

Rau Family



The Rau name was established in the area between 1850 and 1853 by Gottlieb "Henry" Rau, who founded a family with generations of local businessmen. Henry was a hotel keeper. His nephew, William, built a power plant that gave the nearby community of Reese its first electric lights. His great-nephew, Oscar Rau, introduced Frankenmuth to television, air conditioning and other modern conveniences at his Oscar Rau Electric Company. Raymond J. Rau, Oscar's son, carried on the family business tradition as general manager of Oscar Rau's Fine Furniture & Interiors.

Henry was born in Preuzen, Germany. He came to America as a child with his parents Elizabeth "Dorothy" Pirsch and Johann "Gottlieb" Rau. He was the oldest of their seven children.

Henry became a hotel keeper and started the Commercial House Hotel in Frankenmuth in 1882 during an era when the community had four hotels. He sold the hotel to the Kern family in 1894 and a year later a historical event took place there. Mrs. Lorenz Kern served chicken dinners on an "all you can eat" basis to a bridal party and a famous tradition had begun. The menu was such a success that all the hotels followed. Soon Frankenmuth became well known for the hearty meals that are still served today. The Commercial House Hotel remains on Main Street. It houses the Frankenmuth Historical Museum. Prior, it was the headquarters of the Frankenmuth News.

Henry married Maria "Barbara" Charlotte Ranke February 23, 1868 at St. Lorenz Church in Frankenmuth. They had four children: Agnes, Augusta, Richard and Bertha. Henry's younger brother Karl "August" was a tailor and lived on the hill on Main Street. Henry died

December 26, 1893. His wife died December 12, 1898. Eighteen years later his nephew William F. Rau used two gas engines to provide the first electrical power to Reese in December 1916. A power schedule was set up and electricity was provided from 4-11 p.m. nightly except Saturday when it was left on until midnight. Later on the power stayed on from 5-10 a.m. "so the ladies could get their ironing done". William sold his interest in Consumers Power Company in 1926.

William's sons, Oscar and Raymond E., moved to Frankenmuth. Oscar took an interest in electrical work like his father. In 1944 he received the Westinghouse franchise and sold appliances behind the home he built on Franklin Street. By 1951 his business expanded and he leased the lower floor of the vacant Ortner General Store at Main and Tuscola Streets. He eventually took over the entire building and bought the adjoining cleaners business.

During World War II Raymond E. was a prisoner of war for 40 months in the Philippines and Manchuria. He was also the only Frankenmuth resident that partook in the Batton Death March. Raymond E. was an electrician and worked for Oscar for 11 years and then for Carling Brewery for 20 years. He retired in 1976. In 1985, he reentered the work force as a full time electrician for Nuechterlein Electric, the electrical contractor for the Bavarian Inn Lodge. Raymond E. Rau died in 1999.

The first television in Frankenmuth was shown at a cooking school sponsored by Rau's Electric in 1950. Oscar was also the first to install an air conditioner and sell electric blankets, power mowers, deep freezers, hi-fis and color television. Eventually he phased out of the appliance business and added a line of furniture. In 1973 the Oscar Rau Furniture Center was created with Oscar's son, Raymond J., as manager. Oscar Rau died in 1991.



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