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Hullar's at 100: Fayetteville, N.Y. landmark celebrates a century in the same family

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By **Don Cazentre / The Post-Standard**



Michelle Gabel / The Post-Standard

Jacob C. "Jake" Hullar III, his wife Maria and daughter Nanette, who runs the Fayetteville restaurant that has been in the family since July 1911.

Nanette Hullar enjoys coming to work every day to manage the **Fayetteville restaurant that bears her family name.**

"I know everybody who comes in," she said. "I love the people."

Her father, Jacob C. "Jake" Hullar III, describes himself as "more of an outdoors guy." Though the restaurant has been in his name since the late 1960s, he always preferred working at his other business, a gravel and septic service, before he retired.

His mother, Doris, ran the restaurant in the 1950s, and before that, his father, Jake Hullar II, operated

it in the 1930s and 1940s as more of a tavern than a restaurant. "You know beer was just a dime back then," Jake Hullar III said.

His grandfather, the first Jake Hullar, was the man who bought an existing crossroads inn and tavern -- then already almost a century old -- and established Hullar's Restaurant.

That was July 19, 1911.

This week, Hullar's marks 100 years in the family. The site, 411 E. Genesee St. in the heart of the village, has been a tavern and hotel dating back to 1818. It was founded by a man named Eben Blakeman.

"I'm not sure there are many other businesses that have been around longer," said Jake Hullar III, who is 83. "(Now) the family can start in on the second hundred years."

Century club?

Do you know of any restaurants, taverns or similar businesses in Central New York that have been owned by the same family

Hullar's is a comfortable place -- from the row of roomy booths across from the bar to dishes like

for 100 years or longer? Let us know. Send information to food@syracuse.com, with the words "100 Years" in the subject line.

the Hullar Burger, Fried Haddock Dinner, Southern Fried Chicken and the signature Hot Beef on Kummelwick, or "Beef on a'wick."

The regulars like that comfort.

In late 1990s, there was a minor dust-up in the village when the restaurant changed some staff and added Cajun-influenced and other then-newfangled menu items.

For the most part, however, Hullar's is a place where the regulars are looking for the familiar.

"They know what they want when they get up in the morning," Nanette Hullar said.

The inn and tavern founded by Eben Blakeman dated back to the days when weary travelers stopped in at such places for food, a drink, the latest news and a bed for the night.

"These kind of places go back to before the Erie Canal, before the Thruway and (Interstate) 81, when people traveled on these old roads, and towns and villages (like Fayetteville) were the population centers of the time," said Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association.

Places like Hullar's, Connor said, "were able to survive because the major routes of transportation -- like the Erie Canal and the interstates -- moved away from them, insulating them from development."

Jake Hullar III tells the story of the horse-and-buggy era Wands House, which was the name of the place when his grandfather bought it in 1911.

"The old Wands House had been written up in the travelogues," Hullar said. "From Utica to Syracuse -- you could make it here from Utica in one day, and tie your horses out back, and go into Syracuse the next morning. It was noted for that."

Hullar's grandfather already had experience in the trade: He owned the Cazenovia House and the Park House, two similar inns in Cazenovia.

"He knew the tavern and hotel business," Hullar said.

A photo dated 1914 shows Hullar's grandfather standing with a group of men on the boardwalk in front of the restaurant. Another man sits astride a donkey in the spot where cars now park.

Over the years, the nature of the business changed. It no longer served as an inn. During Prohibition, it was a confectionery store, ice cream parlor and gas station.

Jake Hullar II got the liquor license back in 1938 or 1939, his son said. A photo Jake Hullar III thinks is from 1940 shows his father standing with bartender Casper Burkhardt behind the bar. A mirror advertising Ballantine's Ale can be seen on a wall.

"Dad never wanted food," Hullar said. "Booze was the big thing."

But to satisfy state liquor laws, the tavern served sandwiches and light lunches, the origins of the menu that grew to incorporate the comfort foods of today.

Jake Hullar III remembers working at a job he calls "the first mop" when he was about 13. "I had to clean the place out after school," he said.

After that, he hardly ever worked in the restaurant, though other family members did. In addition to his gravel business, he also started a pay-to-fish business off of Highbridge Road in Fayetteville. (That may explain the restaurant's long focus on seafood.)

Renovations came over the years -- about 30 years ago the restaurant nearly doubled in size when it took over an adjacent storefront, which had been a dry cleaners among other businesses.

In the mid-1970s, the village decided to ban neon signs, which meant the end for the one that had hung at Hullar's for several decades.

"I think we were the last place in the village to take ours down," Hullar said.

The last major renovation came about 14 years ago, Nanette Hullar said.

Nanette, 50, is one of three daughters of Jake Hullar III and his wife, Maria. Her sisters, Susan and Nadia, worked at the restaurant but moved on to other things.

She has worked many jobs at the restaurant -- "I've even cooked when we're desperate" -- but her love is the "front of the house," where she can interact with customers.

Nanette, who has no children, still hopes to pass the restaurant on within the family, to build on a second century.

"My nieces and nephews are my hope," she said.

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