

## Larry's Restaurant boasted of 'western' steak to appeal to cowboy-loving public

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242 Meeting St.

Today: The parking lot opposite FIG

Yesterday: Larry's Restaurant, 1941-1955

On the menu: Broiled western filet mignon with mushroom buttons Parisien, \$2 (Dec. 24, 1942)

John Larry, a Folly Beach developer who at one point owned the Folly Hotel, Folly Bathhouse and Folly Pier, in 1941 affixed a two-story-tall neon sign to the facade of his new restaurant. The lettering promised seafood, air conditioning and "western steak."

Steak wasn't the only regional specialty on the menu. Larry also sold Vermont turkey, Maine squab and Virginia ham in his fluorescent-lit restaurant, located directly across from the Argyle Hotel.

But beef ostensibly raised and roped by real cowboys was a top draw in 1941, when the Old West had such a hold on Hollywood that the column announcing Larry's opening ran alongside an ad for Gene Autry's film "Melody Ranch." "It's astonishin'," the Majestic Theater promised would-be moviegoers.

"Americans of the 1930s and 1940s had ample reasons for wanting songs about the mythic West," Richard Aquila explained in his groundbreaking study of the American West in popular culture. "The vision of the United States as a pastoral, idyllic nation that promoted opportunity, freedom and justice for all appeal(ed) to Americans experiencing the urbanization, industrialization and alienation of modern times."

So they wanted to hear from cowpokes, and eat like them, too. In 1931, American Cattle Producers magazine lamented, "even local meat appears on hotel menus as 'western steak.'"

Larry was born in Greece, and in 1926 tried his luck selling hot dogs in Florida ("They have returned," The Sunday News crowed when he came back, reminding readers that Larry and his partner had vowed to "ride on the crest of the boom wave" to permanent residency in the Sunshine State.) Still, his fluency in ranch cuisine wasn't totally without precedent: As The News and Courier pointed out when Larry in 1935 wed Viola Sterlakos, his father-in-law "long has been noted for his chile con carne."

The wedding menu consisted of chicken, lamb, ripe olives, celery and cheese. In other words, no steak was served - western or otherwise.

Hanna Raskin

- Caption: Larry's Restaurant once stood across Hasell Street from the present-day FIG restaurant. File/Wade Spees/STaff
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