

# From Colonial Hotel to Good Old Days

By Brad Cole

Reading an article in the *Press Enterprise* on February 18 by M. J. Mahon about the renovations underway to the Good Old Days bar and restaurant at the southwest corner of East and Fifth Streets in Bloomsburg took my mind back to my early youth in town.

My memories stem from experiences when the place was known as Rock's Steak House. During the 1960s, my late grandmother, Miriam Lee Rishton, worked there as a part-time waitress. I would drop by on Saturday afternoons with friends, and she would sit us down out of the way and bring dishes of ice cream. Those were some of my good old days in Bloomsburg. While on the topic, below is a very brief historical outline of the storied past of what has become a historic Bloomsburg establishment – well beyond the times of Good Old Days and Rock's.

During the early 1900s, the place was operated by Thomas Metherell and Rocque "Rock" Guinard as the Colonial Hotel with a bar. The hotel contained twenty-six rooms (with two bathrooms). In 1919, when Prohibition hit, they lost their license to sell alcoholic beverages. However, during the 1920s, they ran a speakeasy-type operation known as the Bloomsburg Poultry Club.



*This photo circa 1914 was provided by Mark Fritz, grandson of Elmer Fritz. The man to the right, with his hand on his hip, is Elmer, a single young man at the time (born 1892) who had left his family farm in Benton to come to Bloomsburg in search of easier, more profitable work at the booming Magee Carpet Company. He stayed at the hotel only for a short time while looking for better, less expensive accommodations in town. A few years later, Elmer was drafted and sent off to France to participate in WW I.*

Since Society President Dunkelberger wrote in the December 2023 Newsletter about the ostrich business in Columbia County back in the day, I will include below a related story that was reported in *The Morning Press* on March 17, 1919.

*'TOMMY' GAVE ITS KEEPER A CHASE, Colonial Hotel 'Zoo' Broke Out Again and East End Joined in the Chase. "If you don't get that ostrich, you get no supper," was the alternative that rang in the ears of the caretaker of the Hotel Colonial ostrich as he started out after the obstreperous bird that had sallied forth on another of its larks. An hour and a half later, a drenched ostrich and an equally drenched caretaker rounded out an experience that led both through the canal, down along the river and over much of the built-up, suburban and farm land of Bloomsburg, as the assessor would have it.*

*Up East Street the ostrich first lumbered, with the caretaker after it. A motor-cyclist joined in the chase, and there was a real "movie" setting. As the old man got near the ostrich, he wooed it with words of "Come, here, Tommie; you know me."*

*But 'Tommie' was not to be won with the honeyed words. Even the suggestion that he ought to return to the good meal that was awaiting him only served to make him the more cautious, and when a few dogs jumped at his heels – if he has them – he only ran faster. A good sized part of the East End's youthful population joined the chase, and their elders looked on and grinned.*

*The situation, from the aged caretaker's viewpoint, was serious enough. To return to the hotel without the ostrich meant that he go supperless to bed – and that was not the most pleasant thought for a Sunday. He finally succeeded in getting the ostrich's head turned down toward the railroad. But it never stopped there. Straight on and through the old canal, now pretty well filled with water, it ran until it reached the river. Then it turned around. An hour and a half after it had started out to view the scenery it was persuaded to get back in its pen.*

*And both man and bird got their suppers.*

Now, let's go back to the continuation of history. After Mr. Metherell left the partnership, the place became known as *Guinard's* and no longer operated as a hotel. It seems that shortly after that, the conversion to apartments on the upper floors occurred.

Operations were taken over in the 1940s by Rock Guinard's son and wife, Philip and Betty (Ohl) Guinard, and renamed Rock's Steak House.

In the mid to late 1950s, Bill and Betty (Hess) Hassert took over operations of the restaurant and bar. (They bought the real estate from the Guinards in 1960.) Bill's stepdaughter, Darl Edwards, and her husband, John Venditti, ran the place. Their run lasted 20 years.



*Rock's Restaurant circa 1960s, East Street side*

Hassert sold the business and real estate to Robert and Diana Howard in 1976. They renamed the place Good Old Days.

Next came the Woodland family. In 1982, they acquired the real estate and business. Some locals then referred to the place as "Woodie's Good Old Days." Sadly, the son, Franklin "Woodie" Woodland, Jr., died in January 1985 from a tragic car accident on a snowy stretch of Route 11 near Lime Ridge.

Then, around 1990, Sharon Babb bought the place and continued to run it as Good Old Days.

The place changed ownership again in early 2019. Roxana Falconi Zoppetti now owns it and is undertaking the renovation described in M. J. Mahon's article.

So, at that location on East and Fifth was once a hotel with a restaurant and bar that has remained a restaurant and bar for over 100 years – about 30 years as Rock's and two years short of 50 years as Good Old Days.

I hope this short trip down Memory Lane and the accompanying history has been enjoyable. But I can hear my late father saying to me, "Son, knowing this stuff along with \$3 might get you a large coffee at 7-Eleven." Or perhaps a draft beer during happy hour after Good Old Days reopens in August.

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