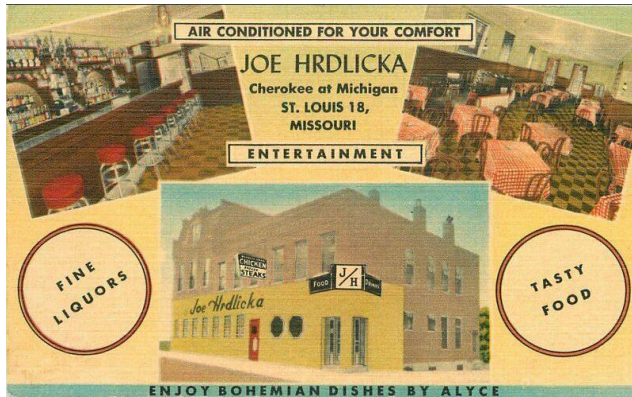


1953-Beer, Fun and Friends at Joe Hrdlicka's on Cherokee Street



It's a nice summer Saturday night, 1953, in South St. Louis. Friendly corner taverns, often family-style establishments, occupy many neighborhood corners. Early TVs sporting rabbit-ears antennas are mounted close to the ceiling behind the bar. (In the early 1950s, you could watch Rocky Marciano demolish every one of his 49 opponents.) Although only going to a Southside bar, many patrons

are attired in dresses, coats and ties. Many of these gathering spots can be walked to without fear, since crime is not a South St. Louis problem.

Perhaps one of the friendliest Southside watering holes is the Joe Hrdlicka Cherokee Café, located at 3126 Cherokee St. It's actually a fairly large place, offering food featuring many German dishes, and cold beers served on tables decked out in classic red-checked tablecloths. The bar area is ornately constructed of dark-stained wood.



Patrons entering the front door are immediately greeted by a cool, air-conditioned interior scented with cigar and cigarette smoke--and the sounds of an accordion! That happy music is courtesy of owner Joe Hrdlicka. He is known as "the man with 1001 hats," which are often Bavarian style as are his outfits. The hats frequently sport a feather. He holds forth singing a variety of songs in a strong voice, and when he isn't singing, he is firing jokes out at the audience. These jests often gently kid the audience, making them part of the show. Big laughs for everyone! He carries around a notebook of 100 jokes. Joe also plays a mean piano.

Originally, Joe worked in a local factory and entertained on weekends at the Black Forest Restaurant, a Southside German eatery. He married Alyce Treybal in 1942, and with money borrowed from their families, started their successful business in 1944. Alyce passed away in 1955, and Joe sold the business and retired in 1966. He still made appearances at various local venues. A life-long Southsider, upon his passing at age 82, his memorial mass was celebrated at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, 3140 Meramec Street.

After years of hearing stories about Joe Hrdlicka from my family, I was fortunate enough to see Joe around 1974 at a Macklind Ave. bar which is currently the home of The Mack. My Dad heard about the event and said I should go. So my future wife Bonnie and I went there. We heard the accordion music on the sidewalk before we entered the building, and there he was in person, Joe Hrdlicka, decked out in German cloths, a crazy hat with a feather, belting out songs. He soon switched to throwing good-natured

zingers at the audience. I was fortunate enough to catch a few! (Always the nice guy, he reminded the audience it was all in fun.)



Memories of

Joe
Hrdlicka
Cherokee Cafe

3122-24-26 CHEROKEE ST. ST. LOUIS, MO.

Now, let's go back, live, to that nice summer, Saturday night, 1953, in South St. Louis via this vintage photo. A good-looking group of people in their late 20s park their cars on Cherokee St. and head towards the Joe Hrdlicka Cherokee Café. As usual, the place is packed on the weekend. The well-dressed party finds seating at a comfortable table by a wall. The big guy in the coat, tie and glasses at the

table's head is my Dad, Cy Polley. Seated to his right with a winning smile is my Mom, Jean Polley. To her right is her cousin Maryann Cahalin and her husband Jack, Dad's best man. The Greatest Generation bringing their class to Joe's joint for a well-earned night out. The ice-cold beers are on the table. The jokes, music and beers starts to flow. It doesn't get better than this!

(I wish I could have been there, but they left me with my Grandma!)

(Various facts found on a St. Louis Post-Dispatch memorial article written upon Mr. Hrdlicka's passing)