



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Melrose Diner Collection, 1938-1988

NMAH.AC.0489

Don Darroch

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Archives Center, National Museum of American History
P.O. Box 37012
Suite 1100, MRC 601
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012
archivescenter@si.edu
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Melrose Diner Collection
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0489
Date:	1938-1988
Extent:	1.5 Cubic feet (5 boxes)
Creator:	Kubach, Richard Ellsworth, Scott, Dr. National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Community Life Melrose Diner, owners and employees
Language:	English .
Summary:	Correspondence, advertisements, accounting records, and 19 audio tape interviews documenting the history and operation of Melrose Diner in Philadelphia, Pa.; interviews conducted by oral historian Scott Ellsworth, 1987; and notes written by him.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The material in this collection was primarily collected or created by Scott Ellsworth under contract with the National Museum of American History in 1987, as part of a project that originally envisioned the acquisition and display of the Melrose Diner by the Museum.

Provenance

Notes and oral history interviews created by Scott Ellsworth for the Archives Center. Diner records transferred to the Archives Center June 1993 from the Division of Community Life (now Division of Cultural and Community Life).

Processing Information

Collection processed by Don Darroch, October 6, 1994.

Preferred Citation

Melrose Diner Collection, 1938-1988, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

The Melrose Diner (the second structure by that name) was built by the Jerry O'Mahony Company of Bayonne, New Jersey and placed in South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at 1610 W. Passyunk Street. Constructed to the plans of owner Richard Kubach, a 33 year old German immigrant, the diner opened for business March 18, 1940. Kubach had been the owner of the predecessor diner at the same address which he had bought five years earlier and had quickly developed into a successful business.

The new diner with 54 seats had more than twice the capacity of its predecessor, cost \$15,000 (less a 10% discount to Kubach for his planning) and was supplemented by a kitchen, bakery and storeroom. Under Kubach's skilled and enlightened management, the new diner rapidly acquired a reputation for excellent food and good service. It became a community fixture, open 24 hours a day and attracting industrial workers and merchants from the area as well as families and young people in the evenings.

In 1956, Kubach opened a third diner a few blocks from the original site and closed the older building. It remained vacant until 1959, when Jim D'Andrea, a construction foreman, bought the structure and moved it across the Delaware River to a site in Washington Township, Mercer County in New Jersey. This location on Route 130, a main highway between Philadelphia and New York, proved to be a good one for truckers as customers for the diner. D'Andrea and his son Gene leased the diner successively to more than a dozen different individuals in less than 20 years. Under this variety of managers and different names (although long term patrons continued to call it the Melrose) the diner physically deteriorated; a fire in 1979 finally ended its serviceable life. D'Andrea boarded it up in the early 1980s.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of material collected by contract researcher Scott Ellsworth during a 1987 historical study of the Melrose Diner. It includes correspondence with Kubach and D'Andrea and with lessees when D'Andrea was the owner; with former employees and patrons; and with the manufacturer of the diner, the O'Mahony company. There are also menus and flyers advertising the diner, as well as payrolls and other accounting documents relating to its operation. Nineteen audio tapes of interviews Ellsworth conducted with Kubach, D'Andrea and others are also part of the collection. In addition, there is a history of the Melrose Diner based on his recorded interviews.

Arrangement

Collection arranged into three series.

Series 1: History of Melrose Diner and Scott Ellsworth Notes

Series 2: Melrose Diner records, 1959-1983

Series 3: Audio tape interviews with owners and employees of Melrose Diner, 1987.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Diners -- 1940-1979 -- Philadelphia (Pa.)
Restaurants -- 1940-1980 -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia
Restaurateurs
Truck drivers
Truck stops

Types of Materials:

Audiotapes
Interviews
Oral history

Names:

Jerry O'Mahony Company

Geographic Names:

New Jersey -- Restaurants
Philadelphia (Pa.) -- Restaurants

Container Listing

Series 1: History of the Melrose Diner and Scott Ellsworth Notes, 1938-1988

Box 1, Folder 1	Ellsworth notebook (loose-leaf): personal contacts, deeds of conveyance, handwritten notes, memoranda, O'Mahony promotional material, correspondence, 1938-1987
Box 1, Folder 2	News clippings regarding Washington Township (Mercer County, NJ), 1939-1987
Box 1, Folder 3	Melrose Diner: construction bank note, menus, press clippings, 1940-1987
Box 2, Folder 4	Ellsworth notebook (loose-leaf): media sources, correspondence, clippings, 1986-1987
Box 2, Folder 5	Ellsworth notes and correspondence, 1987
Box 2, Folder 6	Ellsworth notebook (spiral): notes on taped interviews, 1987
Box 2, Folder 7	Ellsworth notebook (spiral): notes on taped interviews, 1987
Box 2, Folder 8	Ellsworth notebook (bound): names, addresses and appointments, 1987
Box 2, Folder 9	Melrose Diner: history by Scott Ellsworth, 1987

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Series 2: Melrose Diner Records, 1959-1983

Box 3, Folder 1	Washington Township Centennial booklet, 1959
Box 3, Folder 2	Leases of diner by Eugene D'Andrea, 1962-1978
Box 3, Folder 3	Account journal, 1969-1970
Box 3, Folder 4	Disbursement records (2 books of check stubs), 1969-1970
Box 3, Folder 5	Log of diner expenditures, 1969-1970
Box 3, Folder 6	Log of diner receipts, sales tax, 1969-1970
Box 3, Folder 7	Payroll record, 1969-1970
Box 4, Folder 8	Cancelled checks, bank statement, 1970-1974
Box 4, Folder 9	Washington Township and New Jersey Board of Health inspection certificates, 1971-1975
Box 4, Folder 10	Receipts and disbursements, 1972
Box 4, Folder 11	Receipts and disbursements, 1973
Box 4, Folder 12	Payroll record, 1973
Box 4, Folder 13	Jim Quinn, But Never Eat Out on Saturday Night (Dolphin Books 1983)
Box 4, Folder 14	Business card file
Box 4, Folder 15	Local maps of Washington Township and environs

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Series 3: Audio Tapes of Interviews with Owners and Employees of Melrose Diner, 1987

Box 4, Folder 1	Anderson, Evelyn, October 05, 1987
Box 4, Folder 2	Birckhead, Walter, September 25, 1987
Box 4, Folder 3	Bongiovanni, Joseph, September 25, 1987
Box 4, Folder 4	Bundschuh, Kurt, September 25, 1987
Box 4, Folder 5	Butler, James, September 24, 1987
Box 4, Folder 6	D'Andrea, Gene, October 07, 1987
Box 4, Folder 7	D'Espinosi, Anthony, September 18, 1987
Box 4, Folder 8	Dielsi, Regina, September 24, 1987
Box 4, Folder 11-12	Kubach, Richard, September 18, 1987
Box 4, Folder 12	Kubach, Richard, September 24, 1987
Box 4, Folder 13	Marchese, Marianna, September 25, 1987
Box 4, Folder 14	Meisner, Irene, September 25, 1987
Box 4, Folder 15	Moses, Marion, September 24, 1987
Box 4, Folder 16	Phillips, Phyllis, October 06, 1987
Box 4, Folder 17	Scully, Ann, October 07, 1987
Box 4, Folder 18-19	Tierney, Paul, September 18, 1987

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