

Ice Cream and Oysters

By Frances Harrington

The other day, Dawn Kelley and I decided to try out this new little place downtown called "Occidental Eats". They share a building that houses Mike's saloon on the east and they are on the west. The building next door is the Heritage Museum. They serve ice cream, old fashioned malts, soup, hot dogs, etc. They call it "Occidental Eats" because they serve a hot fudge Sunday using the old hot fudge recipe from the Occidental Hotel. While we were there, enjoying our old fashion malts, we got to talking with the owners, Corrine and Eric Cockream. We started talking about the uniqueness of the building. They said they had been told by different people that it had been used as a number of different businesses. I told them I would see what I could find about it.

That night, I got on my laptop and started searching city directories on Ancestry.com. What I found is from 1889 to 1926, the address was listed as 237 W. Western Avenue and after 1926, it was renumbered to 557 W. Western Ave. Keep in mind, that it is a single-story building that is divided into two separate business spaces with separate entrances. I don't know if both sides had ever been combined to be used as a single business or not. Since the spaces are so small, I don't see how some of these businesses operated there unless it was, at one time, one entire space. What I found was that in 1889, it had been used as the business offices for McCracken, Hume, & Company (lumber and shingles) and at the same time, for Hovey & McCracken (lumber manufacturers). From 1907 to 1911, it was Gilroy's (confectionery, bakery, lunch room, etc.). From then until 1956, it has been a men's clothing store (Isaac Arenstein); a retail confectionery & fruit sales store (Frederick Spadator); a jewelry store (Julius C Nerreter); a tailor shop (Conrad Bayer); and a barber shop (Carl K Krueger). Carl Krueger seems to have been there for the longest amount of time, with his barber shop, for 16 years. I didn't look any farther than the directories I could get on-line so after 1956, I'm sure many other businesses have been in that building. I do know that recently, it was the 557 Café & Deli.

I then began to wonder if I could find an old picture of any of the businesses listed above, so I started checking the internet. The only picture I was able to find was from the Lakeshore Museum Center's online photo collection data base. That picture was of "Gilroy's Lunch Room & Bakery" (see attached photo). I also found another picture of a 2nd Gilroy's Lunch Room. At first, I thought the photos were of the same place, but upon closer investigation, I could see they were not. I found the larger building was at 353 W. Western Avenue. So, two "Gilroy's" lunch rooms? Were they owned by the same person? At the same time? Or by brothers? I need to do some more investigating. In the meantime, I gave the information and picture to the Cockreams. They were very appreciative and even gave me a free lunch!

Now about Gilroy's....

James and Mary (Gallagher) Gilroy lived in New York City in 1857, where they gave birth to their firstborn son, Bernard Francis Gilroy. James dies in 1880 and Bernard moves to Muskegon, Michigan in 1881. I don't know what brought him to Muskegon, but perhaps, like many others, he had heard of the prosperity of this city due to the lumber industry and decided this was the place to be. His mother, Mary, follows him here in 1882 and his brother, Hugh, in 1883. The first Muskegon City Directory I can find him in is the 1883. That that time he has a small restaurant located at the south side of Western Avenue between Pine and Terrace and resides at the same address. By 1885, his restaurant is located at 23 Western Avenue, along with his residence in the back. The Chronicle states that the popular restaurant owner has remodeled, added a skylight, added on to the building, and is now able to accommodate 14 tables. (This address is probably the same location as before only now the directory is listing it by the street number.) One of the ads in the Chronicle says: "*Go To Gilroy's*

RESTAURANT The finest and best equipped in the city for a Splendid Dish of Oysters, a Good Meal, a First-class Lunch, or a Package of Candy. FRUIT IN THEIR SEASON! Warm Meals furnished at all hours, and the most courteous treatment always awarded to customers". Another ad states that he also sells the choicest fruits, confections (sweets), cigars and tobacco. In 1886, he will serve a complete Thanksgiving holiday meal for 25 cents! Can you imagine an entire Thanksgiving meal for 25 cents? Today, you can't even get a glass of water for that!

By 1887, Bernard sells the old place and opens a new Gilroy's Restaurant at 139 W. Western Avenue, that he calls an "oyster house" because oysters are his specialty and he will have "oysters of all kinds" available all year round. It is located on 3rd Street and W. Western Avenue, opposite the Occidental Hotel. Besides the oysters and is regular restaurant favorites, he will have a fine selection of candy, fudge, toys, and "Harrison's Ice Cream" (a popular brand in Muskegon at the time).

By July, 1888, he is advertising as the "Headquarters for Gilroy's Oysters" and also, the "Headquarters for Harrison's Celebrated Ice Cream" along with his normal restaurant and confectionery items. This is the year he buys his house at 183 Clay Avenue where he and his family will live until 1920. This is the property across from the Lakeshore Museum Center, where the parking lot is.

In 1890, he purchases the building where the old Pine Street Hardware was located. He doesn't move to that location but later rents it out. In the fall of that year, he sells his restaurant and oyster business to J. F. Hirshman.

1891 is a busy year for Bernard. In April, he marries Elinor "Nellie" T. McCarthy at St. Mary's Church in Muskegon. Nellie is a life-long resident of Muskegon and the daughter of Bridgett (Glavin) and Thomas McCarthy. They will end up having 5 children together. In May, Bernard opens the first refreshment stand at the Lake Michigan Park Pavilion. In June, the infamous Pine Street fire happens. The building on Pine Street he is renting out to J. A. Moore, is completely destroyed. (Poor Mr. Moore spent his life's savings moving to Muskegon, purchasing inventory, establishing a new business, and setting up a home in the upstairs, only to have all he owned go up in smoke. Even the last \$500 he kept in the safe was destroyed. Luckily, he, his wife, and 6 children survived. Mr. Moore was so devastated by his loss that he became ill and died 3 months later.) In November, Bernard leases a store at 111 W. Western Avenue and transforms it into what he calls "a 1st class establishment" for selling confectionery, fruit, and you guessed it...ice cream, and oysters.

In 1894, he is no longer the "headquarters" for Harrison Ice Cream. In fact, Harrison's put a notice in the Chronicle listing those businesses who do sell their ice cream and specifically mentions that Gilroy's no longer handles their product. In July, Bernard adds a room for manufacturing his own brand of ice cream at his restaurant. He advertises it as being "equal to any other brand in the city or no charge". An ice cream soda can be had for 5 cents, a quart of ice cream is 35 cents, and a gallon is 1 dollar. By this time, he has also bought a rig and will deliver his goods to any part of the city.

1896 has Gilroy's moving his confectionery, restaurant, and lunchroom to 33 W. Western Avenue. He starts a lunch wagon to sell oysters, celery, and crackers and continues to deliver his ice cream to any part of the city. He advertises that he will deliver to dealers, private citizens, parties, church socials, and other gatherings.

In 1898 Bernard brings a well-known candy maker from out east to Muskegon and starts to manufacture his own candy and moves to 39 W. Western Avenue. He advertises: Gilroy's Fine Candies, Lowney's Chocolate & Bon Bons, Oysters direct from Baltimore, and his fancy ice cream called "Gilroy's Velvet Ice Cream".

In 1903, Bernard sells his restaurant and candy store to go into the wholesale candy and ice cream business at 145 W. Western Avenue and continues to sell oysters.

Remember at the beginning of the story, I mentioned the “Occidental Eats” at 557 W. Western (which up to 1926 was known as 237 W. Western Avenue) that Dawn and I went to? Well, in 1907, Bernard moves into this building and once again starts a lunch room and sells fresh fruit, candy, baked goods, ice cream, and oysters (see photo 1). He stays in this location until 1911 when he again moves down the street to 353 W. Western Avenue to have more room for his businesses (see photo 2). He sells this restaurant in 1913 to enlarge his ice cream manufacturing business and starts the **Gilroy Ice Cream and Oyster Company** on his property at 183 Clay Avenue (across from the current Lakeshore Museum Center).

In 1920, Bernard retires as the oldest ice cream manufacturer in Muskegon (26 years). He builds a new home on the property west of his old residence at 201 Clay Avenue (renumbered 467) and continues to sell oysters but he sells his ice cream manufacturing business to the Piper Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Bernard Gilroy was a successful restaurateur, entrepreneur, and manufacturer in Muskegon for 38 years. He died at his home, after a short illness, in 1927. Bernard’s mother, Mary, was born in Ireland in 1831, and died in Muskegon, in 1907. Elinor “Nellie”, his wife, died in Muskegon, in 1958. Their children were all born in Muskegon: Bernard J. born in 1892, became the manager of Piper Ice Cream Company in Grand Haven, and died in Muskegon, in 1940; Thomas J. born in 1893, had some run-ins with the law, spent some time in prison in New Mexico, then became a salesman, and died in Muskegon, in 1945; Helen F. born in 1895, became the office manager for Piper Ice Cream Company, married Lawrence Kearney, and died in Muskegon, in 1989; Marie K. born 1896, became a teacher, married John H. Kearney, and died in Orange County, California, in 1985; Louis E. born 1898, became an associate pastor for the Catholic church, and died in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1936. All are buried at St. Mary’s Cemetery in Muskegon, at the family plot, except for Marie who is buried at the Holy Sepulcher in Orange County.

(Sources: Ancestry.com; Genealogybank.com; Lakeshore Museum Center; Findagrave.com; Hackley Library, Local History & Genealogy Center)



Photo 1



Photo 2

Headquarters!

Candies,
Fruits,
Nuts,
Oysters,
Lowney's
Bon Bons

Gilroy's

Prices lowest.
Quality best.

Finest stock of Confectionery, Home Made Candies, Nuts and Fruits in the city.

GILROY'S
New Store.
39 W. Western Ave.,
'PHONE 279.

GILROY'S

Wholesale Ice Cream and Oysters.
Brick and Fancy Cream a Specialty.

GILROY
Ice Cream and Oyster Co.
183 W. Clay Ave. Phone 2911