



The Grim family's Texas winter vacation in early February 2001 was over before it began. Lisa Grim, the owner of The Pub and Restaurant on Gettysburg's Lincoln Square, overslept the planned 4 a.m. departure time and was awakened by a caller telling her, "The Pub is burning." Within a few hours the oldest surviving building on the square was a pile of smoldering debris.

# DINING OUT WITH HISTORY

*story and photographs by Farron D. Brougher*





**T**he building that replaced the original The Pub and Restaurant after it burned in 2001 retains the distinctive steeply pitched gable roof that helped make it a hallmark of the Gettysburg cityscape. To a visitor not attuned to the finer points of Federal Period architecture, the building's most striking feature is the large number of small windows. From across Lincoln Square, 24 windows are visible on The Pub's south and east facades, with 13 on the second floor alone.

### Some historical footnotes

According to a 1991 Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission survey, the "two story, side-gabled, L-shaped, Federal style stuccoed brick building" dates from 1800-1801. The



*(Photo courtesy of the Gettysburg Times.)*

PHMC's surveyor Elwood W. Christ traced the property's ownership from the 1741 Penn Manor of Maske. Samuel Gettys obtained 381 acres of the Penn land and subsequently lost the property because of financial problems after the Revolution. James Gettys bought a portion of his father Samuel's land at a sheriff's sale in 1785.

In a recent interview, Elwood Christ confirmed that The Pub property at 20-22 Lincoln Square was Lots #1 and #2 of the

210 lots in James Gettys' subdivision that became "Gettistown" and later Gettysburg. "Gettys held a lottery," Christ says, to determine who would be able to purchase the tracts. The town developed around the square, originally called the "Diamond," though Christ notes that historians believe the original roadbeds are near but not directly under the modern streets.

Through a succession of at least 10 owners over the next 120 years, the property that became The Pub and Restaurant was expanded and improved, with its functions varying as widely as its tenants. A log house gave way to a brick building with dwelling space and a store operated by partners Jacob Eyster and Jacob Middlecoff. Eyster bought out his partner, but despite becoming a director

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## Dining Out

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of the Bank of Gettysburg and brigadier general in the state militia, Eyster was no storekeeper and lost the property in a sheriff's sale in 1823. A few years later Eyster turned up in Harrisburg, working as a clerk for the surveyor-general.

Fate was no kinder to later tenants. Alexander Stevenson died at age 36 in 1852, just two years after losing his wife. John Hoke then acquired the property and operated a store until his death in 1866, leaving no will, considerable debt and a widow with three minor children, according to the PHMC report. Ann Hoke was forced to sell first one lot and then the other for a total of \$7,300.

### In no position to give away free meals

During the late 19th and early 20th century, the Spangler family owned the property and either operated or leased space to a clothing store, hat shop and a business selling "queensware," a pottery

pattern made famous by Wedgwood and now auctioned on eBay at prices ranging from less than a dollar to nearly \$200.

After 38 years of Spangler ownership, George F. Mitchell bought the property and promptly installed a restaurant. In 1934, the year after Prohibition was repealed, Mitchell added a tap room. For his contribution to the town's commerce, Mitchell was honored in a front page obituary in the *Gettysburg Times* on Valentine's Day, 1944. "It was a by-word among 'men of the road,' the needy and the unfortunate that you'll never be refused a meal at Mitchell's.... He had a reputation of never having turned anyone away." Not bad for a man who first visited Gettysburg as a "street salesman," according to the PHMC report.

Lisa Grim was in no position to give away free meals when she bought out her ex-husband's share of the business and took over The Pub in 1994. The business was burdened with debt totaling \$450,000, including long overdue state, federal and local taxes. Grim refused to declare bankruptcy, and says eventually she "paid creditors 100 cents on the dollar, maybe more because of tax penalties." Every Friday a Federal agent visited The Pub to collect a \$500 payment on the back taxes.

A local bank came through with financing after Grim promised and delivered a profit in January, always a slow month. By the spring of 1995, the turnaround had progressed enough to allow exterior remodeling, followed by extensive interior renovation in 1996. The Pub closes for two weeks every January for renovation, and in 2005 Grim hopes to complete the second floor, including "an upscale bar for older drinkers."

### The proper balance between modernization and preservation

Rebuilding after the fire gave Lisa Grim the chance not only to restore the business that she'd built from near-bankruptcy to annual gross sales exceeding \$1 million but also to improve it. In the historic district around Gettysburg's town center, however, a business owner must find the proper balance between modernization and preservation. Grim had her own ideas

and no shortage of advice from others.

Reporting on the fire the following day, the *Gettysburg Times* quoted a comment by Borough Historic Preservation Officer Walter Powell, who "noted that the building could be reconstructed to replicate a Civil War building but be reconfigured to meet today's building code and space requirements." In an opinion piece written after the Historic Architecture Review Board approved Grim's plans, *Times* writer John Messeder quoted with approval HARB chairman Greg Shaffer's observation that, "This town is more than the Civil War and it's very important that the architecture reflect that."

The Pub and Restaurant of today reflects its owner's intention to restore a favorite place as it exists in the living memory of customers who recall it with stucco over the original brick, a change made in the late 1920s by the Mitchells. Generations of Gettysburg College students who remember marching up a steep staircase from the bar to the bathrooms surely would applaud one of Grim's additions: downstairs bathrooms.

### A high rate of success

With sales estimated to reach \$3 million in 2004, the reborn Pub clearly has satisfied old customers and won new ones. Grim attributes her success to a highly motivated and loyal staff. Managers receive quarterly bonuses, as do kitchen and bar staff, based on their efforts to hold down food and liquor costs by doing what's necessary to avoid returned orders. Employee menu suggestions are welcomed at quarterly meetings.

The menu ranges from nearly a page of salad choices (\$2.50-\$10.95) to pasta, chicken, steak and seafood dinners (\$8.50-\$22.95). Customers appreciate the soups, chili and desserts made from scratch. An attraction not on the menu is outdoor seating in the summer, when diners can watch drivers negotiate the famous roundabout. Depression-era owner George Mitchell, famous for his food handouts, surely would approve of this version of free entertainment. ♦

*Farron Brougher, a freelance writer based in Anaheim, Calif., grew up in northern York County.*

## GRAHAM C. SHOWALTER ATTORNEY AT LAW

36 South Third Street • P.O. Box 553  
Lewisburg, PA 17837

By Appointment  
(570) 523-3237 • Fax: (570) 524-5831

E-Mail: gcs@attorneyshowalter.com

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