

Fischer Hall: FRANKENMUTH'S Gathering Place

By Joanmarie Hoffmann Weiss

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Front Cover

1901 playbill offering entertainment at Fischer's Hall

1985.8.1

"GRAND CONCERT Given by the..... Blind Musical Prodigees

LOUIS AND BARBARA TREMMEL. At Fischer's Hall, Frankenmuth,
Saturday and Sunday Evenings, December 7 and 8, 1901.

ADMISSION 25 CENTS CHILDREN 10 CENTS"

FISCHER HALL: FRANKENMUTH'S GATHERING PLACE

Fischer Hall Proprietors

1894 – 1921	Theodore Fischer
1921 – 1935	Henry Fischer
1935 – 1941	Herman Fischer
1941 – 1950	Elmer Fischer
1950 – 1986	William Zehnder Family
1986 -	Frankenmuth Historical Association

THEODORE FISCHER: CONSTRUCTION OF THE HALL

Incidentally, before I go on, there was a professor from Saginaw that came out here (Fischer Hall). We called him Professor Lex. He played piano at the Gray Fox and the Country Club parties. He was an entertainer, sort of, plus a little hink-honky-tonk piano player and he was a great guest of Frankenmuth! He came out and everyone came to hear Professor Lex! (Oral history interview with Waldo Vanek)

And that is what Theodore Fischer had in mind when he built Fischer Hall in 1894, a place where guests and entertainers could perform in Frankenmuth and where residents of the city could meet. Some local people date the construction of Fischer Hall as far back as 1888; a reference “fur Halle \$1.00” (for hall) in the Gray Fox Club’s minutes of August 1890 lends some credence to the earlier date. Both dates are based on local oral history reminiscences, no written documents have been found that pinpoint as actual construction date.



Theodore Fischer, ca. 1914

Theodore Fischer had come from Germany in 1876; by 1888 he was in the hotel business. The Union House, later renamed Fischer's Hotel, was the fourth hotel built in Frankenmuth. Fischer's gained a reputation for serving fine meals, especially chicken dinners. In the late 1800's Fischer decided to add the Hall to the premises, it was located behind the hotel near the banks of the Cass River.

Fischer was a Mason, a member of Lodge #258 in Bridgeport. He painted a Masonic slogan "Einigkeit macht Stark" (Togetherness makes strength) in the arch over the hall's stage. Perhaps it was this affiliation, which the local church disapproved of, that prompted Fischer to build a hall for residents of the area who might wish to indulge in "worldly activities". The hall became a favorite place for Frankenmuth residents to congregate in as they celebrated weddings, graduations, and held meetings of the local Gray Fox Club.

Theodore Fischer was proprietor of the Fischer Hotel and Fischer Hall until his death February 25, 1921. In the obituary that the Frankenmuth News ran, Fischer was fondly remembered.

He was widely known throughout the country and was highly respected by a host of friends. No one ever went hungry from his door or applied for help in vain, generosity was a byword among his acquaintances. No man will be missed more sorely than Theodore Fischer from the social and business life of this community. He was a man, upright, kind and generous, and a faithful friend.

He was given a proper Mason funeral. The obituary notes that so many friends were in attendance that most stood outside the Mason Temple entrance.



1906 advertisement in Frankenmuth News

Versammlung abgehalten den 4. Juni 1890
 In der Capitul Versammlung sind eingezogen 103 72
 Die Capitul Versammlung abgehalten 13 00

 für Halle 1 00
 Summa 116 72

Versammlung abgehalten den 13. Sept. 90.
 Es wurde beschlossen das die Geselligkeit am
 dem nächsten Tag nach Termin festzusetzen.
 Ferner wurde beschlossen das G. H. Hubinger
 im Termin für die Tagesordnung für John Hoover
 abrot machen soll.
 Es wird, das Paul Herbst wieder als Mitglied
 beibehalten werden soll, so bald er die letzte
 jährige Beiträge bezahlt hat.

Kassenbestand \$ 120. 77

Versammlung abgehalten den 8. Nov. 1890.
 für John Herbst wurde für Unterstützung
 für sein Mitglied für Beiträge besprochen
 notwendig ist.
 für Halle 1 00
 Kassenbestand Summa \$ 119 77

Versammlung abgehalten den 7. Decbr. 1890.
 Es wurde beschlossen das am 1. Sonntag im
 Januar, um 8 Uhr, die jährliche Versammlung
 wird nach der Versammlung im Doppel
 stattfinden soll.
 für Halle 1 00
 Kassenbestand Summa \$ 115 77

Gray Fox 1890 minutes include a payment of "Für Halle \$1.00"
 1975.6.1

A SOCIAL GATHERING PLACE

Waldo Vanek: That hall catered to a lot of people, from not just Frankenmuth. Well, within a radius of 30-40 miles maybe. Fischer Hall was the only place where people could congregate.

Norm Meyer: Right, that was the only hall. Just about everything took place there from weddings to funerals.

Waldo Vanek: That's what the Fischers set it up for. Because they liked to see people have a good time. That was part of the history, the tradition of the Fischers. "Have a good time!"

The Gray Fox Club met regularly at Fischer Hall from 1889 until 1956 when it was disbanded. It was a men's club, although several dances and parties were sponsored each year to which women and children were also invited.



Gray Fox Club members in 1896
1973.6.54

Many local residents still remember Gray Fox parties:

Arnold Nuechterlein: the Gray Fox Club was a social club, family oriented ...They had their monthly parties there ...That's what I wanted to tell you. It was the most, and they would only have like fifty at parties and then the ladies would be invited. And they would put on a beautiful luncheon ...

Fred Hubinger: ...at midnight they put tables down the middle of the floor. The music would stop and everybody would eat, and the main dish was Hackefleish (cold meats) ...Grandma made that homemade cheese all the time for that ...Cup Kase ... Schmiere Kase ...

Erwin Honold: The dances at the hall included the waltz, schottische, two-step, fox trot and square dances which were called by Henry Poellet in German.

Rudy List: (Norine Kern asked Rudy to talk about the orchestra that played for Gray Fox) Hoffmann, that was his name. She played the piano and he played the drum and they had one guy with a horn – a saxophone – ... and their son played with them. I'm not a dancer, but I remember them talking about it!

Henry Poellet: ...and the kids and everyone was there...And when the music stopped the kids was out on the floor and skating around there. ...and when the music starts again you got to be off and by God those kids minded!

Norine Kern: And then when the kids would get tired they'd just let them sleep on the tables!

The Gray Fox club also had other functions at the hall.

Harry Boesnecker: They played cards, too. They used to call raffles, Kenos, instead of Bingo and they would raffle off turkeys for Thanksgiving and Christmas Day.

Fred Hubinger: A Smoker is ...I believe the Gray Fox had them during Lent. See, there was no dancing during Lent. The men would go there and play cards and have their beer and they'd smoke cigars ...



**Gray Fox Dance, ca. 1900
1973.6.57**

Entertainers who came to Frankenmuth also used Fischer Hall for their performances. In this capacity, the hall was similar to many other theaters of the same period in Michigan. Memories shared about our Fischer Hall are likely to be found among older residents of any city that had a public hall or theater.

St. Lorenz Choir often entertained at Fischer Hall [Frankenmuth News, April 1 and 5, 1915]

Entertainment of St. Lorenz Choir a Success

The entertainment given by the St. Lorenz Choir at Fischer's hall on the evenings of Sunday and Monday, was very well attended at each performance. On Sunday night many were unable to see the entertainment on account of the hall not being large enough to hold the large number who came from the surrounding country.

The program was carried out in a very successful manner, much credit being due to the leadership of Prof. Paul Umbach. Also special mention should be made upon the realistic acting, as a servant girl in the dialogue "Das Moderne Dienstmaedchen," of Miss Laura Warnick.

PROGRAM.

Song — Die Wacht an Rhein ... Choir.

Dialogue — Rede stets die Wahrheit. Willibald Trinklein, Herbert Geyer, Alma Boesenecker, Lorenz List, Lydia List.

Song — Verlassen, verlassen, verlassen bin ich ... Choir.

Dialogue — Wanted a Wife ... Paul Umbach, Richard Bernthal, Meta Link, Alma Rogner.

Dialogue — Das Moderne Dienstmaedchen ... Ella Hubinger, Alma Boesenecker, Laura Warnick.

Song — Die Bremer Stadtsaenger ... Choir.

Dialogue — Der Seifenklopp ... Ella Hubinger, Ella List, Amelia Trinklein, Johanna Gugel, Ada List, Clara Bernthal, Augusta Mayer, Alma Frank, Lydia Kern.

Song — Deutschland, Deutschland u[e]ber alles ... Choir.

Dialogue — Anton soll Ruhe haben ... Richard Bernthal, Sarah Eischer, Robert List, Adolf Kern, Herbert Geyer, Herman Naegele, Willibald Trinklein, Lorenz List, Laura Warnick, Ruben Baum, Carl Hubinger, Erwin Rummel.

Song — Potpourri ... Choir.

Arnold Nuechterlein on Sak parties: ...if I were gonna give a private party I could rent the hall and bring my own food and my own drinks for my party. And that's what was done regularly ... Years ago when beer was brewed, you brewed your own beer at home and you brought it along. And you had the big quart bottleWhat you did, you put them in gunny sacks and carried them.

Fred Hubinger on Medicine Shows: They came into town and then they'd sell stuff! ...They usually brought a little orchestra along and they had people doing acts ... maybe it was the same person only dressed different, played a woman then ... a man they'd sell candy, liniment ... but they had comical programs. Then they'd say, "I need five boys to come up." So you go up there (on stage). And another one they had was a whistling contest. I got in on that too. So, they'd say "Can you whistle?" "Yeah." "OK. Whistle once." So then they said first of all we'll give you a cracker to eat. So you ate the cracker and then they'd say "OK. Now the one who whistles the loudest gets the prize." And you can't whistle when you eat a cracker!

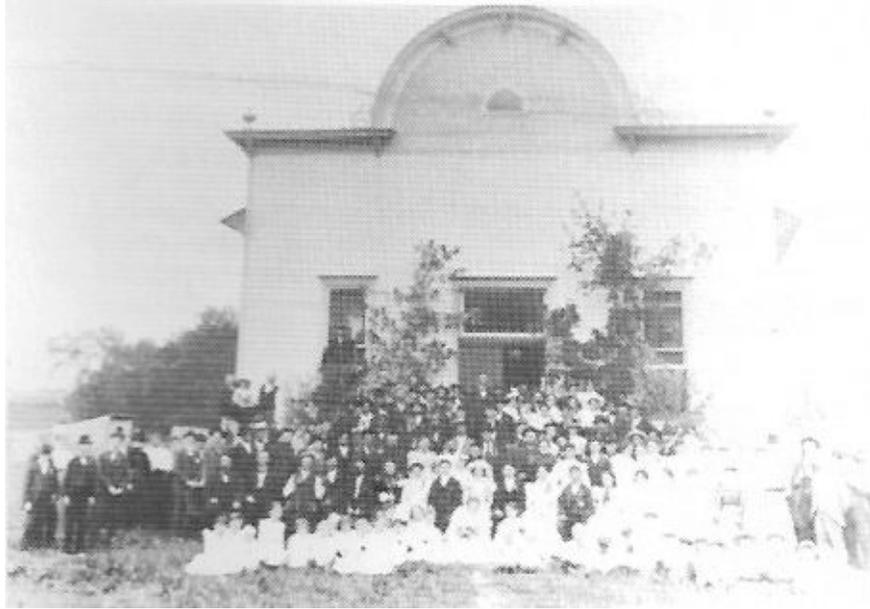
Fred Hubinger on Box Socials: Another thing that was interesting that they had there ... they had box socials. They had a dance and then the girls would bring a lunch and the boxes would be all decorated so pretty! And then the boys would bid on the boxes. Of course, their favorite girl would, you know ...



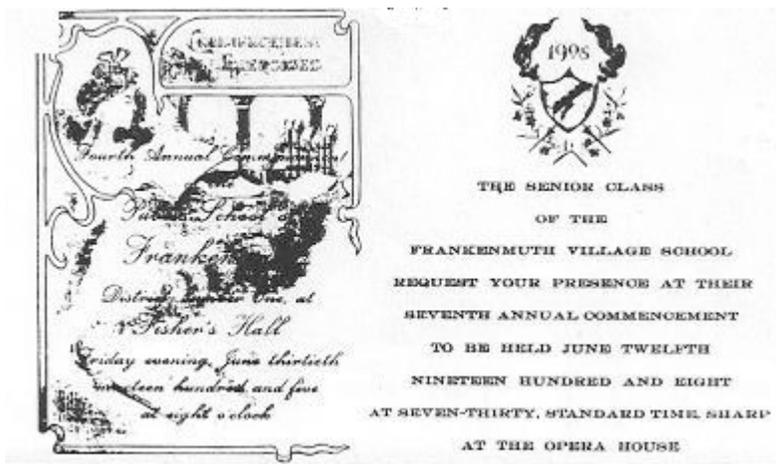
St. Lorenz Choir, October 17, 1915
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Meetings for the public to attend concerning politics, public utilities, and agriculture were also held at Fischer Hall. When Governor Warner visited Frankenmuth in October of 1906 he held his Republican Rally at Fischer Hall. When Frankenmuth businessmen decided to start a baseball team in Frankenmuth they held their meetings in the Hall.

Fischer Hall was also used by local choir groups, glee clubs, the graduating high school classes, and several wedding couples. For a while in the 1930's it was the town's movie hall, a skating rink and a place to hold bowling banquets. In every respect the Hall has been a social gathering place for the people of Frankenmuth and surrounding communities.



Max Rau Wedding, Fischer's Hall, August 1898
1986.50.1



A high school graduation announcement, 1905 or 1908
1987.24

THAT “NOTORIOUS” PARTY

Prohibition hit hard in Frankenmuth. Like German communities elsewhere in the Midwest, locals oftentimes skirted the law and made bootleg alcohol. The Fischers were rumored to have been in on this illegal activity.

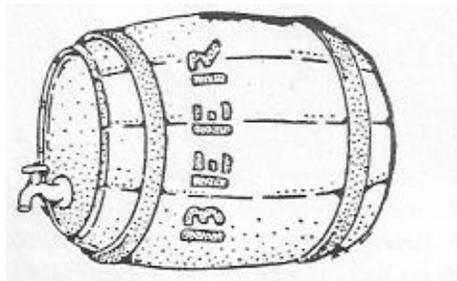


Perhaps the most famous story about Fischer Hall is the “Notorious Flint Party” of January 30, 1926. It is certainly the one event that everyone is able to recall! According to the local newspaper, events unraveled as follows:

A party at Fischer Hall Saturday night given and attended solely by Flint parties turned out to be so outrageous that a number of the party left in disgust. Village Marshall Martin Eischer investigated the affair, reported to President G. J. Hubinger who telephoned the sheriff’s office for help to stop the orgy. Deputy Sheriff Wilson came up and tried to stop the affair and was assaulted, fortunately at this point the state police appeared and scooped in all in the hall and one or two curious villagers looking on. Twenty-five were taken to Saginaw, 21 fined and 2 held for possession of liquor. The “ladies” of the party had departed before the raid was made.

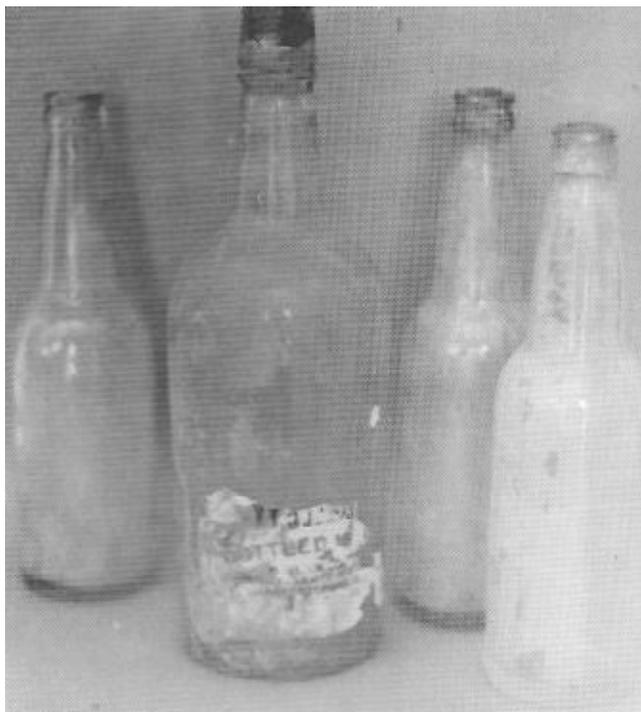
A week later that paper reported:

The investigation into the famous “party” that has made so much stir in the county shows that Flint people came to the hall bringing women dancers from Detroit and that plenty of light wine and beer was on hand to quench their thirst.



Although amusing today in retrospect, the incident was an embarrassment by February 25, 1926:

The notoriety given Frankenmuth by the Evening News Courier of Saginaw has led people throughout the country to believe that Frankenmuth people are willing to go to any length in drunken orgies and disgusting performances. That the "Frankenmuth party" which the News Courier continually harps about, was not a Frankenmuth party at all, not a Frankenmuther, except some men roosting on fences "enjoying" the great party were Flint-Saginaw people. Why not then speak of it as the Flint-Saginaw party at a Frankenmuth Hall. The people from outside rented the hall and no one supposed they would attempt to pull off such a raw thing as they did. It is true that the majority of people are in favor of beer and wine, but they will not put up with drunken riots and indecent acting and the Saginaw News Courier is asked to take notice that no more orgies of that kind will ever be put over on the Frankenmuth people again. The people invite all decent people of Saginaw and Flint to come and enjoy themselves at a decent respectable manner, and such people will be received with open arms, but the other class we do not want.



**These bottles were found under Fischer Hall in 1986.
0000.377.8-13**

Many of the people we interviewed talk laughingly about this party. Some even report to have been witnesses to the event. The amusement is probably due to the fact that no local residents were implicated in the plot except as "fence watchers" and Prohibition was not popular in the community.



The Gaslight Revue began in 1973 and runs each summer in Fischer Hall.

THE ZEHNDER FAMILY: FRANKENMUTH BAVARIAN INN AND FISCHER HALL

In 1950 the Zehnder family purchased the Fischer Hotel and Hall. The hall remained in use as a warehouse for the Bavarian Inn restaurant.

In 1973 the Bavarian Inn began renovating Fischer Hall and opened up a summer theater show called "Gaslight Revue." This vaudeville show is still shown in the Hall in the summertime.

William Zehnder, Jr. is also a long-time member of the Frankenmuth Historical Association. In 1986 he made arrangements to donate the hall and a piece of property along Main Street to the Historical Association.



Frankenkuth Historical Association at May 19, 1988 Dedication.

FRANKENMUTH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION **HERITAGE FOR THE FUTURE**

In October, 1986, the Frankenkuth Historical Association moved Fischer Hall from its location behind the Bavarian Inn 500 feet north to its present location on Main Street. Much research was done to restore the Hall to its original condition and appearance. A campaign was run to raise the \$750,000 needed to restore and re-open Fischer Hall as a performing arts center in Frankenkuth. A two-level interconnecting building was also built to connect the older part of the Frankenkuth Historical Museum to Fischer Hall. With this addition, the museum doubled its exhibit space and office areas.

In June, 1987 the renovations were completed. The Hall housed "Gaslight Revue" in the summer months. Since then, it has been the location for several Christmas concerts, community theater performances, private parties and business meetings. As it was in the past, Fischer Hall is once again a gathering place for Frankenkuth residents and members of the surrounding communities.



Back Cover:
Frankenmuth Community Theater now produces four shows a year at Fischer Hall.