

What's for Dinner?

Looking through Fairmont telephone directories from the past, it becomes very obvious that there were many restaurants available in or near Fairmont for a wide variety of tastes. Regretfully, many no longer exist today. There was the A & W Drive In, The City Hub, The Oaks Inn, Club 16, the Feed Bag, the Jolly Inn, the Melody Grill on Lake Ave., the Redwood Drive Inn Café, Ronnie's Restaurant, Serle's Café, the Sweet Shop Restaurant, the Toot-N-Tell, the Western Café, Lake Aires Supper Club, the Triangle Drive Inn, the Sweet Shop, and many, many more.

Today, it might be of interest to recall the names of some more of those establishments of the past, as well as where they were located. According to a 1939 *Sentinel* newspaper article entitled "Are You Hungry? Only 45 Places To Eat Here," the following are some of the restaurants of days gone by, as well as their locations at that period of time in our local history:

- Roger's Eat Shop at 913 North North Avenue;
- Sooner's Café at 712 North North Avenue;
- Barney's Café at 417 North North Avenue;
- Fairmont Hotel at 223 North North Avenue;
- Lou's Café at 211 North North Avenue;
- Way Down East on Highway 16;
- Rosie's Eat Shop on 1st Street;
- City Drug Store on North Avenue;
- Corn Crib just south of the Nicholas Theater;
- Peglau Pool Hall at 120 West 1st Street;
- Chile Bowl on the corner of North Avenue and Blue Earth Avenue;
- Philips 66 Lunch on Lake Avenue;
- Jim's "Hamburger Hut" on wheels served at auctions and football games;
- Serle's Café at 209 North North Avenue;
- Augusta Hotel at 121 East Blue Earth Avenue;
- Wimpy's Pantry across from the courthouse;
- Colonial Ice Cream Company at 212 East 3rd St.;
- Chase & Wilson at 205 North North Avenue;
- Barney's Café at 417 North North Avenue;
- Brad's Café at 220 North North Avenue, and many more.

In addition, there were numerous restaurants just outside the city limits of Fairmont, such as: the Red Horse Tavern on Lair Road, Gordy's Root Beer Tap on McKisson's corner, the Interlaken Inn at Interlaken Park, Tubby's just west of Fairmont, and more.

From the 1940's - An all night café was going to open at the Bowlmor in 1946, Sparky's Grill opened in 1946 just east of the Gilbert Hotel, Koenig's Luncheonette in the Ben Franklin Building on North North Avenue opened in 1947 and as a daily feature served a roast turkey dinner including mashed potatoes, vegetables, and dressing for \$0.50. The Coffeepot opened in 1948, The Gables Drive-In was located at McKisson's Corner, and

Rueben and Alta Olander sold their “Nickel and Dime” eat stand business after an estimated six million hamburgers have been fried by the Olanders over sixteen years. They admitted that they almost waited too long to raise their price from five and ten-cent hamburgers to ten and fifteen cents.

Alas, in 1949 coffee was to hit ten cents a cup in Fairmont. A *Sentinel* article from November of 1949 stated, “Fairmont coffee guzzlers, hitch up your belt and dig deeper into your jeans, because effective on Thursday morning, across the counter coffee here will cost ten cents a cup.” The price hike did not come without much consideration as members of “Bureau 8 of the Chamber of Commerce,” restaurant owners, and other businessmen met to discuss the increase. However, it’s interesting to note that a later *Sentinel* article stated that “All but two of the local food and java dispensaries chucked the decision to raise coffee to a dime a cup, for the time being at least, in the face of unfavorable public opinion.”

From the 1950’s - An article from the June 11, 1952, edition of the *Sentinel* stated that the “Rainbow Café Opens Thursday.” It was located at 110 W. First Street and would serve breakfast, noon lunches, and dinners. Menu items included chow mein to take out and Italian spaghetti. Also, a sandwich shop was to open in the Bowlmor in 1950, Ozzie’s Café had new owners, the Beach Club, formerly known as the Merrie Garden at Interlaken, opened under new management in 1952, the Lunch Box located across from the Nicholas Theater at 210 South North Avenue had an open house in 1953, and the Toot-N-Tell was located at 1000 North State Street.

Milly’s Eat Shop opened in 1955 at 117 West First Street in Fairmont. Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Milbrandt were the owners. It was said to have had five booths and thirteen stools and served steaks plus a full line of meals.

Ronnie’s Café, located at 110 W. First Street, opened in 1957. The café was operated by Mrs. Ronnie Jaqua, and had a staff of eleven full-time employees, including two chefs. This air conditioned café would serve regular meals and lunches as well as Sunday dinners.

Over the years, Fairmont has certainly provided its citizens with a multitude of excellent dining establishments, each seeming to have its own unique characteristics that in turn appealed to many different tastes. Those mentioned above are but a few of the restaurants from the past that many of you may remember, some which lasted for many years, and others but for a few. Many restaurants have come and gone in Fairmont, of which many of us very likely have fond recollections of their specialties, the ambiance, and the pleasant memories associating our experiences at that time in our lives with their existence.