
The *Original* Hamburger Chain!

[As a life-long hamburger aficionado, I just had to stop and investigate when I came across this cover] White Castle was founded in 1921 in Wichita, Kansas. Walter A. Anderson partnered with cook Edgar Waldo "Billy" Ingram to make White Castle into a chain of restaurants and market White Castle. At the time, Americans were hesitant to eat ground beef after Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel *The Jungle* had publicized the poor sanitation practices of the meat packing industry. The founders set out to change the public's perception of the cleanliness of the industry.

Their first restaurants in Wichita, Kansas, were a success, and the company branched out into other Midwestern markets, starting in 1923 with Omaha, Nebraska. White Castle Building No. 8, built in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1936, (photo below, was an example of the chain's prefabricated porcelain buildings. Anderson, by the way, is credited with invention of the hamburger bun, as well as "the kitchen as assembly line, and the cook as infinitely replaceable technician," hence giving rise to the modern fast food phenomenon. Known for its small, square hamburgers, sometimes referred to, and today trademarked, as "Slyders", its burgers were priced at five cents until the 1940s, and remained at ten cents for years thereafter. For several years, when the original burgers sold for five cents, White Castle periodically ran promotional ads in local newspapers which contained coupons offering five burgers for ten cents, takeout only. *[Oh! I knew I was born too late!]*

Since fast food was unknown in the United States in that era, there was no infrastructure to support the business, as is common with today's fast food restaurants. The company established centralized bakeries, meat supply plants, and warehouses to supply itself. It was said that the only thing they did not do themselves was raise the cows and grow their own wheat. They also created a subsidiary in 1934 named Porcelain Steel Buildings that manufactured movable, prefabricated steel frame structures with porcelain enamel interior and exterior panels that could be assembled at any White Castle restaurant site. This is the first known use of this material in a building design.



In 1933, Ingram bought out Anderson, and the following year the company moved its corporate headquarters to Columbus, Ohio. The company remains privately held and its restaurants are company-owned; they are not franchised in the United States. Ingram's steadfast refusal to franchise or take on debt resulted in the chain remaining relatively small, with a very discontinuous geography compared to most chains. (There are 422 White Castle outlets, all in the United States and specifically in the Midwest and Tennessee, except for a significant smattering of outlets in the New York metropolitan region), compared with about 13,001 McDonald's in the country.) But the company, which is now run by Ingram's grandson, nonetheless, has the fast-food industry's second-highest sales revenues per store, trailing only McDonald's. *[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Castle_\(restaurant\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Castle_(restaurant))]*

