

Ralph M. Snyder
R. D. 2
Mount Joy, PA 17552 431

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THE SHIFTER: Don't ask for one in Lancaster City

Many residents of Marietta and Columbia told us the same embarrassing story.

"I got a pretty strange look," said John Hinkle.

"They didn't know what I was talking about," said Bob Spangler.

"They acted like I was off my rocker," someone else admitted.

That's what will happen if you try to order a shifter in Lancaster City restaurants. The shifter sandwich is a distinctively local food, although its popularity is spreading.

According to legend, the shifter was created in Columbia back in the heyday of the railroad business. The big "shifting

yards" in Columbia were full of freight cars waiting to be arranged into separate trains. A small locomotive called a "shifter" was used to move the cars from one train to another.

When the men who ran the shifter engines got hungry, they ordered sandwiches from the bars and restaurants on Locust Street. The railroad men worked hard, and they wanted a big sandwich: something with lots of ham, cheese, lettuce, mayonnaise, sweet pickles, tomatoes, and sliced onion.

Since the men who ordered the sandwich worked on the shifters, everyone began calling the things "shifter sandwiches."

Where is it safe to order a shifter?

The *Susquehanna Times* editor decided to investigate the geography and history of the shifter. He cornered an unlucky cub reporter, and ordered the young wretch to start calling restaurants.

The reporter decided to get the worst part over with first. He dialed a Lancaster restaurant.

"Hello," a woman's voice purred. "May we help you?"

The reporter said, "Do you sell shifters?"

The voice on the phone stopped purring. "This is a restaurant, not a hardware store," she said. "You've got the wrong number."

The man at another Lancaster restaurant was more helpful. "Oh, that's an old sandwich," he said. "There's a place on North Queen Street, sold them years ago, but nobody makes them any more."

Origins of the shifter

According to most experts, the late T. W. Olena created the first shifter in his Locust Street restaurant. We were unable to contact any of Mr. Olena's relatives for confirmation.

The restaurant is now managed by Jane Kreider, who calls the place Janie's Restaurant. Jane didn't realize that the legendary event may have occurred (continued on Page 14)



Susquehanna Times staffers Pat (left) and Jody (right)

attack a pair of shifters. Don't try to order one in Lancaster City.



The late Tuffie W. "Tuffie" Olena, the man credited with creating the first shifter sandwich, sits in his restaurant at 400 Locust Street in this photograph from

the 1930's. His wife, the late Mary J. Olena, stands at far left.

photo courtesy of Dick Geesey of Columbia. Our thanks to Joe Balt and Tom King for helping to locate the photo.