

McNiven Family



The Frankenmuth family-style chicken dinner had its origin in the various hotels that served the travelers going through Frankenmuth, as well as the local people in the community. The first meals served to the public were at The Exchange Hotel in 1856, only 11 years after the founding of Frankenmuth. The hotel was built by Henry Reichel. His wife, as was always the case then, was the cook. They served breakfast, lunch, supper, but only at mealtime hours. Between meals, bountiful snacks and appetizers were available and often were free with the beer. As salesmen stopped on their rounds (they were called "agents" then), they carried the word back home about the excellent meals served in Frankenmuth, and at very reasonable prices. Lodging and breakfast, with shelter and feed for the horse, was as little as 75 cents.

Henry Reichel operated The Exchange Hotel for 20 years; Benjamin Felgner for 8 years; Theodore Fischer for 3 years; Richard Robbel for 3 years; and Henry Goetz for 7 years. In 1899, Henry Goetz built a new hotel, which he named the Goetz Hotel.

In 1927, the new owners of the hotel, Henry and Mary Fischer, renamed it the Fischer Hotel. In 1944, Rollie McNiven bought the hotel and the name was changed again – this time to McNiven Hotel – serving chicken, steaks and fish. Rollie and his wife, Irma, operated the hotel until February of 1962, when it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Edward "Bud" Adams.

Rollie McNiven was born 1911, the son of George and Mary nee Graham McNiven. He had a sister, Rita, born in 1909, and a brother, Dan, born in 1917. George and Mary McNiven moved their family from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, to Saginaw, Michigan in 1919. George McNiven worked for Consumers Power Company.

Rollie attended Saginaw schools and became an excellent basketball player. Even after he was through school he continued playing on the various company teams that played in the Industrial Leagues in those days.

Rollie came to Frankenmuth and worked as a bartender and then assistant manager at Fischer's hotel, owned by Elmer and Marcella Fischer. He married Irma Schreiner, the daughter of Henry and Amelia Schreiner. They had two sons, George and Ronald.

Rollie and Irma leased the Fischer Hotel in 1943 and purchased it the following year. They continued operating it until 1962. Frankenmuth was famous for its family-style chicken dinners. It was not uncommon for the three hotels, Zehnder's, Fischer's, and McNiven's, to serve 3,500 to 5,000 chicken dinners on a weekend.

After Rollie's death, Irma and son, George, operated the restaurant. Irma finally sold the business and worked as a cook at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant– formerly Fischer's Hotel.

George McNiven and his wife, Norine, moved to California for a number of years. They eventually returned and George then worked at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant as manager of the bar room. They had two daughters, Kim and Missy. Kim and Missy both worked at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant. The marriage dissolved and George left the community.

Ronald McNiven was confirmed at St. Lorenz Lutheran Church in 1946. He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. He received a Bachelor of Science degree and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Force.



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