

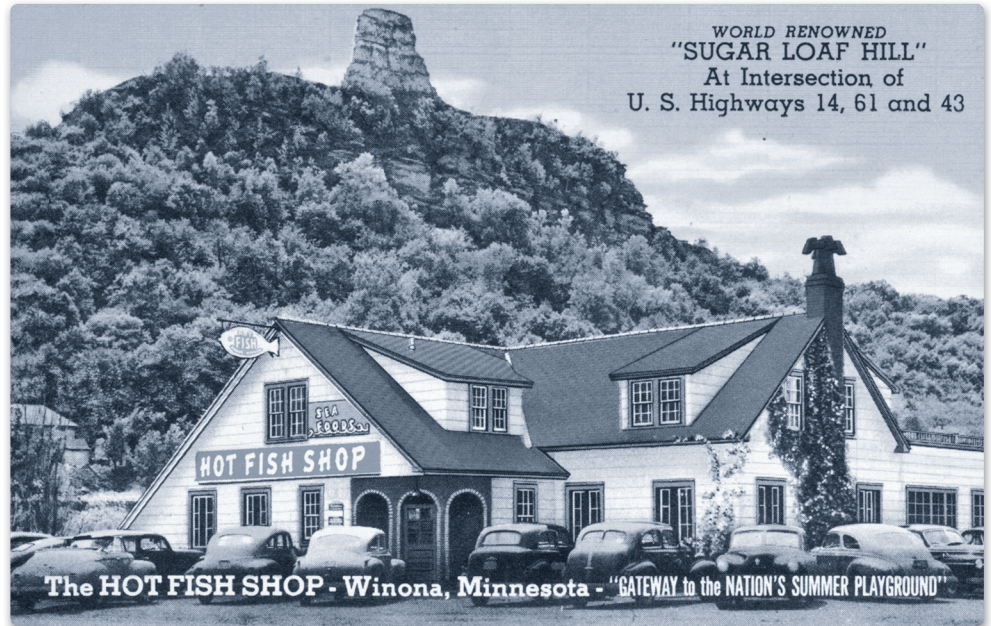
## Hot Fish Shop, Winona



THERE IS A MYSTICAL relationship between Minnesotans and fish. Whether this special understanding has roots in the region's extensive watery terrain or in the sporting nature of its residents is not known. But in a state where the fishing opener ranks up there with the Fourth of July, it's an indisputable fact.

It's also true that fish live in places—streams, lakes, and rivers—where people tend to travel to commune with nature. In the best of all possible worlds, the water stands in or flows through a landscape of geologic distinction or spectacular beauty. Such idyllic spots, which attract sportsmen and tourists alike, present opportunities for enterprising businessmen. Winona, nestled along the Mississippi River, is such a picturesque locale, and the city's Hot Fish Shop was the place where tourists with appetites met fried fish and entrepreneurial spirit.

The most scenic route to Winona, the "Gateway to the Nation's Summer Playground," is along the Great River Road, a ten-state, collaborative initiative dating to the late 1930s. Along its route, travelers pass charming river towns, dramatic scenery, and soaring eagles. Winona's towering topographic feature is Sugar Loaf Bluff, a limestone column left from the quarrying operation that provided stones for the city's sidewalks. When hungry vacationers tired of



Postcard view, about 1948 (MHS COLLECTIONS)

sightseeing, the bluff pointed the way to sustenance—the Hot Fish Shop standing below the rocky outcropping.

Alphonse "Mose" Bambenek was only 16 when he joined his uncle at the restaurant located at the intersection of U.S. Highways 14, 61, and 43. For six decades, his way with "Boneless Wall-Eyed Pike"—a featured menu item—tartar sauce, pickled beets, and lemon pie drew thousands of ravenous patrons and earned the eatery a national reputation for quality seafood and other delights. Like Sugar Loaf Bluff, the Hot Fish Shop became a signature Winona landmark and a legendary destination on the Great River Road.

Like so many dearly loved, irreplaceable people and places, both Bambenek and the Hot Fish Shop are gone; Bambenek died in 1995, and a Dairy Queen now stands where the restaurant once packed them in. Perhaps one could not be expected to go on without the other.

*Jane King Hession is an architectural writer and historian based in Edina, Minnesota. She is currently working on a monograph on Elizabeth "Lisl" Scheu Close.*



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