

Who Remembers...Burger Chef?

The first Burger Chef opened its doors in 1957

Here is another installment in our *Who Remembers?* series. You can browse previous articles by using the search bar on the right. These articles are strolls down memory lane. In some cases the buildings, but new businesses have replaced them. In other instances, the buildings or even the properties have been razed. Instead of a building, it may be a TV show, personality, or commercial that no one longer exists. Either way, it can't stop us from taking the Memory Lane stroll!

As always we would rather this be a discussion. No one knows this area better than those who grew up here! Please, leave constructive criticism, feedback, and corrections. We'd love to hear your anecdotes. Please share!

Any waxing nostalgic of food related topics is always popular. It's not difficult to recall these memories because typically we've had the experience hundreds of times and gustatory recollection involves multiple sensory experiences; sight, smell, and taste. Lend me the liberty and even count audio as an experience; the conversation had with family and friends, ordering inside or at the drive-thru speaker, and familiar crash of ice into your paper cup and the click-click of the fountain gun being engaged.

Food and restaurants serve as an exemplar mnemonic anchor, because of the many childhood experiences that revolve around them. Mention a "forgotten" place like [Barbero's](#), A&W, or Howdy's Beefburgers or Royal Hamburgers is to immediately evoke specific memories. "Remember that time when we were at Barbero's and..."



The first Burger Chef opened its doors in 1957

Burger Chef is no different!! If you grew up in New Bedford, you'll recall the one on Mt. Pleasant Street that became Popeye's. If you grew up in Dartmouth, you may recall the one on Route 6/State Road. Fairhaven's was opened by George Staffopulous in 1970, who I believe was his second store. I don't recall where this one was.

The very first Burger Chef was opened in 1957 in Indianapolis, Indiana by Frank and Donald Thomas who incidentally patented the Frame Boiler. At this time a Triple Treat which was an order of fries, a burger and a milkshake (Vanilla, Chocolate or Strawberry) were an incredible 15 cents each. The family could eat out for about a buck and a half! Imagine that?!

The concept spread like wildfire West and East and within a few short years you could get the *Super Shef* -a quarter-pounder with cheese, lettuce tomato, onions and pickles with ketchup- or their signature double-burger called the *Big Shef* all advertised by mascots Burger Chef and Jeff, just about anywhere. Later they added the *Top Shef*, a 1/3 pound of beef, topped with bacon and cheese. You could also have your order "with" or "without" which meant that the servers could dress your burger or you could do it yourself at the "Works Bar." In 1964 they debuted the Fish Sandwich and their first dessert

item, the Apple Turnover.

Within a year Frank and Donald Thomas had opened seven additional Burger Chefs. As impressive and quick as that was, it wasn't as impressive as the number of restaurant openings that followed: 100 by 1960, 250 by 1963, 500 by 1965 and their 1000th store opened in 1969.

When the 70s rolled around you could get the precursor to the Happy Meal, the Funmeal Platter or Fun Meal, which would include puzzles and stories about Burger Chef Chef and/or his sidekicks, the Fangmily: vampire Count Fangburger, Burgerini, Cackleburger the witch, and the talking ape Burgerilla. I can't recall whether the little records, plastic frisbees, or fun money came with the Fun Meal or had to be bought separately. Do you?



*"Hard to believe prices"
is an understatement!*

For adults they had a few different types of platters: the Mariner Platter had two batter dipped fish fillets, fries and salad, the Rancher Platter was a 1/3 pound of beef, Texas Toast, fries and salad.

In 1968 General Foods bought it, but couldn't keep up with its expansion and it was bought in 1982 by Hardee's owners Imasco. They converted many of the Burger Chef's into more Hardee's. I believe, the last Burger Chef in the nation closed its doors in 1996. Want to relive the experience and have a Big Shef? You still can in Danville, Illinois, where a converted Burger

hef that is now Schroeder's Drive-In serves burger chef burgers and even has a works bar.

What were YOUR fondest memories of Burger Chef? Do you have any collectibles?

Slogans (Wikipedia):

- Early 1980s – *"Nowhere else but Burger Chef"*
 - Late 1970s – *"We really give you the works."*
 - Mid 1970s – early 1980s – *"You get more to like at Burger Chef."*
 - 1970s – *"There's more to like at Burger Chef"* and *"Burger Chef goes all out to please your family"*
 - Early 1970s – *"We'll always treat you right"*
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