

Dudley Beltz
Oral History Interview
Marshall Public Library
July 21, 2005

NK: [We are] talking this evening for our Key Ingredients documentary, and can you tell me what your name is, sir?

DB: Dudley Beltz.

NC: OK. And just tell us where you were born and who your parents and siblings were and then you can go ahead and tell us a little bit about what you remember about the food business in Marshall.

DB: Well, I was born in lower Wabash in 1920 and I am a twin, but my twin brother died at birth. And then I had a brother four years younger who was Dwight Beltz and that's all the family that I had.

NC: Tell us what you - some of the things you remember about the food history of Marshall.

DB: Well, when I first started coming to Marshall it was when I was going to high school and occasionally I would come downtown and eat dinner. [Money was pretty scarce then but] you could get [lunch]at the Little Owl Café which is where Bishops is now. You could get a plate lunch for a quarter and a dinner was \$.35. And the difference was you got a piece of pie with the dinner. Otherwise it was \$.25. They called it the Owl Café and Tom Crump ran it. And in later years when Tom got older his son-in-law, Al Edwards, took it over and ran it. And occasionally I went down to the Keystone which is where the fire station is now. And it was a men's - kind of a men's stop for truckers. Well, they went to all three of the restaurants – Tom's, and Owl Café, and Keystone. At that time Route 40 went right through town, here, and since we were about half way between St. Louis and Indianapolis, the truck drivers would stop, eat something, get a drink, and that's what - they stayed open all night – all three of them restaurants. There were other restaurants in town. If you want to know about food – as you come up there from the two restaurants I'm at, Ridpath's had a grocery in there just this side of City Hall – a grocery store. And then

you come on up and cross the street where the Chinese place is at. That was Moye's corner grocery.

And then just a few doors this way, that we had what they called the Marshall Bakery. And they baked their own bread and distributed it around to people here in town and even had a truck that went out in to the country stores at that time. And they sold doughnuts and you'd just go in and buy them by the dozens and buy bread and stuff. And then the next eating place, I would say, would be Nell's. Nell Boesiger had a restaurant on this side of the street in this block. And I don't remember the name she called it. But she had a restaurant there for quite a while. And then the next thing you would come to in the food would be Kroger's store. You had Oakley's on the corner. You had Dulaney Bank between them and then Kroger's store. And Oakley's – and then around to the north was Spotts Meat Market. And they done their own butchering. They had a place in the southeast part of town down where the light plant is now, and they done their own butchering down there. They bought animals and butchered them and brought them up here and they even delivered meat around town. They had a man who would go in an old top buggy and he delivered meat around town. You would call in and tell him what you wanted and he would deliver it to you. Going on west there where - the drug store wouldn't be considered that. They just had ice cream and stuff. But now Murphy's down there – the building is gone now. But where Cooper's laundry is at - that outside driveway between them - there was a building went half way back and Murphy's had an ice cream parlor there but he also sold sandwiches. And on down where the 66 Phillips is now there was a gas station in there where it's at, but out in front of it there was a small building – real small. And Irene Walker run it and she sold hamburgers and pies and stuff like that in it.

That pretty well takes care of the north side.

And you said you already had Tom's. Lichtenburger's had a grocery store in there pretty close to where the barber shop is now – right in there. That would have been a grocery store. But we also had a lot of small grocery stores all over town. You probably have heard about them - one down at the south end, one up across from the VFW, and then out where the Medicine Shoppe is, that was a grocery store. And going east here you had Blizzard's grocery store, and then where Alice Houk's beauty shop is at - that was Poorman run it. It was a grocery store. I expect there were more but I can't remember them all now, but the one out here where the Medicine Shoppe is at – at one time, before

that – before that was a grocery store, my wife said her grandma had a little restaurant in that – run a restaurant in that. So that’s way before my time. Anything else is

NC: Let’s see. What do you think the difference is between the way it used to be with all the grocery stores in the times that you are telling about – the grocery stores and the restaurants – and the way it is now? What do you think the difference is?

DB: Well, at that time they was what they called Pop-and-Mom grocery stores, and that community right around the stores traded there pretty much so. But occasionally they would come up to Oakley’s or Kroger’s, I guess, and there at Oakley’s and Kroger’s it was a little bit cheaper then because they could buy it cheaper. That’s what put the little groceries out. The grocery people didn’t want to stop. Now, another thing that might be interesting is how the restaurants got their meat. Virgil Eller lived at the state line – right at the state line - and had a restaurant there on the Indiana side, and he had a truck. He went to Home Packing every morning - he had it insulated - and pick up meat and deliver it around to the restaurants and places here in town. It was a one man deal. He took orders, collected, and delivered. When he delivered and collected for it he also took the orders for the next week. And, in fact, he had enough routes that he went just once a week to the different routes. And whatever he didn’t – he put a little extra on - and whatever he didn’t sell he would take it back to Home Packing and put it back there. He had it insulated and he put ice in it – in the truck – to keep it cool.

NC: And who was that?

DB: Virgil Eller. His wife also ran a restaurant right there that you entered on the Indiana side. That’s where I learned to drink coffee. My folks never drank coffee. But I bought me a truck [when I was nineteen] and it didn’t have no heater and I’d get cold and I’d stop there and drink a cup of coffee to get warmed up. [Dudley added: It was a 1935 Ford ton-and-a-half truck. I paid \$140.00 for that 5 year old truck. It didn’t have a bed. I built my own truck bed.]

NC: Did you have a favorite place to go eat or visit?

DB: I used to go to (?) down there pretty much. Mainly, I went to the Keystone at that time because they had a lot out north there that you could park. Another interesting thing about the Keystone – when Jack Ragan had it, his mother-in-law died and he wanted to close the restaurant for the funeral but he couldn't lock it up. There was no way to lock it up. See, it was open twenty-four hours – twenty-four/seven. And he could lock the front door to keep people from coming in, but he couldn't lock the back end of it. And he had to hire a woman to stay there at the restaurant while he went to the funeral.

NC: What do you think the difference was in the different restaurants?

DB: Oh, it was – there wasn't a lot of difference in the food as I remember it. It was just different waitresses. I mean, you knew some of them and you liked them and you just went there because it was handy. And down at the – didn't have too big - Nell's Café didn't have that near a long bar as they've got now. It was only about half of that, and it went plumb to the door and only about half way back, and they've built on to it since. The other part was the kitchen. And then they had what they call these ice cream chairs and tables sitting around to eat.

NC: Why, did you ever go to the Candy Kitchen?

DB: I did some, but not a lot. See, the Candy Kitchen was run by Rademakers. And they also had another place just across the alley there at what you call little Rademakers. And on band concert nights – it's there where Bill Meehling is now - on band concert nights you would go over there and get your ice cream. You'd get a double-dip come for a nickel. And then Rademaker also had a bottling works in the back there and you bought Double Cola. You've probably heard about that.

NC: Can you think of anything else that you'd like to add?

DB: Oh, you were talking about the – [but you already had it] about the cheese plant out here at the railroad. My uncle used to haul milk in to that. Where I'd been somewhere trucking – some of the truckers – a truck would break down and they just had one truck. Oh, I was talking about the cheese plant. What did they call that? They called it the cheese plant, but it had another name. But they had a lot of milk routes over the country and they would bring milk in there to it

and I – when their truck would break down I had an extra truck and sometimes I'd run their route for a day or two while they got the truck repaired. And I also run a few of them over to Terre Haute, but very few. Most of them were here in Marshall.

NC: Well, thank you very much for your interview, and we look forward to having this on part of our - as part of our oral history and our Key Ingredients project. Thank you very much.

DB: OK