

The Three Sisters Restaurant

Just north of Culver on Indiana Highway 17 was a restaurant called The Three Sisters. It was known for family atmosphere and delicious meals. Those who lived or vacationed in Culver in the years from 1948 to 1963 were treated to wonderful meals served by the Gass family.

Raymond Gass and his brother worked with their father in the Gass Lady's Shop in Huntington, Indiana. The two brothers continued operating the store after their father's retirement. After several years, Raymond longed for a change. He had always dreamed of having a little restaurant. His brother agreed to continue the clothing business on his own.

The Gass family enjoyed the cottage on Lake Maxinkuckee which they had purchased in 1943. Mr. Gass came to the conclusion that Culver was the place he would choose to have his restaurant. In 1948 he was able to purchase land on Highway 17 from Father Joseph Lenk. He then told his surprised family what he had done. By the time he took them to see the property, the land was being prepared for the building of the restaurant.

There were five children in the Gass family; the two eldest, Raymond and Jane, were away from home. The restaurant was named for the three daughters remaining at home, Norma, Dorothy and Mary.

The Three Sisters Restaurant started with a dining room, a counter with stools, a few tables and a drive-up service. Everything was prepared in one kitchen. The Gasses soon found that many of their customers preferred to have their meals in the restaurant. A dining room was added at the south. Still, there was not enough seating space; therefore, another dining room was added along with a kitchen large enough to serve the dining rooms. A separate building was constructed with a kitchen for the drive-up service.

There was a guest house with three bedrooms behind the restaurant for college girls who came to work during the summer months. They were housed without cost to them.

The restaurant would open for the summer soon after Easter. At the time, the three sisters were in school during the week in their hometown of Huntington. Norma and Dorothy were in high school and Mary was in eighth grade. On week-

**Three Sisters
Drive-Inn Restaurant**

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**The
Three Sisters
Drive-Inn**

The Place of
Fine Food

Located $\frac{3}{4}$ Mile
North of Culver
on
State Road 17



Welcome: During this our second season,
we trust you find our service much im-
proved.

Norma
Dorothy
and
Mary Gass

The cover of an early menu at The Three Sisters Restaurant featured the three sisters.

ends, in spring and fall, they would be in Culver helping at the restaurant.

One of the reasons for the restaurant's success, according to his daughters, was that their dad chose to buy quality meat at local markets. He traveled around the Culver area to buy the best. No frozen or pre-packaged meats were ever purchased. He would buy a whole beef loin and cut filets. Mary shared, "I

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had to cut so many filets I don't eat filet mignon to this day."

The sisters described the special fish for which the restaurant was known. "We sold a lot of walleyed pike. Dad got them out of Chicago. Many times he would be able to pick out just the size he wanted. We would get a ton of walleye packed in chipped ice in wooden crates. The head and scales would have been removed. The insides were not as clean as we wanted them to be. We had to finish the job. This would take all day; some of the fish would be cut into filets. A certain amount would be frozen, because even though a supply was coming in each week, we could not always get them as fast as we needed. We would get 400 to 500 pounds of fish each week."

Chickens were purchased from a local farmer. He would cut them in half, and the girls would finish cleaning them, as well. The chickens were soaked in salt water before they were prepared. All of the baking was made from scratch. The pies were homemade.

The regular prices for a dinner were \$1.50 for a half chicken, \$1.75 for a whole walleyed pike, \$2.75 for a T-bone steak and \$6 for a double sirloin for two.

The potatoes were peeled by hand and boiled. "If we had some time off with nothing to do, we'd find a shady spot under a tree and peel potatoes. That was our recreation," said Mary. It was Dot who suggested to her father that he might see if he could purchase a mechanical potato peeler. Sure enough, he found one. It was greatly appreciated.

In the morning, they would often receive a call from a gentleman asking if there had been some mashed potatoes left over from the previous evening. If the answer were yes, he would ask if it would be possible for Mrs. Gass to make some potato doughnuts. She always readily agreed. They were a favorite of many of the men in town. Their mother would find one of the biggest bowls she could and stir them up. She had no recipe; she just knew how to make them, and it only took a minute, as her daughters recollect.

As grandchildren came along, they were given jobs to do. Lynn Stoffel (Overmyer) was the first grandchild. When she was old enough, they put a little apron on her and would give her small tasks to do.

Dick Powell and June Allyson came to Culver to visit a



The Culver community's reputation for fine dining was well established during the years The Three Sisters Restaurant operated north of town on Indiana Highway 17.

relative at CMA and stopped by the restaurant for dinner. Lynn remembers that Mr. Powell gave her a kiss on the cheek. She then put a Bandaid on the spot, vowing never to wash it again.

The family continued to grow, and the younger grandchildren would be given small tasks as soon as they could see over the top of a table, such as putting garnish on the plates and filling small containers with apple sauce. Since it was being a part of the family, it was fun. As sons-in-law joined the family, they also helped with the weekend preparations at the restaurant and doing the financial accounting. It was indeed a family affair.

Lynn remembers fondly the summers she worked at the restaurant. She began when she was in fifth grade, starting with the job of scraping plates, the next year advancing to busing the tables before becoming a full-fledged waitress. Her grandfather told her that working in a restaurant would prepare her for anything she wanted to do in life.

When her husband, Lance, became a part of the family, he also was given a job. His father-in-law asked him to dig holes along the roadsides for posts with an arrow attached pointing the way to The Three Sisters Restaurant. One of these arrows can be seen at the Edgewater Grille.

The Sunday after Thanksgiving was the final big Sunday of the season. The object was to empty the cooler, freezer and pantry. The menu was printed on cardboard. When an item was gone, it was crossed out. On "Close-Out Sunday," chicken dinners were a dollar and steaks were a dollar and a half. They hoped the inventory would be depleted.

Mr. Gass sold the restaurant in 1963. It continued with

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the same name for several years under the new management.

The favorite pastime for the girls' free time was fishing. According to Dot, "We really pulled in those fish. The fishing was really good back then. We pulled in those old sun bellies and bluegills. We would fish all the time."

A new cane pole had to be purchased at the beginning of each summer. The choosing of a pole would take a good deal of time. It had to be just the right length and have the correct amount of flexibility.

The next step was getting the bait. The girls knew where to find what was needed for the fish they had targeted for that day. If minnows were the proper bait, they could get plenty by passing a seine a couple of times in the water in front of their cottage. Corncocks had been dumped by the bridge which was over the outlet at that time. The girls gathered a few corncocks, would bring them home, break them open and find red worms. Nightcrawlers and leaf worms could be found across the street. With a little dig-

ging, they would have enough bait. They also knew which rocks housed the crawdads.

Small turtles would sun themselves on their seawall. The girls would approach them quietly and put a mark on their backs with fingernail polish in the hope they might return.

Their dad bought a big Army raft. According to the younger sisters, the older girls in the family used it to float across the lake with their boyfriends. The younger sisters had a little boat with a motor and would follow the raft until they were shooed away. Eventually, they would be called back to tow the raft to shore. They would agree to do it, all the while threatening that, if they weren't treated better, they might not do it another time.

The three sisters did not choose to continue in the restaurant business. Norma (deceased) married and had a family of seven children. Dot studied to be a nurse. She also had an antique shop. Mary became a teacher and taught in the Huntington schools.

- Jo Dugger

Steamboat Carries Passengers on Lake



Jim Kinkaide of Elkhart is the skipper of the steamboat that carried passengers on Lake Maxinkuckee on August 10. (Photo by Jo Dugger)

On Sunday, August 10, the people of Culver along the lake shore downtown and at the town park were transported back in time to an era of innocence, romance and adventure. The weather was perfect: clear blue skies with puffy clouds and temperatures in the 70s. Lake Maxinkuckee was at her marvelous best with shining water reflecting the blue of the skies. The Ledbetter, with sails billowing to a fair wind, plied the northern half of the lake, and the steamboat, which began its life nearly 100 years ago as a lifeboat on the SS Alabama, took passengers on a ride along the shores of the town park as her steam whistle echoed across the lake.

On shore at the Culver Cove, interested observers were treated to a display of antique wooden boats and classic cars. Live music complemented the cheerfulness and friendliness of the crowd, and most indulged themselves with the ice cream and root beer, creating what we used to call a "black cow."

This was the Antiquarian and Historical Society's Ice Cream Social, held at the Cove for members of the society and their families. Well over 400 people attended the gala affair and were greeted and assisted by the AHS volunteers wearing skimmer hats and ribbon badges. Thirty new members joined the society that day and enjoyed the festivities. Everyone pronounced the event a great success and hoped we would do something similar next year.

Thanks must go to all the volunteers for their hard work and especially to the committee chairpersons for making this an event to remember:

- Frank Stubblefield - event chairman
- Robert Kreuzberger - antique boats and car committee
- Dick Brantingham - facilities committee
- Jim Bartlett - refreshment committee
- Dusty Henricks - volunteer committee
- Dorothy Peterson - registration committee



Antiquarian and Historical Society
P.O. Box 125
Culver, Indiana 46511-0125

Culver Library Board Accepts Donation

The following proposal was presented to the Culver-Union Township Library Board in August by Jennifer Shea on behalf of the Antiquarian and Historical Society of Culver:

"The Antiquarian and Historical Society Board met August 3, 2003, and I am here...to present their proposal. They have determined that at this time, they cannot afford the previously discussed \$50,000 payment and a \$2,500 annual lease fee for the use of the library room.

"However, the board wishes to make a gift of \$10,000 to the library board in appreciation of your efforts to keep the library downtown, contingent upon the library board agreeing at this time to grant the Antiquarian and Historical Society a first right of refusal on the use of the room for a period of two years.

"This would enable the Antiquarian Society to see if our finances improve to a point that we could enter into an agreement acceptable to both parties to use the room."

The Library Board accepted the proposal and the check. Our negotiations with the library board seem to be at a standstill for the present.

October Board Meeting

The Antiquarian Society Board will meet at the Summit Chapel School in Tippecanoe Township at 10 a.m. on Saturday, October 11.

A member of the Wythougan Valley Preservation Council board will be present to tell about the history and recent restoration of the one-room school. As always, Antiquarian Society members are welcome to attend the board meeting and may have a special interest in seeing this historic building.

To reach the Summit Chapel School from Culver, drive east on Indiana Highway 10 until you reach the school, at one of the highest points in Marshall County, and park east of the building.

Memorial Bricks in Park

We are still taking orders for memorial bricks to be installed in Heritage Park. This has become a popular way for our members to honor family members and friends. Call Agnes Bramfeld, 842-2477, or Dorothy Peterson, 842-3940, for information and the necessary forms for ordering.