

Dinner for a dollar at The Lazy Susan



Last fall I came across an intriguing advertisement in the *Gazette* of June 6, 1951, announcing the opening of The Lazy Susan Restaurant, a “mile west of Whonnock on Lougheed Highway.”

The new restaurant would be open from noon to eight in the evening every day, except Tuesday, offering “lunches and tea” and also dinners from \$1.

Here was something I did not know anything about.

Nothing more could be found in the *Gazette* about The Lazy Susan or its fate, so I started to ask around.

Who had ever heard about The Lazy Susan?

Where was the restaurant?

Who owned it?

Some of the long-time residents of Whonnock remembered that The Lazy Susan stood close to the foot of Spilsbury Street.

Others, as children, had a meal there with their parents.

It was owned, it seems, by the Stirks – a husband and wife team.

Nothing more came out of the collective memory.

I was ready to give up when just a few weeks ago I got a call from Elsie Meldrum, who told me that she treasured a copy of a long-forgotten trade magazine called *Restaurant & Caterer* of August 1953, with a picture of Sam Stirk on the cover and inside an illustrated article about The Lazy Susan.

I dropped what I was doing and drove off to meet her.

The article in *Restaurant & Caterer* describes the interior of The Lazy Susan as “simple but attractive and homey.”

The Stirks used “kitchen-type” chairs with cushions and inexpensive plywood tables for the dining area.

A large red brick fireplace with a comfortable chesterfield and chairs were at one end.

French doors opened out on a treed lawn area with flower borders, offering “... a commanding view of the Fraser [River], with Mount Baker in the background.”

There was ample off-highway parking space.

Sam Stirk, a RAF veteran, gained restaurant experience in Chilliwack and on Vancouver Island before opening The Lazy Susan.

He kept the overhead down by doing the cooking himself, while his wife Catherine acted as hostess and waitress.

Extra help was only hired as needed, mostly on weekends.

Sam used a wood stove for cooking and water heating. He started using a simple

icebox, but soon had to purchase a refrigerator and freezer.

The Stirks worked long days, even spending time on their day off doing maintenance and shopping for supplies for the restaurant.

To avoid food waste, only grilled items were on the menu during the week, and fresh-frozen vegetables were heated as customers arrived.

On weekdays, The Lazy Susan also offered a “Salesmen’s Special” for 65 cents, including soup, a sandwich, a green salad, and a beverage.

On Sundays, The Lazy Susan’s big day, the specialty was fresh Fraser River salmon.

At the top of the fare, at \$2, was T-bone steak.

Home-baked bread and pies completed the meal.

At lunchtime during the week, men from the sawmill close by were regular customers.

Mrs. Meldrum, who as a young girl occasionally assisted with the serving, remembers how the men from the mill confused her immensely by each ordering a differently cooked steak: rare, medium well done, medium rare, well done, or medium.

“I am not sure,” she says, “if they all got what they ordered.”

She also recalls a couple from Vancouver “motoring” every Sunday to The Lazy Susan for lunch. They were known as “the Wigs” because the husband was wearing a hairpiece.

“Have the Wigs not arrived yet,” the Stirks would ask. “... the Wigs are late.”

Mrs. Meldrum fondly remembers Sam Stirk and his wife.

“They were the nicest people to work for,” she says, “truly nice people.”

Fred Braches is a local historian who lives in Whonnock.