



YESTERDAY

The First Fast Food

A small restaurant in Kansas changed the way Americans eat.

BY ALEXIS BURLING

In 1921, a former janitor named Walt Anderson made plans to open a new restaurant in Wichita, Kansas. There would be no waiters, tablecloths, or silverware. People would stand in line and order at a counter. He would serve mainly one type of food: hamburgers. And the service would be so quick that diners could get in and out in just a few minutes.

This type of dining, which came to be known as “fast food,” was unknown in Anderson’s day, and therefore many people said his idea would never work. But Anderson’s restaurant, which he named, White Castle, was a success. And over time, his fast-food concept would change how Americans ate—and America itself.

In the early 1900s, when Anderson was growing up, restaurants were mainly for wealthy people. The average American worked long hours to make just under \$9 a week. For most families, eating in a restaurant was reserved for special occasions.

But by 1920, the American way of life was shifting. People were working less and earning more; weekly salaries had jumped to \$25. They were traveling more, too, thanks to a new invention called the automobile. It turned out

Compare / Contrast

Directions:

1. Read both articles.
2. Write down five facts about the rise in popularity of both White Castle and McDonald’s.

that White Castle was the perfect restaurant for these changing times.

People flocked in droves to try out Anderson’s new convenient style of dining. Customers felt comfortable eating food from the clean, open kitchen, served by employees with spotless, starched uniforms. They gobbled up the 5-cent square hamburgers called “slyders” made from fresh ground beef that was delivered twice-a-day. And they loved that they could get their food just 2-minutes after ordering it.

Anderson’s invention took a while to catch on in other parts of the country. But by the 1940s, as new highways zigzagged the country, Americans were spending more and more time in their cars. White Castle began popping up all across America, often right near the freeway. Then in 1955, three men opened a restaurant that would turn Anderson’s fast-food fad into a world-wide phenomenon. The restaurant’s name? McDonald’s. ■