

Powellville, As Remembered by Venita Roberts

Venita Roberts, a friend of Fern Powell and her sister Bernice, long time operators of Powellville, once wrote a brief history of this once popular restaurant along Route 66. The following remembrance is based on the information written down by Venita.

Sometime in the early 1930's, Springfield, Missourian Harry Powell decided to buy a section of land about halfway between Waynesville and Rolla that he had spotted while travelling on Route 66. Soon afterward, he built a small store building along the roadway and sold clothing to those who paid a visit. Powell called the store, "Powellville."

He later added groceries and liquor. Then, seeing an even greater opportunity, Harry constructed a restaurant out of native rock and began serving delicious Ozark-styled meals to the many hungry Route 66 travellers who stopped to satisfy their appetites. The restaurant also became a favorite dining spot for many local families from Waynesville to Rolla.

Powell's business continued to expand with the growing traffic along this historic highway. Responding to

the opportunity, he built a filling station and fifteen cabins, again from native rock. Two houses, one for Harry and the other for his filling station attendant, soon followed. The two men literally were on call at all hours of the day and night to rent a cabin to another weary motorist, or to provide gasoline for a traveller eager to continue further west on the highway.

In the early 1940's, Harry Powell married Fern Beckerdite of Springfield. But tragedy struck only eight days later when the new groom died unexpectedly. After a very brief period of wedded bliss, Fern was left with the sobering prospect of having to run the entire operation of Powellville without the knowledge that Harry had possessed. Responding to the challenge, she sent for her sister, Bernice, who lived back in Springfield. Working together, both sisters continued to operate the business at a very successful level.

The sisters got married in the late 1940's, but remained faithful to Harry's dream of serving Route 66 travellers. Under their guidance, Powellville continued to enjoy a good deal of success for the next



From its houselike exterior to its home-cooked meals, Powellville Restaurant and staff quickly made weary Route 66 travelers feel at home. Postcard from the 1950's courtesy of Elnora Gaddy.

twenty years. However, with the advent of fast food restaurants and motels, Fern and Bernice's business began to feel the strain of increased competition. The fatal blow came when the federal government constructed two new lanes in that area and the old westbound lanes running right in front of Powellville were abandoned for the purpose of interstate traffic.

In 1968, the women

closed their restaurant and sold the property to the Missouri Department of Conservation, which removed all the buildings.

Despite the loss of these structures, many local residents still remember many treasured moments and meals they enjoyed at Powellville. They also remember Elnora Gaddy, who worked from 1953 to 1968 with Fern and Bernice at the restaurant.



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