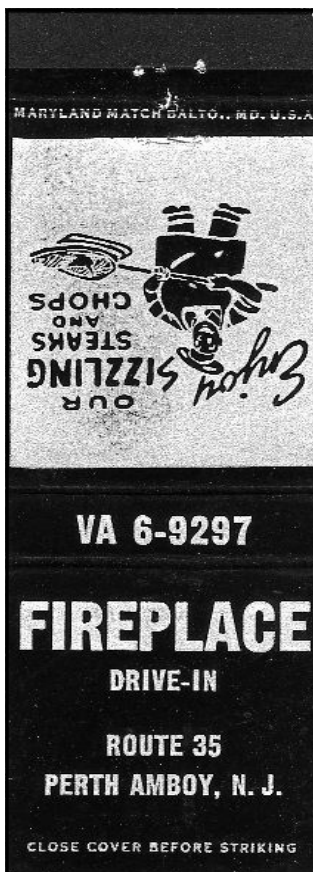# Drive-In Restaurants

In the 1920s, the roadside restaurant industry emerged. Before World War I, automobiles were less common and there were few opportunities for getting meals on the road. Between 1920 and 1930, the number of automobiles in America rose from eight million to twenty-three million and along with the increase came thousands of barbeque shacks, ice cream stands and diners. These restaurants and stands catered to motorists, travelers and tourists, like the Howard Johnson ice cream stands that popped up in Boston in the mid-20s, later evolving into the hotel and restaurant chain.

In 1921, two men—J.G. Kirby and Dr. Reuben W. Jackson—revolutionized the restaurant industry. They introduced the first drive-in restaurant known as the Texas Pig Stand—a barbeque-themed curbside service located off a busy highway in Dallas, Texas. Customers sat in their automobiles as "tray boys delivered barbeque pork and Coca-Colas. J.G. Kirby once said, "People with cars are so lazy they don't want to get out of them to eat."

In 1919, a man named Roy Allen was introduced to a delicious root beer recipe. Soon after, he opened up a small root beer stand on a busy corner in Lodi, California. By the end of the year he had successfully made a name for himself quenching the thirst of Americans in the height of prohibition. By 1920, the stands evolved into multiple outlets around California with a full car-hop service, adopting it's name as it is still know today, A&W (combining the first initial of the owners' last names Allen and Wright). Years later, the company turned into the nation's first chain drive-in restaurant with 171 restaurants across the U.S. in 1933.

In the 1950s, drive-ins became a nation-wide phenomenon and prized aspect of popular culture. Atlanta's Varsity Drive-In, known for being the largest drive-in, employed 150 people in three shifts in the early 1950s, with room for 200 cars in the parking-lot to be serviced by carhops under canopies.

Drive-In restaurants fit perfectly into teen lifestyle as they cruised from place to place to see and be seen, then ordering root beer floats on the hoods of their cars—or from the backseat of a cheap date—only venturing inside to change the song on the Jukebox.

As drive-ins increased in their popularity in the forties and fifties, so did their technological advancements. All around the country cars pulled into restaurants with parking spaces with individual menus and speakers from which carhops in flashy outfits, and sometimes on roller skates, took orders and delivered meals. Some drive-ins even employed telephones to take orders. Forton's Drive-In in Muskegon, Michigan used French phones that the carhops plugged in at each stall and orders were called into the kitchen switchboard. Creating a further separation from the customer and restaurant institution, and a more private meal.

Drive-in restaurants continued to thrive in the 60s and 70s, but became an immortal icon of Americana and teen culture when it was portrayed in television sitcoms and motion pictures. *Happy Days*, *Laverne and Shirley* and *Grease* were hugely popular, but one motion picture, *American Graffiti*, captured the drive-in landscape, sound, and feel especially well. And as a result, Mel's Drive-In in San Francisco, California became legendary.

As the highways were built up, local "mom and pop" drive-ins were no longer passed by when going from place to place. Americans generally chose the faster, more direct routes of the highway system. Thus, establishments such as franchise restaurants, gas stations, and motels were built around these highways. The new restaurants brought in the most customers and drove the local drive-ins to shut down. The drive-ins that survived survived on creating nostalgia or were made into franchises with highway-paced drive-thrus.

The idea of drive-through restaurants has its roots in the creation of fast-food, the hamburger, and the automobile. Through the nineteenth century, restaurants represented a luxury experience that few Americans were able to afford, and were often reserved for last-resort circumstances. One of those last-resort circumstances was during cross-country travel, though the menus of these early restaurants were often limited. One of the first entrepreneurs to capitalize on the restaurant market for travelers was Frederick Henry Harvey, who opened a chain of cafés, later dubbed 'Harvey Houses,' along railway routes in the late 1800's. Trains would make a stop and passengers could disembark and be treated to a sit-down meal. Eventually, these cafes were subsidized by railway companies, so the meals were far cheaper than other restaurants of the time. Placing an affordable café along a major commuter route brought the customers straight to the restaurant rather than the other way around, and Harvey Houses would later serve as the business model for other fast-food restaurants.

Drive-through restaurants and drive-in restaurants both share a common ancestor in the idea of making it convenient for drivers to get their food as fast as possible. As cars became more numerous, people were able to move out of big cities and live in suburban neighborhoods, away from the bustle of city life. As an example, the predecessor of the White Castle franchise began as a humble stand in 1921, in Wichita, Kansas, called "Hamburgers 5¢". After the restaurant boomed in Wichita, and it soon expanded to El Dorado, Omaha, Kansas City, and more than eight other major metropolitan centers by 1930. After World War II, White Castle migrated to the suburbs, following the newly mobile middle-class, providing fast food for those who could now drive a few minutes to the restaurant.

White Castle is the oldest fast-food franchise in America, and built its reputation on friendly service, immaculate buildings, and, of course, fast food. As a business model, White Castle was quickly imitated by many competitors. McDonald's, Burger King, and other fast-food giants all were influenced by White Castle. Many franchises branched out into specialized foods, such as KFC selling mainly fried chicken, so as to set themselves apart in a saturated market. Additionally, fast-food restaurants standardized their menus and placed locations along interstate highways, so that weary travelers would have quick access to familiar food. The idea of the restaurant not as a dining experience, but as a temporary fuel stop for people, is pervasive even today. Their convenience is one of the main factors in their success. *[http://umich.edu/~drivein/restaurant.html#:~:text=Drive%2Din%20Restaurant&text=In%20the%201920s%2C%20the%20roadside%20restaurant%*