

The Heartbeat of America's Mother Road

ROUTE 66 PULSE

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CALIFORNIA IN THE NEWS

Over 1 Million Hamburgers Sold

By Al Morrisette

San Bernardino, CA – In 1937, Richard (Dick) and Maurice (Mac) McDonald moved from Manchester, New Hampshire to Arcadia, California and opened up their first restaurant named Airdrome. They sold hot dogs, orange juice and other items, becoming successful in their initial endeavor.

The brothers moved the Airdrome to San Bernardino in 1940, hired 20 "carhops" and expanded their menu to 25 items including barbeque ribs. Their venture was successful through WWII and when America took to the road after the war, the brothers changed their concept to be speedy, convenient and inexpensive.

They closed the restaurant for a short time and in 1948 reopened it as McDonald's Restaurant selling 15-cent hamburgers, French fries, soda and malts. The car hops were replaced with a walk-up window where patrons could watch their food being made and rather than receive it on a plate or tray, it came in a bag and paper cups.

Though not officially on Route 66 (Mt Vernon, just a few blocks away was the official Route 66), it was in the San Bernardino Route 66 business district and attracted not only local customers but numerous Route 66 travelers that loved the convenience of the very first "fast food," a term coined by Dick McDonald in 1948.

The McDonald brothers were already franchising their restaurant ideas, but their partnership with malt machine salesman Ray Croc took the chain nationwide in 1954. Croc eventually felt that the brothers were holding him back and made a deal to purchase the franchise rights from the brothers in 1961 for \$2.7 million.

Friction between Croc and the brothers forced the brothers to change their restaurant's name to "Big M" in 1962. Ray Croc opened a new McDonald's restaurant just a block away and



The very first McDonald's restaurant, now the McDonald's Museum, in San Bernardino, California.

in a short time successfully drove the brothers out of business. The brothers eventually sold the property in 1968 and the abandoned original building was replaced in 1974 with a commercial building.

In 1992, the San Bernardino Civic Light Opera bought the property and through a dedication ceremony the same year, the McDonald's Corp acknowledged the brothers and the site as the first true McDonald's restaurant and the brothers as the first true owners.

The opera went bankrupt a few years later and Albert Okura bought the property in 1998 after reading about the foreclosure in a local newspaper. "I couldn't believe that the location of the first McDonald's restaurant was for sale," said Okura, adding, "I wanted to make sure it stayed a part of Route 66 history, so I bought it."

Okura, who started his fast food chain, Juan Pollo Chicken, in 1984, has transformed the building partly into the administration offices for his restaurant chain, but also into a McDonald's Museum.

Within the walls of the building you can transcend the history of McDonald's through newspaper clippings, artifacts and other items. You will find many items such as hats, kid's meals, machines and playground equipment that portray the lineage of the company. The facility located at 1398 N. E St in San Bernardino can be easily recognized because of the fully restored original sign.

As a Route 66 philanthropist, Okura has dedicated much of his time and efforts to help support both the Route 66 Mother Road Museum in Barstow and the Victorville Route 66 Museum. He also sponsors the Cruizin E St. Veteran's Parade and Car Show at the McDonald's Museum on a weekend near Veteran's Day each year. He helps in additional Route 66 activities for other organizations, but in recent years has focused on improvements to the community rich in Route 66 heritage, Amboy. Okura purchase Amboy and is dedicated to the restoration of the community because he understands the place it holds in history.

For the Route 66 traveler in California, Okura and Juan Pollo Chicken have secured two icons of the Mother Road that transcend time and asphalt.