

Felgner Family



The Felgner name came to Frankenmuth through Benjamin B. Felgner. Benjamin purchased the old Exchange Hotel property – now Zehnder's Restaurant – after he came to Frankenmuth.

Benjamin was not the typical poor, jobless immigrant who traveled from Germany seeking economic opportunity. Instead, his parents owned one of the largest flour mills in Leipzig and he was raised in comfort.

Benjamin was born in Saxony, Germany October 3, 1851. He was baptized October 12 at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Eutritzsch, near Leipzig.

He received a good education and was later placed in charge of his father's books. It was good work but the adventure of traveling to America like so many other young Germans his age must have been irresistible. In 1871, at the age of 20, Benjamin made the voyage.

Benjamin's first experiences in America must have been quite a letdown from his younger days. He was alone and homeless. He had no job and no connections to find one; but he was determined.

After seeking work from numerous parties, he finally found a job at a railroad as a truck repairer. It was quite severe labor for a boy who was use to comfort. He worked at this job for about two years and then came to Frankenmuth in 1873.

By 1873, the German settlement in mid-Michigan was pretty well established. Productive farms were carved out of the forests and about 25 businesses made up the commercial district near the bend in the Cass River.

The shops included: a hotel, two breweries, a sawmill, a flour mill, a tannery, four wagon and blacksmith shops, a furniture shop, two shoemakers and cobblers, a drugstore, four building firms and cabinet shops, four general stores, one harness shop, two meat markets, a shingle mill, plus other businesses conducted in private homes.

In 1878 Benjamin married Mary Margarete Hoffman, a daughter of one of Frankenmuth's pioneer families. At first he settled at the George Daenzer farm on Curtis, east of M83. The acreage is now owned by Albert Daenzer. The same year Benjamin was married, he bought the old Exchange Hotel property in the heart of the community's commercial district. He had been in Frankenmuth only five years. Benjamin improved and completely re-fitted the Exchange Hotel.

Benjamin was said to have a pleasing personality and was well-liked. In 1880, when the new brick St. Lorenz Church was constructed, he and his wife furnished the food for the members who volunteered their labor to build the church.

The couple had four children: their son Benjamin G. owned the Woolen Mill in Frankenmuth; Emil Oskar died at three months; Minna Margarete Katharina Schreiner was a housewife; and Clara Maria Dankert was a housewife.

Their grandchildren are: Norman Felgner, Meta Gardner, Neina Fechter, Claire Dankert, and four Schreiner children.

Benjamin died April 22, 1890 at the age of 38. He is buried at St. Lorenz Cemetery.

