

# Some Businesses Close, But Live Forever

by Roger Kratochvil

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**BUZZ MAGAZINE** - There are some businesses that become an integral part of a community for a long time and then, for any of a number of reasons, they close. Their legacy lives on and on and many of us that have been around a long time remember all the good things about that business.

How could you remember Benld and not remember Fazios, New Dan, Benld Dairy, Mr. Rizzis Bank, Leone's Lumber, Gaudio Distributing, or Tarros? I better stop there in naming businesses there that are gone.

How could you not remember Staunton's Kozis, Marty and Millies, The Alleys, Cignetti Beer Garden, Dietiker's Clothing, and Illini Lumber in Staunton, Litchfield's Dierduffs Roller Rink, Gardens Restaurant, Saratoga Club, Blackwelders Clothing, Yaeger's Clothing, Newberrys Dime Store or Blue Danube? What about Gillespie's Bernhardt's Restaurant, Mikes Tavern, or Demuzio's Tavern, Livingston's Ken Dons Restaurant, Wray's Grocery, Cooperative Store (Augustines), and Hatfields Tavern?

A funny statement about Hatfield's Tavern was that after baseball practice and games the team would congregate at this bar. The saying as reported to me by good friend, Terry Wray, was, "There was infield, outfield and then Hatfields." All played an important role in each of those towns and are remembered for all the joy that they brought to people's lives. By far, this is not all of them but just a sampling to bring memories to those who remember enjoying what they provided.

I am going to name just a few from Mt. Olive and White City now that should bring some joy to not only local citizens, but neighboring citizens who often frequented those businesses.

Located on East Main Street for many years was a restaurant called the Home Café. Owned by George Thomas, the chef, it provided meals for many people. When I started teaching at Mt. Olive, I would eat there. When I could afford it. My sister Mary Ann while in high school, was a waitress there in the late 1940s, and when my children were young I use to take them on Saturday mornings to have breakfast at a central large table where many of the citizens gathered.

I remember fondly meeting Bill Delich there as he was a survivor of the Bataan Death March during World War II. Bill had an outstanding sense of humor, and he told us that his humor got him through the pain and torture at the hands of the Japanese army.

The waitresses were the Wolf sisters, Hilda and Vera. There were none better. Mrs. Grejtak and Mrs. Jacobs were cooks there and the quality of the food was appreciated.

Mt. Olive had two grocery stores on the east end that served mostly the ethnic Slovak population that came to Mt. Olive to work in the mines. One was Fedor's store that lasted until about 1929 when the depression hit and they probably went bankrupt. Some of that probably was caused by the store giving a lot of credit and the customers not being able to pay it back because of a loss of a job. For many years, it specialized in butchering and having the best meat in town.

Since there was very little refrigeration those days, you shopped for meat for only one day. My grandfather had 11 kids and they lived on the north side of town and were German. He would send one of the 9 boys to get the meat for the day from Fedors. On the way back the boy was usually beat up by a few of the tough Slovak youth. My grandfather then got smarter and when he needed meat, he would sent all of the 9 sons who were available, so their safety would be ensured. Fedors eventually became Bahn's Grocery Store in 1929.

Across the alley was another grocery store called Putzy Gavrun's store. It was a two-story building and was sort of a congregating area for Slovak families, and especially the youth.

In describing an average summer day at Putzys, we can look at four young boys who we will just call Mickey, Georgie, Gary, and Mikey. It seems that they enjoyed the store so much that they frequented it numerous times during the day. Mikey saw on the Dr. Pepper bottle, 10, 2, 4 and he interpreted it that they go buy a Dr. Pepper for 8 cents at those times every day. The grocery store was on the bottom floor and Gene Gavrun ran the store. There were two showcases with nothing but penny candy in it. They enjoyed that along with a 10 cent Hostess Twinkie or Dixie cup. In the store was also the neighborhood newspaper, the State Journal or Post-Dispatch. Gary always read the paper and would buy himself a snack, and a can of sauerkraut to eat. That might be construed as a little unusual.

I asked them where they got their money and they said that they earned it by hauling trash out to the dump which was near where they lived. They also collected bottles as they were always returned for a deposit by local beer halls or local soda plant, Meyer Beverage (OK soda was the brand).

The upstairs housed a small woodworking shop managed by John Gavrun, Gene's brother. He made very professional wooden toys for the kids.

Also, dances were held in the hall where the whole family would go to enjoy music and great ethnic food. And liquid refreshments. No babysitters were needed those days as the whole family went together.

The four boys all went to the neighborhood Holy Trinity School and Church where they were under the watchful eye and hand of the Sisters of the church who did not spare the rod.

Another memorable business was the Block Tavern in White City. It was located right next to Cullom Lane that took traffic to the coal mine. It was one of five taverns that did a good business in this coal mining town. There were many owners during its years of operation. Jerry (Flat) and Barbara Brabec ran it and the McGarvys from Madison operated it for a few years. The McGarvys were an interesting family as they created an exciting atmosphere at the tavern. They had a daughter who came to White City school as a second grader smoking a cigar. We never saw that before. There were often skirmishes there, but police were never involved because all of that was handled by the citizens in the bar. The most memorable proprietors were Harry and Tilly Eccher. It was truly a fun bar and often they had free fish there on Friday night. They had a huge hall

where dances and weddings were held. A highlight of the evening was usually when Harry would dance with a real monkey that he had caged in the building. It was always funny. Harry liked to have fun, so he had a couple of quarters and half dollars placed just outside of the indoor restrooms. People would come out of the restroom and see those coins and try to pick them up. Harry had them welded to a nail in the floor and it was impossible to take. Many of us tried more than one time. After all, a glass of beer was only 10 cents, and one of those coins would buy several.

Westend Garage is still standing across the street east of Jumpin Jimmys. It was owned by Fred Windau and he lived in the family house located at the northeast corner of Main and Lake. His business was started in 1929 and lasted many years. His mechanic was affectionately known as “Dirty Ernie” but his real name was Maynard Scheller. Fred operated this business with people’s trust in mind. What a lot of people did not know was that his wife anonymously helped a lot of people in town with her generous financial help to poor and needy people.

You may be wondering if there were any memorable businesses that closed other than taverns. With about 20 taverns doing a good business, that might be a good question.

Located on main street where the car wash is today was the Opera House or more commonly known as Collie’s Tavern. It was truly a unique place with just a lot of fun occurring every day. It had an upstairs banquet hall for weddings, boxing matches, etc but most of the action happened downstairs. Collie Haller was the consummate entertainer and he often entertained the crowd with his singing and if he could get the Thomas brothers or Abie Luecht there, they would form a harmonizing quartet. He usually had a pot of food cooking on the stove and if you were not picky, you could probably get a muskrat or turtle stew. As loose as the tavern was, he ran a tight ship as far as conduct. Because of no air conditioning, the front door would usually be wide open. One of his regular customers would often walk his dog and bring him into the tavern. Regularly, the dog would proceed to go to the bathroom on his slot machines and Collie would end up tossing out the dog attached to his owner. Collie’s brother was Skinny Haller, the police chief, so it was an orderly tavern as Skinny was a no-nonsense chief.

The next business is Boggio’s Confectionary. It was located roughly where Sullivan’s Drug Store is today. It served sandwiches, soft drinks and especially ice cream. As a young White City boy, Slim Schuette used to send a bus out to White City to pick up the village people who wanted to go to the New Grand Theater, located where Hurley’s Fitness Center is today. It would cost a quarter with 14 cents for the show and 11 cents for the bus ride. When the bus got us to the show, my brother Donnie and I would walk the half block to Boggios and get a nickel ice cream cone. The cones were the long thin cones with often at the bottom was a small piece of paper awarding you a free ice cream

cone. It happened often enough that it was worth the investment. We lived in a close knit community like White City so we did not know many people from Mt. Olive at the time so we were like strangers. But it sure was fun, especially on a Friday night when the Durango Kid - starring Charles Starrett - was playing.

As you can see, just because a business closes, does not mean that it did not make a lasting impression. In talking to some of the older people I talked to about these businesses, I could not forget seeing the nice smiles and the twinkle in their eyes, as they were remembering those fun days.

Just writing this helped me have a better day and I hope you did too.

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