

Business Watch

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Dining Out In The 40s

People come from all over South Carolina to eat in Charleston's restaurants. Fortunately, the Holy City has a wide variety of places to eat that offer an equally wide variety of food.

It hasn't always been that way.

The many restaurants in Charleston today are a far cry from the handful of restaurants, bunched mainly on the peninsula, that were in operation during the early 1940s. Charleston was beginning to grow and people in those days had money to spend on eating out.

Food wasn't easy to obtain during the tension-filled days of World War II, however, and that explains why there were so few restaurants. Most simply ate at home.

There was even what was advertised as "an acute shortage of whiskey." True. An advertisement that appeared on Nov. 26, 1943 in The News and Courier stated: "An acute shortage of whiskey exists in the United States. At the present high rate of consumption, supplies could be exhausted in less than a year."

People had cut down on their eating, but they surely were drinking a lot.

It was the day of Spur Cola and a jingle that was on the lips of many beer drinkers. It went like this:

Here's to the beer
That made Milwaukee famous;
Here's to the beer
That made a nation cheer
Just the kiss of the hops
That makes the world seem brighter;
Here's to Schlitz,
America's most distinguished beer.

Pazo ointment was the big number in those days for the relief of piles. They're called hemorrhoids today.

Peter Lorre hosted the spooky radio program "Suspense," sponsored by Roma Wines.

People were washing their clothes with Rinso, Super Suds, Oxydol and Duz. They were washing their bodies with bars of Lifebouy, Sweetheart, Lux or Ivory soap.

For those who enjoyed dining out, there was

Henry's on Market Street, and the Phoenix Cafe. Complete dinners at the Phoenix ranged from \$1 to \$2. The seating capacity of the Phoenix was 100 people.

Sunday dinner was an occasion at the Francis Marion Hotel. An advertisement in The News and Courier on Saturday, Nov. 6, proclaimed a top price of \$2 for broiled Maine lobster in drawn butter, with shoestring potatoes. Prime rib of beef dinner was \$1.50. Most of the seafood dishes were \$1.30 to \$1.50.

One of the most popular eating places on King Street, which was the absolute hub of all business activity in those days, was Woolworth's lunch counter.

If you wanted to ride out of town for Sunday dinner, you could use up some of your precious rationed gasoline and drive to Summerville for dinner at the Squirrel Inn. Sunday dinner with all the trimmings was \$1.35.

The Idle Hour Restaurant at 1067 King St. advertised "moderate prices" and the fact that "your patronage will be appreciated."

There was a popular restaurant at 242 Meeting St. called Larry's. It was closed on Monday. In the ads which were published in the Charleston newspapers, Larry's boasted "For The Treat Of Your Life, Dine At Larry's." Another line in the restaurant's ad read: "The quiet atmosphere found at Larry's is inducive to fine dining."

One of the really fun places to go in downtown Charleston during the early and middle 1940s was the Helene Curtis Lounge and Grill at 368 King St. Just try and find the spot today where the Helene Curtis Lounge and Grill used to be.

Gayden Brothers Cigar Store on King Street was a great place to get milkshakes and sandwiches and the best bowl of chili in town.

There were a few others, including the Belmont Cafeteria and Grill (if you can believe that) and the Horse Shoe Lounge and Grill, where "unescorted ladies are always welcome."

Lounges and grills were big back then. You don't hear much about them any more.