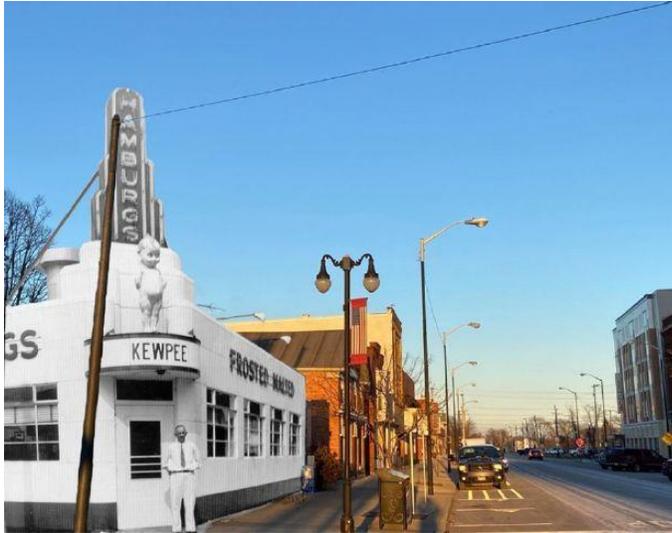


History by Horsman: Kewpee and Markley's



This transposed photo imagines what the old Kewpee restaurant in downtown Sandusky would look like today at the corner of E. Market and Wayne Streets in Downtown Sandusky.

Photo illustration and provided photo/Tom Horsman and Sandusky Library Follett House Museum

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If you've ever visited Lima, Ohio, about two hours southwest of Sandusky, you may have visited one of the few remaining locations of what was once a popular fast-food chain in the Midwest: Kewpee Hamburgers.

Kewpee was founded in Flint, Michigan, in 1923, making it one of America's earliest fast-food chains, and it eventually expanded to have more than 200 locations in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Ohio.

There's a story that Dave Thomas loved to eat at Kewpee in his hometown of Kalamazoo, Michigan, and that it inspired him to go into the fast-food business. If you go to Kewpee today, you'll notice the food is indeed quite similar to that of Wendy's — complete with square burgers, chili, and malts (its version of a Frosty).

One of the 200 Kewpee locations was right here in Sandusky, at the corner of Wayne and East Market streets, where Subway stands today.

Sandusky's Kewpee, then called Kewpee Hotel, was opened in September of 1939 by owner Don White Sr. and his two sons. The Register described the new restaurant on Sept. 14, 1939: *The exterior of the Kewpee is of heavily enameled steel paneling in a dazzling white and trimmed with orange. The building is of modern construction with ample windows giving plenty of daylight ... The Kewpee specializes in the service of hamburg (sic) sandwiches, beverages of all kinds, chili, frosted malted, pies, rolls and breakfast cereals.*

A large ad was in the same edition of the Register, advertising the grand opening on Sept. 15 along with messages of well-wishes on the opening from other local Sandusky businesses like Citizens Banking Co., Sandusky Paint Co., Sandusky Baking Co. and many others.

A few years after opening, the restaurant came under the ownership of Carl and Helen Ruth, who owned it until 1954 when they sold it to Lyle Mayhew. Mayhew did not make many changes to the business but did change the name to Whitehouse Restaurant.

Shortly thereafter, Roger Markley, Mayhew's brother-in-law, took ownership of it and changed the name to Markley's — a name that is likely familiar to many Sanduskians. Markley extensively renovated the building in the 1960s, giving it the appearance that we know today.

Markley's would go on to be a beloved Sandusky institution for many decades. The building's current occupant, Subway, opened in 2012, just a few years after Markley's had closed.

To experience what the Sandusky Kewpee was like, take a trip out to Lima and visit its downtown location, which was built in the 1930s and looks very similar to what Sandusky's location once looked like.

Editor's note: Tom Horsman works for the city of Sandusky's department of community development as serves on the board of trustees for the Erie County Historical Society.