated with the industrialist, Edward P. Allis, to create gears for water pumps manufactured by the E. P. Allis Company. This company was later called Allis-Chalmers. Allis-Chalmers used Falk gears to produce steam engines, steam turbines, motors, tractors, and construction equipment. With all these machine shops cooperating and competing, Milwaukee became a world center for manufacturing. As a result, Milwaukee was known as “*The Machine Shop of the World*”.

The Falk family, immigrants from Germany, created manufacturing businesses and two of Milwaukee’s most famous products; beers and gears. Their stories are examples of how immigrant dreams and hard work resulted in the creation of Milwaukee industries that prospered and gained world-wide attention.