

RESTAURANT ROW

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PUBLISHED:
THE JOURNAL 4/25/84

Wheeling's 'Valley Trail' Seen Many Changes

Now Milwaukee Ave.

Once Bison Route

First known as the "Des Plaines Valley Trail," Milwaukee Avenue has undergone almost as many name changes as some of its restaurants and taverns.

The original Indian trail was rutted deeply by buffalo herds, some say, and widened by wagons of the pioneers. An 1830 map gives its name as "Milwalky Trace." In 1836 it was designated as a post road between Chicago and Green Bay, and as a stage route between Chicago and Milwaukee it became heavily traveled. It was to serve these travelers that Joseph Filkins built his two-story frame tavern-hotel at what is now the northwest corner of Milwaukee Avenue and Dundee Road in 1837.

Customs and prices were far different in 1837. When Filkins rang the dinner bell, his customers rushed from the washing trough to the long table to eat all they could hold for 25 cents—whiskey was five cents extra.

A second hotel, the Parker, was built in 1840. It was here that a meeting was held to organize Wheeling Township in April of 1850.

IN 1849, planking of the road was started in Chicago. It only got as far as Niles by 1851. Nevertheless, it was now known as the "Milwaukee Plank Road" and a forerunner of IDOT's tollways. To pay for the planking, tolls were collected: 10 cents at Irving Park, 15 cents at Tower, 25 at Jefferson Park, 35 cents at Niles and 45 cents at Wheeling.

In 1877, John Behm built the Union Hotel and Hall, a two-story frame building at 124 S. Milwaukee Ave., the establishment with the longest history of any in Wheeling. It was sold to Charles Wenzlaff in 1916, and the

Behms opened a restaurant on the east side of the street at 241 South, where Hackney's is now. In 1917 Milwaukee Ave. was paved and "Restaurant Row" boomed.

The Union Hotel bore a sign proclaiming it "Auto Stop No. 1" for Chicago travelers headed north. In 1924 the hotel was sold to Felix Rogalski, who was the owner when the original frame building burned down on Dec. 26, 1925. It was rebuilt with red brick, was owned by Frank Miramonti and George Palm in 1947 when *Gourmet Magazine* quoted its prices: "Perch dinner, \$2.50; chicken or pot roast with gravy, \$3." The hotel underwent a series of owners, with names including The Savoy, Cafe Angelo, Hooligan's Disco, The Gallery, Kisses, and currently Billy and Company.

BY 1893, the bicycle craze reached its peak and women's clothing went from bustles to bloomer suits as they rode out from Chicago and neighboring communities to eat at the famous Wheeling restaurants. By this time the lower-wheeled cycles called "safety bikes" came into use.

Although Milwaukee Avenue still wasn't paved, early Fords, Appersons and Stanley Steamers found their way to Wheeling, the women wearing veils, the men wearing goggles, and both wearing dusters for good reason.

The Union Hotel and Hall played a significant role in the history of the Village in early June, 1894. It was here that a meeting was held to plan incorporation of the Village. Because of the number of taverns springing up and the rowdiness of many of the patrons, especially those from a settlement of



The Chicago House at 141 S. Milwaukee Ave. was built in 1873 by George Armbruster on the site now occupied by Hein's Pub.

railroad workers from a village known as Everett or West Lake Forest, it was decided that a local government would have to be formed to make and enforce laws.

After incorporation, the first village ordinance was to issue dram shop licenses to Kurt Knoblauch for the Chicago House, C.F. Metz for the Columbia Hotel, Jacob Schwingel for Schwingel House, John Behm for the Union Hotel, Herman Harmening for the Wheeling House and Andrew G. Horcher for the Wisconsin Central Hotel. The latter two fronted on what is now the Soo Line Railroad, south of Dundee Rd.

THE TAVERNS and restaurants were supported by local workers from the brewery, sawmills and cheese factories as well as by the outsiders. They gave work to Wheeling women as cooks, waitresses and chambermaids.

In some cases, restaurant owners built wide porches around old farm houses on Milwaukee Avenue. They were mostly family operations. Marshall Balling, Wheeling's historian, describes the restaurants as being "elegant in a family way. Varnished and polished wainscoting and starched curtains. Clean, neat and substantial."

One early tavern with a long history was the Chicago House at 141 S. Milwaukee, across from the Union Hotel. In 1901 it was taken over by Henry Hartmann and called "Hartmann's Chicago House." In 1917 the business was moved into a new cement block building at 393 S. Milwaukee and presided over by Henry's son, Harold. In 1955, Adam Schieck took over and the name changed to "Adam's Hartmann House." This sign is still visible on the ice house at the rear. Following ownership by Frank Marimonti and George Palm, the restaurant was

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known as The Spaghetti Factory and, presently, The Crab House.

The original Chicago House was on the front of the same property occupied by Periolat's Brewery. After changes in ownership and an extensive face lift, the Chicago House building became the Wheeling Amvets Post 66 which now is located on Old McHenry Road. The site is now occupied by Hein's Pub and Liquor Store and Wheeling Auto Parts. Friday night fish fries and music by Dick Henson's one-man band now are featured at the Pub.

CHARLES WENZLAFF went from ownership of the Union Hotel to an operation under his own name at 144 N. Milwaukee. The ownership and name changed to Kristoff's, and it is now the oriental Tien Tsin restaurant.

The John Schminke home at 61 N. Milwaukee, built in the 1880s, later became Haggerstrom's, a wrought iron studio and gift shop, which was followed by the Seven Countries restaurant. Since 1969 it has been Don Roth's operation in Wheeling.

The Gazebo, an antique filled restaurant, occupies the original Redlinger farmhouse and is a part of the Wheeling Sale Barn complex.

With paving in 1917 came a larger influx of cars; the Ford "Fliver" was priced at \$350. This was the year the Knights of Columbus built the Columbian Gardens, later known as the Bon Aire and as Chevy Chase Country Club, at one time under the ownership of Skidmore and Johnson. In the Roaring Twenties the famous and infamous arrived in Duesenberg SJs and Rolls Royce Phantoms to dance to the music of the big bands of the Dorseys, Benny Goodman, Ted Weems or Vincent Lopez, playing "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Who Cares?" and "Tea for Two." Later, flappers with bee-stung lips wearing short, fringed skirts and headache bands or cloche hats, and men with slicked down hair, raccoon

coats and bell bottom trousers, complete with hip flasks, did the Charleston to "Anything Goes" and "Ain't We Got Fun?"

Chevy Chase is now owned and operated by the Wheeling Park Dist., dispenses legal liquor, and is becoming known for its sedate Wednesday night dances and chicken and fish fries on Wednesday and Friday nights.

In the early twenties, Wheeling had a population of 350 and 17 taverns. Whiskey was distilled in various barns in the general area, for local consumption as well as export during Prohibition. Some restaurant owners bought whiskey by the barrel and hid it in barns and cellars. They brought it into the taverns for serving in coffee pots and other disguises. More exotic liquor, Canadian or Scotch, came by way of crime syndicate bootleggers who came into town in trucks disguised as various legitimate businesses.

According to Marshall Balling, "Every few months word of a raid came from the State's Attorney's office. The government would seal off the bar-room and the bar would open in another room or, once in the case of the Union Hotel, in the woodshed. Gangs competed to supply liquor and ran bookie operations in back of the taverns and placed slot machines in bars. Even the Royal Blue grocery had a bar.

Following the repeal of Prohibition and after World War II, Milwaukee Avenue shed its honky-tonk image and settled down to offering a variety of good restaurants which still attract patrons from all over. Banchet's famous Le Francais is on the site once occupied by Borchardt's Tavern at 269 S. Milwaukee and attracts patrons who arrive, in some instances, from either coast by plane at Palwaukee Airport. Jamies at 604 N. Milwaukee was the Fulton Fish Market in 1976 and the Fireplace in 1973. Hans Bavarian Lodge, owned by Hans Ammeloux in 1967 had an earlier life as Ernie's

Bavarian Lodge and, still earlier, as Hessling's. It has been in the Berghoff family since 1978 and is noted for its Octoberfests.

Toppers, at 933 N. Milwaukee, was formerly known as Edie's 19th Hole. What had been Tony Blum's restaurant at 920 N. Milwaukee opened as Ricketts in 1960. The 94th Aero Squadron is a theme restaurant on the edge of Palwaukee Airport that opened in 1978.

Two Doves Greek restaurant is in a space formerly occupied by Welflin's Variety Store. The Wheel Inn at 39 S. Milwaukee burned in 1972, and the Wheeling Trust and Savings Bank replaces the Wheeling Inn, at one time known as "Red Mary's" C.F. Metz's Columbia Tavern site, also that of a bowling alley owned by Arthur Miller in 1952, now is in a state of transition from Lum's to My Pi. Mors Place, a hotel and rathskellar, was demolished in the early 1900s when Frank Forke bought

4½ acres on the east side of Milwaukee, south of Dundee, to build a home, funeral home and automobile garage.

AS FOR THE Filkins tavern-hotel, it lasted longer than Joseph Filkins who died in 1857 after a five year career as a hardware dealer in Chicago. His old hotel on the northwest corner of Milwaukee and Dundee was torn down in 1918.

The accompanying material on Milwaukee Ave. will appear in an expanded form in a history of Wheeling which is being compiled by volunteers under the direction of E. Albert Fantl, curator and director of the Wheeling Historical Museum. Anyone who would like to contribute is invited to call the museum at 537-3119.

(Wheeling resident Barbara K. McIntyre is the author of this article).