

arts and entertainment

Burgers, buns battle for business in downtown Lincoln

By Peg Sheldrick

Who's got the best darn burger in the whole wide world? That's a matter for debate. In fact, it's getting hard to tell who has the best darn burger in Lincoln alone.

And as if the choice wasn't wide enough already, three new purveyors of patties have opened shop within a few blocks of campus during the last three months. New to the area are McDonald's, the Hamburger Factory and Wendy's, all dedicated to the proposition that all hamburgers are not created equal.

The managements of the new businesses are facing the competition with optimism. Jim Gage, manager of the newly opened Wendy's on 14th street, won't even admit there's any competition.

No bother

"We don't considerably bother them and they don't bother us," he said.

Steve Ekeler of the Hamburger Factory (a block away on Q Street) also claims he's indifferent to the competition.

"The name of the game is quality," he said, "and I'm not worried."

But Mike Sharpe, supervisor at the 14th and O McDonald's, indicates that the abundance of other stores does have an effect.

"Any competition always concerns us," he says. "Generally what we find is it makes us a little better . . . we realize they will take away the business."

Students comprise a large share of the business of each of these eateries although the bulk of the trade for each comes from the business community. It might help to have a few guidelines for selection.

Differences 'neath the bun

Given that ground beef is essentially ground beef, it's hard to understand how one store can claim their 100 percent pure patty is better than anyone else's. The difference lies in what goes around the burger from the topping beneath the bun to the trappings of the eatery itself. The areas that distinguish one bun-and-run from another are decor, sandwich preparation, and prices.

Each of these restaurants has a different atmosphere. McDonald's is the most flamboyant, looking like a cross between a frontier bordello and the interior of the Walton's barn. It offers all manner of seating at tables, along counters, and in booths.

Wendy's opts for an old-fashioned look in bright red and has only tables for four. The Hamburger Factory is a remodeled International House of Pancakes, so its decor is somewhat limited by what went before. The booths and tables are done in sober browns, a switch from the bright plastic normally associated with fast food operations.

Big burgers

Of course, what really matters is the hamburger itself. At Wendy's and the Hamburger Factory, the smallest sandwich

is the quarter pound size. The products from these two places are very similar in taste.

The McDonald's Quarter-pounder comes on a sesame seed bun and is topped with pickles, onions, and other things not found on the other two (which come on a plain bun). The Big Mac probably is closer in taste to the others because it, too, has dressing, lettuce, and other similar ingredients in its topping.

Sacred recipes

The recipes for the various combinations of condiments are secret and sacred unto each store, but in general the quality and flavor of each brand of sandwich are good.

A ground beef gourmet might be able to tell the difference, but the average customer probably couldn't tell one burger with dressing, lettuce, *et al* from another. Which is best? It all depends on the diner.

Each store boasts a strong emphasis on quality. However, each has a different strategy for winning the battle of the burger. Wendy's chooses to emphasize

fast service. To this end, it limits its menu to specific items and runs its line like a drive-through for pedestrians.

The Hamburger Factory is unique in offering pinball machines for its customers' enjoyment. McDonald's emphasizes variety in its menu as well as its decor.

If none of these criteria grab you, then you must look to the price as the ultimate determiner.

Pocketbook pickings

Wendy's Single costs 89 cents. Cheese and tomato are extra, at 10 cents each. McDonald's Quarter-pounder runs 85 cents (with cheese for 10 cents more) and the Big Mac comes cheese included for 90 cents.

The Hamburger Factory Lightweight is the lightest in price, a scant 80 cents with tomatoes included. So where you dine will probably depend on whether you're shopping with a discerning palate or a diminished pocketbook.

Will all this competition prove healthy for the burger business downtown? Debbie Skinner, manager of Burger Chef (an

"established" firm at three years old), thinks it's a mixed blessing.

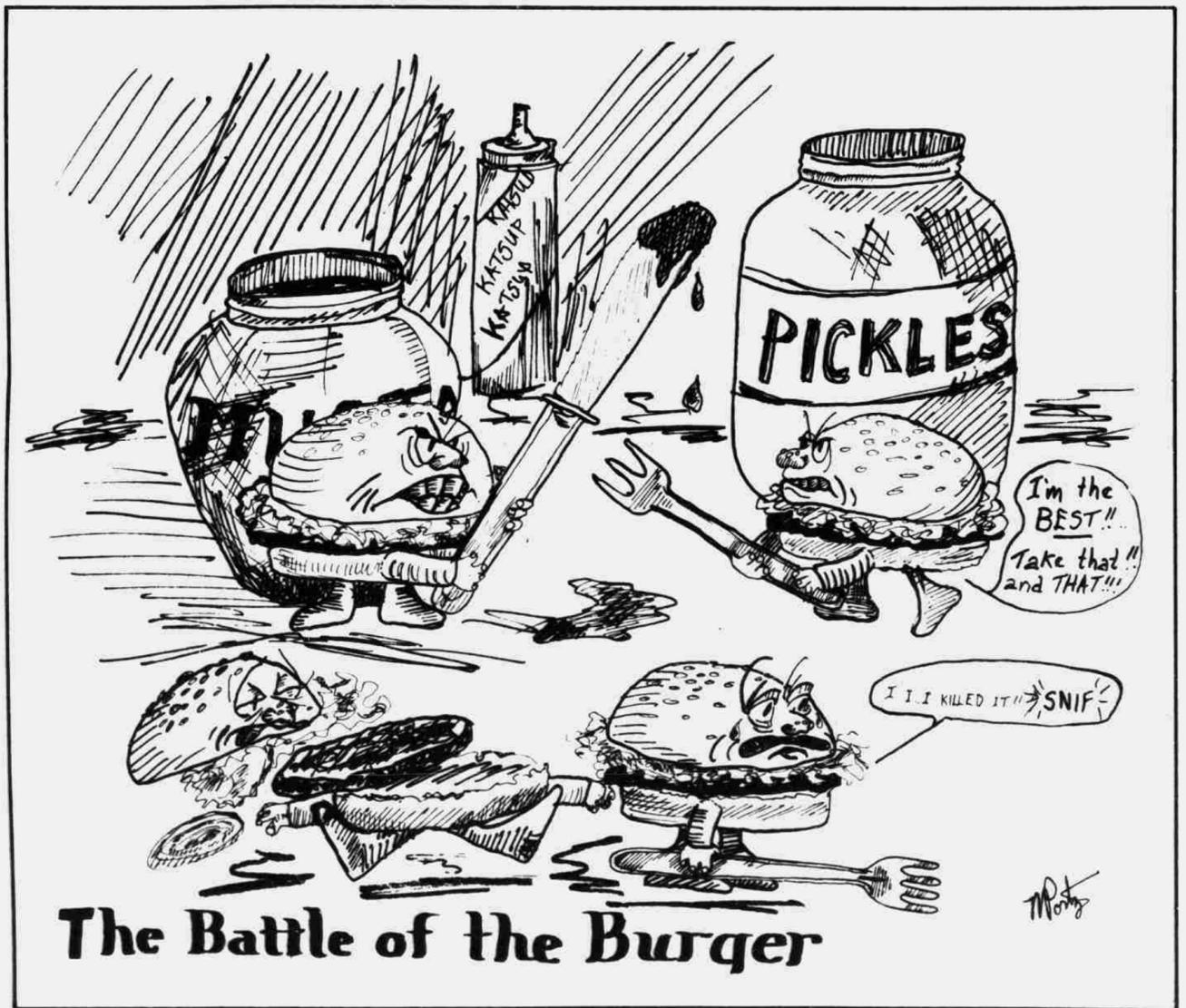
"It gives people more of a variety if there are more businesses that open," she says. "The only thing is there might not be enough downtown business to keep them all open."

Few slumps

Her own store has seen a few slumps with the opening of competitor's stores, but regular customers returned once the novelty wore off. None of the stores are getting as much student trade as they originally anticipated they would.

As Mike Sharpe of McDonald's puts it, "We'll fight 'em—we'll do our best to limit the amount of business they (the competitors) take from us. Any competition can hurt you if you let 'em."

The avenues of downtown Lincoln are lined with burger businesses just waiting for you to put your mouth where their money is. There are a million burgers in the naked city, and these are just a few of them.



Zealots, elitist rock critics part of new music scene

There was something oddly disturbing about the way this woman friend of mine eye's misted over as she embraced her stuffed poodle.

"He looks just like Ringo," she explained, "but he's got Paul's personality. . ."

Something in the back of my head was kicking around the loose brain cells, and saying—rather gruffly at that—"Never tango with a zealot, kid. . ."

Of course I knew better than to attempt to deal rationally with anyone clinging to a stuffed poodle with Paul's personality, but, I had time between classes.

It was a mistake.

This particular woman's affliction was Beatlemania, one of the more common manias when the subject is music. Everybody has their musical weakness. I, for example am very fond of Slavic folk tunes played on pear leaves. I have several stuffed poodles around the apartment which resemble Slavic pear leaves.

Rock critics masochists

It is precisely the wide variance in musi-

cal tastes which has opened a whole new area for those with strong masochistic tendencies. If you are a glutton for punish-

michael zangari

ment, it is comforting to know you can always be a rock critic.

Once upon a time there was a concept known as "rock as art." This was the largely mystical belief that rock 'n' roll had some sort of redeeming social qualities. That concept gave rise to a new race of gods called "critics," who sat in musical judgment of all wrong and right. And they were pretty good.

People like Dave Marsh of *Rolling Stone* magazine gave a new credibility to rock through sensitive and perceptive reviews. Half of the fun was respecting the critics but disagreeing with them. After all,

musical taste was relative, wasn't it? And those critics didn't really take themselves seriously did they? Of course not.

Defenses rolling

In the last four issues of *Rolling Stone*, they have printed no less than five explanation/defenses of reviews that have appeared over the last few months.

It would seem that the old guard has lost it's sense of humor.

Initially, I wasn't sure how to handle this sudden wave of insecurity coming from the established rock press. Not only were they taking themselves seriously, they were getting defensive. They were taking cheap shots at the people who were writing letters to the editor.

What is developing is an "us and them" situation. Us being the reader/consumer, them being the newly-elected rock elite. This has got to stop.

The rock elite has succeeded in giving a certain needed credibility to the contemporary music business. It was a slow, two decade process. In the process it also has lost touch with who it is and what rock is.

Writing a defense of a review is not unprecedented, but dragging a defense out over four issues of a national magazine is ridiculous.

I enjoy reading reviews. Especially Dave Marsh's. I agree with him about fifty percent of the time. The other half of the time I have fun getting mad at him.

Because I like him I feel obligated to point out some things to him, like I would to a friend, (which through his writing he has become.)

It is OK to be wrong, Dave. This incredible elitist pretentiousness of late is pretty disgusting. You really don't have to be right. If a review needed defense, maybe you should have spent more time with it initially, maybe given it more thought. Now is too late.

You gave your opinion once. It was good. That is enough.

For what it's worth I'd like you to meet a friend of mine. She has a poodle who looks like Ringo, and a personality like Paul. You too would probably have a lot to talk about.