

OWL CAFE

BY RICH BELMONT

Retired Math Professor and Farmer Dick Graney and his wife Laurie contacted me to tell me about a great little restaurant they frequent in Platteville, WI.

They said the food was really good, and it is; and the prices were reasonable, and they are. They also said this café has been in the same family for sixty years. Well, I admit it took some time for me to understand the significance of this last part. So please indulge me while I go back to the beginning.

In the early 1900's there was a store called the Owl Meat Market. Several years later the store expanded and added the Owl Café. Wanda Kammerud worked there while it was operated by Max Wycik. (Fun Fact: In 1926 the Owl Meat Market advertised Beef Roast for 14 cents, Picnic Ham for 18 cents, a dozen oranges for 19 cents and 3 pounds of bananas for 25 cents!)

Wanda Kammerud married Don Stoney in 1945 and they purchased the Owl Café in March, 1958. At this time the restaurant had been owned and operated for 5 years by Elmer and Sye Burbach. So Don and Wanda Stoney purchased the business from Mr. & Mrs. Burbach and the building from Mrs. Elizabeth Wycik Edge. They then proceeded to run the business for the next 30 years. During that time they not only gained a reputation for serving excellent food but also for their generous support of anyone who could use a little help. In February 1987 Don and Wanda Stoney were recipients of the Platteville Chamber of Commerce President's Award for Community Service. At the time of her passing in July, 1988 Journal Publisher Richard Brockman said "All it took for Wanda to extend a helping hand was the knowledge that someone was in need." Peggy remembers one time she came home from school and discovered her Mom had given away her bed!



Don and Wanda's daughter Margaret (Peggy) Banfield took over the café along with the help of her sister Suzi Moon in 1988. Several years later Peggy's son, Tommy Banfield, bought out the family

and now runs the restaurant with him Mom's help.

So the Owl Café has now been owned and operated by the same family for sixty years. Tommy is planning an anniversary party that will take place this summer.

When you walk into the Owl Café you feel like you have taken a huge step back in time. Not a lot has changed in 60 years. Originally there was dark wood paneling and green wallpaper and two booths and seven counter seats. Tommy replaced the dark paneling with knotty pine paneling and removed the wallpaper. The two booths were removed and two tables added. Suzi had the counter seats reupholstered once. Otherwise everything is the same as it always was.

It's a small place with seating for 28 guests. There are the 7 original seats at the counter and 6 tables and 21 chairs.

There are some framed covers of Life Magazine on the wall and a collection of Tommy's Bradford Exchange Marilyn Monroe collectible plates on display.

The exterior has been improved three times but not in the last forty years.

The food in this café is outstanding. You know whatever you order is going to be because it has pretty much been prepared the same way for sixty years! All Soups, the Egg Salad, Tuna Salad, American Fries and Cole Slaw, Macaroni, Cauliflower Salad and all other Salads are homemade.

Breakfast is served six days per week from 6 am to 11 am. The menu is a listing of all the usual American favorites of Eggs



with Ham, Bacon or Sausage Links or Patties. Plus Pancakes, French Toast and Breakfast Sandwiches served on your choice of either Sour Dough Toast or English Muffin.



You can order your eggs Hobo Style which means your breakfast includes a side of Hash Browns or American Fries. I highly recommend the American Fries: these are whole Idaho Spuds boiled in their skins. They are peeled and left to cool, then sliced into chunks and pan fried.



The Omelets are a house specialty. The Denver Omelet is popular because it contains ham, onions, mushrooms, green peppers and American cheese. The Wundo Omelet is exceptional and my favorite. This masterpiece is loaded with sausage, salsa, sour cream, onions, mushrooms, green peppers and American cheese and a very special seasoning. And what very special seasoning is that you ask? Well it's Wun-Doe-Mus, the all-purpose Creole Spice Blend made right in Platteville! It contains 14 spices mixed in a carefully measured ratio. It features lower salt content and no calories, fat, cholesterol or MSG. It was developed by Scott Patchin (Red Pepper) and Tud Bowden (Colonel Wun-Do) who formed the company Wun-Doe-Mus ([wundo.com](http://www.wundo.com)).

You might have heard of the Wundo Band. Tud Bowden (Colonel Wun-Do), Dana Meadows (Pappy Paprika), Bill Day (Thyme O'Day) Terry Cushman (Sweet Basil Daddy) and Carl Winkler are a popular dance band in the area. You can check their list of upcoming gigs on the Wundo website.



Lunch is served Monday through Friday from 11 am to 1:30 pm. A new lunch menu is printed for each day with the Daily Lunch Specials normally printed in Red.

The sandwiches are all popular with the locals because they are good and downright cheap: an Egg Salad Sandwich is \$2.95 and a half pound hand pattied ground chuck hamburger is only \$3.95.

For another dollar you can make your burger a California which means it will come with American cheese, lettuce, tomato, onion and pickle. Of course, I couldn't resist my favorite the Olive Burger with Swiss cheese and green olives.



Tommy makes all the soups from scratch. Each day he decides what soup to serve. He has a very long list of possibilities including: Chicken Noodle with Homemade Dumplings, Vegetable Beef, Ham & Bean, Baked Potato with Bacon, Beef Barley or Minestrone (mee-ness-TROH-nay).

The Daily Lunch Specials are all homemade and they are truly special. They are usually posted on the Facebook Page, [facebook.com/tommy.banfield.50](https://www.facebook.com/tommy.banfield.50).

I recently had the Pasty which is a meat and potato pie. Tommy shreds potatoes then layers potatoes, onions and hamburger in a pie crust then repeats the three layers, adds butter, a top crust and bakes. It was satisfying and very filling!



On another visit I thoroughly enjoyed the Chicken A La King over a freshly baked biscuit. There were large chunks of white chicken in a chicken gravy with peas and carrots.

There is a different Lunch Special every weekday. Some of the most popular are: Spaghetti & Meat Sauce, Lasagna, Potato Puff Casserole, Hot Beef with Mashed Potatoes and Gravy, Goulash, Meat Loaf or Salmon Patties.

The Daily Lunch Special for Saint Patty's Day is Corned Beef and Cabbage and is usually served on Saint Patty's Day. This year it will be the special on Thursday, March 15th. The Special every Friday is Hand Battered Cod with homemade Potato Salad.

Don't forget to save room for dessert. Peggy is an expert baker and all her sweet endings are scrumptious. Some examples of her baking prowess include: Chocolate Cake, Strawberry Cheesecake, and all kinds of pies like Apple, Sour Cream and Raisin, Custard and, Lemon Meringue.



I cannot say enough good things about this restaurant so perhaps I should let Retired Chemistry Professor Roy Shaver who wrote this poem in March, 1993 sum it up for me:

THE OWL CAFÉ

Oh we are the guests of the Owl Café
We breakfast there at the break of day;
The Eaters help with the coffee pot,
Which helps the waitress quite a lot.

The Owl is where folks go to eat.
It's located down on Second Street;
Visited by plumbers, cops and the like
The Crowd at the Owl is quite a sight.

All lit up with its neon sign,
The Owl is an easy place to find;
Gene, Ron, Frank and Bill are there,
With Platteville Natives everywhere.

Now it's time to bring this to a close,
The Poem's rhythm barely flows
But we've just tried to make the case
That The Owl Café is a unique place.

OWL CAFE

80 NORTH 2ND ST, PLATTEVILLE, WI 53818
608-348-4416 • [FACEBOOK.COM/TOMMY.BANFIELD.50](https://www.facebook.com/tommy.banfield.50)

Hours: Breakfast: Mon-Sat: 6-11 AM; Sun: Closed;
Lunch: Mon-Fri: 11 AM-1:30 PM; Sun: Closed

Dining Style: Come As You Are

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: Eggs Your Way with Ham, Bacon, Sausage and American Fries; Denver Omelet; Wundo Omelet; Egg Sandwiches on either Sour Dough Toast or English Muffin; All Home Made Soups; All Daily Lunch Specials; Egg Salad Sandwich; California or Olive Burger; all Home Made Desserts

Liquor Service: None

Prices: Breakfast: \$1.50-\$7.25;

Lunch: \$2.95-\$8.95; Sandwiches: \$2.95-\$4.95

Pay Options: Cash or Check; NO Credit Cards

Accessibility: Back Door has one step.

Unisex Bathroom - no bars

Kids Policy: Welcome but no menu. High Chair available

Reservations: Call Ahead • **Catering:** No

Take Out: Yes • **Delivery:** No

Parking: On 2nd St. & Public Lot in Back

