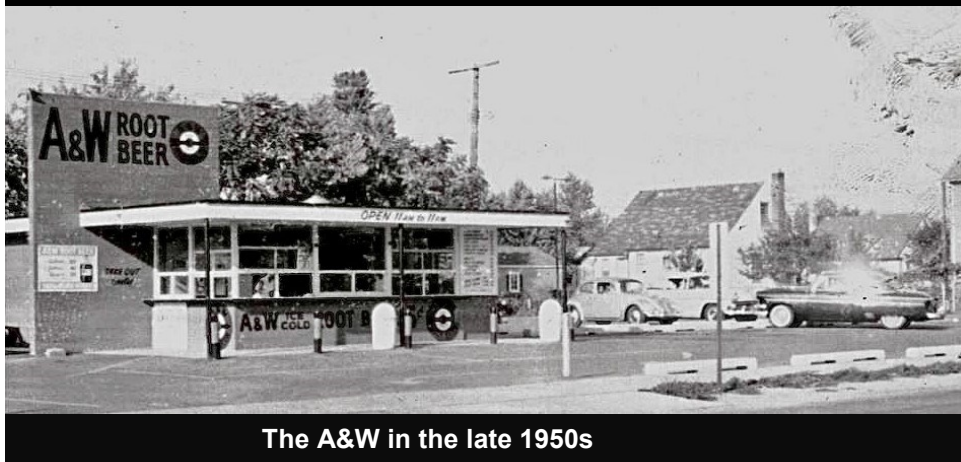




Berkley History & Museum Happenings

June 2024



The A&W in the late 1950s

The A & W Root Beer Drive-In A Berkley Classic

by Don Callihan

A New Job

It was mid-June 1958. I had just finished my junior year at Berkley High School and was looking for a summer job. The A&W Root Beer Drive-In was at the corner of my street and had a help-wanted sign in the window. I went to the outdoor counter and said I was there in response to the help-wanted sign. The person who talked with me appeared to be the owner. He explained the job and asked if I had experience. I said that I had worked part-time as a bottle boy in the beer store across the street. I was hired on the spot and started the next day.

I was introduced to the other people on site when I reported for duty. The last people I met were the carhops; two were moms, Betty and Dotty, who had worked there for a while, and one was a young girl, Neva, who was also experiencing her first day on the job.

The First Day

As the day progressed, I was coached through my new duties. I filled an order for food and two large root beers. The mugs were kept in a chilled water bath. I removed two mugs from the bath and put root beer into them. No foam was generated because the mugs were almost the same temperature as the root beer. When the root beer was about an inch from the top, I pressed the dispenser handle backward to dispense foam, thus establishing a 1-inch head on the mug. I set the mugs on a tray, transferred the food prepared in the kitchen (two chilidogs and two French fries) to the tray, and collected \$1.03 (chilidog 25¢, French fries 15¢, large root beer 10¢, Michigan sales tax 3¢) from the carhop. This was my summer job for the next two years. I also learned on the first day, new owners would take over the business in two weeks and the

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Upcoming Events

- **Additional Museum Hours**
 - ♦ **July 20 till Aug 31**
Saturdays
10 AM till 1 PM
- **2nd Annual Kit Home Tour**
 - ♦ **Sept 28, 2024**
6 kit homes not
seen at last year's
tour will be open
to the public.

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The Berkley A&W - 2024

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New Owners

original owners were training the new owners. Joseph Munroe Gardner built the A & W in early 1956 and received building approval on May 31 of that year. It took some time to install equipment and hire help. The first newspaper ad for a cook and carhops appeared in The Daily Tribune on July 19, 1956, so the business opened around that time. Shortly before the building received approval, Gardener placed the following ad in The Detroit News, "A & W ROOT BEER Drive-In -- Unusual circumstances, New A & W stand and franchise in Berkley, Mich. for sale. Price includes new building, new equipment and property." It took two years to find a buyer.

The new owners were A. Kenneth Hill and his wife, Lloraine (not misspelled). The Gardners (Munroe and Jane) left the business on June 30, 1958. With inexperienced owners and an inexperienced crew, other than two of the carhops, the first week was chaos. The weather was hot, increasing business, and the building was not air-conditioned. Just about when we thought we could not get busier, two little league teams showed up at the window, resulting in an order for 25 or so small root beers and straining our supply of small mugs.

We got by that first week and settled into our positions. We opened at 11 a.m. and enjoyed a steady lunch business until 1:30. It was relatively slow until the dinner crowd arrived around 5 p.m. The dinner hour ended at about 7:00 p.m., and then it was slow again until 8:30, when the young crowd arrived for root beer, shakes, malts, floats and coolers. By 11 p.m., we were ready for the day to end. While the inside crew cleaned up for the day, the carhops swept the parking lot. It was a fun workplace; most of the time, my shift went by quickly.

A Seasonal Operation

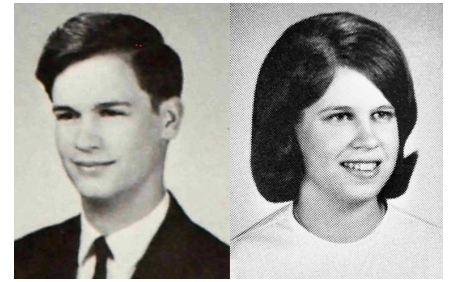
Weather played a major role in the operation. There was no canopy at that time and business dropped off when it rained. It also dropped off when it was cold. Winters were longer then. We opened for the year in April and closed at the end of September. The building had neither heat nor air conditioning; in spring and fall, we had to run electric heaters to stay warm.

A&W Root Beer is Made Onsite

Root beer was made on the premises. It began with cane sugar poured into a stainless steel open-topped tank with a cover. Water was added to the cane sugar and stirred until the sugar dissolved. A&W root beer extract was added to the water and sugar solution and stirred until everything was adequately dissolved. This made concentrated root beer. Our root beer dispenser held about 50 gallons. It chilled and carbonated the root beer as it was being dispensed. When the dispenser was running low, we would add one part of the concentrate to multiple parts of water to get the actual root beer. A&W Root Beer continues to be made on the premises today and uses the same ingredients.

The Hills owned the A&W until the spring of 1965. Betty and Fred Kochis ran it

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Larry & Nancy Streetman
Long-time Owners

In 1966, a young Berkley teenager, Larry Owen Streetman, began his career at the A&W in Berkley. Little did he know then that this was the start of a life-long journey. Larry, the 3rd of 8 children, grew up in the first block of Thomas Avenue, just north of 12-Mile. He attended Pattengill Elementary School and Anderson Junior High School before graduating from Berkley High School in 1968. Before his A&W days, he delivered The Daily Tribune on Prairie and Cummings. This early start at the A&W set the stage for his future.

Larry continued working summers at the A&W and used some of his money to purchase 45 RPM Records at the Hockey Radio Shop on the north side of 12-Mile, just east of Kipling. He was an excellent customer and knew the record stock from top to bottom, so it was only natural that he began working there from October through March, the A&W off-season. Larry stayed on at the A&W after graduation and worked his way up to manager.

In the same summer, a young Berkley girl was hired as a cook. Larry recognized her as she attended the same church that his family attended. Her name was Nancy Fay Killewald. A few years later, she and Larry began to date. Their courtship ended in their marriage in December of 1974.

The couple bought a house in Berkley and started a family. Larry continued to work at the A&W during the summer and Hockey Radio during the off-season. Then, in November of 1980, Stanley Trzcinski sold

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Larry & Nancy Streetman

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the A&W to Tom Colucci, and Larry found himself out of a job. However, Bill Davis, the owner of the A&W on Rochester Road in Troy, quickly hired him as manager, and he worked for Bill for four years.

In the meantime, he maintained contact with Colucci, and Tom brought him back to Berkley as manager at the beginning of the 1985 season.

Colucci lived in Trenton and had the opportunity to buy an A&W closer to home in 1986. He closed the deal and sold the Berkley location to Tom and Nancy in 1987.

By this time, the couple had five kids, four boys and a girl. Growing up, they learned the value of hard work as they all worked in the business. In late 1994, Larry and Nancy bought the Clawson A&W and operated both locations until early 2015. All the kids had college degrees by that time, and Larry and Nancy could cut their workload by half.



Nonetheless, Larry is still at the Berkley location early every morning, setting up for the day. Subtracting the four years he spent in Troy, Larry has been at the Berkley A&W for 55 years. When asked about retirement, Larry says, "I'm thinking about it, but I'm not quite ready yet."



The A&W *continued from page 2*

for them during the 1963 season and may have also been there in 1962. Betty was one of the car hops that I met on my first day. The Hills sold it to Stanley Trzcinski, a co-owner of Great Lakes Packing Company, which supplied hot dogs and hamburgers during the Gardner and Hill ownerships. Stanley sold the business to Tom & Shirley Colucci in November of 1981, and Larry and Nancy Streetman, the current owners, bought it in January 1987.

Changes

Many changes have occurred during the restaurant's 68-year history. The canopy was completed in time for the 1964 season, resulting in more business on rainy days. Several minor additions enlarged the building for working and storage space. Stanley Trzcinski initially added the orange roof in 1973. Then, he completed a major exterior remodeling in 1977 when a new brick fascia and the current roof were added. Point-of-Service, the intercom ordering system and back-lit menus were added in 1973. The system greatly reduced the time from arrival until food delivery because a carhop did not have to walk to a car to take an order. The Totem Pole Drive-in on Woodward in Royal Oak pioneered this technology in the Detroit area in 1954. Year-round service began in April of 1989.

New Menus

The menu also increased extensively over the years as shown below. Note that the childdog became a coney dog. 1970 saw foot-long hot dogs introduced. When it first opened, root beer and coffee were the only beverages. Coffee is no longer sold, but in addition to root beer, there is a full array of Pepsi beverages. Of course inflation has taken its toll; A large root beer is \$2.49 and a large French fry is \$2.99. Kids' meals are now available.

Root Beer 5/10 Hamburger 25 Cheeseburger 30 Hot Dog 20 Chili Dog 25 Grilled Cheese 20 French Fries 15 Malts 25 Milk Shakes 20 Coolers 20 Coffee 10 Pop Corn 10	
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Original Menu & Current Menu

The A&W Corporate Entity

The A&W corporate entity has also changed. The first A&W was started by Roy W. Allen in Lodi, California, in 1919. When he partnered with Frank Wright, they named the business A&W. Franchising began in 1926. Over the years, the parent company has changed many times. Since 2011, the chain has been owned by a group of franchise owners who formed a partnership and bought the company. Today, A&W is the only major restaurant brand 100% owned by its franchisees, the National A&W Franchisee Association (NAWFA). A&W is America's oldest franchised restaurant chain. Interestingly, Marriott International began as an A&W Root Beer franchise in Washington, D.C., in May 1927 operated by J. Willard Marriott and his wife, Alice.

The A&W continues to be an iconic Berkley Institution. This is especially evident on summer Saturday evenings when classic cars gather there to celebrate the 1950s when cars were king and the drive-in restaurant was the place to be and be seen.

Post Script

The young girl, Neva, who was also experiencing her first day on the job, and I, became husband and wife in 1962.

The Museum Gift Shop

The museum gift shop has the perfect gift for that person with a Berkley connection. Selections include books about Berkley history, posters, banners, post cards and our Berkley Map prints

Coffee Mugs

Don't forget the coffee mug featuring the bygone restaurants of Berkley, including Sila's. Restaurant mugs are available at the Museum, the City Hall and the Library for \$15 each.

Berkley Theater and Santa mugs are also available for \$10 each.

NEW! - Original artwork prints from Berkley artists

L to R, The Berkley Theater Marquee by Steven Patterson, Downtown Berkley—January 13, 2024 by Dale Carlson, The Vinsetta Garage by Steven Patterson.



Visit Us

Berkley Historical Museum
3338 Coolidge Highway
Berkley, MI 48072
248-658-3335
museum@berkleymich.net

Hours: Wed: 10 AM till 1 PM
Sun: 2 PM till 4 PM

Group tours by appointment.

Visit us on the web at
www.berkleyhistory.org

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X: [@BerkleyMuseum](https://twitter.com/BerkleyMuseum)

The Museum Corner Editor:
Don Callihan

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Donate Items of Historical Interest

If you have artifacts or historical photos that you wish to donate, stop by the museum or email: museum@berkleymich.net. Items should be clean and in restorable condition.

Become a Member

Do you enjoy history and/or the preservation of historical artifacts? If so, we have a place for you on the Berkley Historical Committee. We are an official committee of the City of Berkley dedicated to preserving and promoting its history. We educate and engage the public in our efforts through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum. If you wish to become an active member of this committee, send an email to museum@berkleymich.net indicating your interest, or call 248-658-3335 and leave a message.

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Photos are from Joan Jaeger, daughter of Kenneth & Lloraine Hill, Larry Streetman and Don Callihan. Historical references include Joan Jaeger, Karen Trczinski Kebler, daughter of Stanley Trczinski, Fred Kochis, son of Betty & Fred Kochis, Larry Streetman, *The Daily Tribune*, and *The Detroit Free Press* at Newspapers.com.

The mission of the Berkley Historical Committee is to preserve and promote the history of the City of Berkley, Michigan, and to engage the public through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum.