

Pigs and Bowling Bring Fame to Town Hotels

FROM CARNEY BLUM

NUTLEY once had two hotels, the Central and the Feuerbach, and they were famous - of all things - for their bowling alleys.

The Central had a fair-to-middlin' bar, and the Feuerbach had a picnic grounds and fattened and slaughtered its own pigs for an annual Autumn party on the house, but in the memory of the town's native sons, in the over-50 bracket, the bowling alleys were the life of the town.

The bowling alleys of the Feuerbach were particularly famous because unlike any other alleys anywhere they were made of slate. Slabs of slate as smooth as they could be ground, were laid end to end. They were tricky to say the least and the bowling balls jumped and twisted as they rolled with a hollow roar down the string of slates.

There is a legend, and it is perhaps true, that when the Feuerbach Hotel was torn down, not long before the war, the bowling alleys were torn up and used to lay a sidewalk on one of the streets that was laid out in the old picnic grounds.

As a hotel, the Feuerbach disappeared from the scene not long after the husband of Mrs. Brendel, the proprietress, shot himself to death. She sold her liquor license, and a Newark building and loan association took over and cut up the picnic grounds into building lots.

Mrs. Brendel was famous in the neighborhood of Nutley for a red wine which she pressed from grapes grown in her own vineyard. Nutley never will be a rival for Beaune or Bordeaux, for her red wine was sour but powerful and a one-time mayor of Nutley was the one who gave it the tell-tale name of "Tanglefoot." It was a predecessor of Mrs. Brendel, named Joseph Zeigler, who started the tradition of the fatted pigs. The neighbors, then, were far enough away that Herr Zeigler was able to raise his own pigs.

Every year he would slaughter his pigs and when he had huge tables ready, filled with liverwurst, headcheese, blood pudding, hams and sausages, he would call in his customers for a free feed. They came by the thousands, the "Dutch" from Newark and Jersey City, Hoboken and Weehawken. The pork was free but Zeigler recuperated on the sale of beer in barrels which were rolled out under the trees and emptied as fast as his perspiring porters could replace them.

Zeigler built up a big "horse and buggy" trade for his picnic grounds. Every sunny Sunday would see from 500 to 2,000 picnickers. They came in surreys with their fringes on top. They came in drays and drags. They came in Studebaker farm wagons and they came on foot. His open house picnic parties were called "Mitgebrachts," which, as the name says, meant: bring your own

food. Herr Zeigler furnished the beer, at a profitable price, naturally.

It all would have gone on cheerily enough if Herr Zeigler had not been gored in the belly by the horns of one of his bulls. It seems that there was to be a stain of violent death on the Feuerbach, as far as its owners were concerned. After Zeigler died and Mrs. Brendel took over, she kept up the tradition of the "Mitgebrachts" and the annual liverwurst feast, but she abandoned the pig pens and, bought her meat for the party from town butchers.

Before Zeigler, the owner was Emil Schneider, a rotund German who was as big around as he was high. He was a disciplinarian and many a Nutley adult recalls how the old man used to try to impose upon them as boys an edict that while they could go swimming naked on weekdays in "Crocker's quarry," behind the hotel, they had to wear tights on Sundays.

The boys used to hang their clothes on a hickory limb in the thickets around the quarry and then, with a shout, would race through the trees and take off into space. The quarry was a deep one and the water was generally about 50 feet deep which placed it about 35 feet below the ground level. To Nutley boys the 35 foot dive was nothing when, on a Sunday afternoon, old Schneider used to come after them with a stinging willow whip.

Somewhere in the long line of Feuerbach proprietors came L. C. Rubin who deserted the old hotel on Washington Avenue and acquired the Central Hotel on Chestnut Street at the corner of Hamilton Place. It was Rubin who installed bowling alleys at the Central too, but he put wooden alleys instead of slate into the new place.

Rubin was one of those people who could never settle down. From Nutley he moved up into Sussex County, at a place called Macaffe, and built a racetrack for trotting and pacing which by then were becoming the prime attraction of Nutley, along the "mile straightaway" on Washington Avenue.

"Both the Central and the Feuerbach were called hotels, but they were hotels in name only," Carney Blum, bowler of class in that era, told *The Nutley Sun* in recalling a past of strikes and spares.

They both had rooms if anyone insisted on spending the night there, but they primarily were places where the town congregated and bowled. After every town meeting, the Mayor and the commissioners, and the audience too, used to retire to the Central and play cards for the rest of the evening.

They always kept a roast of sirloin hot and ready and for a nickel or a dime they would slice an inch of sirloin and put it between two pieces of rye bread for a sandwich.

"There were some great bowlers in those days, among them Tom O'Neil, John Howe, Jesse Kierstead, Dr. Van Riper, Max Zitsmann and S. S. Davis. My father Abram Blum put his own team into the field-himself and my brothers Joe, Ray, Cy and myself.

“In all the history of bowling in Nutley, nobody ever rolled a perfect 300. If you did better than 150 on the Feuerbach’s slate alleys you were a champion.” Blum modestly neglected to add that he still holds the record, a 289 that might have been a perfect score if he had not missed the last strike.

Even before it became the Central Hotel, the old Chestnut Street house was the home of a town character, Colonel Rowan, a huge transplanted Texan, who was as famous for his ability to use tobacco juice in target practice as for his ten-gallon Texas hat, the only one of its kind in town.

When the Rowans lived in the house, Dr. George B. Philhower met and married Florence Rowan in one of the great Nutley weddings of past days.

In that era, Chestnut Street was destined for prominence and the intersection of Chestnut and Passaic Avenue was the center of town. When the street cars were run up Franklin Avenue instead of Passaic Avenue, the center of town shifted to the present “Four Corners.”

In those days, the Rowan homestead stood in the rustic setting of an apple orchard which extended down to “Pig Tail Alley,” the muddy little path that led back in from Chestnut Street east of the Third River, alongside the Stirratt blacksmith shop and was the setting of five little houses that were built as homes for textile workers of the Duncan woolen mills across the avenue. The dingy houses and the muddy approach gave the place its picturesque name.

The old hotel survived one big war but not the other and when progress demanded the paving of Chestnut Street, a two story brick business building replaced its structure but not its memory. The bowling alleys survived in a new building near the same place.