

Travel

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0617 Thursday, July 6, 1989

Bavarian skyline, Glockenspiel Tower?

This is the way a village would look if it was designed by the Brothers Grimm, with a little help from Santa Claus: a Bavarian skyline, the Pled Piper leading his children around the Glockenspiel Tower and the biggest Christmas decoration store in the world greeting you in 63 languages.

The setting is not a theme park or a restored village but a real town, established by German missionaries and run now by fourth and fifth generation descendants, who know how to market the good life they enjoy 80 miles north of Detroit.

If you haven't been to Frankenmuth lately, you may have forgotten how much fun it is to wander among the gemütlichkeit shops on Main Street, have one of the Zehnder family's all-you-can-eat chicken dinners and enjoy the 30,000 different Christmas items for sale at Bronner's Christmas decorations.

The annual Bavarian Festival is over for this year, but the Bronner float will be parked all year next to the wise men and the camels that are frozen-mid-stride outside Wally Bronner's 2.5-acre shop.

Bronner's is the biggest year-round Christmas decoration store in the world. Two-million people a year browse among the 750 different nativity scenes, the 500 animations and the 150 different kinds of Christmas trees that share floor and ceiling space with Hummel figurines, Danish Christmas plates and hundreds of other items.

Most of the browsers neither know nor care that Bronner's designs the commercial decorations found in department stores and malls nationwide, or that 1,000 retail stores from around the continent buy their Christmas decorations here.

All they really care about is the magic that has moved the Bronners from a basement studio to this fantasy land at the entrance to town. The signs around the doors and on the litter barrels say "Welcome" and "Merry Christmas" in almost every language in the world.

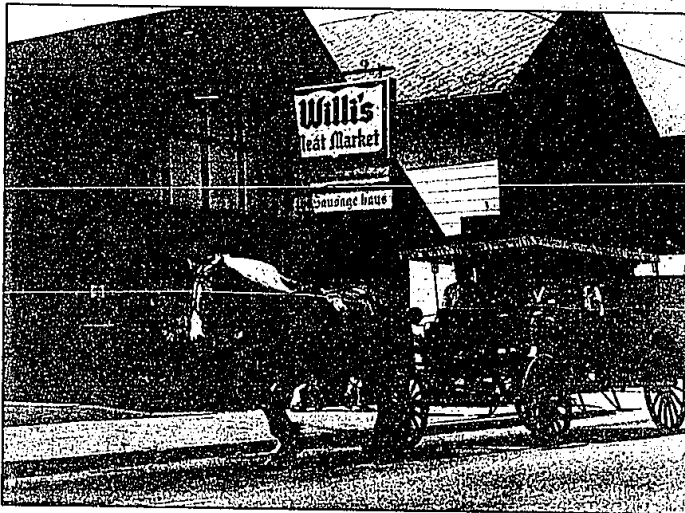
It may be hard for you to think of Christmas in July, but bus loads of tourists think yuletide every day, as soon as they go through the door and past the first animations: elves rolling Christmas cookies, Santa swinging from the ceiling, carolers singing.

Wally Bronner has just introduced an 18-minute film based on his theme: "Enjoy Christmas, it's His birthday. Enjoy life, it's His way." The film done with the same skill and charm that applies to everything around here, a slick presentation with lots of pictures from the family album thrown in to give it a homey look.

Bronner's is at 25 Christmas Lane. Carry on down M-88, past Korn's Sausage Shop and the Carling Brewery, and you will find yourself going downhill into that village designed by the Brothers Grimm.

You enter "downtown" on a bridge

That's Frankenmuth



MICKY JONES

Frankenmuth is famous for its family-style chicken dinners, but the Bavarian Inn has bratwurst and sauerkraut on its menu. Zehnder's features seafood and ribs and Will's Meat Market (above) is a good place to go for a bratwurst hot dog.

across the Cass River, with the newly restored Mickless-Hubinger Flour Mill downstream to your left and the four-year-old 19th-century covered bridge upstream to your right.

The 239-foot replica of an authentic covered bridge, known as Zehnder's Holz-Brücke, was designed and hand built by a New England expert and pulled into place in 1980. The Mill downstream was opened this year. Both of them look like they have been in town for centuries.

Tourists in T-shirts and summer hats follow the red brick path through a tiny green park to the place where horse and carriage tours of the town begin. This part of Frankenmuth is new to me.

I've seen the "old world" gas station and the Covered Bridge Shop that opened across the street a year or two ago, but this is my first look at Zehnder's Italian Village, a miniature village that was on display in the Detroit

area before it moved to Frankenmuth.

All of these new buildings beside the river are really a preamble to the two Zehnder restaurants that traditionally form a "gateway" to Main Street.

It was Frankenmuth's famous chicken dinners that attracted attention to this town in the 19th century, and it is all-you-can-eat chicken dinners that still attract hungry travelers to tables set by various members of the Zehnder family.

William "Tiny" Zehnder runs the Bavarian Inn, with its Glockenspiel Tower, on the south side of Main Street, and his brother Edwin runs Zehnder's Restaurant on the north side.

Both places serve the famous family-style fried-chicken dinner, but with variations. The Bavarian Inn has bratwurst and sauerkraut on its menu, while Zehnder's has American seafood and ribs to match its colonial architecture.

If you are not inclined toward a

heavy chicken dinner, have a bratwurst hot dog at Kern's Sausages or up the street at Will's Meat Market.

Most people explore the dozens of small shops and food stores at the Cass River end of town, but not too many visitors get up Main Street as far as the wine-tasting rooms where both Warner's and St. Julian wineries serve Michigan wine. Some of the wine is made from grapes grown in Frankenmuth.

Frankenmuth has always been a delightful place to spend a summer's day, but it will be even more popular now that Auto World has opened in Flint. Add the nearby Huckleberry Railroad and Crossroads Village and you have a triad of tourist attractions of special interest to families.

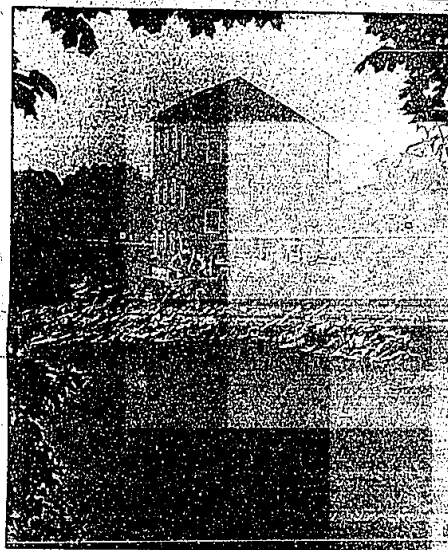
For further information on Frankenmuth, contact the Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce 635 Main Street, Frankenmuth 48734 or telephone (517) 653-4100.

one-of-a-kind traveler

Iris Jones

contributing travel editor

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MICKY JONES

Among the sites to see in Frankenmuth are a 19th-century covered bridge and the newly restored Mickless-Hubinger Flour Mill (above) on the Cass River.

travel notes

CRUISING is back on the Great Lakes. The Caribbean Prince, a new \$4.5 million Great Lakes ship operated by the American Canadian Line Inc., departs for a 12-day summer sailing between Detroit and Owen Sound, Ontario, on Sunday, July 15.

The ship will follow the Lake Huron shoreline, winding past eastern Michigan and Isle Royale working its way to Mackinaw City and Mackinac Island. The Prince follows the North Channel to Manitoulin Island, then heads through Georgian Bay for Owen Sound.

Rates vary from \$849 to \$1,349. For more information call any A&A office.

UNIVERSITY of Michigan researchers have found that drivers or passengers who use seat belts are twice as likely to be conscious after a collision as those not using seat belts. Accident data compiled at the U-M Transportation Research Institute show that one of every 190 automobile occupants using seat belts was unconscious after a crash, compared to one of every 78 occupants who were not using seat belts.

STEP BACK into the 18th century at the Sixth Annual Old French Town Days Festival, July 21-22, at Hellenberg Park in Monroe.

You may experience life as it was 200 years ago on the site of the River Raisin Battlefield, see a re-enactment of a battle, view an encampment of militia and their families, or enjoy 18th century French and English music. Craftsmen also will demonstrate 18th century crafts, and there will be a play area for children.

Cost is \$1 per person, children under 5

admitted free. For more information contact the Monroe County Historical Society, 126 E. Monroe Street, Monroe 48161 (phone 243-7137).

BIG BAND JAZZ will echo across the hills when the Roof Petroleum Big Band returns to the Hidden Valley Club and Resort for the second annual Evening in the Alps concert during Gaylord's 20th Anniversary.

The concert, featuring music from the era of Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller and contemporary artists, is set for 7:30 p.m. Monday, July 18.

Concertgoers may bring their own seats to the club's 7th fairway, where picnic snacks, soft drinks and bar service will be offered.

Hidden Valley is in the northern Lower Peninsula, one mile east of Gaylord on M-32. Tickets are \$6 and may be purchased by mail, c/o Bellweather, P.O. Box 166, Gaylord 49735. Tickets also will be available at the gate.

For more information call 617-742-1303.

FORT MICHILIMACKINAC in Mackinaw City is open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. through Labor Day. Now exhibits of Indian artifacts and penal practices, as well as ongoing archaeological digs await the curious.

Tickets (\$7.50 per person, children 12 and under free) include admission to Old Mill Creek State Historic Park, three miles east of Mackinaw City.

Reconstruction of the fort began in 1960, and the once-thriving fortified community of the French and British colonial era is 80 percent restored. For more information call 847-552-1319.

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Sept. 22 through Oct. 1. Ten days of down-east romance. You'll visit Acadia National Park, Maine; Campobello (F.D.R.'s summer home) and St. Andrew's By-the-Sea in New Brunswick, plus that gem, Canada's smallest province, Prince Edward Island - from bow to stern. You'll stay in delightful inns and hotels. Drive in a private motor coach. Airfare and most meals are included. Cost per person, \$1,895 double occupancy. Details call: Hudson's Travel Service, Northland, 564-6133, Caledonia, 585-6020; Westland, 423-3366; Ann Arbor, 994-0033. Mon. through Sat. from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.