



## Jack's Grill

"The Legend"

The old adage that looks can be deceiving is never truer than in the case of Jack's Grill. Walking into this unassuming restaurant is in many ways like walking into the 1930s. The retro atmosphere is one of its draws, but people come to Jack's for one very good reason: its choice steaks. Locally owned from the beginning, the restaurant has justifiably become a Redding institution.

The history of Jack's Grill is a colorful one. Built in 1935 by Bill Morrison, the two-story structure on California Street originally housed a second-hand store. In 1938 Morrison leased the downstairs to Jack Young, a World War I flying ace, who opened a bar and grill. The last thing the town needed at that time was another bar, but Jack's was successful nonetheless. In the years just prior to World War II, Redding was a boomtown filled with thousands of men who had come to work on the railroads, the construction of Shasta Dam or in the mines. In the best Old West tradition, it was also a raucous, wide-open town, and California Street was an infamous strip of bars, hotels, restaurants and several houses of prostitution (including the upstairs of Jack's Grill for a brief time in the early 1940s). Of the numerous bars that sprang up during that era, Jack's is the only one to survive.

Sticking around barely long enough to give the business his name, Jack Young sold the bar to Fats Woolf in the 1940s. Upon Woolf's death in 1951, Jack's was purchased by Joe Stanley and his wife, June, who happened to be the daughter of the property's original builder. Up to that point Jack's had been primarily a bar; June Stanley was the first to emphasize the restaurant instead, and she began building the reputation it still enjoys today. Joe became the bar's piano player and performed regularly at Jack's until his death in 1962. June continued to manage the business until 1977, when Don Conley became manager. Eventually he bought the grill.

Under Conley's ownership, Jack's Grill has held fast to the traditions that made it successful. Believing that if it ain't broke, don't fix it, Conley has resisted the temptation to modernize the restaurant. The building still sports the faded and decor of its early days, including two original Old West-style paintings by a down-on-his-luck artist who was befriended by the original bar owner. Given to Jack Young in appreciation for his help, one of the paintings depicts an old-time sheriff sitting in a chair. One night, an inebriated customer, fresh from an overnight stint in jail, was so infuriated by the sight of the badge-wearing lawman in the painting that he pulled out a pistol and shot the painting five times. All five bullets hit within four inches of the badge and left holes in the wall behind the painting that were not discovered until 40 years later.

The tradition most important to the popularity of Jack's Grill has always been its steaks. When the grill opened, most of its patrons were miners and construction workers who wanted a substantial meal after a strenuous 16-hour workday. Jack Young served them one-pound steaks. More than 60 years later, the house specialty - and its biggest draw - is its famous 16-oz. New York strip, filet mignon or choice top sirloin, which are also offered in a more modest 10-oz. cut. Jack's steaks are exclusively USDA choice, cut fresh at the restaurant each day. Also on the menu are brochette of beef, Jack's Stack (tender bits of filet, New York and top sirloin sautéed with onion, peppers and a light gravy, served over hot garlic bread), deep fried jumbo prawns, tender ocean scallops and Southern fried chicken. All dinners include garlic bread, baked potato or French fries, and tossed green salad with Jack's homemade dressings.

Not only is Jack's a steak-lover's heaven, but it is also a great place to work. The last waitresses who retired from the restaurant worked here between 20 and 33 years, Conley explains. And Mike Woodrum, my manager and bartender, has been here for more than 20 years. When regular customers walk through the door, they know they are going to be served by someone with a friendly, familiar face, someone who knows them. That kind of continuity is one of the things that makes this a comfortable place to eat and keeps our customers coming back. Conley is another reason customers come back. A past president of the Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce and currently an officer of the California Restaurant Association, the friendly and hospitable owner is an important part of the restaurant's character and charm. In 1991 he was honored with the Virgil Covington Award for outstanding leadership in the restaurant industry and his community.

Open for dinner every day except Sunday, Jack's Grill has 17 stools at the bar and seats 46 in the dining room's old-style booths and tables. Despite its modest size, the restaurant

does an amazing business, averaging between 150 and 200 customers each night. Having been featured in newspapers, travel guides, Nation's Restaurant News Sunset and United Airlines Magazine, it draws tourists at least five of the six nights it is open each week. It also holds a special place in the hearts of Shasta County residents who know a good thing when they see it; the fiercely loyal base of regular customers includes the second and third generations of families who have been coming to Jack's for years.

For a restaurant to stay in business - and in the same location - for more than 60 years, it has to exhibit some very special qualities. Aside from its legendary steaks and excellent service, the key to the longevity of Jack's Grill is that it has remained largely unchanged since it opened. It remains unchanged because the customers want it that way. So as one of them put it, Jack's is Jack's. Why would you change it?