

# Elaine's DINING ROOM

Elaine Curtis became a working woman in 1952 after she was forced into employment due to unfortunate circumstances on the family farm. Mrs. Curtis worked as a waitress at Hartzell's Supper Club, located west on Northtown Road. After a few years she was hired as a waitress by Cleo Mendenhall, the owner of the Colonial Manor. Elaine Curtis became manager in 1954, the same year she was hired, due to the death of Mr. Mendenhall. Mrs. Curtis received a proposal from Raymond Newcum and W.O. Mackie that they would build the type of building she wanted if she would open a restaurant on the site. Mrs. Curtis accepted the offer.

In an advertisement in the September 15, 1957, edition of the *Kirkville Daily Express*, Mrs. Curtis gave a description of the dining room: "We want you to come see our beautiful New Dining Rooms, Modern Stainless Steel Kitchen and New Platinum Walnut Chrome and Ebony Furniture. Visitors are welcome to see our new building. No cooking in the new building until Monday. Meals will be served at Colonial Manor Dining Room on Sunday and we will start serving in our new dining room on Monday, Sept. 16. We will use similar Menu and our Price Policy for meals, coffee hour and after show snacks that have proved to be so popular in the past. We greatly appreciate the wonderful business that we have enjoyed. We thank you for the patronage which has exceeded our former

facilities. You have helped us to grow so now we can offer you more comfort and better service. . . . The fine food you like will be served promptly in new attractive surroundings." The *Kirkville Daily Express* carried four pages of ads from supporters on that same day. A few of the supporters of the opening of Elaine's Dining Room and the Northland Shopping Center were Babcock Sales Co.; Beards; Adair Lumber Company; Shockey's Service Station; Adair County Sale Barn; Superway Food Store; Leo's Roller Rink; Jesse Peterson & Son Furniture; Hayden Concrete Products; Siegles Cities Service; Brown Construction Co.; Luther Longfield; Doc Haggard & Son Oil Co.; Shelton & Sons; Mackie & Williams Food Stores; Baker Sign Co.; T.H. & N. Electric Service; Wright's Tire & Appliance; and M-M Gas.

On September 15, 1957, the open house of the first unit in the Northland Shopping Center took place. Within the first few weeks, after-opening problems were being encountered. Mrs. Curtis said, "We had our Grand Opening on September 15, 1957, with all the usual problems of a new business; exhaust fans that didn't work and a broiler that caught on fire, but somehow we survived those first few weeks, in spite of ourselves, and the customers kept coming back." At this time there were few other places to eat in Kirkville.

The business became a family-owned and family-run

*This was the sign that many people saw when they passed by the restaurant located north on Highway 63.*

*Elaine's, the first business to open in the Northland Shopping Center, held an open house on September 15, 1957.*



restaurant after her husband Paul Curtis sold the farm and moved to town to help his wife manage the restaurant. "We tried to run a family farm and a restaurant but found that it wasn't possible, so Paul sold the farm and we moved to town. The restaurant was then truly a 'family' owned and run business. On any given day you could see Paul in the kitchen cooking or out front cleaning tables. The kids were doing whatever they had to. They were typical kids who would rather have not worked but we kept them busy. They always thought we had spies all over town because we usually knew what they'd been up to before they came home. By the time the restaurant was gone, we had not only raised our four kids but also had them all married with 10 grandchildren. They realized that the people skills they learned from Elaine's were something that would help them the rest of their lives. There were many good people who worked for us over the years and I can't possibly mention them all but there are a few that I just have to mention. Some of the cooks were Jim and Lucille Miley, Graci Kenney, Buelah Simler, Bessie Wilson, Dorothy Garwood, and Maggie Sullivan. Some of the waitresses were Kay Richards, Glenda Shaver, Mary Riley, Brenda Sewell, Bonita Cassidy, and Ellena Western. Some of the bus boys were Rex Hardman, Fred Northrop, Rob and Jack Bragg. All of these people helped to make Elaine's what it was." Ellena Western, an employee of Mrs. Curtis' for 15 years said, "Elaine wouldn't ask for help to do anything that she wouldn't just get right in there and do herself."

Elaine's quickly grew into a gathering place with the family in mind. Mrs. Curtis said, "Elaine's Dining Room was one of the social centers in town. Everyone came to Elaine's after a football game, play, or any important event. It was the place to 'see and be seen.' Easter, Mother's Day, Homecoming or Graduation Days were always big days for Elaine's." She also said there were times when people were lined up outside for a half a block to get in on one of those days. "There wasn't even time to think on those days let alone realize how tired you were. You just had to keep going." Elaine's offered four dining rooms, two of which, the Hereford Room and the Angus Room, could seat up to 300 people. Anne Kelly, waitress for Elaine's from 1958 until 1963, recalled what type of people would eat at the restaurant: "Elaine's was at that time the 'in' restaurant. Kiwanis, Lions, Sig Taus, Phi Sigs, college as well



Elaine's main dining room was furnished with platinum, walnut, chrome, and ebony furniture.

as local (people) because the student union wasn't there so Elaine's was about the only place you could have a big banquet in Kirksville."

Many customers ate the cinnamon rolls, one of the specialties at Elaine's. Mrs. Western remembers, "I loved to eat them. I think everybody else did too because at that time they could get two large rolls and all the coffee they wanted to drink for 25 cents. We set the coffee right on the table and they could drink as much as they wanted. The rolls were made in muffin tins and they would rise to the top and they had sugar, cinnamon, and pecans on them." Mrs. Curtis said, "There was something called 'Coffee Hour' that usually lasted from about 8:30 till 10:00. You could get two of Elaine's famous cinnamon rolls for 15 cents and all the coffee you could drink for 10 cents. It wasn't unusual on Tuesday nights, 'Greek Night,' to have 300 people there for Coffee Hour." Mrs. Kelly said that there were other popular items on the menu: "Her roquefort dress-

## Welcome to ELAINE'S DINING ROOM

### Steaks

WE SERVE  
U S D A. CHOICE BEEF



NEW YORK STRIP SIRLOIN, Large	Large NY	4.50
	Medium NY	3.50
FILET MIGNON, Bacon Wrapped	Filet	4.50
CHOICE CLUB STEAK	Club St	3.50
GIANT T-BONE STEAK	T Bone	5.00
SERVED WITH CHOICE OF TOSSED GREEN SALAD, COTTAGE CHEESE OR JELLO SALAD, CHOICE OF POTATOES, HOT ROLLS, BUTTER & COFFEE (BAKED POTATOES AFTER 5:00 P.M.)		

### CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

HAMBURGER STEAK	Albst	1.50
PORK TENDERLOIN	Loin pl	1.50
CALVES LIVER	Calf	2.75
PORK CHOPS, Broiled	PC	2.75
HAM STEAK	Ham St	3.00
BARBECUE RIBS, Top Loin	Ribs TJ Deq	2.00

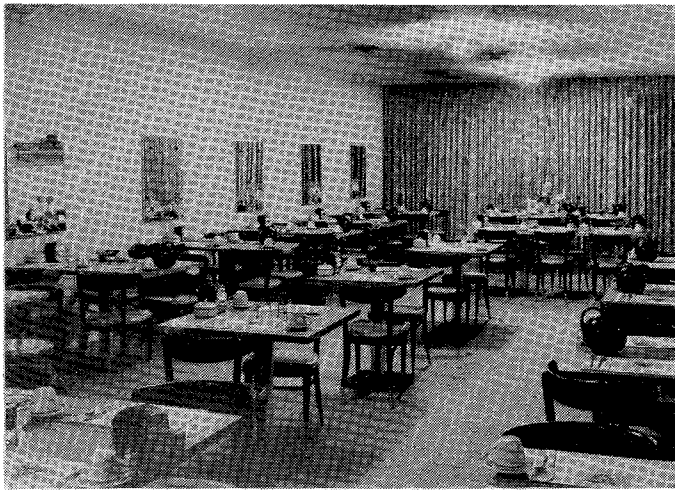
SERVED WITH ~~SAUCE~~, CHOICE OF POTATO, CHOICE OF SALAD, HOT ROLLS, BUTTER AND COFFEE

### Seafood

FRENCH FRIED JUMBO SHRIMP	Shrp	2.00
FRENCH FRIED OYSTERS	Oys	2.00
FRENCH FRIED SCALLOPS	Scallops	1.75
CATFISH FILLET, Tartar Sauce	Cat	2.00
FROG LEGS	Frog	3.00
AFRICAN LOBSTER TAIL	Lobst	5.00

SERVED WITH TOMATO JUICE, VEGETABLE, CHOICE OF POTATO, CHOICE OF SALAD, HOT ROLLS, BUTTER AND COFFEE

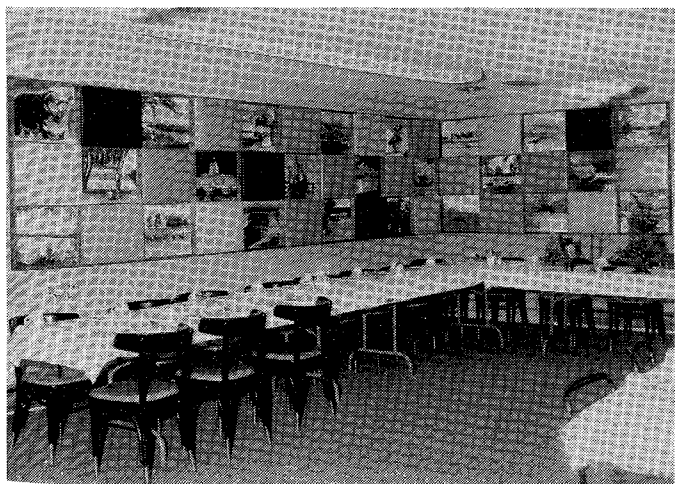
Anne Kelly worked at Elaine's when it was located at the Shamrock Restaurant, which was under Mrs. Curtis' control for most of 1968. The menu shows the abbreviations used by the waitresses on their order forms.



*The Angus Room was one of the dining rooms at Elaine's which was decorated similar to the main dining room.*



*The main dining room was much larger in size than any of the other rooms. The walls were tan and the carpet was green. The drapes were mainly green with a floral print while the leather on the chair seats closely matched the table tops.*



*The Hereford Room was one of four dining rooms where banquets, receptions, business meetings, and reunions were held.*

ing was because a lot of people liked it. It was a combination of a French dressing and bleu cheese dressing. It looked like French dressing but it tasted like bleu cheese. It was good and I think people liked her family-style meals. I think her sirloin strips were real popular.”

A table that many referred to as the “round table” was placed in the restaurant after opening. Mrs. Western remembers waiting on the prominent business people of that time: “They had a round table up close to the kitchen door and every morning when I would come, the table would be full of businessmen. They came there so often that you would have to know what they wanted. All they would say was, ‘Bring me my usual.’ You had to remember what everybody ate and drank. I imagine 15 people would crowd around the table at one time.”

Elaine’s was open 363 days a year from 7 a.m. until midnight, seven days a week. Not even weather seemed to halt the restaurant from staying open. The event that sticks out most in Mrs. Curtis’ mind was the snowstorm on April 9, 1973. “It was so bad they closed Highway 63. I kept the restaurant open all night for the people who were stranded. Paul was making trips back and forth on his horse to bring things from the house. He even took Marge and Charlie McCune home by horse! He took Marge first and then came back for Charlie. It was so bad he couldn’t leave the horse outside so he stayed in the entryway while Paul was at the restaurant.”

On September 24, 1978, 21 years and 9 days after the grand opening, Elaine’s Dining Room was destroyed by fire. Bob Foss, one of the first firefighters to arrive on the scene, recalls being on duty that night: “On a Sunday morning the Fire Department received a call at 3:05 a.m. that Lucky Lanes was on fire. Me and Dave Hudnall took old engine number two from the north station where we were on duty. Upon arriving at the scene we noticed smoke and fire coming from the roof of the bowling alley. Twenty-five firefighters from the Kirksville Fire Department responded to the call. Fred Schwaner, a volunteer from the department, was on a ladder on the west side of the building when the roof caved in causing the wall to cave in also. Fred was thrown from the ladder away from the fire, breaking his back in two places. We were there for about 16 hours.” The fire was believed to have started in the attic of the bowling alley. Although the exact cause was not found, Elaine’s was completely destroyed by 6 a.m., along with Lucky Lanes and the Untouchable Disco Bar.

Elaine and Paul Curtis now live in Claremore, Oklahoma, and Mrs. Curtis works in the medical office of Dr. Fred Northrop, her son-in-law. Although Elaine’s Dining Room is no longer around, it still fondly lingers in the memories of those who supported it.

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**By Angela Briggs**

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