



Richland County History Room photo.

Gables Restaurant – 212 North Main Street - 1932.

Your Friends Know!

Where to go for a Lunch or Dinner in Richland Center.

They know we serve only the best of everything at Lowest Prices.

The Gables Restaurant
Regular Dinners—Short Orders—Lunches
Open Day and Night.

The Richland Democrat archive - 1936.

Diners have been a quintessential part of America's dining landscape for decades. During the '30s and '40s, they became even more prevalent as they provided civilians with affordable options during the Great Depression and World War II. A full meal may be available for a special price, sometimes called a blue-plate special and regional fare is often served. Coffee, iced tea, and soft drinks are the typical beverages, and pie and ice cream are popular desserts. The Gables Restaurant opened in 1932 just as the Great Depression was making life very difficult for the average person to get along. Its forte was providing affordable meals 24 hours a day, every day.

It does not actually fit the definition of a classic diner. A diner is a prefabricated fast food restaurant building characteristic of American life, especially in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and in other areas of the Northeastern United States, as well as in the Midwest, although examples can be found throughout the United States, Canada, and parts of Western Europe. Diners are characterized by offering a wide range of foods, mostly American, a distinct exterior structure, a casual atmosphere, a counter, and late

operating hours. "Classic American Diners" are often characterized by an exterior layer of stainless steel—a feature unique to diner architecture. The older ones are often repurposed streetcars or train cars.



A typical building fitting the definition of "Diner."

Gables Restaurant, throughout its existence, has been an eating establishment that more closely fits the definition of "greasy spoon." Greasy spoon is a colloquial term for a small, cheap restaurant typically specializing in fried foods. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term originated in the United States and is now used in various English-speaking countries. It's not meant as a derogatory term, just definitive. The name "greasy spoon" is a reference to the typically high-fat, high-calorie menu items such as eggs and bacon and in the Midwest, the hot beef plate. The term has been used to refer to a "small cheap restaurant" since at least the 1920s.

Hot beef: Rather than merely describing the temperature of beef, the phrase "Hot Beef" is used to describe a particular dish consisting of roast-beef sandwiches on white bread smothered in gravy and accompanied by mashed potatoes. This dish is consumed most often for dinner (which means lunch) at small-town restaurants such as Richland Center.



Even as the Depression deepened, the number of full-fledged restaurants continued to increase, from 134,293 in 1929 to 169,792 in 1939. Immigration slows in response to restrictive legislation of the late 1920s, reducing the supply of professional waiters and cooks. Female servers make up more than half of wait staffs. The economical fixed-price meal, which had virtually been replaced by a la carte service, returns to popularity. Promotions such as "all you can eat" and "free coffee refills" are featured. After the repeal of Prohibition nightlife revives. Many diners, accustomed to speakeasies, show a preference for small, intimate restaurants. All-white interiors give way to

The Midwestern specialty "Hot Beef."

imaginative decor which mimics ships or European courtyards. Federal financing facilitates modernization, encouraging restaurants to add streamlined fronts and air-conditioning.

There was a period during WW II when Gables had to reduce its hours due to the labor shortage but continued to function. Through the years of its existence, Gables has continued to fit this niche in the restaurant business even though it has gone through a number of ownership changes. It has been the quintessential comfort food haven; Richland Center's very own "Greasy Spoon."



Gables Restaurant as it appears in 2016.