



**IS COLLEGE CUISINE AN OXYMORON? FOR LEGIONS OF MU STUDENTS
OVER THE YEARS, THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OFF-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVES
TO A DIET OF RAMEN NOODLES AND MICROWAVE POPCORN.**

**STORY BY
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**PHOTO BY
ERNIE BLOCK**

Nothing lasts forever, especially in a college town like Columbia where fads and fashions rise and fall like blobs of wax in a lava lamp. What's all the rage for one generation of college students will likely be retro for the next.

But even in Columbia some things stand the test of time. One constant on the Columbia scene is a wide-ranging

menu of cafes and eateries that pop up near campus to help college students manage their munchies.

Ask Mizzou grads to recite some favorite memories and, along with recollections about all-nighters or a special professor, you're likely to hear a sigh or two for a favorite treat from a time when they didn't have a clue there could be both good and bad cholesterol. Forget

about Proust and his madeleines; MU alumni are more likely to remember a late-night run to The Bakery at 518 E. Broadway, where, in a run-down storefront, trays of hot-from-the-fryer doughnuts spiced the night air with the sweet essence of cinnamon and yeast.

Maybe they'll recall the cheap and gloriously greasy hamburgers from the Dine-A-Mite Drive-in, just north of

All-night diners such as Columbia's *Minute Inn* are an important link in the college town food chain. Now called the *Broadway Diner*, it specializes in "The Stretch," a chili-topped platter of eggs, cheese and hash browns.

campus on Ninth Street, or the Ku-Ku Drive-in at 18 N. Providence Road. A bagful of those burgers could ignite a gastric chain reaction and bust a gut without busting the bank. Then there were those plump burritos from Connie's El Sombrero, across from Peace Park at 209 S. Eighth St. In those pre-Taco Bell days, Mexican food was as exotic as hummingbird tongues to mid-Missouri palates.

All of those Columbia eateries bit the dust years ago, along with other culinary standbys, from familiar campus joints such as Gaebler's Black and Gold and the Topic Café to fancy-schmancy, white-tablecloth places such as Haden House and Breisch's. Restaurants have a high mortality rate, but a handful have made it over the long haul.

For some, the secret to success has been not to change a thing, like the bacon-and-eggs breakfast tradition at Ernie's Café and Steak House, downtown at 1005 E. Walnut St., or the sublime burgers served on squares of wax paper at Booche's Billiard Hall at 110 S. Ninth St.

For others, a location next to campus means that the same building has been home to a succession of eating spots. Take



STEWART PHOTOS

Shakespeare's Pizza, for example. It's held down the corner of Ninth and Elm streets, across from the J-School, for nearly 30 years — so long that it might seem that Shake's has always been there.

Before it was Columbia's premier pizza palace, that building was home to a long list of campus eating spots: Max's Campus Snacks, Max's Ham and Egger, Poor Richard's Almanac and the Campus Edge, to name a few of the more recent.

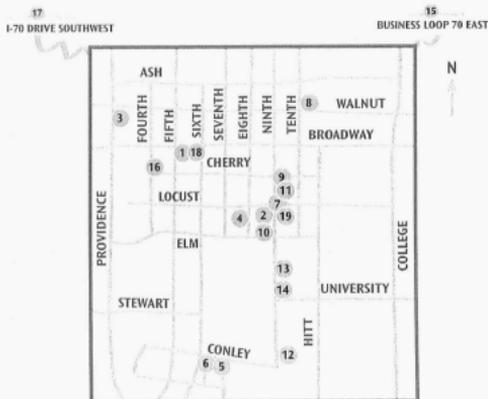
Today's students flock to a high-tech nightclub called Tonic at 122 S. Ninth St. That location has been a campus hangout since the 1920s, when students danced cheek to cheek at afternoon "tea dances" in what was then the Harris Café. In the

late 1960s, the same spot was home to G&D Steak House, a budget-friendly date destination where the holy trinity — a steak, baked potato and salad — cost only a few bucks. In the '80s and '90s, a venerable Chinese food emporium called the Peking Restaurant occupied the location.

In recent years, fast food has made inroads into what was once a world of mom-and-pop campus cafes. Generations of Mizzou students chowed down between classes at the M Bar on the ground floor of the Missouri Bookstore on a car-clogged Lowry Avenue. Today there's a McDonald's restaurant at the same spot, and Lowry Avenue has become a landscaped pedestrian mall.

Find Your Favorite Eateries, Present and Past

1. The Bakery 518 E. Broadway
2. Dine-A-Mite 219 S. Ninth St.
3. Ku-Ku Drive-In 18 N. Providence Road
4. Connie's El Sombrero 209 S. Eighth St.
5. Gaebler's Black and Gold Inn 706 Conley Ave.
6. Topic Café 702 Conley Ave.
7. Breisch's Restaurant 126 S. Ninth St.
8. Ernie's Café and Steak House 1005 E. Walnut St.
9. Booche's Billiard Hall 110 S. Ninth St.
10. Shakespeare's Pizza, Max's Campus Snacks, Max's Ham and Egger, Poor Richard's Almanac, Campus Edge 225 S. Ninth St.
11. Tonic, Peking Restaurant, G&D Steak House, Harris Café 122 S. Ninth St.
12. McDonald's, M Bar 909 Lowry St.
13. Chipotle, Ivanhoe, Romano's Pizza House, Henry J's 306 S. Ninth St.
14. Old Heidelberg, Ever Eat Café 410 S. Ninth St.
15. Jack's Gourmet Restaurant, The Coronado Club, Mel and Red's 1903 Business Loop 70 E.
16. Broadway Diner, Fran's Diner, Minute Inn 22 S. Fourth St. (new location)
17. Interstate Pancake House 1110 I-70 Drive S.W.
18. Lucy's Corner Café, Ron's Country Boy, Cornbread's Café, White House Café 522 E. Broadway
19. Long's Bar-B-Q 208 S. Ninth St.





COLUMBIA MEMORIAS PHOTO

Booeche's Billiard Hall has been a magnet for MU students for more than 100 years. USA Today rated Booeche's no-frills burgers — served on squares of wax paper — among the best in the country.

A building around the corner at 306 S. Ninth St., a block north of Middlebush Hall, has housed such student favorites as The Ivanhoe, Romano's Pizza House and Henry J's Italian restaurant. Now students flock there to grab a lunchtime burrito or taco at a fast-food Mexican place called Chipotle.

The granddaddy of all campus eateries has to be the Old Heidelberg Restaurant. The 'Berg, a student hangout since 1963, reopened this past September in a new building that replaced the original structure, gutted by fire in August 2003.

Beginning in 1930, long before the Heidelberg sold its first pitcher of beer, that spot at 410 S. Ninth St. was a family-run restaurant called the Ever Eat Café. Longtime owner Ralph Morris, Arts '34, once described the cafe as "an old farmer's-type place, with food that really stuck to your ribs."

It was nothing fancy, but the down-home food kept customers belying up to the horseshoe-shaped counter. The low prices didn't hurt, either. During the height of the Depression, lunch specials went for 35 cents, small hamburgers were a nickel, and two bottles of Budweiser cost a quarter.

Students could buy meal tickets

from the Ever Eat at the beginning of the month — on credit, if necessary — to help them stick to their food budgets. Morris and his mother, Bessie "Mom" Morris, both now deceased, made their customers feel like members of the family.

A few longtime Columbia restaurants have survived by accommodating their customers' changing tastes and growing pocketbooks. Over the years, Jack's Gourmet Restaurant, 1903 Business Loop 70 E., has evolved from honky-tonk to haute cuisine. Mizzou students from the '30s and '40s might remember it as the Coronado Club or Mel and Red's. Back then, it was a drab cinder block beer hall and liquor store right on old Highway 40. Students hitchhiking home to St. Louis could stop in for a beer when rides were scarce.

Jack's current owner, Ken Applegate, is used to having MU graduates share their recollections about his restaurant's earlier days. "They come in and tell stories about when they used to be here and how they

courted their wife here," he says.

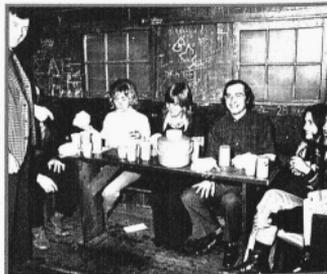
There's no telling how many nervous young men popped the big question while dining on chateaubriand and escargot in one of Jack's plush dark red booths. When they remodeled after a fire in 2002, Applegate and his wife, Melissa Naylor-Applegate, BS Ed '82, M Ed '92, were careful to maintain that atmosphere.

"After the fire, people would call us and say, 'You aren't going to take out the red booths, are you?' Well, we listened," Naylor-Applegate says. "Part of the romance of Jack's was the booths and the dark-paneled walls that looked very 'mafia.' It's an ambience that was special."

The Applegates heard other stories, too, about when couples jammed the sawdust dance floor and the Coronado Club was off-limits to Stephens College students. The restaurant went upscale in the late 1960s when Jack Crouch — the "Jack" in Jack's Gourmet — bought the place, gussied it up and started serving fine cuisine.

Like all college towns, Columbia has always had an appetite for after-hours eats, and all-night cafes have been there to fill that niche. The Broadway Diner has been slingin' hash since the 1940s in its earlier incarnations as the Minute Inn and Fran's Diner. After nearly a half-century at a

The Shack was never accused of putting on airs, even as tumbledown, graffiti-carved additions sprouted up around the original 1920s lunch wagon. Before the Shack burned in 1988, cook Donna Weston kept the crowds happy with her signature Shackburgers slathered with a secret barbecue-style "Shack sauce."



LEFT: PHOTO COURTESY OF JOE FRANKE

Broadway location just west of Providence Road, owner Ed Johnson's lease ran out, and he was forced to move the operation off-Broadway to its current home a few blocks away at 22 S. Fourth St.

Two wacky brothers named "Poor Ken" and "Lonesome Del" Gebhardt ruled the late-night roost on the west side of town during the 1970s. Their often- raucous, always-jammed Interstate Pancake House on I-70 Drive Southwest served up a respectable plate of hotcakes, but the dapper pair of entrepreneurs probably were better known for their lowbrow TV ads:

"Pie are square," Del would intone solemnly into the camera.

"No, Del," Ken would insist, "pie are round." Then he'd smack his partner in the face with a cream pie and giggle, adding, "Pie are messy." Cornball stuff, but it brought in the customers.

Corn was key to the success of another all-night eatery in the heart of downtown — Cornbread's Café at 522 E. Broadway. The place was named for its owner, Jim "Cornbread" Martin. Everyone knew

Cornbread Martin, BS Ed '58, as a bruising lineman for the Tigers, but he also dished up a mean breakfast. Ham and eggs with coffee and all the fixings went for \$1.25 during the cafe's heyday in the late 1960s.

When Martin and his partner, Jack Overton, BS BA '56, took over what had once been the White House Café, they expanded to 24-hour service and added more seating. "The place was always pretty busy, and there were a lot of sleepless nights," Martin says. "We served good food, and we ran a fairly strict place. We didn't allow any trouble."

For Overton, the restaurant trade was just a sideline to his home-building business. As an MU student working at the Harris Café and other student hangouts, he says he quickly learned that the restaurant business is the hardest work there is.

Overton also worked the late shift for several years at Long's Bar-B-Q on South Ninth Street, across from what is now Shakespeare's. A plate of toast and eggs cost 40 cents, ham or bacon added another 20 cents, and a side order of hash

browns brought the grand total to 80 cents. "And what a meal it was for 80 cents," Overton recalls.

Long's Bar-B-Q also exposed Overton to an enduring mantra of real estate: location, location, location. "The reason for most of those little restaurants' success was their proximity to the University," he says. "Kids would come out of their classes and come pouring across the street."

Sundays were especially busy, Overton recalls. "We would just get run over for the Sunday rush." On those evenings, Long's was thronged with hungry students. All 28 stools filled up, the milkshake mixer kept up a steady roar, and a line of students stood behind each stool, waiting for a vacancy. "The business was just incredible," he says.

Although restaurant work might be grueling, there's another surefire adage to explain Columbia's rich restaurant heritage, Overton says: "Everybody's gotta eat." ☼

