

Remembering a Baltimore culinary classic

The pending closure of Obrycki's in Fells Point, a legendary crab house and Baltimore institution, reminds me of the loss of another Baltimore culinary landmark: Haussner's in Highlandtown.

The quirky German restaurant, famous for its endless menu and extensive art collection, closed its doors more than a decade ago. Located within walking distance of several Catholic parishes, Haussner's was THE place to celebrate special occasions in East Baltimore.

My personal favorite entrée was the sauerbraten. For dessert, you could never go wrong with the restaurant's storied strawberry pie.

In an age of cloned chain restaurants, it's sad to see family operations like Haussner's and Obrycki's leave voids in the city.

Below is a piece I did in The Catholic Review when Haussner's closed.

What are your memories of Haussner's, Obrycki's or other favorites?

Whenever Evelyn Jakowski had something to celebrate, there was one place she knew she could go for some fine dining in a pleasant, eclectic atmosphere: Haussner's in Highlandtown.

For years, the administrative assistant of nearby Holy Redeemer Chapel has marked wedding anniversaries, birthdays and special parish events with a dinner at the legendary German restaurant. Meals there weren't just pleasure for the palate - sauerbraten, crab cakes, hasenpfeffer and grilled pig knuckle - they were also a feast for the eyes, as diners sat beneath a crammed panoply of portraits and sculptures by artists like Rembrandt, Homer and Millet.

Mrs. Jakowski was looking forward to celebrating the 11th anniversary of her

son's ordination to the diaconate at Haussner's later this year. But since the restaurant closed its doors Sept. 22, she won't get that chance. For her and a lot of other neighborhood Catholics, it's going to be a big loss.

"It was a special place to go," said Mrs. Jakowski. "They made you feel like someone special. They treated you like a guest, not just a patron."

The founders of Haussner's, William Henry Haussner and Frances Wilke Haussner, always treated priests with extra kindness, Mrs. Jakowski said. When long lines of waiting customers would stretch along Eastern Avenue - as was often the case - the owners would pluck priests out of the crowd and make sure they and their guests were given priority seating.

"The priests at Sacred Heart of Jesus never had cooks on Saturdays at the rectory," remembered Mrs. Jakowski. "So they all used to go to Haussner's."

Father John Drum, C.Ss.R., associate pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus, was one of those Saturday evening clerical diners.

"I liked the crab cakes and the potato pancakes," he said. "The owners were wonderful people. They provided a pleasing atmosphere with an extensive menu."

Mrs. Haussner probably had a soft spot in her heart for the priests and nuns who were frequent guests at her restaurant because of her own experiences in Germany.

The Bontkirchen native's mother died when Mrs. Haussner was only 13. She was raised in a 400-year-old convent boarding school, before coming to the United States in 1924. Customers remember one of her favorite life-long expressions: "The Lord gives us everything."

Mr. Haussner died in 1963 and Mrs. Haussner has not been active in the restaurant for the last several years.

Thomas Kuhl, a 91-year-old parishioner of Our Lady of Pompei in Highlandtown, remembers Mrs. Haussner as a "very kind and very intelligent lady." He's been a customer of Haussner's ever since the days when the original restaurant was

located in the 3300 block of Eastern Avenue in the 1920s.

Every Saturday, after attending a rosary and benediction service at Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mr. Kuhl would walk a few blocks to Haussner's to get some cakes or coffee rings to bring home to his mother. He has continued to patronize the restaurant over the last several decades, taking his parish priests out to dinner every year after the parish carnival.

Frances Haussner George, the daughter of Haussner's founders, said she will donate the Haussner's building to the Baltimore International College as a training center for chefs. All the extensive artwork, valued at more than \$8 million, will be auctioned at Sotheby's in New York and elsewhere.

"Highlandtown just isn't going to be the same," said Mrs. Jakowski. "Haussner's was a classy place."