

Do they serve any food in this place?

Today there are over 20 food service establishments in Saugatuck, another 12 in Douglas, and 9 more in the Township. Most are open even after summer is over. This is a remarkable number for towns with a combined population of just over 2,000. People in Saugatuck have always eaten well. A newspaper editor who visited in 1859 praised the food at the local hotel, even though he wasn't impressed with anything else in town.



A restaurant run by Jim Davis, with rooms for rent upstairs, shown in a photograph taken about 1901. The two-story structure was located on Butler Street to the north of the Leland Building, and in 1910, was the area's first Chinese restaurant, the Chop Suey. It later was one venue of the popular Soda Lounge, before being razed in 1968 along with the old bank building next door.

Beginning about 1870, what and where to eat became an important part of the area economy. A secondary benefit is that the young people of the town received early and extensive experience in the food service industry as wait staff and cooks.

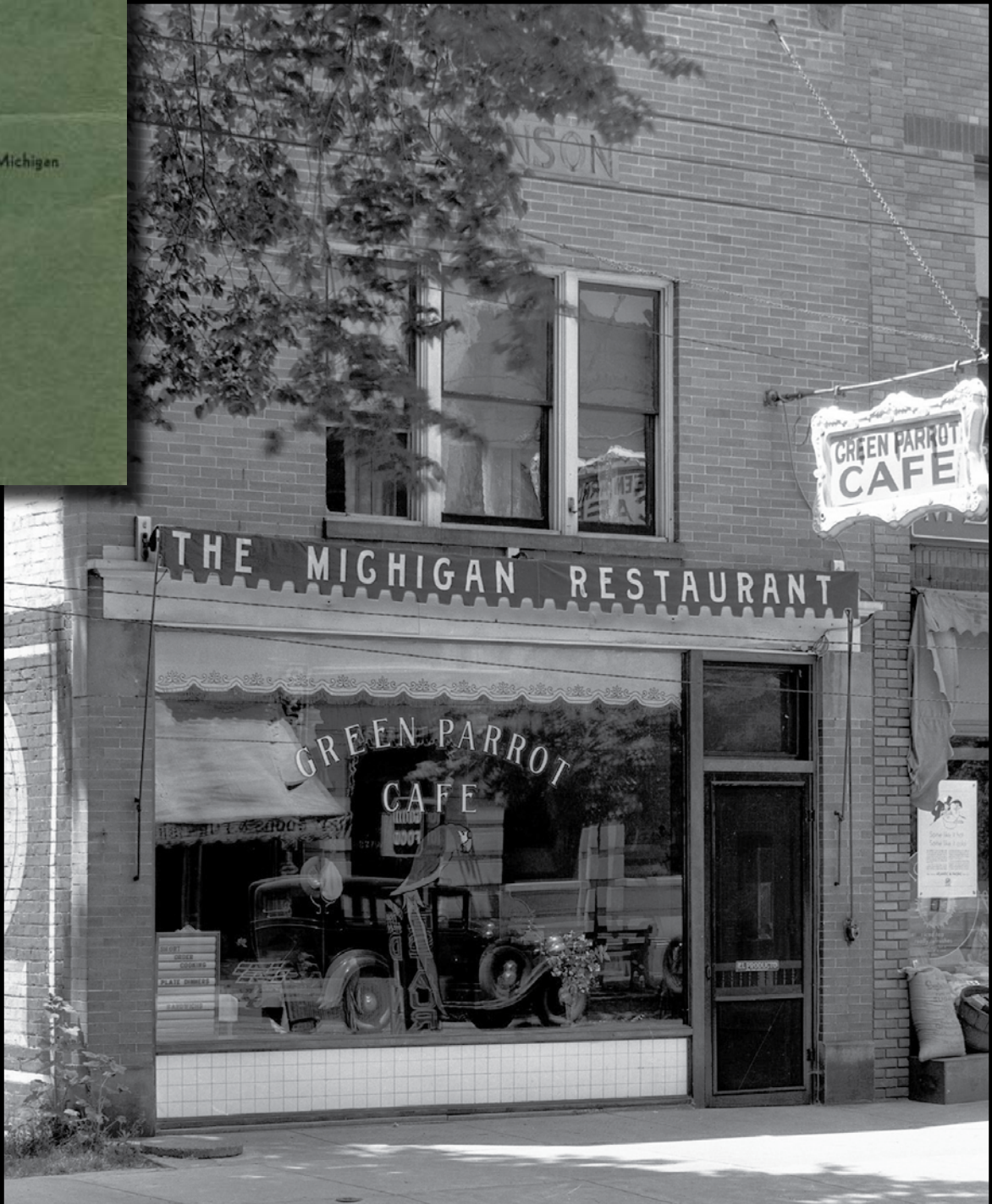


Eleanor Koning, left, and friends were some of the Saugatuck youngsters to gain early experience in the restaurant business, probably at Tara in Douglas, which was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Koning.

In the earliest days fried chicken was top of the menu because birds young and tender enough to fry were only available in the spring and summer when it was warm enough to hatch chicks. Oysters, which had to be imported from the East Coast, were popular in the 1870s and 1880s, and steaks and chops were major draws on the menu beginning about 1920. Today's top chefs specialize in locally grown fresh produce — and food-street fairs and “socials” bring thousands to the area.



The Italian section of the Walton Restaurant menu, probably in the 1940s. Thanks to chefs named Galli, Mocini, Mengarelli, Belardinelli, Palazzolo and Marro, Italian food has been served in Saugatuck since 1920, although spaghetti and chicken livers is seldom on the menu anymore.



In May of 1931 Mrs. D. E. Damoth opened the Green Parrot Café in the So-renson building.