

Remembering...

Rocky's Roost

By Heather Makechnie
Beacon volunteer

In 1960, Rocky Theodore took time off from his job as a bartender in Boston to do some thinking. He jumped in his car and drove north. His travels landed him in Andover by sunset, so he booked into the Andover Meadow Inn.

The next day he decided to explore the quaint New England town and soon found himself on Bradley Lake Road. There was a "for sale" sign in front of a cabin up there, and a few hours later Rocky owned real estate. "I was born, raised, and grew up in the city. When I returned from my journey, I was a landed gent. Then, in 1966, I decided to move to Andover permanently."

Says Rocky, "As a young man, I was a cook on a Navy tugboat in Norfolk, Virginia. I spent a lot of my time off getting to know the locals, visiting their homes and learning to appreciate their food, like a good plate of chitlins or fried tripe. I also visited the restaurants in the area and got to know the chefs. They taught me how to make wonderful dishes like Chateau Briand. I loved to cook. I was good at it."

The opportunity to start a restaurant in Andover arose when the Proctor Block Building at the center of town went up for auction. "The Kearsarge Masonic Lodge was the winner and agreed to give me a lease for part of the building. It took a year to remodel. The old Howard Johnson's Restaurant in Boscawen went out of business just after I began constructing my restaurant space, and I was able to completely furnish it with their old booths, tables, and chairs. We named the 65-seat place Rocky's Roost.

"It was the only place in Andover where one could purchase a drink with their meal. Many items on the menu cost 99 cents. That, plus a penny tax, brought the grand total to \$1 for some mighty fine eating. Man, oh, man did I make a good clam plate!

"For \$3.95 we served a complete dinner, including aperitif and dessert. One of our entrees was a delicious small portion of quality filet mignon. It wasn't a huge side of beef with fat dripping off the plate like you might find at Durgin Park, but it was a good deal for the money, a full meal.

"It was a very difficult lifestyle," says Rocky with emphasis. "I worked long hours doing all the cooking. My new bride, Sandy, did all the serving. My mother and father, Nanni and Papa, were the only other help. We never found anyone else who had the knowledge and experience to be of any great help. We ran the Roost for eight years; open for breakfast at 6 AM until closing at 1 AM.

"When I-89 was completed in the mid '60s and Route 11 was no longer the main thoroughfare, Andover saw more than a 50% drop in traffic. Even so, in our heyday we didn't even advertise. On Proctor's Parents Day and on

the Fourth of July we were absolutely mobbed. On those days alone, we asked other family members, like our two sons, Mike and Bob, to come in to help us. Word of mouth brought me customers from as far away as Boston, many of whom were former customers and friends from my bartending days.

"Many people ask if it was difficult to deal with the Proctor students," says Rocky. "My answer has several parts. First, they tended to go to other places where they could congregate and be noisy. Second, I had a strict dress code, etc. Third, my wife Sandy brooked no rudeness from anybody and treated the kids like adults. If they were rude, she quietly pointed in the direction of the door, and they were not allowed back in until they apologized.

"But I have to say that the problems were few and far between. Over the years we grew so fond of many of the students that we would sometimes close the restaurant to attend their games or ski races. To this day we are still in touch with some of the students. While we had through-trucking patrons and town locals, eventually the greatest part of our clientele came from the school; not only students, but also their parents and many faculty members.

"I had a back room that I outfitted with a pinball machine and some tables. Students came in droves during their after-study-hall break from 9 to 10 PM. They could either order ahead or they could get a sandwich and soda and enjoy their hour off in a fun, social setting. I never had any trouble.

"I am also asked about the perils of having minors around a liquor-selling establishment. When the legal drinking age was lowered from 21 to 18, I still refused to serve minors. I learned a lot when I was a bartender in Boston, and one of the greatest lessons was that a drunk is a drunk. I said 'no' to a lot of people, and I threw out a lot of people, and many of them were famous. Teenagers were no more difficult to handle."

In 1975 Rocky had the opportunity to work for the Federal Government temporarily on Long Island, training crews to fight and eliminate the Golden Nematode Cyst, which was devastating potato crops. He was chosen for this position because he had experience working with the Gypsy Moth eradication program in New England.

"While I was working for the government I leased the restaurant to some people from Rhode Island who ran it as the Green Mountain Cafe from 1975 to 1977. After that I rented it to some people who ran it for a very short time as The Sub and Pub, with live entertainment, but that was very short lived. I didn't want to leave it vacant, so I reopened it myself as The Stable, selling beer and sandwiches. I also ran an ice cream bar called Sunday Farm. I'll bet 90% of the

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