

“The Barrels were fun places to work in because you couldn’t get off in a corner and sulk—because there was no corner to get to.”—Ford Dickerson, Crookston

As automobiles captured the fancy of Americans after 1900, merchants learned to entice autoists into their establishments. Signs and billboards pointed out services and products geared to motorists. By the 1920s and its ever-faster cars, entrepreneurs merged their buildings with billboards. The result: businesses took the shape of gigantic milk bottles, whimsical teapots, or colorful gas pumps in order to sell products along the roadside.¹

THE BARRELS ROOT BEER STANDS OF THE UPPER MIDWEST

Steven R. Hoffbeck

employment with the Great Northern Railway, working as an engineer until 1920. Next he moved to Crookston and in 1922 opened the Crookston Cigar Store. He also dabbled in coin-operated player pianos and vending machines, collecting the cash from those he bought and placed in restaurants around town. Through

In 1929 William “Harry” Muzzy of Crookston entered the world of curbside service by building a two-story root beer barrel in Great Falls, Montana. Over the next seven years, during the worst times of the Great Depression, he erected a string of varnished wooden barrels across the Upper Midwest. His story of pluck, determination, and vision in selling root beer serves as an example of the American dream of success as well as a reminder of the automobile’s conquest of the nation.²

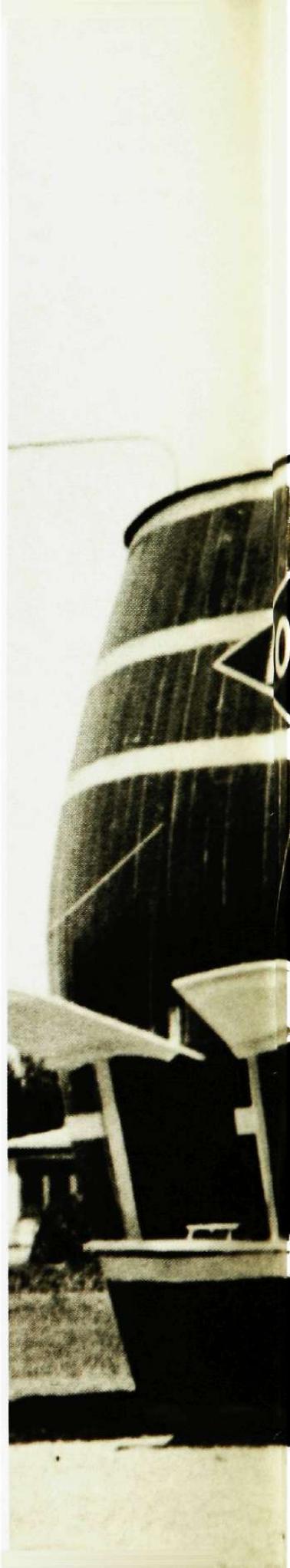
At first glance, Muzzy might seem an unlikely candidate to become a king of the roadside. Born in Iowa in 1883, he moved with his family to Minot, North Dakota, at an early age. There he later found

¹Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1985), 48, 49; Frederick L. Allen, *The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950* (New York: Harper, 1952), 121-30.

Research for this study was funded, in part, by the North Dakota Humanities Council. Steven Grosz assisted in the early architectural survey of The Kegs, Grand Forks, for the Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission.

²Here and below, see *Grand Forks Herald* (N.Dak.), Mar. 21, 1948, p. 28; Lloyd Eagan (Muzzy’s nephew), tape-recorded interview with the author, Sioux Falls, S.Dak., July 18, 1991, transcript, p. 2; Martha Muzzy and Ford Dickerson, tape-recorded interview with the author, Crookston, Oct. 31, 1990, transcript p. 1-3. All tapes and transcripts cited hereafter are in the author’s possession.

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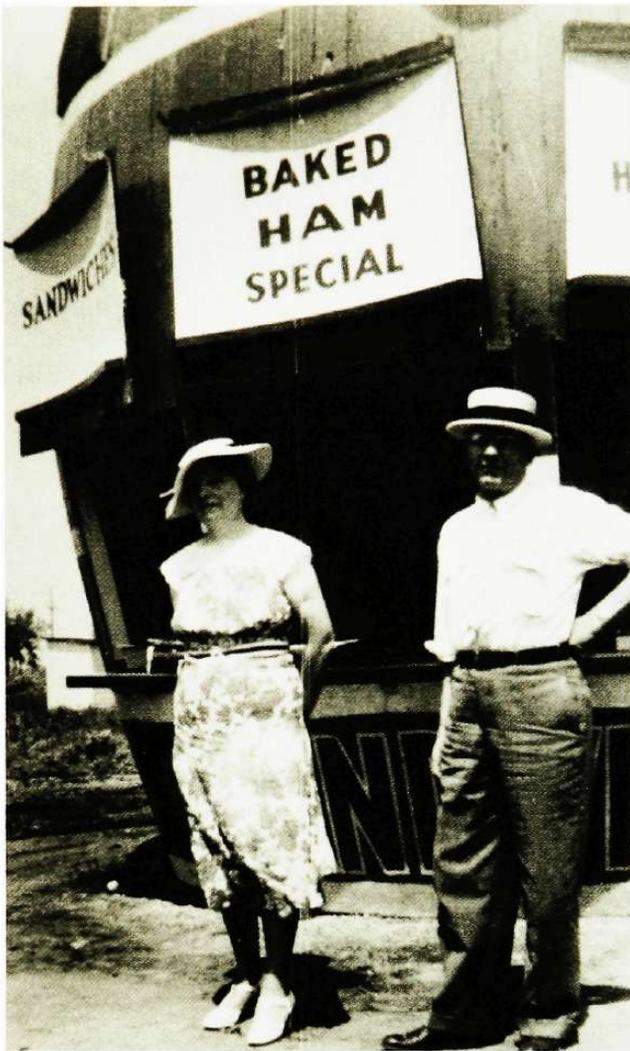
The Barrel at Dilworth

this sideline he became acquainted with James F. Clifford of Great Falls, who shared his interest in pianos. In 1928 Clifford suggested that Muzzy join him as a partner in a Great Falls root beer business. The pair decided to sign on as franchisees of the Texas-based Triple XXX Root Beer Company.

Muzzy liked the idea of getting a franchise. The time was right: a consumer economy boomed in the 1920s, encouraged by national advertising on an unprecedented scale. California, which led the nation in refining car culture and roadside architecture, saw a proliferation of franchised establishments. Among the most successful was the chain of A & W root beer stands, which began to spread into the Midwest during the 1920s. Franchising itself was not new, but the innovation of drive-in service attracted customers and franchisees alike. The combination of enough automobiles and enough good roads led to a group of customers ready to be served.³

Structures such as A & W's barrel-shaped stands exemplified programmatic architecture, in which a building acts as a roadside sign, informing the public what is for sale inside. Such oversized images along the nation's new highways lent a sense of "playfulness and joy" that typified the spirit of the Roaring Twenties, according to architec-

³Alan Hess, "The Origins of McDonald's Golden Arches," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (Mar. 1986): 61; Liebs, *Main Street*, 208–9; "75 Years of Food Services History," *Restaurant Business* 75 (May 1976): 91–100; Philip Langdon, *Orange Roofs, Golden Arches: The Architecture of American Chain Restaurants* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 64; Mary Cable, *American Manners & Morals: A Picture History of How We Behaved and Misbehaved* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1969), 348–51.



Martha and Harry Muzzy, 1930s

tural historian David Gebhard. Outlandish buildings seemed to represent a grass-roots movement against sophisticated forms of modern architecture such as art deco and streamline moderne that bespoke the wonders of the machine age. The idea that “form follows function” served as the motto of the modernists. The programmatic buildings countered this notion and raised the idea that “form follows fantasy.”⁴

Muzzy and Clifford knew of the proliferation of A & W drive-ins across the Midwest. They also had watched as White Castle hamburger operations, founded in 1921, began to spread. By 1926 White Castle had reached Minneapolis, and the idea of the porcelain-coated steel buildings shone like silver coins in Muzzy’s imagination. With luck, he could capture some of the magic and become a mid-western model of franchised success.⁵

Harry Muzzy and James Clifford built a two-story, barrel-shaped business on the eastern outskirts of Great Falls in 1928, Clifford providing the investment for half of the net profit. Muzzy and his wife, Martha, whom he had married in Crookston in 1927, supplied the labor for the other half. The venture began at a fortuitous time. Wall Street was still on a dizzy upward spiral, and root beer served as a legal way to quench thirst during the hot summers of Prohibition. Selling soft drinks and, soon after opening, ham sandwiches and hot dogs with sauerkraut proved to be a smashing success.⁶

The Barrel soon became a curiosity, so that car owners just had to “come by at once and see what it was about,” according to Ford Dickerson, Martha’s son from a previous marriage. The Muzzys lived in the top of the building, while Dickerson lived in a tent out back. Business boomed from the start. At ten cents a mug, the Triple XXX root beer, as advertised, “made thirst a joy” in the sweltering summer of 1929, when temperatures repeatedly climbed above 100 degrees. The owners of the White Spot Restaurant next door, envious of the franchise’s success, soon opened their own roadside food service, placing a take-out window featuring Magnus Root Beer on the end of the building nearest the Barrel. Within a short time, carhops from the competing establishments raced to take orders from customers parked between the buildings.⁷

The Barrel did not offer a manicured landscape, a lawn, or any frills. Morning winds in Great Falls were said to blow rocks the size of acorns and golf balls around “like nothing,” but the building held up to the gales. Heavy rainfall forced the establishment to close for the duration. Waitresses had no protection from the elements until Muzzy added a front porch near the take-out windows. Since it was not unusual for horse-drawn

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⁴Gebhard quoted in J. J. C. Andrews, *The Well-Built Elephant and Other Roadside Attractions: A Tribute to American Eccentricity* (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1984), vii, ix–xii; Langdon, *Orange Roofs*, 43, 61.

⁵Langdon, *Orange Roofs*, 29, 30, 33; Liebs, *Main Street*, 207–9; Muzzy-Dickerson interview, passim.

⁶*Great Falls City Directory, 1929–1930*, 127; *Great Falls Tribune*, July 28, 1991, p. 1E; *Crookston Daily Times*, Mar. 20, 1948, p. 2; Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 3, 8, 44.

⁷Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 4; *Great Falls Tribune*, July 28, 1991, p. 1E.

wagons to pull up for curb service in the early days, car-hops had to maneuver around the droppings left behind. These hard workers earned the nickname from gingerly scrambling onto the running boards of automobiles and trucks to deliver orders.⁸

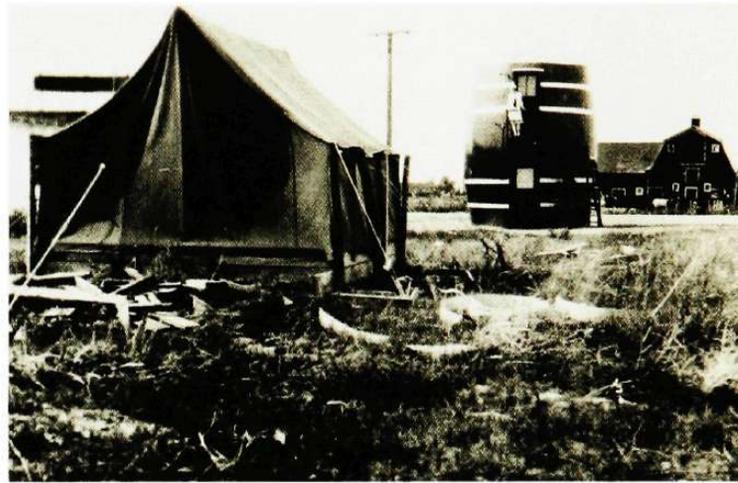
Martha Muzzy outfitted her employees with hand-sewn, braided-front uniforms, all to cater to the new roadside trade. The waitresses resembled hotel bellhops, complete with jauntily placed pillbox caps. The first car-hops at the drive-ins were women, not teenagers. In 1929 the tips, even on a dime root beer, were said to be good, and women eagerly sought the work. Thirteen-year-old Ford Dickerson helped out around the Barrel, filling mugs while standing on the sawdust-covered floor.⁹

Triple XXX root beer attracted customers in Great Falls for several reasons. It was a franchised name, clearly not a backyard concoction. The logo painted on the Barrel tied Great Falls to the national trend of franchising. Just as consumers enjoyed their other brand-name possessions, so, too, did they enjoy drinking brand-name root beer in their autos. In addition, the name teased the drinker by its association with bootleg alcohol, marked with three Xs for extra potency.

Soon after the stock market crash in October 1929, the Barrel began to feel the strain of the depression. In 1930 prices were reduced to a nickel per serving for adults (children still got a smaller mug for free), but even that proved to be profitable. The only real limits appeared to be those of nature. Root beer stands are seasonal businesses, and the Great Falls Barrel had to close when temperatures plummeted. The Muzzys later used a slogan that put the rationale in a nutshell: "Closed for the Season. Reason—Freezin'." Lack of artificial outdoor lighting also relegated trade to the daylight hours. One way for the business to prosper despite these limitations was to build more barrels in other locations.¹⁰

Inspired by success in Great Falls, Harry Muzzy traveled by car to his old hometown of Minot in 1931 to open a new drive-in without a partner. He located a piece of ground opposite the city zoo entrance, right next to the local baseball field. Muzzy directed construction of the new Barrel himself, using blueprints and plans supplied by the Triple XXX company.¹¹

Due to its excellent location, the Minot Barrel proved to be a miracle in the midst of hard times. Muzzy had attempted to obtain a bank loan to build; when refused,



Back view of the Great Falls Barrel, showing Ford Dickerson's tent and stairway to the Muzzys' second-floor apartment

Smartly attired staff at the brand-new Great Falls Barrel, 1929



⁸Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 10; *Crookston Daily Times*, July 22, 1957, p. 8.

⁹Here and below, see Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 4, 8, 9.

¹⁰*Crookston Daily Times*, July 22, 1957, p. 8; *St. Paul Dispatch*, Dec. 28, 1965, p. 22; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 27, 1960, p. 1F, 7F; Cecile Menard Kerns, Crookston, to the author, Oct. 1, 1991, p. 1, 2, 3.

¹¹Here and below, see Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 4-7.

he simply built anyway. According to Dickerson, the novelty of the Triple XXX logo attracted patrons at first. Peppy curbside service and quality food, such as sauerkraut and wieners, kept them coming back.

Harry and Martha, wishing to return to Crookston, built their next drive-in there in 1932. As in Minot, Muzzy hired local laborers to help. Building such a large barrel involved some skill. Most men in construction and woodworking had little knowledge of barrel-making, though they knew plenty about building houses. About 117 pieces of one-by-six-inch tongue-and-groove fir lumber, each board sixteen feet in length, formed the outer shell. Lumberyard workers, glad for the business in the depression days, had to learn to shape and bevel the wood so that it would fit into the top and bottom hoops. The shape once again proved to be stable in the winds of the Upper Midwest, and it brought in customers. The Crookston Barrel became an oasis for thirsty travelers along United States Highway 2. The Muzzys settled down in town, counting their gains from the summertime during the long, cold northern Minnesota winters.¹²

Harry Muzzy followed his successes with another Barrel in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in 1935. This one, according to records in the city engineer's office, cost approximately \$350 to build. In a yearly succession thereafter, Barrels sprang up in Detroit Lakes, Dilworth, and Wadena in Minnesota and in Devils Lake, North Dakota. Muzzy dropped the Triple XXX brand just after he built the Minot establishment, when he got a better price on concentrate from the Liquid Carbonic Company of Chicago. Instead of the old logo, new large-print five-cent signs now signaled the way to the Barrels.¹³

Since the Muzzys personally operated the Crookston stand, trustworthy workers had to be found to manage the other stands. Harry gave control of each establishment either to two women or a couple familiar with the business, allowing them a percentage of the net profits. The managers typically lived in the upper story of the Barrel. In 1936 waitresses were paid \$1.25 per day plus free food and tips.¹⁴

Buoyed by his success with the Barrels, Muzzy launched a traveling root beer stand, named The Boat. The vagabond enterprise followed the county fairs in Minnesota during the mid-1930s. Run by a relative of the Muzzys, The Boat sold nickel root beers until it broke down near Clear Lake (Sherburne County) and was abandoned.¹⁵

By any standard the Barrels proved successful, even through the darkest days of the Great Depression. Harry Muzzy understood well the basic maxim that the *Magazine of Wall Street* applied to the 120 million Americans of 1931: "Depression or no depression, every one of them eats." A well-conceived and well-supervised eatery could "do well despite [the] Depression." Extensive advertising proved unnecessary, since the shape of the business indicated what was sold within. Some small signs posted along the highways steered motorists to the root beer havens.¹⁶

The Detroit Lakes Barrel, for example, was extremely popular with the local citizenry and with lake-cabin visitors. The influx of customers encouraged businessmen on both sides of the stand to add soft drinks to their product lines. Lynch's service station next door constructed a drive-in with curbside root beer service within a year of the Barrel's debut. Diemert's Tourist Cabins soon sported a Coca Cola sign and sold the soda in the main office. To reduce confusion for potential customers traveling along East Highway 10, the Muzzys hoisted a large Main Entrance sign over their take-out window.¹⁷

¹²Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 9, 10.

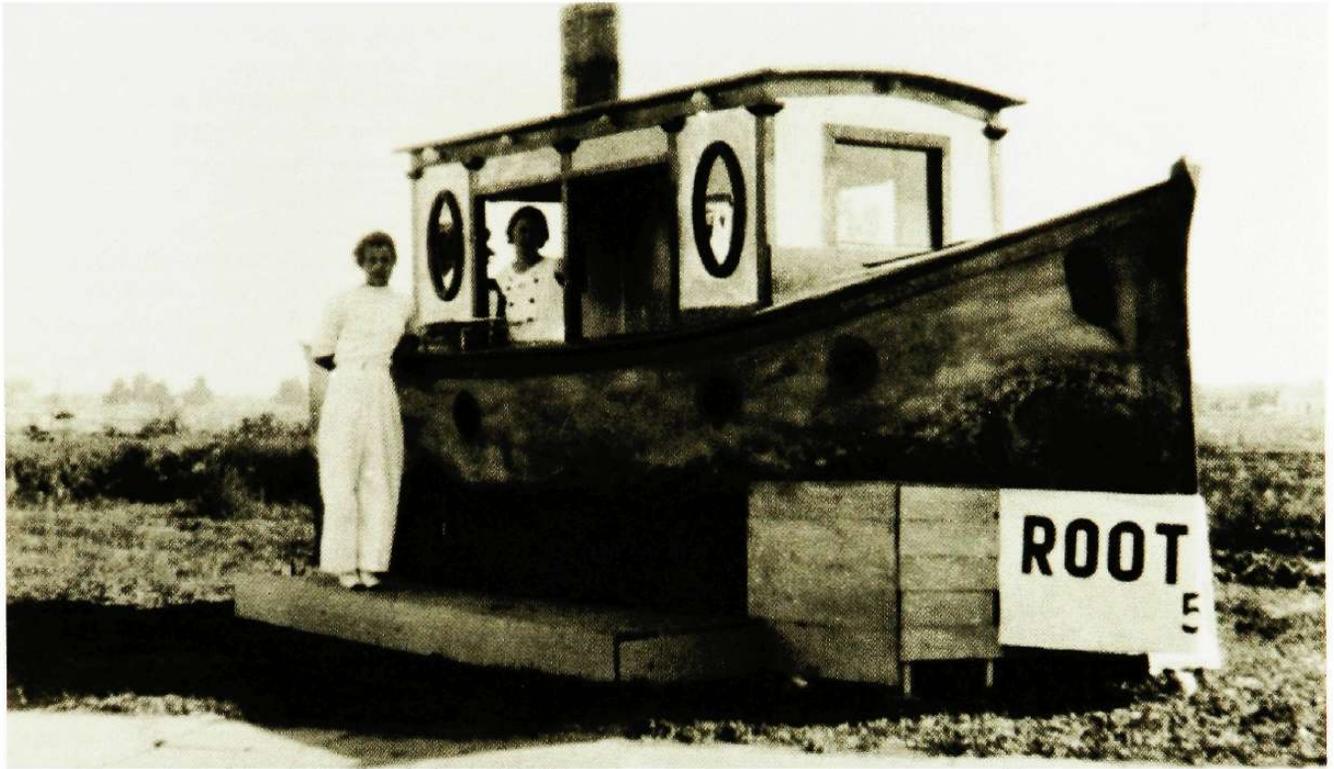
¹³*Building Permits: City of Grand Forks, N.D., 1935-1948*, #5607, Apr. 23, 1935, Block E, Alexander & Ives Addition, Grand Forks city engineer's office; Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 37; Lillian Imes Bruhn, waitress at Detroit Lakes Barrel, to the author, Aug. 5, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁴Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 12; Bruhn to author, 1.

¹⁵Information from photo identification during Muzzy-Dickerson interview.

¹⁶J. C. Clifford, "The Investor Views the Chain Restaurant," *Magazine of Wall Street*, Oct. 17, 1931, p. 848.

¹⁷Here and below, see Woodrow Lynch, Detroit Lakes, to the author, July 21, 1991; Betty Heiberg, Osage, Minn., to the author, July 22, 1991, p. 1; Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 30-31, 36, 41.



The Boat, moored at a county fair about 1935

In 1934, after the repeal of Prohibition, the Crookston Barrel experimented with the sale of 3.2-percent-alcohol beer along the highway. After the dry years, the residents went “hog wild” for the brew, and profits jumped. Alcohol fueled fights in the parking lot, however, and the beer license proved to be more trouble than it was worth. The Barrel returned to the proven success of selling root beer to families rather than real beer to adults.

In 1939 Muzzy’s nephew Lloyd Eagan, a Western Union telegraph agent in Grand Forks, began to look for a better way to make a living. Struggling to get by, his wife, Lillian, took a job at the local Barrel. Eagan observed that Uncle Harry made “pretty good money” with his chain of seven drive-ins (Muzzy had left the Great Falls partnership), and he began to look for an opportunity to emulate that success. Lloyd and Lillian saved their money and opened their own Barrel in St. Cloud, hoping to leave their old jobs behind. Lloyd took a five-week vacation from Western Union to build the structure and arrange for workers and a manager. The St. Cloud Barrel should have prospered because of its location at the junction of highways 52 and 10 (the present-day site of a McDonald’s restaurant); other factors, however, came into play. Muzzy disagreed with the St. Cloud location and told Eagan that the drive-in would “die like a weed” because the area’s predominantly Catholic citizens would rather donate their spending money to the church. This prediction came to pass, but for different reasons. According to Eagan, the ethnic groups around St. Cloud preferred real beer to root beer, even in Prohibition days. In addition, Eagan continued working in Grand Forks, leaving care of the Barrel to a manager who developed impetigo, a skin condition that deterred some customers.¹⁸

¹⁸Here and below, see Eagan interview, 1–5, 7.

Discouraged but not defeated, Eagan searched for another location. He looked at sites in Owatonna, Mankato, and Fairmont. While in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, he was inspired to establish a Barrel in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Journeying to a place he had never before visited, Eagan secured the use of an empty lot on the city's southern outskirts. With the proceeds from the St. Cloud drive-in, which Lillian was keeping afloat, the couple built another establishment, this one spelled "Barrell." After completing it, Lloyd and Lillian had but three dollars to buy the food and root beer necessary for opening. On the first day, the couple sold enough nickel soft drinks and nickel hamburgers to clear eleven dollars. As Eagan recalled, they could "tell the first day, the first night, we were going to make it." The Eagans turned a profit every year for almost three decades.

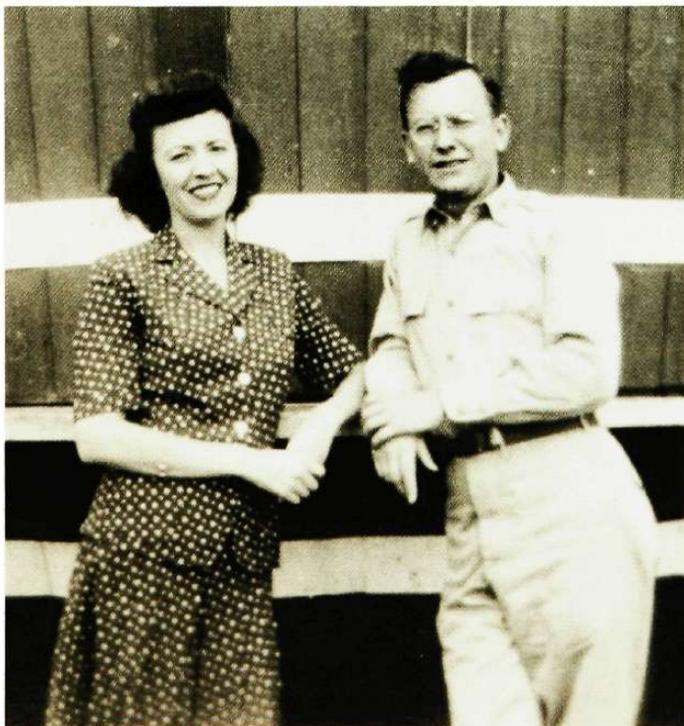
Between 1929 to 1939, ten Barrels sprouted up along the main highways in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana. Each offered curbside service complete with carhops. Operating from April to October—from frost to frost—the Barrels provided employment to local people as well as an inexpensive night out for young and old alike. Readily available gasoline made weekly Sunday drives a wonderful family event. With root beer priced at a nickel a glass and children's mugs free, a carload could stop at the Barrel for twenty-five cents at most. Deloise Haugen of Devils Lake recalled redeeming empty pop or milk bottles at grocery stores in order to have enough coins to buy a hamburger at the Barrel.¹⁹

The Japanese attacks at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines in late 1941 affected the lives of all Americans, and the Barrels reflected these changes. Sugar, a principal ingredient of root beer, became essential to the war effort. (Industrial alcohol derived from sugar was used to make smokeless gunpowder.) American supplies of sugar from the Philippines were cut off during the Japanese conquest, and production in Hawaii became difficult. Sugar beet growers in the Red River Valley sought to put in more acreage in 1942, but the Agricultural Adjustment Administration at first denied the request. The War Production Board took control of available supplies of raw cane sugar in 1942, making this commodity the first product rationed during the war.²⁰

Shrewd consumers who had weathered World War I began to stock their cupboards with the sweet stuff. Federal Price Administrator Leon Henderson insisted that hoarding was a virtually "traitorous" activity and urged people to sell their sugar back to grocers. In 1942 every person was allowed fifty pounds for the year. Commercial users were allotted 80 percent of the amount of sugar they had purchased per month in 1941.²¹

The belt-tightening of World War II affected the Barrels to varying degrees. Regular patrons and soldiers home on leave continued to visit. Sugar was still delivered by the truckload, but gasoline rationing reduced traffic to the businesses. Fewer customers, in turn, required less sugar. The Detroit Lakes and Wadena establishments suffered because of their relatively small populations and their distance from larger cities. Citizens of the Fargo-

Lillian and Lloyd Eagan at their Sioux Falls drive-in, 1943, when Lloyd served in the armed forces



¹⁹Deloise Haugen, interview with the author, Grand Forks, Nov. 5, 1991, notes in author's possession.

²⁰*Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 1, p. 11, Jan. 20, p. 1, Jan. 27, p. 2, Feb. 15, p. 1, 16—all 1942.

²¹*Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 25, p. 1, Jan. 29, p. 1, Feb. 7, p. 1, Feb. 20, p. 1—all 1942.

Moorhead area might be able to save up gas coupons for a trip to “the lake” in Minnesota—passing through Dilworth on the way—but they had little fuel to burn for Sunday drives to these other Barrels.²²

Gasoline rationing affected management as well. Harry Muzzy supervised his chain of drive-ins from his home in Crookston. During the 1930s he and Martha visited their other locations at least once a month to make sure everything went well. Harry often did repair work on the buildings himself. During the war years, however, the entrepreneur had to cut back on his travels.²³

Security posed no problem throughout this time, for officers of the law stopped by regularly. In Detroit Lakes, for example, motorcycle patrolman Archie Northrup had a root beer each day and helped business proceed smoothly. Because so many young women worked at the Barrels, police officers came around at closing time to oversee the employees’ homeward journeys.²⁴

Menus at the Barrels varied a little from location to location according to the culinary skills of the cooks and managers. The Crookston stand, for example, began by offering only root beer and ice-cream cones. Later additions included ten-cent hamburgers and “jumbo size home baked ham sandwiches with mayonnaise and homegrown lettuce for fifteen cents.” At a number of the drive-ins, Detroit Lakes in particular, grilled peanut butter sandwiches were available. Sauerkraut and hot dogs were on some of the menus. Muzzy even sold cigars at the Grand Forks Barrel. Root beer, however, continued to be the best-selling item.²⁵

The rare high-school students who had cars in 1940 earned great popularity among classmates. Friends might spend a night on the town, making the Barrel their main destination. According to Margaret Erdman Junkert, the Minot drive-in served as one of the favorite hangouts for college and high-school students in the 1940s. During the war, though, teenagers walked more than they had before. Monica Sheehan Grinde, who managed the Grand Forks Barrel at that time, noted that Saturdays and Sundays continued to be the busiest days, with many customers riding to the stand on bicycles.²⁶

After the war, as rationing disappeared, the Barrels’ business again grew. Residents of the Fargo-Moorhead area resumed their practice of patronizing the stands on their return trip from “the lake” in Minnesota. The property owner in Wadena, however, decided his lot would be more valuable with a gas station on it. He terminated the Barrel’s lease, and in about 1946 Ford Dickerson moved the building to Grand Forks, where twin Barrels could serve twice the number of customers as before the war. Local patrons began calling the drive-in “The Kegs,” which soon became its official name.²⁷

Clark Drawz, Helen Harchanko, Maxine Russell, Betty Stevens, and Margaret Erdman at the Minot Barrel, 1940



²²Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 40, 42; Monica Sheehan Grinde, interview with the author, Grand Forks, Jan. 25, 1991, and Stanley Murray, history professor, University of North Dakota, interview with the author, Jan. 28, 1992, notes for both in author’s possession.

²³Joseph A. Collins, Devils Lake, to the author, Aug. 12, 1991, p. 3; Winnifred Peck Minor, Washougal, Wa., to the author, Aug. 9, 1991, p. 3. Minor managed the Detroit Lakes Barrel in 1937.

²⁴Minor to author, 2; Eagan interview, 15.

²⁵Bruhn to author, 1; Jack Bone, Minot, to the author, Aug. 21, 1991, p. 1; *Crookston Daily Times*, July 22, 1957, p. 8. For more on menus at drive-ins, see *Collier’s*, Jan. 25, 1941, p. 22, 42.

²⁶Grinde interview; Margaret Erdman Junkert, Minot, to the author, Oct. 25, 1991, p. 1.

²⁷Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 13; *The Forum* (Fargo), Aug. 28, 1991, p. 1B.

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Catering to teen culture; Sioux Falls newspaper advertisement from the 1960s.

Harry Muzzy's health began to fail in the 1940s, and he died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1948 at the age of 64. In nineteen years, he had established and tended a chain of eight Barrells; to have expanded to any greater extent would have involved selling franchises. Muzzy never entered this realm, which became the common route for food-merchandising success after his death. Business associates believe he had done "very well" financially and apparently lived quite contentedly with his modest domain. Over the next decade, Martha Muzzy sold most of the Barrells to their local managers. She kept control of The Kegs until 1968 and continued to manage the Crookston Barrel herself.²⁸

The post-World War II era brought prosperity to the nation and to the Barrells drive-ins. Consumers spent their long-pent-up savings and everything seemed "high, wide, and handsome."²⁹ Yet the same elements that caused their success—money, cars, and an "eating out" mentality—brought about great changes for the drive-ins.

In the mid-1950s some restaurant owners became concerned that television would improve in picture quality and would "certainly keep more people at home." Questions about television were answered by another form of modern technology: the speaker-phone ordering device. Patrons at the Grand Forks Kegs and the Crookston Barrel found their introduction to drive-in automation in 1957. The Servus-Phones equipment, purchased in Minneapolis, allowed faster service to customers and attracted patrons as a novelty of the Sputnik age. Thus the restaurant that brought curbside service to northwestern Minnesota also brought the electronic ordering system to the region.³⁰

The Barrells became more and more the domain of teenagers—social centers where young people visited from car window to car window. Drive-ins both responded to the new youth-centered culture and contributed to it. Carhops were among the most visible teenagers in a small city, and romances often began at the root beer stand.

Some young men carried on extensive conversations with carhops by ordering one item at a time, chatting with the waitress whenever she brought out the food and drinks.³¹

By the 1950s the depression-era Barrells had begun to show their age. As business increased, new additions and porches changed their facades. In Crookston, Martha Muzzy replaced the old building in 1955 with a completely new drive-in, Your Host. This establishment sported an updated butterfly roof, incorporating a style historian and preservationist Chester Liebs calls "exaggerated modern." The upswept roof with wide over-

²⁸Crookston Daily Times, Mar. 20, 1948, p. 2; Grinde interview; Minneapolis Tribune, Nov. 27, 1960, p. 7F; The Forum, Aug. 28, 1991, p. 1B.

²⁹Dickerson, in Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 45.

³⁰American Restaurant Magazine, Apr. 1949, p. 125; Drive-In Restaurant and Highway Cafe Magazine, June 1956, p. 22; Muzzy-Dickerson interview, 25.

³¹"Eye-Catching Waitresses Car Hops At Drive-Ins Here," Argus-Leader (Sioux Falls), undated but late 1950s, Lloyd Eagan Scrapbook, Sioux Falls; Argus-Leader, Apr. 5, 1983, p. 1B. Description of carhop dating from Life, Jan. 19, 1942, p. 86.

hangs epitomized the futuristic trend in the architecture of roadside eateries. The restaurant's shiny glass front exemplified cleanliness and modernity in contrast to the old, folksy image of the Barrel. Patrons still referred to the place as "the Barrel," however, long after the original structure was demolished.³²

In the 1970s the drive-in business began to wane. As Lloyd Eagan commented, "The carhop days were over." Managers of the surviving Barrels lamented a noticeable change in the young people who frequented their establishments, as the post-Vietnam War era brought increased problems with customers using marijuana, drugs, and alcohol.³³

It was the spread of fast-food chain restaurants, however, that brought about the Barrels' demise. Eagan noted that the arrival of restaurants like McDonald's initially stimulated the local drive-in businesses through their massive advertising campaigns and the resultant war for customers. When the next series of places opened—Burger King, Wendy's, Hardee's—business was spread too thin. A local drive-in could stand to lose 2 or 3 percent of its trade to the chains, but the accumulated effect wreaked havoc.

³²*Grand Forks Herald*, June 27, 1990, p. 2E; *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, Nov. 27, 1960, p. 7F; Liebs, *Main Street*, 61–63. For a brief review of drive-in designs, see Nancy Seliger, "Fast Food Architecture," *Fast Service*, May 1, 1980, p. 22–34; *American Builder* 71 (Nov. 1949): 90–91; *Architectural Record* 126 (Oct. 1954): 163–69; *Drive-In Restaurant and Highway Cafe Magazine*, June 1955, p. 9.

³³Here and below, see *Argus-Leader*, Apr. 5, 1983; p. 1B; Eagan interview, 17, 18.



Martha Muzzy, who claimed she had never so much as tasted a hamburger, inside her new restaurant, Your Host, mid-1960s



Postcard view of The Kegs from about 1960, with neon sign advertising sandwiches, chicken, and root beer

The Dilworth and Detroit Lakes drive-ins eventually fell into disrepair, were moved to different locations, and ultimately were destroyed. The Sioux Falls establishment flourished enough to outgrow two buildings by the mid-1950s. Eagan eventually rented his property to a Burger King franchisee. The Keg in Minot, damaged by a 1969 flood, suffered demolition in 1971. The Barrel in Devils Lake, vacant and deteriorating for three years, met its end by controlled burning in 1984.³⁴

The very first Barrel in Great Falls did survive—as the rear portion of the Barrel Cafe and Lounge on a new site. In the 1990s, only The Kegs in Grand Forks remains as a drive-in restaurant. The twin barrels, painted red and covered with Hawaiian-style bamboo, continue to lure customers off North 5th Street. The original Servus-Phones still work. The Kegs has become an institution with deep customer loyalty, carrying on the tradition of carhops, barbecued-beef sandwiches, and burgers. It remains a harbinger of the seasons; as one local resident remarked, “I know it is spring when The Kegs opens up,” and summer is over when the drive-in closes. Groups at high-school reunions pay a reminiscent call on the restaurant in order to get “the best hamburgers in town.” Employees relate that it is common for customers to say that they used to eat there in the 1940s or 1950s.³⁵

The Barrels were not the first root beer stands in the nation, but the Muzzys’ drive-ins were the first in the Red River Valley and northern Minnesota. Harry Muzzy took his idea from the A & W root beer chain, and then the buildings evolved from varnished Barrels to painted Barrels to icons of nostalgia.

Part of the love affair of Americans and their automobiles, the Barrels contributed to Minnesota’s distinctive roadside architecture, as documented by Karal Ann Marling in

³⁴*Minot Daily News*, May 20, 1971, p. 12; *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, Sept. 27, 1984, p. 1; *Argus-Leader*, Apr. 5, 1983, p. 1B.

³⁵*Great Falls Tribune*, July 28, 1991, p. 1E; *The Forum*, Aug. 28, 1991, p. 1B; quotes from Tom Mulhern, interview with the author, Grand Forks, Mar. 28, 1991, notes in author’s possession.



Barrel Cafe and Lounge, Great Falls, Montana, 1991

The Colossus of Roads. They merit an honored place along with the nationally famous statues of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox in Bemidji, built by Cyril and Leonard Dickinson of that town in 1937, as well as other outsized roadside attractions, including the giant corn ear in Olivia and Big Ole the Viking in Alexandria. These structures stand out in a culture marked with the “faceless sameness of chrome, steel and ceramic” brought about by corporate franchising.³⁶

With the advent of interstate highways and the concurrent rise of chain restaurants beginning in the 1950s, the nature of life in towns and cities changed. Some consumers found security in the reputation of nationally known restaurants and avoided the hometown mom-and-pop eateries. During an era when every town looks the same, however, Grand Forks’s Kegs are a pleasant anomaly. As preservationist Timothy Cantell has written, “In a world of concrete, Concorde and computers, it is vital that we preserve what remains of individuality.”³⁷ Memories of visiting the Barrels are a part of the lives of the Baby Boom generation and its predecessors. The days of nickel root beers, bobby-soxers, burgers, and rock and roll music frame this story that belongs to the social history of Minnesota and the Upper Midwest.

³⁶Karal Ann Marling, *The Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 47, 137; Ernest Dichter, president of the Institute for Motivational Research, quoted in *Drive-In Restaurant and Highway Cafe Magazine*, June 1955, p. 9.

³⁷*Barron’s National Business and Financial Weekly*, May 17, 1965, p. 11–12; Cantell quoted in *The Past is a Foreign Country*, ed. David Lowenthal (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 384.

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