The Birth of the Burger and White Castle

However, things started to change for the hamburger when a restaurant worker named Walter Anderson set out to improve the taste of the hamburger by a new cooking process. Walter worked in a restaurant that served dry, tasteless burgers, and he thought that he could make a better-tasting burger.

Through trial and error, Walter discovered a way to cook tasty hamburgers. He would begin by flattening some ground meat on the griddle with a spatula and mashing in some shredded onions for more flavors. Then he would cook the meat quickly over a hot fire. After flipping the meat over, he would finish cooking it with the bun warming on top of the meat. This method sealed in the meat's natural juices.

In 1916, Anderson began selling his sandwiches out of an old, remodeled streetcar. He knew the importance of freshness and had meat and buns delivered twice daily to his restaurant. His new sandwich was so successful that it was not long before he opened two additional shops. Anderson soon realized that to keep on expanding he would need to have a partner. He became partners with Edgar Waldo “Billy” Ingram, who invested $700 so that a new restaurant could be opened.

White Castle-The First Fast Food Chain

Together, Ingram and Anderson founded the first White Castle restaurant in Wichita, Kansas, in 1921. In order that their new restaurant venture would not be linked specifically to either of them, they selected the name White Castle. The name was chosen because “White” signifies purity and cleanliness, and “Castle” stands for strength, permanence, and stability. The architecture of the restaurant was unique. With battlements and a turret, the building really did look like a miniature castle.

The company used Anderson's new cooking method, which quickly erased people's objections to the hamburger. In fact, while updated, White Castle still uses this unique cooking method today. The success of the new restaurant was immediate, and within 90 days the investment of $700 was recovered. Ingram and Anderson remained partners until 1933, when Ingram became the sole owner.

Today, the company is still owned by the Ingram family. The president of the company is Mr. Ingram's grandson Edgar Waldo Ingram III, who goes by the name "Bill." The chairman of the board is the founder's son Edgar Waldo Ingram, Jr. The White Castle concept has been so successful that by the end of 1987 there were 227 stores.

The history of White Castle tells the story not only of the growth of a new company, but also of the beginning of a whole new kind of eating for the American people. Today, when you travel along most roads it is quite commonplace to see many different fast food restaurants. But that was not the case when White Castle began expanding. However, as the number of White Castle restaurants grew, competition followed right behind them.

White Castle was a true pioneer in fast foods. The company has to be given credit for starting or creating so many different things that are now standard in fast food restaurants. Many of the things that everyone takes for granted when they visit a fast food restaurant today came about because of White Castle. For example, did you know that White Castle was the first fast food restaurant to…?

- use frozen ground meat,
- install under-the-counter electric dishwashers,
- design a mug that would allow water to drain off,
- have an exhaust system that eliminated griddle fumes,
- use stainless steel even for buckets, pots, and pans,
have movable all-metal buildings,

install a machine that could fold paper caps,

use coupons to increase their sales volume,

have a checking system that enabled each store to know the number of hamburgers, cups of coffee, and other items sold on any day of the year,

initiate a cash bonus plan (in 1924) which was based on sales rather than profits,

start an insurance plan (1927) for their workers when the idea was still new,

do a study (1930) to find out the exact nutritional value of the Castle Burger (In one part of the study, a medical student lived on only Castle burgers and water for 3 months.), and

develop a program (1932) to educate mothers and housewives to work in the burger business. (Women worked as hostesses and were given the name "Julia Joyce.")

Although many things have changed in White Castle restaurants since the first one was opened in 1921, the company's pledge remains the same: "Serving the finest products, for the least cost, in the cleanest surroundings, with the most courteous personnel."

Howard Johnson and His Restaurants

In 1925, Howard Johnson developed his own special ice cream. He then began opening ice cream stands along beaches and highways. He used orange paint to make his ice cream stands noticeable. Johnson decided that his ice cream would be even more popular with travelers if it were combined with a good restaurant. The only problem was that Johnson did not have the money necessary to open this type of restaurant. He decided to franchise his restaurants. He was a pioneer in the development of food franchising which is so popular today in the fast food industry.

The first Howard Johnson restaurant opened in the spring of 1935 and was built and operated in accordance with Johnson's policies. Howard Johnson restaurants were such a big success that by the fall of 1940 there were over 100 of them. They were always placed along heavily travelled tourist routes. In fact, most of you have probably seen the orange roofs of the Howard Johnson restaurants as you travel. Many of the restaurants now also have motels attached.