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Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

Duggan's Irish Pub on Woodward near 13 Mile features hard-to-find recipes from restaurants and drive-ins that have been gone for decades.

Eat up Woodward

It's been a dining destination for generations

Tom Greenwood / The Detroit News

Woodward has long been known for cars, cruising and concrete, but when it comes to food, glorious food, M-1 could easily be called "Mmmmmm-mmmmm-1."

From Detroit to Pontiac, Woodward has been the home of hundreds of restaurants, drive-ins, coffee shops, grills, greasy spoons, cafes, cafeterias, coney islands, pizzerias, sandwich shops, hamburger huts, hash houses, breakfast joints, pancake houses and chicken shacks.

Many, if not most, of the establishments have gone to restaurant heaven, but longtime favorites are still hanging in there.

As for the dearly departed diners of yesteryear,

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well, the memories linger on.

"Going out for dinner was a big deal at our house," said former Clawson resident Dave Urban, now of Santa Barbara, Calif.

"We liked to go to the Tel-Way on Woodward. They had these great little burgers. I always thought I could eat a dozen, but could actually only slam down four or five."

Michael Witty, a University of Detroit Mercy business professor, knows why so many restaurants have called Woodward home over the past two centuries: location, location, location.

"It's a main-line road for Michigan, much like Market Street is for San Francisco," said Witty.

"For decades dining on Woodward was part of the 'shopping on Woodward' experience for Detroiters. You shopped at Hudson's or Kern's or Crowley's, then you ate at an area restaurant. This went all the way up Woodward."

Former Royal Oak resident Susan Avery, 52, fondly remembers toiling as a waitress at one of the avenue's most popular restaurants: the Susie Q, which was just north of 12 Mile, (now the site of a pet supply store).

"It was always busy, that's for sure," said Avery, a registered nurse who lives in Maine. "I worked there my senior year in high school and all through college. It was a fun place to work; a good place to make the transition from high school to college. It was a hopping, busy place. They had all-you-could-eat specials on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Those specials were real big with families."

According to Avery, the Susie Q was known for its fish and chips and other fried treats.

"They had the best onion rings. After I had worked there for five years, the owners gave me a gift certificate marking the occasion. My boyfriend, now my husband, had a steak and I had the lobster tails. I think the entire bill came to about \$15."

If you want to talk about low prices, in 1942 the going rate for hamburgers, hot dogs, pie and hot chocolate at Ferndale's White Cruiser Time restaurant was 10 cents apiece.

Prices climbed higher (but not by much) in a 1960-era advertisement for Detroit's Flaming Embers Restaurant, an institution on Woodward at Grand Circus Park where passers-by could watch flamboyant grill jockeys flip steaks as if they were conducting the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. They offered a T-bone, baked potato, salad and soft drink for \$1.19.

Rochester Hills resident Tom Schmitt remembers the Howard Johnson's Restaurant in Royal Oak.

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Fondly remembered

Many Metro Detroiters have fond memories of these Woodward establishments, now closed or relocated:

Flaming Embers: Grand Circus Park and Woodward. The forerunner of Ponderosa and Bonanza-type steak-atoriums, this eatery offered inexpensive food and cheap entertainment to passers-by who watched grill jockeys broil steaks with flair, flare and flames.

Lelli's: This upscale Italian restaurant opened in 1939 in the 7600 block of Woodward within the shadow of the old GM headquarters. It closed after a kitchen fire in 2000.

Greenfield's Restaurant: 2900 block of Woodward

Sunken Ship Lounge: 12100 Woodward, Highland Park. Patrons dined in the "atmosphere of an old Great Lakes schooner." They could also watch swimmers in the Monterey Motel pool through the windows in the "underwater cocktail lounge."

Paradiso: Four blocks north of Six Mile

Vanelli's: Between Six Mile and Seven Mile

Roumell's Seafood Grotto: Half-mile north of Six Mile

Handy Drive In: In the 22200 block of Woodward, in Ferndale

Red Barn hamburgers: Near the Detroit Zoo

White Cruiser Time: Woodward and Breckenridge, in Ferndale. Motto: "We seat 5,000 eight at a time."

Big Boy: 10 Mile and Woodward. It was very popular during the heavy cruising period of the '50s and '60s.

Dipsy Doodle: Interstate 696 and Woodward

Bel-Aire Drive-In: 4600 block of Woodward. In a June 1954 ad, it touted the latest "west coast rage," the taco.

Totem Pole: Just north and next to Big Boy, this joint with the circular drive was the hot spot for cruisers. Home of the famous Big Chief burger, it's now a Burger King.

Hedge's WigWam: Woodward and 10 Mile. Was it a restaurant, a drive-in or a gift shop? Nobody was quite sure, but you could get something to eat, buy a souvenir and talk with the three wooden Indians in the parking lot.

Guilio's Pizzeria: Just north of 11 Mile. This was a hot spot for students from Dondero and Berkley high schools.

Susie Q: Just north of 12 Mile. It was a favorite among teens and families, and was known for its great onion rings, fish and chips and its "special SQ" salad dressing.

Aunt Fannie's Restaurant: Next to the Susie Q, this southern plantation-themed family restaurant specialized in fried chicken.


Maverick's: 23000 block of Woodward. Specialty was the Big Ranch Steakburger. In 1958 you could purchase a crispy whitefish dinner, fried "taters" and creamy slaw for 75 cents.

Alban's Bottle and Basket/Deli: Near Maple. Kind of upscale but casual, this longtime Birmingham tradition offered patrons steaks, seafood and sandwiches.

Kitchen's Open

Chicken Shack (est. 1956)

Hunter House hamburgers (est. 1952, home of small, greasy, onion-infused killer burgers)

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"Their Friday night fried clam dinners were very popular," said Schmitt, 47, who works in the auto industry. "The dinner came with something they called a 'toastie,' which was sort of like a square toasted cornmeal muffin.

"And on Saturdays everyone piled in for ice cream, particularly during the summer. People remember the scoops, which kind of came to a point like a clown's hat. They served the ice cream with little vanilla wafers.

"Hojo's was a pretty popular place."

Recipe detective

If there's a ground zero for Woodward gourmets, it would have to be Duggan's Irish Pub, just north of 13 Mile in Royal Oak. The two-story green-and-gold building is known for the best pub grub on the strip, featuring hard to find recipes from restaurants and drive-ins that have been gone for decades.

"We feature a number of original recipes," said Larry Payne, owner of the pub, where the walls are studded with decorated photos, menus and other souvenirs from the many drive-ins that lined Woodward Avenue. "The Big Chief burger from the Totem Pole, the Five by Five burger from Ted's and the fish and chips recipes from the Susie Q. I graduated from Royal Oak's Dondero High School in 1961, so I used to cruise to all those places when I was a teenager."

Payne's first restaurant was in Oxford, where he featured the Big Chief burger. "I sold so many of them that I couldn't believe it," Payne said.

"That's when I decided to sell that restaurant and move to Woodward. We have a lot of menus and souvenirs of other Woodward restaurants. People find them in drawers or packed away in trunks and they all bring them here where we put them on display."

Payne had to play the role of detective to dig up his burger and fish and chips recipes.

"The owner of the Totem Pole would only let me have half the recipe," Payne said with a laugh.

"Then I got the other half of the recipe from Benny Bennington, who was a manager at the Pole until he passed away. He also helped me to find the other recipes which I bought from the families that owned Ted's and Susie Q."

Fine dining at both ends

Currently, there are ritzy restaurants anchoring each end of Woodward: The Whitney, in midtown Detroit, and the Fox & Hounds, in Bloomfield Hills. The Whitney -- with its chandeliers, finely burnished woodwork, stained-glass windows and facade of rose granite -- is 113 years old.

The mansion became a restaurant in 1986 and has been known for fine dining in an elegant

Sign of the Beef Carver

Athens Coney Island (est. 1964, hots, malts and milkshakes what more does one need?)

The Phoenicia (est. 1970s on Woodward, in Highland Park, now on Old Woodward, in Birmingham)

Om Cafe (macrobiotic food: Hey, where else are you going to go if you have hankering for steamed kale and aduki beans washed with beet juice?)

Como's (est. 1961, pizza, pizza and pizza plus an large outdoor dining area)

Foran's Irish Pub

The Majestic Cafe (formerly The Gnome)

Union Street (which dates its history back to a 1930s restaurant called Arturo's)

Pasquale's (est. 1954, formerly on the east side of Woodward, now on the west side next to Duggan's)


Monty's Grill, Peabody's Restaurant & Bar

Trini & Carmen's Mexican Restaurant, formerly in Pontiac, now in Waterford Township

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atmosphere.

Probably the oldest continuously operated restaurant on Woodward is the Fox & Hounds, at Long Lake Road and Woodward. Instantly recognizable by its gold leaf roof, the Fox & Hounds has been around since 1928.

"Originally, it was a stopping point for auto executives making the two-day trip between Flint and Detroit," said general manager David Duey.

"They could stop for a meal and stay overnight. Over the years it's also been a gas station, grocery store and flower shop, but we have always served food, right from Day One."

Duey said he has menus going back to the earliest days of the restaurant when shrimp cocktails went for 10 cents and a top-of-the-line dish like chateaubriand cost \$4.40.

"But we've always had two constants on the menu: prime rib and our seafood saute with white wine and butter," he said.

"They're still our strongest sellers."

Survivors still plugging away

A number of other longtime restaurants are still plugging away on Woodward; from fine dining establishments to ham-and-egggers that are as reliable and comfortable as a pair of old slippers.

Members of the "Woodward Olde Timers Honor Roll" include the Om Cafe, Monty's Grill, Chicken Shack, Pasquale's, the Original Pancake House, Peabody's, and the Hunter House.

Greg Mitchell, owner of Royal Oak's Athens Coney Island, is pretty sure he knows why his place has been serving Metro Detroiters for decades.

"We've had the same philosophy since we opened in 1963," Mitchell said. "Be honest, work hard every day, be consistent and serve a coney that keeps them coming back. I've always believed in working hard, going home at night and then coming back the next day to do it all over again."

Let's face it; you might run out of gas on Woodward, but you'll never go hungry.

You can reach Tom Greenwood at (313) 222-2023 or tgreenwood@detnews.com.

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