The Local Hangout

By Emily Randall

Whether it’s the atmosphere, the friends, the food or the locale, the lure of gathering spots holds a special attraction for college students. Throughout the generations, Truman students have found a local hangout to call their own where they can forge social bonds while taking a welcome break from classes, homework, and exams. Take a trip down memory lane as alumni share memories of just a few of the most popular hangouts, past and present.
The original Bulldog Inn was a tiny restaurant right on the street, back when Marion Street still ran through the Truman campus. It was a coffee and blue-plate-special sort of place, and during the diner's early years, the only seating was at a counter. Coffee was 5 cents, and a basic meal, like a hamburger or a roast beef sandwich, was 50 cents.

Because of the friendship associations he made there, the Bulldog Inn was special to alumnus James Sallade, who graduated with his BS in 1955 and his master's in 1956.

"Between classes I always met with friends there and went in to get a cup of coffee," Sallade said. "And sometimes we'd come out and just mill around. It wasn't a very big place. You couldn't always get in there, it was so crowded. There were no paper cups to take [coffee] along with you."

Sallade said the restaurant, which stood between the Student Union Building and McClain Hall where a parking lot is now, was unique because it was an alternative to fraternity hangouts around campus. "It was just a place where people sat around," he said. "They were not a rowdy bunch. They would just drink coffee and discuss things. It was a gathering place."

The heyday of the Bulldog Inn was between 1948 and 1953, Sallade said. When he came back from serving in the military in 1955, the restaurant was not as popular. The building later housed a stenographer's office and was eventually demolished in 1977.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, a diner known as the Huddle called Kirk Building home. So did the student athletes who lived all over the building wherever the University could find room for them.

Harold Coffman, who graduated in 1952, was a football player and lived among the other athletes in Kirk. He also spent much of his time in that little diner.

"We lived in cubicles all over that place," he said. "Campus wasn't nearly as big as it is now. They didn't have a lot of dorms."

Living so close to the Huddle was convenient for Coffman because they had good food, and it was a nice place to hang out with friends. Eventually, it even became a workplace for him.

"The basketball coach bought the restaurant," he said. "And at that time, I started working for an hour to get a free meal on a regular basis."

Like the Bulldog Inn, it was a convenient place to go to drink coffee between classes because of its location.

Another campus element that has changed since Coffman's college days was that the Ophelia Parrish Building used to be a junior-high school. Coffman said that a lot of those students hung out among the college students at the Huddle.

"It was a madhouse during lunch period because a lot of the Ophelia Parrish junior-high kids came over," he said.
In the 1970s and 1980s, the Tap Room, a little bar with low ceilings, was tucked in the basement of the Travelers Inn located downtown Kirksville. Ruth (Selby) Kielczewski, who graduated in 1981, says she liked the Tap Room because it was the kind of place to be with friends and not worry about how people perceived you.

"It was a very popular place to hang out if you didn't want to worry about being seen or being perfectly dressed or perfectly popular or perfectly anything," she said. Kielczewski describes the Tap Room as a place to go where one could spend time with friends, unlike the bigger bars like the Oz and JR's that were popular in the late 1970s in Kirksville where she says people went to try to meet someone. Rather, students sought out the Tap Room when they were looking for a quieter place.

"It could get crowded, but it had a personality all its own that you really couldn't describe," she said. "It was just a nice place to hang out and be with your friends instead of always having to look perfect and dance and all that other stuff that goes with hanging out in a nightclub."

The Tap Room was famous for the tradition of people writing their names on the wall, and if you came back years later, it would still be there.

According to Robert Long, who owned the Tap Room from 1987 to 1994, the bar first opened back in 1936 and was owned by Brian Kirtz in 1995, the last year the Tap Room was open.

"We used to talk about going out to Thousand Hills Lake and 'watching submarine races. . .'

The lake at Thousand Hills State Park, which has been around since the 1950s, is one of the favorite hangouts mentioned often by students who attended the University in the 1980s. Students would go out in the summer to swim, rent pontoon boats and hike around the park.

"The Point" was a common destination for students. Lisa (Collins) Blechle, who graduated in 1986, would go out to the Point with friends to lie out in the sun on a blanket.

Elaine (Chapman) Metcalf ('81), who finished her master's at the University in 1985, remembers people going out to the Point for other reasons. "We used to talk about going out to Thousand Hills Lake and 'watching submarine races,'" Metcalf said, "which meant you were going to go 'parking.'"

Students who were taking summer school classes often hung out at the beach during their afternoons off. "You could put your lawn chair right down in the water," Blechle said.

With a few friends, getting out on the water in a pontoon boat was an easy venture. "We'd rent pontoon boats, and we would try to get 10 to 12 people so that the rental rate was really cheap," Metcalf said. "If it was a cloudy day and the sun would just come out once in a while, we would say 'sun alert.' It was just fun."

The park also has one of the fine-dining restaurants in the Kirksville area. Blechle was a student advisor and had to stay at school for Thanksgiving break. When her family came to visit her for the holiday, they went out to the restaurant.

"It was really neat to go out there in the winter, with the lake frozen. It was just peaceful," she said. "And it was nice to have a place so close where you could take a walk through proper woods. It was just a little treat to be able to have a getaway to nature that was so nice."

Today, the lake continues to offer a peaceful retreat for students.
Alumnus Jacob Wharton, who graduated in 1996, has a special place in his heart for a bar called the Dukum Inn. Wharton called it a democratic bar. He hung out there enough that he even ended up getting a job there while he was a student.

"One of the best things about that place was it attracted all sorts of people," he said. "You could go in at 5 o'clock in the evening and sit next to a guy who was drinking Milwaukee's Best on tap, versus a guy who'd have to have a perfectly-poured Black and Tan. Occasionally the two would strike up a conversation. Not only was the bartender not discriminating, but neither were the patrons."

Located just off the downtown square, the Dukum remains a popular college hangout today although it has changed quite a bit in the past decade. An adjacent room has been added, and the Dukum Up, the upstairs part of the building, now has been put to use housing special events and concerts.

Back in 1996, Wharton remembers working in a simple, long building with one pool table, one bar, one shuffle board table, and about a dozen bar stools. Today, the bar has added more pool tables and has much more seating capacity.

According to Wharton the Dukum was especially busy on Homecoming. "It was the busiest place in the beginning part of the evening...you could not fall over if you wanted to because it was so crowded," he said.

The people and the friendly atmosphere attracted Wharton to the Dukum. "If you go there once, you might be a stranger," he said. "But if you go there twice, you're probably a regular."

Students and locals alike have long joined in the late-night tradition of going to Pancake City, a tradition which is still alive today. Partiers and studiers alike often end up there after a long night. Anyone who has lived in Kirksville will remember it as a beacon of bright lights in the middle of the night, one of the few places open 24 hours a day.

"There were so many people who would end up there early in the morning," said Maggie Burghoff, graduate of the class of 1979. "It was almost a party atmosphere but without alcohol, with people laughing and having fun."

Although the restaurant serves breakfast food, as the name suggests, people also order other specialties, such as garbage fries, almost as much as their pancakes. The food isn't expensive, and the servers are friendly.

Steve Greiner, who graduated in 1996, also remembers Pancake City as the late-night place to be because it was the only place serving food all night. "It just reminds me of a typical Friday or Saturday night in Kirksville," he said. "You'd be at some sort of party until early in the morning, and then of course you would have to eat so you would end up at Pancake City."

He also recalls a few people causing some trouble in those early mornings. "Back then there was a little bit of an issue with people who would eat and run," he said. "They would eat and then they would take out through the back door and they would start running and not pay."

Pancake City no longer has a back door.

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**Share Memories of Your Favorite College Hangout**

We would like to hear about your favorite college gathering place. To share your memories write: *Truman Review*, Office of Advancement, McClain Hall 100, 100 E. Normal St., Kirksville, Mo. 63501-4221 or e-mail drood@truman.edu. Pictures are also welcome. Look for other “Favorite Memories” on the Alumni & Friends Web site at http://alumni.truman.edu/.