



FLAT FRENCH
PUB & BREWING

Florida
BEACHS
IN THE HEAVENS

Breisch's

Breisch's

Sub-S

BROADWAY BREWERY

FIELD HOUSE

CLARK'S SODA
LUNCHEONETTE

PIZZA TREE

THE MALLS

7th

JAMESON

JAMESON

RED BARS



COMO

EATS

A NOSTALGIC LOOK AT LOCAL NOSH | BY MARGARET ENGEL, BJ '73 | ILLUSTRATION BY BLAKE DINSDALE, BA '99

It's been 13 years since their Calvary Episcopal Church wedding in Columbia, but Sonia Weinberg, BJ '02, and Wright Thompson, BJ '01, still wish they could have been married at their first-choice venue, Shakespeare's Pizza. ¶ "They couldn't close the restaurant for us because they'd have to disappoint too many customers," Weinberg says of the revered campus hangout. "We could have put a tent in the parking lot for dancing and everyone could have had unlimited pizza." ¶ Her regret is part olfactory and part nostalgic. When the couple studied at the J-School, they were just yards away from the aroma of the parlor's Masterpiece pizza (red onions, Canadian bacon and tomato sauce). The couple now lives in Oxford, Mississippi, definitely too far for takeout. But their attachment to the wildly popular restaurant hasn't waned. ¶ "Since it would be a smaller event, maybe we can have our 20th-anniversary party there," Weinberg says, wistfully. "It would be Wright's dream." ¶ He's not alone in his food reveries. The emotional pull of Columbia's restaurants has former students and current residents happy to describe the varied and beloved food offerings.



← The Shack originally sat on what is now the circular drive fronting the Reynolds Alumni Center.

on waxed paper. Fortunately, these four venerable restaurants are still in business.

But many former hometown favorites — like the 63 Diner, with its B52 sirloin sandwich and Christmas trees hung upside-down from the ceiling during the holidays — are no more.

Even commercial districts are just memories. At the corner of Fifth and Walnut streets downtown, Tony's Pizza Palace operates out of the only building remaining from the Sharp End, which was Columbia's black business district during segregation. The building has historic designation now and surprisingly remains in the same family. Current landlord Ed Tibbs' father was the first to own the space.

Such longevity is unusual. There's a lot of turnover in the restaurant business, which can mean the demise of old reliables but also a healthy expansion of food choices.

Today, CoMo's nearly 200 restaurants cook up specialties that span the globe. The beloved standards of G&D Steakhouse's famed baked potatoes and sirloin are now joined by goulash at Caf  Poland and steamed shrimp dumplings and green curry at Thip Thai Cuisine.

Dining out is a big part of the city's culture, a departure from the special-occasion-only splurges Linder remembers from the 1970s. "The only time we went out for dinner was to celebrate our parents' anniversary at the Flaming Pit," she recalls. "Now even students go out at least twice a week for dinner."

Here are some morsels of food front-runners that Columbia diners shared with us.

COMO DID YOU KNOW?



Frontier Sustenance

Gentry's Tavern (1819–1870), CoMo's first tavern, served not only locals but also wayfarers on the Boonslick Trail. **Richard Gentry** was a colonel in the Missouri Militia, Columbia's first mayor, a senator and postmaster. When he died in 1839 in the Seminole Wars in Florida, **his wife, Ann**, became the first woman postmaster in the United States. Mizzou's first commencement (1843) kicked off with a procession from the tavern to campus.

Free-range Tavern Cuisine

Ad in an 1858 *Missouri Statesman*: "We wish to buy all kinds of Game, such as Rabbits, **Squirrels**, Turkeys, Quails, Ducks, Venison and Chickens. Also all kinds of Vegetables, for which the highest cash prices will be paid."



One hometown food fan, Kerri Linder, 51, was so taken with the culinary scene that she created food tours of Columbia restaurants. Born and raised here, Linder, BS Acc '90, began to research the history and personalities of the restaurants, their chefs, waitstaffs and owners. She assembled her knowledge into a highly appetizing book, *Iconic Restaurants of Columbia, Missouri* (The History Press, 2018).

In it, we learn that campus's best-known eatery, The Shack, began as a sandwich delivery service in 1921, run out of a car owned by the Chandler Davis family. What may have been the first food truck in Columbia expanded into the Davis Tea Room. It closed briefly during the Depression and reopened as Jack's Shack. Eventually, it was just The Shack, a joint with 25-cent beer nights, names carved into its walls and the place where student cartoonist Mort Walker, BA '48, hung out. Appropriately, he memorialized The Shack in his *Beetle Bailey* comic strip. Much to the dismay of Shack Burger fans, the campus hangout closed in 1984 and burned down on Halloween night in 1988.

Linder's book is a full plate of such culinary and business history.

From wild game to beaten biscuits and yes, brain sandwiches, Columbia restaurants have served both high and low cuisines. From canteens to grillrooms, they have fed everyone from thrifty students downing gyros at Tony's Pizza Palace to visiting parents spending freely at white-tablecloth establishments like the late Jack's Gourmet, with its escargot and bananas Foster.

Before dining halls were common on campus, a multitude of inexpensive lunch counters and diners catered to students. As a result, comfort and fast food dominated Columbia's gastronomy in its early years.

Thousands of students consumed Ernie's Caf 's steam-fried hamburger, the Broadway Diner's Stretch (hash browns topped with eggs, chili, cheese, peppers and onions), Mugs Up chili and root beer, and Booches cash-only burgers served

FRUGAL ME!

In 1958, Kee Groshong, BS '64, lived with seven others in a rooming house on Kuhlman Court, a street later torn up for Ellis Library. "You had to eat your meals out, and we went to the Bullpen Caf , a restaurant in the livestock sale barn on the east end of the Business Loop. You could buy a rib steak, fries, lettuce salad and toast for \$1.03, tax included. We were young, growing and had strong teeth to

eat that steak. Wow. We went there a lot," says Groshong, now 78, retired MU vice chancellor for administrative services. A big fan of The Pasta Factory and Sophia's, he's pleased Columbia continues to be an "eat-out community." His only dilemma is choosing restaurants with his wife, Diana. For her, Chinese is the prime cuisine. "If it were up to Diana, we'd be at House of Chow nearly every night."





↑ Like a little jazz with your green pepper rings? Murry's features solo piano most weeknights, a trio Saturday night and periodically hosts top musicians booked through the We Always Swing Jazz Series.

NIGHTS OF BEER AND ROSES

Being a restaurant owner in Columbia means you often have to decide whether to cater to students, townspeople or both. Bill Sheals, BA '78, owner of Murry's, a beloved jazz restaurant and community gathering place, is happy that his restaurant is patronized by customers who no longer take spring breaks. Murry's offers American food standards, plus uncommon items like frogs legs and fried green pepper rings dusted with powdered sugar.

For years, a standing group of civic leaders has met at Murry's on Mondays for cocktail hour. Tom Schultz, BJ '56, is one of nine men and one woman who arrives weekly at the group's regular table just inside the front door. There, they greet customers and tell stories. "You could leave for a month and they'll be telling the same stories, sometimes with new outcomes," Schultz says.

This sense of community breeds loyalty among Murry's clientele, including a patron who owned a funeral home. One Valentine's Day, he was overstocked with flowers and immediately thought of his No. 1 restaurant. He sent bouquets of roses for each of the restaurant's 30 tables. "We're a notoriously unglamorous place, so, of course, we told everyone where the roses came from," Sheals laughs. "It's not like they came off the graves, but we had fun telling the customers."

ALCOHOL, MY ALCOHOL

Let's face it, cheap beer is at the top of the food pyramid for many students. Hannah Milford, BHS '14, remembers the bargain food and drinks at Harpo's and Big 12.

"Thursdays, we went to the dueling piano bar for dollar tequila shots and tall boy PBRs, which were a bad combination," Milford says. "44 Stone Public House had the best burgers in town, and we always went there when my parents visited for a weekend for football games."

Another great burger place she recalls fondly is Ingredient, which let diners build their own creations. "But if we were looking for a late-night snack after tailgating, it would have to be El Rancho. The line would be out the door late at night, and everyone wanted their nachos smothered in queso."

All these provisions, Milford now confesses, were great "hangover food." She's now a nurse at Mercy Hospital in St. Louis, well past those student indulgences, but still enjoys returning with her extended family — nearly all of whom attended Mizzou — to eat at family favorites like Flat Branch and 44 Stone.



IOU for Food

The Ever Eat Café (1930–1962), opened by Bessie "Mom" and Leonard "Huss" Morris and their son Ralph, was half beer parlor and half meat-and-potatoes restaurant, with a big Tiger picture presiding over it all. Plenty of students, strapped for meal money at the end of a semester, got a loan from the Morrises, without so much as an IOU as collateral. And during World War II, some of those former customers, now soldiers in combat zones in Europe, sent the Ever Eat letters containing greetings and some cash to make good on their tab. The Heidelberg opened on the Ever Eat's location in 1963.



Conveyor Purveyor

The Rollaway Café's gimmick (circa 1960s) — dish after dish of all-you-can-eat comfort food riding a conveyor belt through the restaurant — was a money-maker until hollow-legged football players found out and plucked the belt clean.

COMO EATS

COMO
DID YOU KNOW?



Big Cheese

It's cringeworthy now, perhaps, but the community wheel of cheddar cheese at the **Flaming Pit** (1966–1980s) in Parkade Plaza was part of what made the place a family favorite. Rounding out the scene were comfy booths, a fireplace, the aroma of sizzling steak and a treasure chest of free toys for the kids.



Just Jack's

For more than four decades, **Jack's Gourmet** (1972–2016) was one of a handful of Columbia restaurants to book when everything had to be just right for, say, a rehearsal dinner, graduation or a wedding proposal. The tufted booths were semicircular, the servers professional, the entrees scrumptious and the desserts often spectacularly set aflame within arm's reach. Just ask Stevie Wonder, Kate Capshaw, Brendan Fraser, **Mr. T** or Joe Namath, all of whom dined at Jack's.

Sidebars by Dale Smith, BJ '88



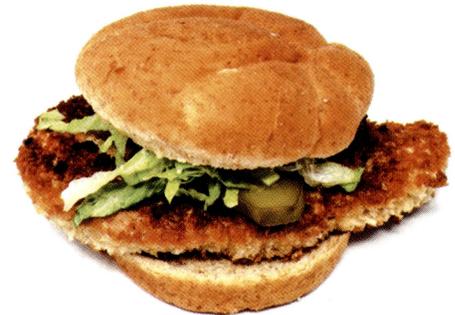
↑ Flat Branch Pub and Brewery first tapped its kegs in 1994 in a barrel-vaulted former car dealership, becoming Columbia's first brew pub in recent memory.

THE LATE, GREAT BOONE TAVERN

What restaurant could lure both splenetic basketball coach Bobby Knight and feminist Gloria Steinem to cross its threshold (not on the same night)? It was Boone Tavern, named after a historic Daniel Boone Tavern, which, in turn, was named for Daniel Boone's sons, who were early Columbia pioneers and salt lick miners.

The last version of the beloved tavern opened in 1978 and pioneered outdoor courtyard dining. It also had an innovative VIP card, which worked like a credit card. Located adjacent to the county courthouse, the tavern became popular not only with lawyers but also visiting parents, who indulged their students with its groaning board Sunday brunch, where fried chicken and raspberry cream pie were big attractions.

The restaurant closed in 2012, but general manager Jim "Hoss" Koetting, BS Ag '84, and director of operations Trish Koetting, Arts '92, opened Hoss's Market on the south side of Columbia, where the chicken enchiladas, Kansas City strip steaks and strong customer service have lured back Boone Tavern fans.



NEVER JUST A NOSH

Order the celebrated pork tenderloin sandwich and fried mushrooms at the venerable Heidelberg and "you'll get a platter that could serve four people," warns Nancy Schultz, BS '69, whose School of Business marketing class used to adjourn there regularly. Her husband, Tom, says they request doggie bags at nearly every Columbia restaurant they patronize. "We just finished off some fantastic salmon from Sophia's that we brought home," he says. "The portions in Columbia are usually Midwest huge."

JUST DESSERTS

Sweets have their own special pull. Linder is taken with the chocolate peanut butter gooey cake with caramel rum sauce from the Broadway Hotel's 11Eleven restaurant. Or you could tempt her with the layered dessert from Coley's, where ice cream, caramel and pecans arrive in a stack.

Ag students get experience making ice cream at Buck's Ice Cream Place, the university's dairy parlor, located under a black-and-gold awning on the south side of Eckles Hall. Its Tiger Stripe variety, a blend of golden French vanilla and Dutch chocolate, is the official ice cream of the Missouri Tigers. Naturally, it's the bestseller and is served at the annual Tiger Walk. That's the yearly tradition — sponsored by the Mizzou Alumni Association — of welcoming the taste buds of new freshmen with a free slice of Shakespeare's pizza and a taste of Tiger Stripe.

Those craving more unusual ice cream flavors head for Sparky's, a locally owned ice cream emporium with hilariously bad art on its walls. Its flavors are equally quirky, from cinnamon to dark chocolate orange cheesecake. When the 17-year locusts emerged a few years back, Sparky's attempted to sell a flavor with the crunchy cicadas mixed in. That didn't last, but creative new combinations like lavender vanilla are always on offer.



↑ The only thing better than a Booche's burger is five more coming right behind it.

Do you have a favorite Columbia restaurant food memory? Send us an email at mizzou@missouri.edu, or join the Mizzou Alumni Association's book club to talk it over at pbc.guru/missouri. **M**

About the author: Margaret Engel, BJ '73, won awards reporting for the Washington Post and co-authored a book that inspired the long-running Food Finds show on The Food Network. She directs the Alicia Patterson Foundation. As a student at Mizzou, she waitressed at Brady Commons and taught Taiwanese friends how to bake pumpkin pie.

COMO
DID YOU KNOW?



Best Biscuit

Annie Fisher, born in 1867 to former slaves living in the Columbia area, was not only a restaurateur and caterer extraordinaire but also a real estate maven who owned 18 rental homes and two mansions. She was famous for her "beaten biscuits," which she described in 1927 as "an ordinary biscuit baked while the life is in it."



Anyone for Pi?

Brothers "Poor" Ken and "Lonesome" Del Gebhardt clowned their way to local fame in a TV commercial with Ken posing as a math teacher instructing Del on the ancient ratio, "Pi R squared." No, Del quipped, "Pi are round!" With that plot in place, the brothers kept repeating the lines, ever louder and more exasperated, until Dell chucked a pie into Ken's face and pronounced, "Pie are messy." (You had to see it). The pair's **Interstate Pancake House**, located just off of I-70, also topped industry headlines as the first U.S. restaurant to go completely computerized.

