

McLean County Museum of History

Steak n Shake Collection

Processed by Bridget McBride
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Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1929-2014
PROVENANCE:	Binder of franchise papers donated by Suzie Zeigler, 2009; most newsletters were collected by Marie Meadows & donated by her niece Amy Miller, 2022.
RESTRICTIONS:	Fragile items including early newsletters.
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	None

Brief History

Steak n Shake was founded by Gus and Edith Belt in Normal about 1934, having previously operated as “Shell Inn.” They converted a gas station / chicken restaurant into the first Steak n Shake with counter seating. The restaurant was so popular, the chain expanded around Central Illinois and eventually into other Midwestern states throughout the 1930s.

Gus Belt died in 1954 and his wife Edith continued to run the business until she sold the company in 1969 to Longchamps, Inc, which sold its interests in 1971 to the Franklin Corporation under the direction of Robert Cronin. Cronin and the Franklin Corporation sold the company to E.W. Kelly and Associates in 1981. After some years of declining sales, the company was sold to Biglari Holdings in 2008. Steak n Shake is still a functioning company and did have over 600 establishments both corporate and franchise, although the impact of the covid pandemic is not yet clear.

Scope

This collection contains newspaper articles, menus, promotional materials, newsletters, and a book containing business records from 1954-1969.

Inventory

Folder 1: Newspaper articles (*Pantagraph* unless noted)

- 1.1 Ad for grand opening of Belt’s Better Tire Service, May 31, 1929
- 1.2 Ad for Belt’s Better Tire Service, (“The Spare Tire” vol 1, no. 7), October 7, 1929.
- 1.3 Ad for Belt’s Better Tire Service Inc. (“The Spare Tire” vol. 1, no. 8), October 14, 1929
- 1.4 “Hamburger Stand Grows Into Big Business,” December 3, 1940
- 1.5 Ad: Meat Shortage due to World War II, June 6, 1945
- 1.6 Ad for reopening of Main and Virginia Ave., Normal, restaurant, Feb 6, 1946
- 1.7 Ad: photo spread in 100th anniversary edition, Nov 20, 1946
- 1.8 Ad, June 19, 1947 featuring hamburgers at Normal Drive-In
- 1.9 Double-page ad (locations of restaurants in Illinois and Indiana), 1953? photocopy
- 1.10 “Steak n Shake President Dies,” August 21, 1954, p. 3
- 1.11 Ad (restaurants closed due to death of Gus Belt), August 23, 1954, p. 3
- 1.12 “Belt Leaves Half Of 1.5 Million Estate to Wife,” Sep 2, 1955, p3
- 1.13 Founder’s Day celebration ad, February 23, 1955. Photocopy
- 1.14 “Steak n Shake Meat Grinding Now Entirely Centered Here,” August 25, 1957
- 1.15 Ad for silver anniversary of company, Dec 1, 1959 Photocopy
- 1.16 “Arthur S. ‘Babe’ Smith Dies; Ex-State, Business Executive,” Nov 20, 1969
- 1.17 “Smith Man of Talent,” Nov 22, 1969. Editorial.
- 1.18 Marie Meadows obit, Nov 5, 1978 (Marie edited the newsletter in 1949-1951 and collected many of the editions that were later donated by niece Amy Miller in 2022.)
- 1.19 FlickFact wrong on Steak’n Shake dish, May 23, 2005
- 1.20 “Campbell’s take on Steak ‘n Shake,” *San Jose Mercury News*, October 11, 2015.

Folder 2: Menus, etc.

- 2.1 Menu, World War II era of early 1940s. Lists restaurants by city and address
- 2.2 Pocket sized menu, 1980. From restaurant on Locust in Blm.
- 2.3 Menu, 1993.
- 2.4 Menu, 1996.
- 2.5 Takhomasak Carry Out Menu, 1996.
- 2.6 Bicentennial placemats, 1976. Three (3)
- 2.7 "It's Always Dinnertime" placemat, nd.
- 2.8 Order forms, unused. Two (2), nd
- 2.9 Customer Comment card, nd. Robt P. Cronin, president.
- 2.10 Bag for take-out, nd. Restaurants in IL, IN, MO & FL
- 2.11 Burger wrappers, 2. nd
- 2.12 Bag for take-out, nd with "Takhomasak"

Folder 3: Promotional Materials

- 3.1 Mileage charts from Bloomington to other principal cities in US & Canada. Two different charts of different vintages, nd. Towns with Shake n Steak restaurants noted.
- 3.2 Gift certificates. Two of different styles, nd.
- 3.3 Three cardboard toy cars, 2014.
- 3.4 Form letter plus envelope from Edith Belt announcing re-opening of the original and now newly refurbished Drive-In at Main & Virginia, Normal. Feb 1955.
- 3.5 Community Players program for *Time for Elizabeth*, Dec 1949. Ad includes list of Steak n Shake locations.
- 3.6 Community Players program for *The Curious Savage*, April 1954. Ad includes list of Steak n Shake locations.

Folder 4: Employee Materials

- 4.1 Two business cards: Purchasing agent Warren Miller and Publicity Director Mel. Callahan, nd.
- 4.2 Three employee paper hats, nd.
- 4.3 80th birthday employee paper hat, 2014.

Folder 5: Miscellaneous

- 5.1 City directory listings, 1926-2010. Prepared Aug 2012. 4 pp.
- 5.2 Email from Terri Clements re Steak n Shake bldg. on West Washington St.
- 5.3 "Learning To Eat Out: The Origins Of Steak 'N Shake," by Keith A. Sculle, article in *MID-AMERICA, An Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2, Summer, 1999.

Folder 6: Franchise Records from Burgundy Binder

- 6.1 1969 Annual Report
- 6.2 Handwritten draft of letter to Mr. Chester Thomson from Ray Smith (franchise operator of the Second Street Steak n Shake (Rockford, Illinois) complaining of the failure of Steak n Shake to aid the franchise, no date

- 6.3 Minutes of Special Meeting of Executive Committee of Steak n Shake, Inc, October 15, 1968; concerning the franchise agreement made with Ray M. Smith of Second Street Steak n Shake, Rockford, Illinois
- 6.4 Steak n Shake, Inc. Notice of Annual meeting of Stockholders, January 15, 1970

Folder 7: Reserved for expansion

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Folder 9: Employee Newsletters, 1945

Fragile; please use photocopies only.

- 9.1 Vol I, No 1 January
- 9.2 Vol I, No 4 April
- 9.3 Vol I, No 6 July
- 9.4 Vol I, No 9 October
- 9.5 Vol I, No 10 November

Folder 10: Employee Newsletters, 1946

Fragile; please use photocopies only.

- 10.1 Vol I, No 12 January
- 10.2 Vol II, No 1 February
- 10.3 Vol II, No 2 April
- 10.4 Vol II, No 3 May
- 10.5 Vol II, No 4 June
- 10.6 Vol II, No 5 July
- 10.7 Vol II, No 6 August
- 10.8 Vol II, No 8 October
- 10.9 Vol II, No 10 December

Folder 11: Employee Newsletters, 1947

Fragile; please use photocopies only.

- 11.1 Vol II, No 12 February
- 11.2 Vol III, No 2 April
- 11.3 Vol III, No 4 June
- 11.4 Vol III, No 6 August
- 11.5 Vol III, No 7 September
- 11.6 Vol III, No 9 November
- 11.7 Vol III, No 10 December

Folder 12: Employee Newsletters, 1948

- 12.1 Vol III, No 11 January
- 12.2 Vol III No 12 February
- 12.3 Vol IV, No 1 March
- 12.4 Vol IV, No 3 May
- 12.5 Vol IV, No 6 August
- 12.6 Vol IV, No 7 September
- 12.7 Vol IV, No 8 October

12.8 Vol IV, No 10 December

Folder 13: Employee Newsletters, 1949

- 13.1 Vol IV, No 12 February
- 13.2 Vol V, No 4 July
- 13.3 Vol V, No 5 August
- 13.4 Vol V, No 7 October
- 13.5 Vol V, No 8 November
- 13.6 Vol V, No 9 December

Folder 14: Employee Newsletters, early 1950

- 14.1 Vol V, No 10 January
- 14.2 Vol V, No 11 February
- 14.3 Vol V, No 12 March
- 14.4 Vol VI, No 1 April 2 copies
- 14.5 Vol VI, No 2 May 2 copies
- 14.6 Vol VI, No 3 June 2 copies

Folder 15: Employee Newsletters, late 1950

- 15.1 Vol VI, No 4 July
- 15.2 Vol VI, No 5 August 2 copies
- 15.3 Vol VI, No 6 September 2 copies
- 15.4 Vol VI, No 7 October 2 copies
- 15.5 Vol VI, No 8 November
- 15.6 Vol VI, No 9 December

Folder 16: Employee Newsletters, early 1951

- 16.1 Vol VI, No 10 January 2 copies
- 16.2 Vol VI, No 11 February
- 16.3 Vol VI, No 12 March
- 16.4 Vol VII, No 1 April
- 16.5 Vol VI, No 2 May
- 16.6 Vol VI, No 3 June

Folder 17: Employee Newsletters, late 1951

- 17.1 Vol VII, No 4 July
- 17.2 Vol VII, No 5 August
- 17.3 Vol VII, No 6 September
- 17.4 Vol VII, No 7 October
- 17.5 Vol VII, No 8 November

Folder 18: Employee Newsletters, 1952-1976

- 18.1 Vol X, No 7 October 1954
- 18.2 Vol XI, No 1 April 1955
- 18.3 Vol XI, No 5 August 1955
- 18.4 Vol XII, No 4 July 1956
- 18.5 Vol XII, No 6 September 1956

18.6 Vol XII, No 9 December 1956

18.7 Vol 1, No 1 July-August 1976 2 copies

Burgundy Binder of Franchise Records 1954-1969

Contains records of the Second Street Steak n Shake franchise, including by laws, records of minutes, incorporation and organization papers, franchise agreements, assignments of lease, articles of incorporation, stock information, merger papers, and stock certificate