

# Fischer Family



The Fischer family name was brought to Frankenmuth by Theodore Fischer in 1876. Theodore went on to build a hotel that was later expanded into the current Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn. The German Restaurant is now owned and operated by the William Zehnder, Jr. family. They also own and operate the Bavarian Inn Lodge.

Theodore was born in Prussia in 1885. He was from Wilhelmshaver, and while living there was a miller. Theodore came to Frankenmuth when the community was 31 years old. At first, he continued his interest in milling here and worked for John G. Hubinger; but it didn't take long for him to become interested in the hotel business. There were three hotels in Frankenmuth at the time – The Exchange Hotel, Stahl's Eagle Hotel and the Commercial House Hotel. These businesses were actually boarding houses for single men who worked in the lumber mills. As time went on and the roads improved, they also catered to salesmen and agents who traveled between Bay City, Saginaw, Flint and Detroit.

Theodore Fischer got his first taste of the hotel business when he worked at the Exchange Hotel as a bartender. He sensed how profitable the operation was. On May 14, 1882 he married a local girl – Katherine Ranke. Katherine was an excellent cook. With an eye on the hotel business, and a wife who could run the kitchen, Theodore purchased the Exchange Hotel in 1884 from Benjamin Felgner. He operated it for the next four years and in 1888 he sold the business to Richard Rabbel. Theodore built a much larger hotel across the street and called it the Union House. Later he renamed it Fischer's Hotel.

The establishment earned a reputation for fine food. Theodore offered dinner for a man and his horse for 75 cents. He was the first hotel man to specialize in the family-style chicken dinners.

These dinners have made Frankenmuth famous all over the world; although the credit for first serving chicken in that manner goes to the wife of Lorenz Kern, owner of the Commercial Hotel.

Theodore also built the community's first social hall in 1894 and aptly named it Fischer's Hall. It was located next to his hotel and was used for the presentation of shows, public meetings, dances and social gatherings. In 1973, it was renovated for the *Gaslight Revue* shows held every summer for the next 13 years. In the fall of 1986, it was donated to the Frankenmuth Historical Association and moved to its present site. Theodore Fischer died in 1921. His widow and children remained in the restaurant business. Katherine continued cooking at the family hotel for 40 years – longer than any other cook in the history of Frankenmuth. Their daughter, Mrs. Henry Schreiner, was also a cook there while another daughter, Mrs. William Stromer, was a housewife. A son, Adolf, owned a bar and another son, Walter, was a bartender. Two other sons, Herman and Henry, were involved in the family's hotel business.

The Henry Fischer's operated Fischer's Hotel until they took over ownership of the Goetz Hotel built by Henry Goetz in 1904. After that the Herman Fischer's ran the hotel for nearly two decades. After "Grandma Katherine" died in 1935, Herman bought the hotel business. In 1941, he sold it to the Elmer Fischer's; and they sold it to Zehnder's Inc. in 1950. William and Dorothy Zehnder renamed it the Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn and added seven Bavarian theme dining rooms.

Theodore and Katherine's 11 grandchildren were: Elmer, Howard, Stanley and Wallace Fischer, Carl Stromer, Erma McNiven, Ruth Bartlett, Ted Schreiner, Gretchen Chase, Lenore Hubinger and Mildred Rupprecht.

