

## Pipher's Diner Remains an Icon in Spite of Changing Landscape

*Photos and story by Rick Hiduk*



**Lou Aquilio (left) has worked at Pipher's Diner in Wysox Township since the 1960s, managing the popular eatery since the 1990s. His family has served food to thousands of local residents and Route 6 travelers there since 1937.**

Built in 1936 by Charles Pipher and his family, Pipher's Diner remains to this day a classic icon of Americana and a staple of Wysox Township's past and present. Run by the Aquilio family since 1937, the boxcar-style front and its simple interior are little changed since the 1940s, and that's the way most residents like it.

"We've kept it the same," current owner Lou Aquilio says proudly. The youngest of five children of Mary and Daniel Aquilio Sr., Lou started working in the diner as a high school student in the 1960s when the eatery was open 24 hours per day.

Though America was still reeling from the Great Depression in the late 1930s, Wysox Township was experiencing a boom economy. The intersection of Lake Wesauking Road and major thoroughfares that would become Routes 6 and 187 was a hub of activity that was quickly built up to accommodate the construction of the Roosevelt Highway, which would eventually be named US Route 6.

The Piphers also built a bar closer to the intersection of Wysox Corners and additional buildings that have served many purposes over the years. They would eventually build a motel and trailer park on the opposite side of Route 6 to accommodate workers involved with the construction of the original Tennessee Gas Pipeline in the 1950s.

"The Diner has seen three booms and three busts," Lou said of the fluctuating economy endured by his and other businesses in the area. The years following World War II into the early 1960s were especially good times, Lou recalls. That boom ended with what Lou refers to as the "farming crisis."

The diner enjoyed an upswing in business in the 1970s when the interstate highways that would eventually circumvent traffic around the area were under construction. GE Sylvania, Masonite, and DuPont were also providing stable employment for thousands of families in the area. The recession of the late 1970s reversed the trend however, and the restaurant business saw a sharp decline in customers.

"From the 1980s to the start of the arrival of the gas industry, there was really nothing going on," Lou explained. "The area was pretty stagnant."

In 1937, Daniel Sr. had brought the family to Wysox from New York's southern tier. Lou's mother, the former Anita Simons, was living on a farm in Windham Township, Bradford County. After marrying Daniel Jr., Anita moved from Windham to Wysox on Sept. 1, 1939 and began working in the restaurant.

The family grew quickly with the births of four sons – Joseph, Daniel III, Kenneth, and Louis - and daughter Sarah Ann in the middle. Lou's parents took up residence behind the diner, and Lou became certified as a CPA after high school and started his own practice in Wysox. In

addition to running the diner, Daniel Jr. climbed the ranks of the local judicial system to become a District Justice.

During that time, the Pipher's Diner became one of several popular eateries in the area of Wysox Corners, serving as a daily coffee and gossip shop for local restaurants and a stopping point for celebrities. Actress Bette Davis, who owned property near Wyalusing for many years, came into the diner on several occasions.

"She'd come in and eat in the evening," Lou said of Davis. "My father and I never bothered her."

Sometime in the early days of The Lone Ranger television show, which began in 1949, lead actor Clayton Moore visited the restaurant as part of a promotional tour and autographed the back of a stock photo of him and his horse, Trigger, for Lou's oldest brother, Joe. It was also not uncommon, Lou noted, for the occasional mafia leader and his entourage to stop in.

A brief shot of Pipher's Diner was included in the 1976 TV movie about the 1950 Brink's Bank robbery, as the criminals were known to have made their way through the area. In late 2014, Pipher's Diner was featured as part of the WVIA TV's Our Town series in an episode that focused on Wysox and Towanda.

"A lot of people have come and gone," Lou said of the occasional celebrity status of the establishment. Mostly, Lou related, he's proud to be part of a tradition that is revered by both local residents and those who choose to stop there on their way through town.

When Daniel Jr. fell ill in the early 1990s, Lou again became involved with the diner, leaving his practice in 1994 to work with Anita full time. Daniel Jr. died in 1996, and Anita passed away in 2009. The rest of Lou's family has spread out across the country, and Lou has no descendants.

Lou noted that neither his parents nor grandparents before him ever thought of quitting the business. "We just kept right on going," he said. Though currently weathering another lull in the natural gas business, Lou isn't ready to throw in the towel yet either. "What else are you gonna do after 75 years?" he joked

Lou knows that the days of the Aquilios running Pipher's Diner are finite, but he is optimistic that the eatery will remain an institution and retain its iconic stature in Wysox Township after he retires.

"Hopefully, someone will keep it going."



**Pipher's Diner (above) as it appeared in the 1940s and (below) as it appears today.**



**The Aquilio family celebrated 50 years of running Pipher's Diner in 1989. To Lou's right is his mother, Anita Aquilio, and 25-year employee Dorothy Young.**



**The view of Pipher's Diner is eclipsed in 2010 by an army of sand trucks associated with the natural gas industry.**



**Actress Bette Davis (above), who had family and land in the area, was perhaps one of Pipher's Diner's more famous patrons, stopping in for the occasional supper. Clayton Moore (below), who portrayed The Lone Ranger on television from 1949 to 1954 paid a visit to the diner as part of a promotional tour and signed copies of photos of him and his horse, Trigger.**

