

Willie Flocko's.... COUNTRY KITCHEN

'In the 60s the Best Place to Eat was Porcupine Ranch'

By Bill Benge (From the 2003 Zephyr Archives)

In the 1960s and into the early 70s, an island of civility, culture, beauty and joie de vivre flourished in the upper reaches of Castle Valley—a veritable Camelot known as Porcupine Ranch. This paradise was owned and operated by Ray and Ethel Scovill.

Ethel was a formally educated scholar who had attended the University of California, Berkeley and the Sorbonne in Paris. Ray was self-educated, more or less (mostly more) and had a colorful and distinguished past. Among the many hats he wore, Ray had been a professional hockey player, the owner of an import/export firm, a Moab City Policeman, and the Moab Justice of the Peace.

While he was a JP, Ray also ran a restaurant, located near the alley, behind what is now the Back of Beyond Books. Ray could dispense justice all day, and dispense steaks and fries all evening with the same aplomb. When the Scovills retired and moved to Porcupine Ranch, they operated a "restaurant" of sorts, partly to offset expenses and partly due to their love of interesting people and eclectic conversation.



Attendance at the "restaurant" was, by and large, by invitation only or, if they were lucky, prospective diners could call and request a reservation. If they were really lucky. Generally, one needed a "recommend" from someone within the Scovills' Inner Circle of Porcupine patrons.

Ray was always very blunt with potential customers; if they weren't on the recommend list he told them. And if he simply wasn't in the mood to serve, he didn't. It was that simple.

Whenever there was a film being shot in the area, the actors and crew could often be found dining at the ranch. Customers included John Wayne (who Ray liked), Betty Davis (who Ray also liked) and Terrence Stamp (who he despised).

It might be noted that Ray's first impressions were usually irreversible and required immediate action. If Ray Scovill didn't like someone, they were history. Immediately. Even before the meal had begun. A Ray Rejection was ordered to leave the premises and a long walk that required a several mile trek to the main Castle Valley road and an even longer journey back to Moab.

Dinners at Ray and Ethel's were conducted in a "salon" atmosphere. One might arrive at seven in the evening for cocktails. Discussions on any subject might follow and go on for hours. Sometimes the topic might be 18th Century French literature. Or it could be modern detective fiction. Or contemporary politics. Or new wines from California. Dinner was served at Ray's whim, when he was good and ready, generally between ten and eleven, like it or not.

Dinner was served family-style at long tables and, with few exceptions, was always the same. It started with French Onion Soup (Ray's secret recipe), a huge salad with Ray's secret and patented salad dressing, followed by huge two or three-inch sirloin steaks, served on a platter from which customers would cut pieces to fit their appetite, and twice-fried French potatoes so that they would puff up like a true French souffles potato.

Dessert was usually Bavarian Cream. On special occasions like birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter, Ray would prepare dishes beyond his usual bill of fare. One of the best of his special dishes was Deviled Crab. This recipe, like the onion soup and the salad dressing, was a carefully guarded secret (Ray had a lot of secrets). However, at the time of Ray's death, the recipe was passed along to a few of Ray's closest friends. I was grateful to be on the list. Inasmuch as Ray has been gone for almost 30 years, I feel it is proper to release this recipe to the general public. Here it is:

RAY'S DEVILED CRAB

4 Tablespoons Butter
4 Tablespoons Flour
3 Cups Milk*
1 Pimento, finely chopped
2 Tablespoons chopped Green Pepper
1 Tablespoon chopped Parsley
1 Tablespoon sherry
1 Tablespoon Worcestershire Sauce
2 Teaspoons Dry Mustard
– Salt to taste
2 Cups canned, flaked Crab Meat
2 Hardboiled Eggs, chopped
– Grated Parmesan Cheese

Make a sauce of butter, flour and milk; add all remaining ingredients except cheese. Turn into greased baking dishes (preferably greased scallop dishes) and sprinkle with cheese.
Bake in 375 degree oven for about 20 minutes.

* Ray always used condensed milk as it kept better, Porcupine Ranch being an hour or more from Moab. Therefore I always use condensed milk for historical reasons. Use one can of condensed milk and the remainder water to make 3 cups.

I hope that all of you will try this recipe and enjoy it, and for those of you who knew Ray and Ethel, I hope this recipe will bring back fond memories.

For those of you who didn't know the Scovills, I'm sorry that you missed two wonderful people and a place and time that was magic.

This recipe is dedicated to Pam, Ross, Donna, Steve, Jim, Adrien, Sam, Barr, Susan, Sylvia, Sal and all the rest of Ray's "special family."

Bill Benge died on October 20, 2006.



Bill "Willie Flocko" Benge, in 1973.

THE ZEPHYR BACKBONE

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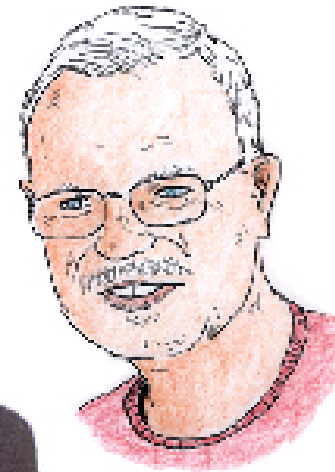


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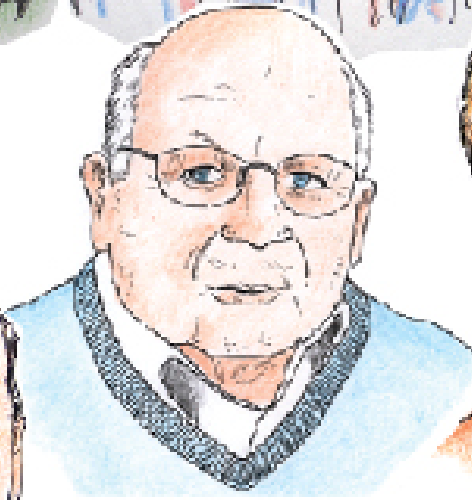
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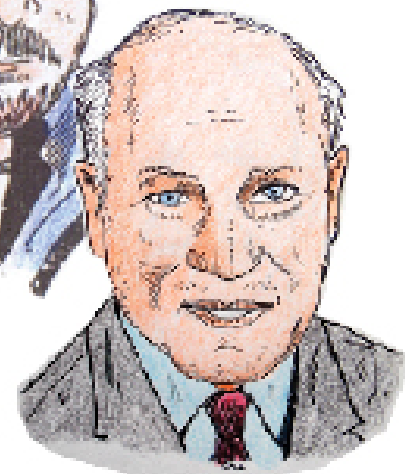
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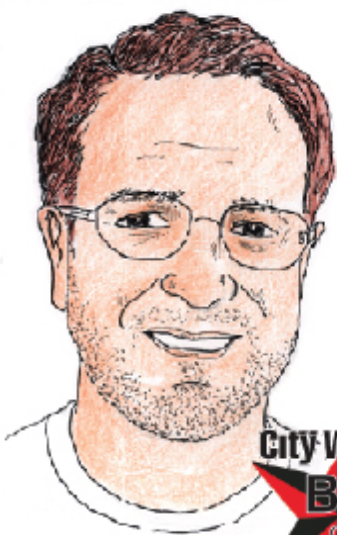
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