

Restaurants find homes in historic buildings

By Ethel Simmons
Staff writer

WHAT MAKES A RESTAURANT special may be the food, but often it's more than that alone. Restaurants in old or unusual buildings, or offbeat settings, add an interesting touch to the dining experience.

Everything from mills (cider and grain, to name a couple), factories (air rifle, fish and frog spear), family homes and doctor's offices have been imaginatively turned into restaurants in areas from Rochester to Plymouth.

Plymouth, in fact, is a leader with some half-dozen restaurants that are in quarters converted from old establishments.



The Paint Creek Restaurant, with its authentic water wheel, is a new addition to the old Paint Creek Cider Mill near Rochester.

The Paint Creek Restaurant recently opened at the Paint Creek Mill, 4490 Orion Road in Goodison near Rochester. Its picturesque setting includes an old water wheel outside the restaurant and a working cider mill with an apple theme.

"THIS IS a historic site," owner Jerry Mancour said. "It had its origin in 1835 and has always been a mill of one type or another, including sawmill or gristmill."

The first building on the site burned in 1885, the second was torn down in 1957. Mancour bought the property, including a millrace and dam, from the original owner six years ago.

The cider mill is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily year-round and now is sell-

ing its 1983 crop of cider. The restaurant is open only for dinner, from 5-10 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays and 5-10 p.m. Sundays.

The Paint Creek Restaurant's homey decor was designed by Mancour's wife, Lucy, who works at the cider mill. Bright blue napkins accent the pine tables and chairs in the River Room, which has two rows of tables, and views from windows on both sides.

"There just isn't a bad seat in the whole restaurant," Mancour said. People request the River Room, where they can see the water wheel on one side and Paint Creek on the other.

THE OTHER dining room, equally pleasing, contains what Mancour calls "his toys." These include an old 10-horsepower steam boiler painted blue and red "just to add some show business." He also has a generator set, which he demonstrated.

Old wood flooring was salvaged from a schoolhouse, and air grates — also from the schoolhouse floor — have become dividers at the entrance. Tin chandeliers throughout the restaurant were handmade in Connecticut.

"For a long time my wife and I have loved visiting country inns," Mancour said, explaining his approach to the restaurant. "We serve American-style foods from Michigan. We're trying to use everything from the area."

Young Chef Jeffrey Harrell, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, said Michigan products include local butchers' meat and fresh whitefish

from the Great Lakes or Canada, Michigan lake perch and brook or rainbow trout. Michigan fruits and vegetables are used and now, in apple season, there are lots of apple desserts on the menu. Among these are Apple Brown Betty, Pomme Surprise and Apple Fritters.

Paint Creek Cider also is used innovatively in cocktails with liquor, and Michigan wines are available. Next spring, Mancour hopes to open a separate cocktail lounge upstairs. The architect's sketch on display shows the cocktail bar designed to resemble an apple press.

MANCOUR SAID, "The chef uses a 10-burner range and most everything is sautéed. The Goodison Meat Pie is topped with puff pastry and baked in the oven. Most popular entree is Sautéed Chicken Old Mill.

Daughter Carol is headwaitress and hostess, while daughter June tends the service bar. "Both oversee the cider mill and restaurant," he said. Daughter Tracy, a metalsmith, planted the flowers outside by the water wheel.

Another old mill, the Plymouth Grain Mill, today is the Grain Mill Crossing, a quaint restaurant in the 134-year-old structure. Howard Lawrence, who has owned the 70-seat restaurant for nearly two years, said, "It was originally J.D. McLaren's Grist Mill. Three generations of McLaren operated the mill."

At one time, it was a bean factory. The original wooden bean sorters are

table talk

still there among many nostalgic pieces that enhance the rustic decor. Chutes in the ceiling were used to pour wheat. The mill also has been a fish and frog spear factory and a place where coal and lumber were sold.

A scale to weigh sacks of grain stands inside the entrance. There's an old pot-bellied stove and the cash register sits on an antique sideboard. Located next to the tracks of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, the building shakes when trains go by.

"WE HAVE a broad menu," Lawrence said. "We serve everything from a typical breakfast to weekend dinners of prime rib, filet mignon and seafood. We have lots of homemade products — lasagna, stuffed cabbage — and we make our own soups, bread and desserts."

The Grain Mill Crossing, open seven days a week, will soon have separate luncheon and weekend dinner menus for its inexpensive meals. A separate menu also is available for breakfast served weekdays.

Two other Plymouth restaurants are in the same area by the railroad tracks. Across the street is Plymouth Landing, part of an offices and restaurant complex in the three-story red brick building that was originally the Markham

Air Rifle Co. Nearby is Bode's, an informal corned beef house in a structure built 115 years ago that was first a hotel, then private homes, a church and other businesses.

Woody Lynch, who designed the complex, pointed out the original interior beams from the factory, which manufactured Daisy Air Rifles. "On the third floor you can see the BBs they used to test by shooting into the beams," he said.

The charming restaurant is accented by leaded glass windows and dividers, brass-topped booths plus table seating, while frosted lamps atop the booths and on the ceiling. A plaque in the main dining room was presented by the Plymouth Historical Society for a contribution to the museum by Plymouth Landing owner Samuel Panzica.

IN THE BACK room, where tables may be put together for banquets, the walls tell the story of the air rifle factory. The air rifle was invented in Plymouth, Markham, incorporated in 1912, was bought out by Daisy Air Rifle. Old guns and rifles, magazine ads and other memorabilia adorn the walls.

Armando, the chef, said the restaurant

Please turn to Next Page

These eateries make a difference

Here are some other restaurants that offer different and distinctive places to dine in the suburban area.

• Victoria Station in Southfield and Troy are restaurants built around authentic old railroad cars. The restaurant chain's moderately priced eateries have a British railway motif and a menu big on steaks as well as a variety of other specialties. The Troy location, which opened in 1977, is housed in four railroad cars, similar to the Southfield operation.

• Norman's Elton Station is still undergoing renovation at the old Birmingham train station where the restaurant originally expected to open this month. The historically designated depot closed in 1976 and was purchased from the Grand Trunk Railroad by Train Station Associates. The restaurant

will be operated by Norman LePage, owner of Nifty Norman's in West Bloomfield.

• The Double Eagle at Sylvan Glen Golf Course in Troy is in a historic building more than 100 years old. Restaurant Bruce Cameron spent more than \$300,000 renovating the interior when he first leased the building from the City of Troy in 1976. The menu accents regional American foods.

• Peabody's Restaurant in Birmingham formerly was Peabody's Market, housed in a barn-shaped building that originally was a mill first operating in 1904. Its interior was remodeled for a restaurant in 1975, and after the barn burned down in 1980, it was rebuilt exactly as before, right down to historic photos inlaid in the tabletops. The restaurant, known for inexpensive, good

food, is still owned and run by the Peabody family.

• The Historic Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills is a real old timer that was the first stage coach stop outside of Detroit on the road to Lansing. It serves traditional meals amid the warmth of a country inn. Dinner theater productions, including outdoor theater, are an added attraction.

• 220 Merrill in Birmingham is housed in the former Detroit Edison building, and the snazzy bar is located where customers used to exchange light bulbs at a service counter. Renovation of the restaurant and two floors of offices cost \$1.7 million. Herbert Schmid has operated the 160-seat restaurant since 1979. Fresh fish is a specialty, and some German dishes are on the menu.

• The Ronde-View restaurant atop the Holiday Inn in Southfield isn't old but it's certainly eye-appealing. Michigan's first revolving restaurant, the Ronde-View, was built on a 16-story tower addition in 1975. It makes one complete turn every hour. The restaurant and cocktail lounge seat 175 persons.

• The Meeting Place in Orchard Lake originally was the Wilkens' family hot dog stand and later a grocery store. Bertha Wilkens continued to live upstairs after Bruce Cameron purchased the old building and opened his restaurant. After her death, Cameron renovated to the tune of \$250,000, creating a lively, smart dining spot in 1977. The "Meat" in Meeting has been expanded from an emphasis on steaks to one favoring seafoods and other special entrees.

— Ethel Simmons

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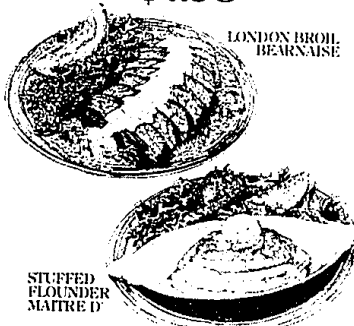
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