



# Our Times

Volume 6 Issue 1

THE PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Spring 2001

## Let's Eat Out

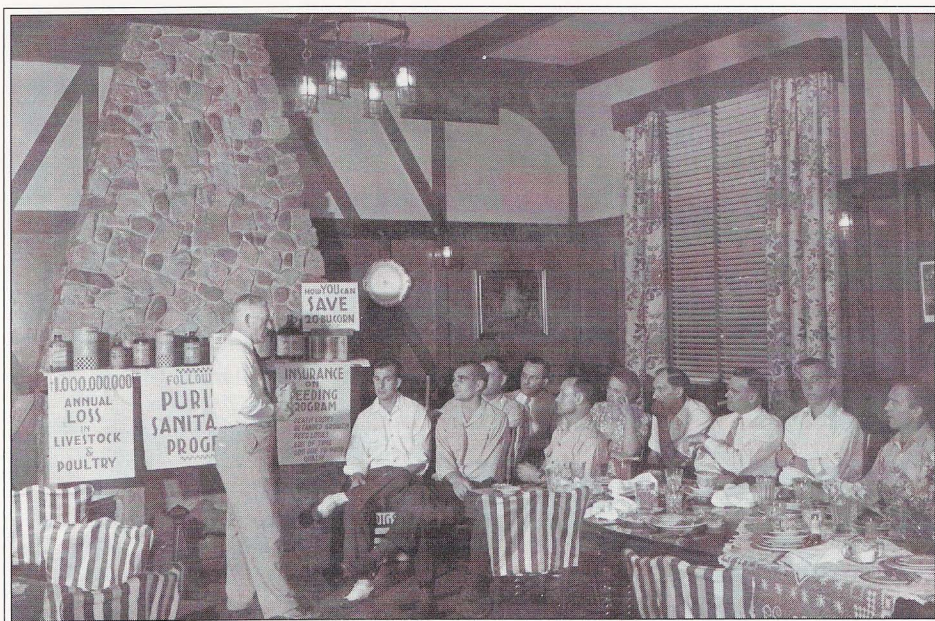
### *Of Restaurants—and Other Eating Establishments*

On a typical day in the thirties, a traveling salesman turning into the driveway of the Sam Sparks farm on Route 121 southeast of Lincoln might see a curious sight: a wicker basket being lowered out of a second-floor window of the big brick house.

If he got a chance to peek into the basket, he would find it full of baby chicks that had been hatched in one of the upstairs bedrooms. Some would be sold, but others would be raised on the farm, where they would be put to good use.

Mrs. Sam Sparks did a brisk business in fried chicken dinners and luncheons. She sent her four daughters out to wait tables while she coaxed the meals from the coal stove in the kitchen and put her son, Sam, to work washing dishes.

Of course, Minnie Sparks wasn't the only one who brought in a little extra income by serving meals. In 1929, Roberta Latham had advertised a "summer supper" at the Latham Tea Room in the family mansion across from Latham Park in Lincoln. She had even hired a tearoom specialist, Ruth Sexton, to supervise the kitchen (*Lincoln Evening Courier*, July 25, 1929).



*Sieb's Hatchery holds a meeting in the English Room at the Hotel Lincoln. Former waitress and night cook Mary Musgrove says everyone used to call her at home to ask if they could eat by the fireplace. Courtesy Paul Dumser.*

In 1931, the mansion would be sold at foreclosure and torn down to build new homes, but in 1929, everyone was still hopeful.

That was the year Paul Coddington opened the Blue Mill (later called The Mill) on Stringer Avenue near the State School.

A white Dutch building trimmed in blue, it featured a lighted revolving windmill and a Dutch blue interior, waitresses dressed in white dresses and blue-trimmed aprons, and enameled furniture with Dutch pictures.

Travelers driving by on Route 4 could purchase toasted sandwiches any hour of the day or night. In fact, when Albert and Blossom Huffman bought the restaurant in 1945, it still had two serving windows on the front of the building.

Albert built on a barroom of knotty pine, added an Army barracks from Camp Ellis to the rear for a dance hall, and painted the buildings barn red.

A delicatessen with curb service took the place of the dance hall for a number of years, after which the building became a dance hall again.

Albert's daughter-in-law Eleanor worked at the Mill from 1948 until the late '80s. The old windmill had come down; her husband, George, put up a new one, also lighted and

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# Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of  
Logan County, Illinois

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## Publisher's Notes

Everyone enjoys dining out, so everyone wants to own a restaurant. Except me. I don't want to get up at 4:30 in the morning to fry bacon and set tables. Or stay up after midnight, dead tired and sore of foot, lugging dirty plates into the kitchen, hearing them clink and clang in the dishwasher, and watching glistening fat congeal on pork chop bones. Waitresses show up late, peevisish cooks stomp out in the middle of banquets, food spoils, and finicky dowagers send back poached eggs that "simply will not do." Doesn't appeal to me.

When I was interviewed for a job at Lincoln College by Dean Dale Brummet in 1972, he took me to the Hotel Lincoln for lunch. A little bit of Cheers. A little bit of Abe Lincoln lore. A little bit of country charm. A certain small-town elegance. The Hotel Lincoln convinced me that Lincoln would be a great place to live, so we moved here, and for several years important occasions were accentuated by meals at the Hotel. I couldn't tell you what we ate.

Every reincarnation of the Depot has been greeted with the high hope that it will restore something we lost when the Hotel closed.

One day I was at the high school and superintendent Jerry Overby looked especially

stressed—probably had a lot on his mind. I took him to the Beason Cafe, where, three eggs and a couple cups of coffee later, he was visibly relaxed. Cafes have that effect on people.

Remember when we used to complain that Lincoln needed a Chinese restaurant? Then, almost overnight, we had three of them. Pizza places have sprung up like mushrooms. If you want to set off a heated debate, don't ask about politics or religion: just inquire about the best pizza in town. Then duck.

My dad likes Daphne's. Lots of food, a menu you can understand, good prices, and waitresses that remember whether you want smoking or non-smoking. All that adds up to a formula for success in the restaurant business in Lincoln. The Mill used to make it on the same formula, with schnitzels and beer to boot.

The Vintage Fare is a happy place to eat lunch—fresh, fresh food ("in sight, it must be fresh" could be its motto), and there are always people to chat with (maybe "fresh food and friendly folks" would work). The sugar cookies are the size of hubcaps.

Guzzardos is upscale, I think, because it offers both French onion soup and twice-baked potatoes. You can't beat the Blue Dog for soup, sandwiches, and an atmosphere that requires you to have fun. The Arcade serves home-raised beef (that's comforting in this day and age). Mary's attracts a sophisticated breakfast crowd. Bonanza made history with the first massive-scale salad bar in the county. The Alley-Bi has kept the Ski's grilled onion cheeseburger legend alive, and Al's Main Event combines a quiet room for the sedate set on one side with barroom excitement for the socially wired on the other.

I spent idle evenings in my high school days driving from the Steak 'n Shake in Normal to the Steak 'n Shake in Bloomington and back again. I probably should have stayed home and studied. Now it's fun to visit the Steak 'n Shake right here in Lincoln.

I guess we are pretty lucky to live amidst so many good restaurants. Maybe someone will open a new one, but not me. **SR**

*(Continued from page 1)*

revolving—only to have a storm destroy it.

By then, the interior had lost its Dutch motif and was becoming a museum of oddities: a mechanical leg that protruded from the ceiling, a 20-pound stuffed catfish, a suit of armor, four life-sized figures.

The Mill was the "Home of the Schnitzel," the huge breaded tenderloin sandwich first made by Louise "Mom" Rofchnasky, an Austrian immigrant who brought her recipe from the old country.

Originally, the schnitzel was made from veal; Eleanor says Louise would "sit there many, many nights pounding it until three or four in the morning." Later, it was made from pork.

Right down through George and Eleanor's son, Randy, and his two older sons, Brian and Danny, four generations of Huffmans worked at the Mill before it closed in 1996.

Another restaurant with an interesting atmosphere was the one at the Hotel Lincoln, which had a full-page ad in the 1953 Centennial edition of the *Courier*.

Owned by Percie and Eva McGowan Edgell and chockfull of English antiques, the hotel was quite a grand place in its day.

Mrs. Edgell ran the kitchen, and she was fussy about the chickens she bought from Armour's—and the prime rib that was cut from beef that hung in the hotel's walk-in cooler and served on heated, rose-colored plates.

Mary Musgrove worked as a waitress and head night cook at the hotel and remembers many parties, complete with white tablecloths and candles.

Under the ceiling fans in the cafeteria, waitresses in blue and white-checked uniforms helped customers choose everything from chicken to Mrs. Edgell's lemon-filled cake.

Evenings, patrons in the English Room and old-world taproom could order steak dinners from the menu.

On less elaborate occasions, a family could run over to Chicago Street, to dine at the Commercial Coffee Shop, have soft-serve ice cream at Tull's Ice Cream Shop, or drink coffee with the train crews at Molloy's.

Clerks at the downtown stores in Lincoln ate lunch at The Gem, Leonard's, or the Arcade, while Bertoni's was the place to meet in Mt. Pulaski.

Some meals were eaten at the taverns—and the dime stores, like the one on the corner in Lincoln, where Waneta Stephens remembers a big brown barrel of Hires Root Beer.

High school kids in the forties met at Tibbs' or the Lincoln Bertoni's after football games at Woodlawn Field, just as Lincoln College students had congregated at Lee's Tavern (later Cafe) at 608 Keokuk in the thirties.

(In fact, Lincoln resident Gene Johnson remembers playing his tenor sax at Lee's on Sundays with a combo called Five Salted Peanuts.)

In 1959, John LaMothe played the Hammond organ at The Colonial, located on the same site.



*The Lincoln Inn on Route 66. Courtesy Lindy Fancher.*

After 1958, anyone with a taste for Italian cooking went to Guzzardo's.

Over the years, on Highways 66 and 121, the owners of The Tropics, The Pig Hip, the Lincoln Inn, Coonhound Johnny's, Tiz-Rite, the Blu-Inn, and the Heritage Inn had met people from all over the country.

Perhaps one of them ran into Anna Curcuru when she was driving down Route 66 looking for a town that could use a casual pizza restaurant. In 1969, she and her two kids, Nina and Sam, opened Sorrento's in Lincoln. Her husband, John, followed from Italy shortly thereafter.

Logan County folks can no longer eat at the Broadway Cafe or the Outside Inn, buy a candy cane and watch a movie at Steve Bennis's Lincoln Candy Kitchen, or drive to the original Country-Aire in Atlanta. But eating out is more popular than ever. ■

## A New Home in America

### Chocolate Sodas with Popcorn

When Howard and Marge Leonard were going into the restaurant business in 1952, Gus Marcucci used to come over in the evening to teach Howard how to make toppings for ice cream sundaes. Marge says Gus bossed Howard around just like a son.

So one night, when Howard flipped the door lock at ten o'clock, Gus was quick to say, "That's not the way you lock up."

"You open the door. You look to the left, and if nobody's going by, you look to the right, and if somebody's coming, you don't lock up until they come in or they go by."

"That's the old school," Howard remembers.

On the northwest corner of the square in Lincoln, there's a yellow, glazed-brick building that stands as witness to the soundness of that way of thinking. On the face of the building is inscribed the name "Marcucci."

Gus Marcucci was an Italian peasant boy who quit school at the age of 9 to help support his family. He arrived in America in 1890 at the age of 16.

In 1898, Gus moved to Lincoln with his wife, Lucia Fabbrini Bucchelli, where he bought the Noel Brothers' confectionery with Joe Fabbrini. He became sole owner in 1905. In 1926, Gus bought the building, which he remodeled after fire struck the block in 1932.

Mafalda Layman Benchea, Gus's only grandchild, remembers that people from up north and out west who were traveling to Florida, "would go out of their way to come to our confectionery for our chocolate sodas."

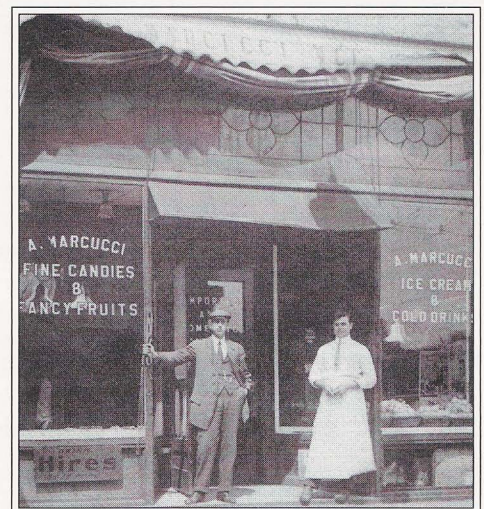
Gus liked the sodas, too. He had a popcorn machine, and he would make a chocolate soda and a bag of popcorn, sit down in the Marcucci family booth in the ice cream parlor, and put popcorn in his soda to eat it.

Marcucci's sold wholesale and retail ice cream and candy, which Floyd Darby made in a separate building attached to the back of the store. At Christmas, Darby's vanilla ice cream had a green Christmas tree running through it; at Easter, it was an Easter egg or a yellow bunny.

The candies Darby made were mostly chocolates: caramels, soft creams, nougats, and chocolate-covered peanuts. He also made peanut brittle. At Halloween, he cut cardboard pieces and covered them with chocolate to look like nougats. He also covered pearl onions and small squares of pimento cheese with chocolate.

The men of the town could choose their cigars and cigarettes from one glass case, while their children chose hard candy (sold in bulk) from the opposite case. Whitman's Samplers, Bunte and Johnston's candy, gum, solid chocolate candy bars—Marcucci's had them all.

*(Continued on page 4)*



*Gus Marcucci, left, and Joe Fabbrini in front of Marcucci's. Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History.*

(Continued from page 3)

The ice cream parlor was a hangout for high school and college kids and adults, who came in for sodas, sundaes, malted milks, and nickel fountain Cokes—plain or flavored. On Saturday nights in the summer, Mafalda remembers, her dad would put a sign on the sidewalk, “Banana splits, 25 cents.” Later, Marcucci’s served hot lunches, as well.

Customers made a pet of Gus’s black-and-white cat, J. Ham (short for J. Hamilton Lewis), who slept on the counter behind the boxed candy.

His owner was pretty well known, too. Every year, as soon as Gus Marcucci was spotted in his straw hat, the *Courier* reported that spring had arrived.

Mafalda’s dad, P. K. Layman, bought the confectionery with Gus’s stepson Vincent Bechelli around 1940. Mafalda’s dad later bought Vince out.

During World War II, Marcucci’s kept Mafalda’s dad so busy that Dr. Gaffney ordered him to rest at Hot Springs, while Mafalda (who was home from college) ran the confectionery.

Later owners included John Wright, Earl Nash, and the Bertonis.

## **Ice Crushers and Spaghetti Dinners**

On Saturday mornings in Mt. Pulaski in the twenties, Harry Van Hook woke up to the sound of “Tony” Bertoni’s ice crusher.

That was all it took for the little boy to get dressed and run over to the back door of Bertoni’s restaurant—to watch Tony make ice cream and to lick the paddle when he was done.

Harry says that Tony made the first ice cream bars by running a sharpened stick through the cardboard tab from the top of a milk bottle, putting a dipper of ice cream on it, and dipping the ice cream in chocolate—all for a nickel.

Rinaldo “Tony” Bertoni was born in Lucca, Italy, in 1882 and came to America, arriving in Chicago in 1905. He opened a restaurant in Elkhart in 1911.

In 1912, he bought the Julius Vonderlieth restaurant on the west side of the square in Mt. Pulaski. That was also the year he hired—and married—Pauline Rigali, a young woman from a neighboring village in Italy.

Harry Van Hook’s memories include: traveling salesmen who made it a point to be in Mt. Pulaski the night Tony made his spaghetti and meatballs . . . a glass case that held stick candy at a penny a stick . . . a music machine with a real violin and other instruments that played when a customer put in a nickel.

## **Waneta Stephens Remembers**

That music machine was gone by the time Tony’s son Sam hired Waneta Milner (Stephens) in 1945. Waneta does remember a box that played a comedy film when a customer deposited a quarter.

Before people had freezers in their homes, a restaurant was the only place to get ice cream, remembers Waneta. Tony was “a little ahead of himself.” In addition to the usual flavors, he also made orange pineapple, orange sherbet, and even ice cream with Grape Nuts.

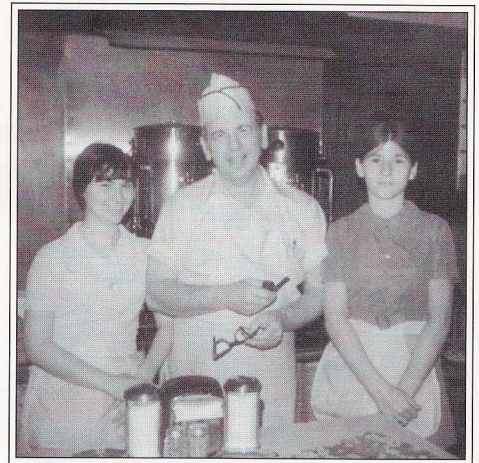
Before the advent of soft ice cream, Tony would always bring Waneta a bowl of the still-soft ice cream before he put it in the hardening cabinet (freezer).

For many years, Mt. Pulaski children walked to the cemetery on Memorial Day, carrying bouquets; they always got a coupon from some organization for

an ice cream cone from Bertoni’s.

Bertoni’s was noted for its chocolate sodas, but Waneta noticed that many of the older people asked for lemon sodas—in their younger days, lemons and oranges had been scarce. Root beer floats, cherry Cokes, Green Rivers, sodas and sundaes, and pie satisfied everyone’s craving for sweets.

Except for spaghetti and meatballs, Bertoni’s served American food.



*Joy Combs (Irwin), Sam Bertoni, and Lisa Milner (Brown) in June of 1972. Courtesy Waneta Stephens.*

“Those (Mt. Pulaski) Germans wouldn’t eat anything different,” says Waneta.

Before the advent of hot lunch programs, kids lined up at the counter every weekday. Bertoni’s was also the place to go after basketball games, says Waneta.

“You had to stand in line to get a seat,” she says. When the team came in, “everybody would start clapping and cheering.”

Tucked behind the counter were several books: a dictionary, an encyclopedia, and the Green book (the Mt. Pulaski history book written by Imogene Green)—they were needed to settle the friendly arguments that sprang up at the back table.

Waneta has a whole collection of post cards sent by traveling customers, addressed simply, “Back Table, Mt. Pulaski, Illinois,” or even “Back Table, 62548.”

When someone was sick, Sam would tear off a full piece of wrapping paper and print "Sorry you're ill" on it. Everyone who came in would sign it and write a little message.

Sam's son Renny operated the former Marcucci's in Lincoln in the late forties. After Sam Bertoni died suddenly in 1980, the original Bertoni's never reopened.

## From Greece to America

When Pete Andrews was a child in Greece, he lived in a two-room house with his parents and his six brothers and sisters.

"We knew what it was to be poor," Pete remembers.

In 1930, Pete's Uncle Tony Rufogales and his wife, Katherine (Danosky), came to Greece for a visit. When they returned to America, they took Pete and his brother Tom back with them.

Pete was eight, and Tom was twelve when they arrived in Lincoln and started at Washington School, taking English classes at night.

Tony Rufogales had come to America about 1905. He had owned cafés in Shelbyville and Marion, Illinois, and had served in World War I, when he stuck a pencil in a map at random and it landed on Lincoln. He opened a lunchroom there with Tony Lapinski on Pulaski Street, later buying him out and moving across the alley to 414 Pulaski (present site of the Vintage Fare).

Pete and Tom got to America just in time for the Depression. Hot dogs were cheap, and people bought them by the bag.

If Tony went to a show, he would tell the boys, "If anyone comes in and wants something to eat, I want you to give them a hot dog and a piece of pie and a cup of coffee."

(In later years, Pete and his wife, Jo, carried on the tradition, serving meals to people sent over by the Salvation

Army and Ministerial Association.)

It was hard work: from 4:30 in the morning until 10:00 at night seven days a week, with only Thanksgiving and Christmas off, says Pete. Jo says people still remember seeing Pete working at the grill when he was eight.

After Pete graduated from high school at 16, he went to work at the Gem full time, until he volunteered for the Army in June of 1941. When he got home in 1945, Josephine Danosky was working in the restaurant. They were married in 1946 and are the proud parents of four children: George, Michael, Kathy, and John. Pete and Tom bought the Gem from Tony in 1945; when Tom moved to Mattoon, he sold his half share to Pete.

The Gem specialized in plate lunches, and Tuesday's chop suey was one of the favorites. Ham and beans, roast pork loin with dressing, and meat loaf—Pete says they probably served about 22 different dishes every week.

Once Jo got into an argument with a man who insisted her chili was canned.

"I cook chili twice a week!" she replied, indignantly.

A lady named Mrs. Hayes baked their pies, and Jo ran across the street to get doughnuts, dinner rolls, and sweet rolls from the elderly couple who ran the Busy "B" Bakery. Meat came from Carl Schneider and Hauffe's meat market.

The Gem had a big breakfast trade, and if a customer ordered ham and eggs, Pete would give him three eggs instead of two. If he ordered one, he got two.

Pete is proud that The Gem was the first restaurant in Lincoln to serve African-Americans in the dining room. When Pete's Uncle Tony had the lunchroom, an African-American janitor named Lee Townsend always ate in the kitchen. One morning, Pete's uncle said, "Lee, I want you to go out and sit on the first stool there."

"It didn't go good with a couple of guys," says Pete. "They threw one of those old-time coffee mugs and almost took his head off."

Pete says, "We continued that practice. Some people didn't like it, but most people accepted it."

Pete served two terms as alderman of Lincoln's fourth ward and was mayor from 1985 to 1989. He sold the Gem to Mel and Joyce Kinzie in 1984. ■



The Gem Coney Island Lunch Room, Tony Rufogales at the counter, Pete Andrews at the grill. Courtesy Pete Andrews.

# Not Exactly Newcomers

## *Pizza and Family*

Dominic “Doc” Guzzardo’s long-time dream came true on December 31, 1958, when Guzzardo’s Italian Villa opened in the rear of the Arcade in Lincoln.

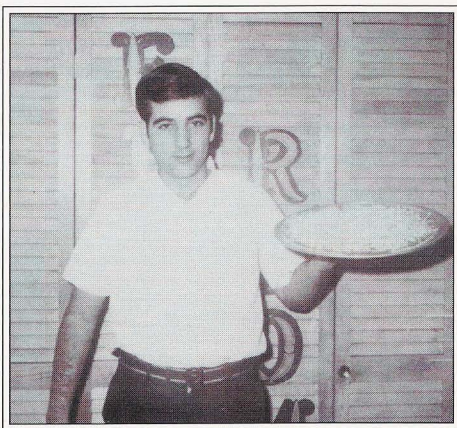
Doc’s wife, Rose, had worked hard to help get the villa ready: staining and varnishing the upstairs walls and removing numerous coats of paint from the downstairs door.

The little restaurant, which seated 32 people upstairs and another 12 downstairs, was a family business. Son John, who was 11, helped his father with the cooking and the dishes, standing on Coke boxes to reach the counter where he rolled out the pizza dough. Daughter Grace was 16 and worked upstairs as a waitress with her mother, who ran the dining room.

Even after Guzzardo’s expanded into the next room and doubled their seating to 84 seats, “we were small, very small,” remembers Rose, “but we raised our family.”

And family is important to the Guzzardos. John is still using recipes that came from his grandmothers Guzzardo and Gervase, both “excellent cooks,” he says, who came from Italy and settled in La Grange, Illinois.

They both lived with his family at the



John Guzzardo. Courtesy Rose Guzzardo.

end of their lives, so John learned how to beat bread so it would be light and how to roll ravioli.

John and his wife, Frankie, have three children: Nick, Michelle, and Janelle. They all learned teamwork from the family business.

How could they not?

“You’re sitting there eating your dinner, and all of a sudden you get busy, and your mom and dad say, ‘Get up and clear the tables,’” says Frankie.

Nick, who started bussing tables when he was nine, is now 25 and in charge of the kitchen. He spends his mornings ordering food and supplies and working with the cooks—making pizza dough, sauces and salad dressings, and cutting steaks.

Afternoons, one of the cooks will spend an hour making 200 twice-baked potatoes for the evening, while someone else cooks the noodles. Dishes won’t be put together until they are ordered, and everything is homemade.

Nick always knew he was going to end up running the restaurant.

“I kinda had it in my heart,” he admits.

“Nick is doing for John what John did for his father,” says Rose. Also like John, Nick married a young woman who enjoys the restaurant business; his wife, Shelley Ann (Winters), manages the upstairs.

In the early days, 75% of Guzzardo’s business was pizza, which Ed Madigan used to deliver in his family’s cabs.

Pizza is still popular today, although the 20-inch version (which didn’t fit in the dumb waiter) was abandoned years ago after an evening in which four people (including John) each tripped on their way upstairs from the kitchen.

The Lincoln College basketball team and their coach, Norm Kaye, “were sitting there starving,” says John, “and we kept dropping their pizzas.”

Today, pizza represents about 25% of the restaurant’s business. Homemade Italian dinners, steaks, prime rib, and french-fried lobster make up the other 75%.

Guzzardo’s also has an active catering business, which grew out of Guzzardo’s Rose Room, a luncheon spot and banquet room in the ‘60s.

For forty years, Guzzardo’s had a booth at the Logan County Fair, where fairgoers lined up for pizza and Italian beef sandwiches.

When Guzzardo’s started at the Illinois State Fair 31 years ago, the food tent was operated by five people who stayed in a camper. Today, Nick takes about 40 high school and college kids down each day to work at Guzzardo’s Pizza House, Steak ‘n Shake, and Guzzardo’s Steak House.

Three years ago, the restaurant expanded into the area where Lincoln Sand and Gravel used to have their offices. It now seats 175.

## *Tropicburgers*

When Lew Johnson started working at The Tropics as a busboy in 1951, Vince Schwenoha’s restaurant consisted of a bar and a small dining room that held about 30 people. Although surrounded by cornfields, it had a prime location on Route 66.

Vince had been in the service in Hawaii, so when he opened his restaurant in 1950, he named it The Tropics. The sandwich he had discovered in California—the bun with two patties of hamburger—became the Tropicburger.

The homemade salad dressings—Thousand Island, French, and French with Roquefort—were his mother’s recipes.

By the time Vince sold the building to Victor Thudium and Harry "Spot" Austman, Lew Johnson had worked at both the Tropics and the Blu-Inn and had met and married Beverly Worth, a hostess at the Tropics.

On November 11, 1955, the couple leased the restaurant. By then, the Tropics had a new dining room, and the old dining room had become a coffee shop.

Lew had worked as a meat cutter, so he cut the pork chops, tenderloins, and steaks himself.

At a restaurant in Springfield, Lew and Bev ran across the horseshoe sandwich (beef, ham, or turkey on toast, covered with cheese sauce and French fries). Bev made it her own by developing her own cheese sauce.

Betty Fletcher, a waitress who became one of Lew's assistants, helped make the salad dressings.

Another employee, Anna Bikai, had cooked for the German Army when she was a little girl.

"She could take a lobster tail and make a beautiful meal," says Lew.

Together, Anna and Bev developed a recipe for French-fried lobster.

Smorgasbords were new when the Johnsons brought Chef Henri from Chicago to set up the first one in the area. Lew's son Kim remembers going to the ice plant with his dad and cutting open the bags to pour ice into the stainless steel serving bar.

Before long, the Tropics was well known by anyone who drove Route 66 between Chicago and St. Louis, not to mention fairgoers, who kept many employees working every day all through the month of August.

The Tropics also did a brisk catering business.

"No wonder I hurt every morning I get up," says Lew. "I used to lug all that stuff around."

Monthly meetings and parties filled out the schedule.

Everything was made from scratch before 1975, when the second of two

fires hit the Tropics (the first was in 1965). It was closed for two and one-half years while the owners built a new building.

The Tropics reopened on July 7, 1977. When I-55 was completed that October, the restaurant was no longer on the highway. By March of 1978, "we couldn't generate enough cash flow to help pay our bills," says Lew.

But, he says, "Mother Nature saved us" by sending an ice storm.

CILCO made sure the Tropics had power, and the restaurant fed their crews three meals a day for some thirty days. While the city of Lincoln was without electricity, residents flocked to the Tropics to eat.

In 1985-87, the Tropics was one of the top 100 independent restaurants in the country in sales.

Kim Johnson says he has "a thousand memories," including the times his dad took him, his brother, Eric, and his sister, Tami (Goodrich), to the coffee shop for breakfast before school. While Lew was in his office, the waitresses would finish the kids' meals so they wouldn't get into trouble.

Both Kim and Eric met their wives, Lisa and Rochelle, at the restaurant, and they all four worked there, as did Lew's sister Frances Mathes.

Bev Johnson died in 1992; the Tropics was sold in 1997.

## Food—And Music!

In 1963, Lew and Bev Johnson leased the Blu-Inn on the Route 66 bypass and changed its name to the Heritage Inn. Lew's brother, Don, became the manager.

"We served a lot of fried chicken," says Don, just as John "Cub" and Maxine Smith had done when they owned the Blu-Inn.

In 1966, The Darrell Last Trio (Darrell on piano and organ, Walt Perkins on drums, and Paul Rankin on bass) began entertaining on Wednesday nights. Some version of the group played there for 13 and one-half years, Bill Schlis taking Paul Rankin's place when he retired.

With the addition of sax player Fyl Legner, the trio became a quartet that eventually played and sang Friday and Saturday nights.

The packed crowds included a lot of regulars. If you wanted to find somebody, says Darrell, "they were there, or they were gonna be."

"Everybody just had a wonderful time on New Year's Eve," says Don.

Don's wife, Mary Ruth, worked at the restaurant as much as she could with five children. Other employees included Helen Poole, Lee Sweeney, Lee Fulk, and Helen Jewell.

Don left the Heritage in 1976; Lew and Bev gave up their lease to concentrate on The Tropics soon after. ■



*Chef Henri and the smorgasbord at The Tropics. Courtesy Lindy Fancher.*

# Mom & Pop—and Their Cafe

## *Curb Service and Slushers*

It's a Saturday night in the early '40s, and the parking lot of The White House drive-in is jammed with cars.

The little frame building sits back from the street in the 600 block of Pulaski Street in Lincoln. The White House has curb service, and the girls who serve the food make 12 ½ cents an hour. Each girl is careful as she hooks the tray over the car window and sets down the glass with the shake in it. If she doesn't dump it in her customer's lap, just maybe she'll get a 10-cent tip.

Inside the building, high school student Joe Seggelke is putting a hamburger patty on the grill, searing and scraping it to form a crust. The hamburgers—served wrapped in white paper—are popular. So are the slushers (parfaits), Joe's mom and dad's chili, and his mother's homemade pies.

Joe's parents, George and Nellie, got the chili recipe from Joe's uncle Jack Seggelke when he set them up in business here in 1939. In 1944, Jack's wife will open Bee's Ice Cream Store in a little building at 301 S. Sangamon Street.

Marion Thickson, manager of the little Star service station on the corner, is a frequent luncheon customer at The White House, as is Jim Coogan, who runs the locker plant nearby. So are the Fuesting boys, who operate Auto Electric at 617 Pulaski and work day and night.

One of these years, Frank Dumser, who owns the building, will want to build an A & P market. When he does, he's going to have to move the restaurant a short distance. This time, they'll have a basement, where they can operate the ice cream freezer and Joe (who's quite a tinkerer) can have a workshop.

After the Seggelkes give up The White House (also called Segg's), Joe Eimer will run it as Eimer's Sandwich and Ice Cream Shop. In 1952, Howard and Marge Leonard will set up business there as the Cottage Drive-In.

## *Fried Pickles*

Howard and Marge Leonard were in the restaurant business from 1952 to 1974. After operating the Cottage Drive-In for a year and one-half, they



Marge Leonard in front of Leonard's Cafe at 111 S. Hamilton. Courtesy Marge and Howard Leonard.

opened up Leonard's Cafe in the remodeled locker plant at 111 S. Hamilton. In 1958, they bought the Hi-Ho at 122 N. McLean from Clyde and Helene Boyd, remodeling the coffee shop and adding on a kitchen and dining room.

Leonard's had a varied clientele: students from Lincoln Bible Institute eating their evening meal, farmers and their wives enjoying a chicken dinner after church, tradesmen polishing off eggs and bacon before setting out for the day, and clerks from Landauer's having a midmorning cup of coffee and a roll.

Leonard's was "kind of a high school hangout," too, says Howard, with its Swift ice cream, soda fountain, and daughter Trudy's deep-fat-fried pickles. Basketball teams from small towns like Beason, Hartsburg, and Emden were always well behaved—their parents came with them!

Leonard's was also a popular coffee spot for Christian Church husbands whose wives were at Sunday School.

So much so that one Sunday morning, Reverend Appel walked in, opened his Bible, and said, "I decided to start a new Sunday School class at Leonard's Cafe."

Mother's Day was the biggest day.

"One year," says Howard, "my mother and sister and brother-in-law came down from Streator to have a nice Mother's Day dinner with us after we finished up, and all we could serve them was hamburger—we'd run out of everything."

Mrs. Edith Hurley, the day cook, would "load those plates up," says Howard. Helen Comstock, the night cook, was another good cook, as was Alma Cooper. Mary Smith was a long-time waitress. Joyce Waldeck (Centers) picked up groceries in "Willie the Jeep" and looked after the cafe when Howard and Marge were on vacation.



Joyce remembers double breasting a pork tenderloin sandwich for the Leonards' son, Ronnie, when he came in on a Saturday and saving Howard a piece of his favorite pie when he came from his job at the bottle factory to help over the noon hour.

Sunkist pies were delivered by Lew Logeman; the bread pudding and apple dumplings were homemade.

In 1974, Marge and Howard sold their restaurant to the Redfairns; they sold it to Bloomington Federal, which tore it down.

## **Tibbs' Hi-Spot**

Charlie Bechelli, Gus Marcucci's stepson, had a confectionery at 418 Broadway in Lincoln, complete with a little gas light that burned continuously so men could light their cigars.

Mary and Glenn Tibbs bought the confectionery in the early '40s.

Located across from the Maid-Rite Grill and Greyhound bus depot, Tibbs' Hi-Spot was open from six in the morning until eleven at night, six days a week (it was closed for three hours on Sunday afternoons). That meant Mary and Glenn's son, Tom, and daughters, Mary Ellen (Copeland), Martha (Crost), and Shirley (McKernon), all had to work.

"And that's all right," says Tom, "because those were good times with your parents."



*Mary and Glenn Tibbs at Tibbs' Hi-Spot in May of 1949. History of Logan County Illinois 1982.*

One of Tom's jobs (in addition to chipping ice for Cokes and climbing under the booths to chop off the gum) was to cook orders for the high school kids who came in for lunch.

"I had the kids all trained," says Tom. "They would just write everything they wanted and write their names on a slip of paper." If he didn't know someone, he'd write a description so he'd know who to give the food to.

There was plenty to attract kids: a Wurlitzer juke box, a popcorn machine, Glenn's homemade ice cream and California hamburgers, Mary's taffy apples.

"My pop just loved kids," says Tom, and he always had something special for them—a Green River or a drink called the Railsplitter.

When the White Sox were playing, "my father didn't care if he sold anything or not; all the signs would be covered up with White Sox banners," Tom says.

Before the days of coffee machines, someone from Malerich's dry cleaners or Partlow & Rust would come in with \$30 for coffee and doughnuts, while people who lived in the nearby apartments depended on Tibbs' for their meals.

During the war, people lined up three across and down the alley for a meal that included meat. That kept Tom busy slicing buns—100 at a time.

The neighborhood included Malerich's, Alexander's grocery store, and Eckert's meat market.

"Every once in a while, you would hear a scream," laughs Tom, and a pig or cow would be loose and running down Broadway with two or three people chasing it. The neighborhood was like a family, and the people who lived there "would take a bullet for each other," says Tom.

Tibbs' was sold in 1964. The next owner closed it after a few years.

## **Little Place—Good Eating**

Steve Schreiber says that when he got married, he'd already done enough dishes for a lifetime—the same ones "over and over and over" when his mom and dad, Kurt and Eloise, owned the Cottage Cafe.

The little house at 229 S. McLean Street in Lincoln had been called Wade's Cafe when Clayton and Ethel Wade served plate lunches there in the early '50s. Paul Eimer ran it briefly as Eimer's Snack Shop before Steve's parents bought it in 1954 or '55.

Steve's mom prepared her plate lunches at home in the mornings. Weekdays, 35 to 50 employees of the *Courier* and other downtown businesses ate at the little restaurant, lining up at 12:00, 12:30, and 1:00 for the 65-cent lunches.

While Steve's mom was at home cooking, Steve's dad was acting as short-order cook at the cafe. Steve worked and cleaned there after school.

"It was a fun experience," he remembers.

Steve's dad died in 1961, and Steve's mother had to sell the restaurant.

In 1979, when Mary Fulscher Musgrove bought the building, the restaurant was closed. It had been the Parkside Cafe; Mary named it Mary's Place.

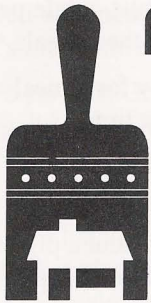
Mary had been a cook at the Hotel Lincoln, but her son, Robby, did the cooking at Mary's Place—and he still does.

In 1990, when the *Courier* asked readers to decide which restaurant had the best hamburger in Logan County, Mary's Place came in first.

The land on which the restaurant stood was sold in 1990, and Mary moved her business to 413 Pulaski, where she and Robby still serve Green Rivers and home-cooked meals. The little building on McLean Street was torn down. ■

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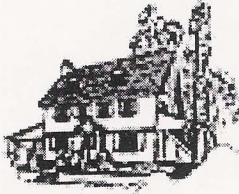
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**The Restaurant at the Depot**

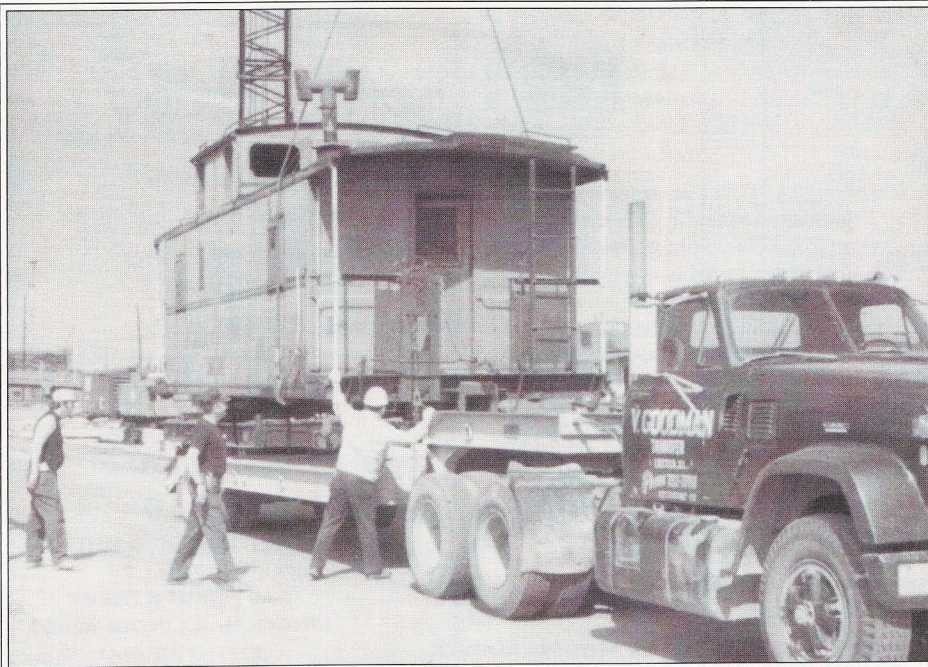
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**A** caboose is unloaded for the Lincoln Depot Restaurant and Lounge, which Dave Katz and Don Gehlbach opened in the former railroad station in 1978. Customers arrived by train or car to spend the evening dining, shopping at the Country Crossings and The Whistle Stop, and listening to bands like the Darrell Last Trio. Harold Goodman brought the Depot's two cabooses from Decatur. In addition, two large train cars were brought in by rail and moved by a St. Louis company onto rails that Dave and Don had laid themselves. One became a dining car, the other a lounge. Don Johnson managed the Depot between 1979 and 1986. Don Gehlbach sold his interest to Dave Katz, and Dennis Pryor bought the Depot in 1988. It is currently owned and operated by the Orr family. Courtesy Iola Gehlbach. ■

Material in this issue came from *History of Logan County Illinois 1982*; *Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History*; *Mt. Pulaski 1836-1986*; the *Courier* under its various names; Lincoln city directories; and the generous memories of our friends. In the last issue, the teacher of the enriched nursery school at the State School was Ruth Jurjevich. By the way, on page 4 of that issue, that's a hog house in the picture, not a greenhouse.

## Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of  
Logan County, Illinois

### *Inside This Issue*

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Not Exactly Newcomers

Mom and Pop—and Their  
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