

Photo of the Month

Susie-Q Malt Shop
By Robert D. Rousey



Susie-Q Malt Shop, 2007
614 N. Second Street, Rogers, Arkansas
Photograph courtesy of James Hales

"I kind of stole the name from a French-fry cutter I bought." Built as a fruit market, the Susie-Q Malt Shop rose up from a cousin's brief business venture on a little portion of the Head family's property, and became a Rogers's icon. Mildred Head had never operated a restaurant. In fact she had never operated any sort of business. But not long after her cousin had moved back to Saint Louis, she took over the fruit stand and began operating one of the most successful businesses her family and the people of Rogers has ever seen.

In 1960 a friend of hers was opening a malt shop in Pea Ridge and she introduced Mildred to a man from the Meadow Gold Ice Cream Company. He helped Mildred map out the equipment and counter placement and then stuck around while she opened the restaurant. Mildred's name for the malt shop came from a popular local favorite, curly fries; the potato cutter she bought for cutting the fries was called a "Suzie Q."

Other than replacing the metal roof, which collapsed from a heavy snow storm in 1989, the distinctive building, the family, and the food has seen little change in over forty-nine years of operation. Mildred Head passed the shop to her son J.B. in 1972 and continued to work until 1999, greeting old friends and customers with her warm style and charm.

“The Susie-Q Malt Shop is one of those places that were fairly common back in the 1960’s that you don’t find very much anymore. I’m very glad it’s still around,” said former Rogers Mayor John Sampier after Mildred Head passed away in 2002. Not only did the local malt shop not fade away, but it thrived. For 35 years, J.B. and his wife Patti continued his mother’s tradition. But in 2004 the time came for the Suzie Q to again pass down into the waiting arms of an eager family member.

J.B.’s childhood friend and cousin Patsy Head Simmons, a local realtor, bought the malt shop. She took over and unlike many business owner’s that make the mistake of trying to improve a well-established business, she didn’t change a thing. “We’re going to keep doing things around here the same way they’ve been done for the past 44 years. You just don’t mess with a good thing”. Passing on the tradition of friendly service and great food, while continuing local childhood memories, Patsy Head Simmons enlisted the help of J.B.’s daughter to operate the restaurant with the same tenacity that her Aunt Mildred displayed in 1960.

In 2004, Patsy summed up her inspiration for the Susie-Q Malt Shop’s continued existence, but more importantly the pride that each customer feels after almost fifty years of a successful tradition in Rogers. “I was born on that corner...I grew up on that corner ...I guess I’m a sentimentalist.”