



## Cook's Forest Lane Café

28 years of serving blue collar, white collar and even the occasional celebrity.



Cook's Forest Lane Café, 2355 Forest Lane, filled many Garlandites' breakfast and lunch needs from 1952 to 1980. This image graced their Christmas card ca. 1960, when a 'plate lunch' cost 65 cents. *Garland Landmark Society Archives*

More often than not, locals eponymously referred to the Forest Lane Café as Cook's. Dorothy Cook, her husband, their children and tenured hometown helpers had personalized the feeding process into as much of a visit as a business transaction.

Dorothy Totten Cook had grown up near the intersection of present Audelia Road and Skillman, where her father had operated a single-family dairy. While working in a Dallas manufacturing plant during WWII, she and her coworkers frequented a nearby

eatery. At the war's end Dorothy joined the staff there, where she gained on-the-job training for her future.

Husband William C. Cook, a Mabank native, had arrived in Garland with the Byer-Rolnick Hat Corporation in 1939. He and Dorothy later purchased a homestead in the northeast quadrant of Shiloh Road and Forest Lane, a short distance west of the hat factory. Included was a semblance of two farm houses and a barn with enough acreage that they

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relinquished a piece of land for the Continental Emsco campus next door.

In 1952, the Cooks constructed the café structure and parking lot in their front yard, a large space between their residence and Forest Lane, then opened for business.

Soon converging at the doorway were hungry employees of Continental Emsco, DeSoto, Kraft and other nearby plants. Shuffled amongst them were business and professional customers from other parts of Garland and the surrounding region. Local school athletes and coaches periodically seasoned the mix. Though the dress code accommodated everything from T-shirts to ties, home-style food encouraged home-style manners.

Beginning at 5 a.m., when William Cook prepared the day's first coffee, a few dozen early birds served themselves buffet-style to a mini-breakfast of eggs with bacon or sausage. An hour later, the staff had

assembled and full breakfast offerings materialized as Mr. Cook hustled down Forest Lane to his daytime hat-making job at Byer-Rolnick.

By 11 o'clock, the buffet counter blossomed with the day's luncheon fare. Rotating entrees included chicken and dumplings, chicken fried steak, enchiladas, fried chicken, meat loaf, spaghetti and meat balls, as well as a seafood choice for Fridays. Vegetable choices varied by season, as family members regularly prowled Dallas' Farmers' Market.

Larrupin desserts magnetized many Forest Lane repeaters. Revolving choices included apple or peach cobbler, as well as pecan pie and meringue-topped banana, coconut and chocolate pies. Often these creations began life in the nearby home of Onita Merriman, the staffer who maintained a steady dessert supply. Copious quantities of water, sweetened tea or coffee washed down every last morsel.

Vacant places at any table constituted wasted space, so hungry patrons routinely dropped into any unoccupied spot and often made new friends. The dining room seated 96, and when the day was done, each place had typically served three people. Since the crowd churned, table hoppers risked returning to discover their dishes cleared and their chairs claimed by interlopers. Serving ceased at 1:30, when cleanup commenced, and the café closed by 2:30 p.m.

Most Tuesday and Wednesday evenings the Cooks catered meetings for two local churches, whose attendance may have grown as a result. These projects mobilized both Cooks, sons Jerry and William



Kelpen's Ice Cream display in interior of Cook's Café. This was a short-term experiment that proved less popular than home-baked cobblers and pies.

Garland Landmark Society Archives

'Brother' Cook, Mrs. Merriman and other stalwarts such as Hazel Hughes, Alma Thompson and Bobbie Thompson. Staff turnover was low.

Baseball legend Mickey Mantle, whose autographed image still peers from the Cook family's memory wall, prized his Forest Lane culinary experiences enough to propose sponsoring a satellite location in New York City. But Mrs. Cook demurred, quietly content with her enterprise in its own place and time.

During almost three decades of operation in Garland, Forest Lane Cafe weathered eight mayors, scores of council members and a ten-fold population increase. William Cook left Byer-Rolnick in 1968 to found his own hat-making firm, Master Hatters of Texas. Even after closing her food venture in 1980, Dorothy Cook returned to the building for several years to operate Master Hatters' western outlet store there. Surviving customers still give fond glances as they pass.

*Michael R. Hayslip*

## The Way We Were...

### September's Garland News

While at the sanitarium in Dallas Monday night to see his wife, some ungenerate scoundrel stole Cecil Jackson's Ford coupe. The car was valued at \$350, and no trace of it has been found so far.

*The Garland News* September 7, 1923

Finding Uncle Tom Handley conspicuous by his absence at the store Monday, it became necessary to make inquiries. These inquiries divulged that the druggist and his wife had hied themselves to Lake Worth Sunday and that they spent Labor day fishing and resting there.

*The Garland News* September 11, 1936

With registration underway in various colleges, approximately sixty students will be leaving Garland for higher institutions of higher learning in the various parts of the state. For twenty-seven students it will be there first year in college.

*The Garland News* September 13, 1940



Mickey Mantle, a popular Forest Lane Cafe regular, was also a center fielder and first baseman for the New York Yankees. Though he joined the Yankees in 1951, the year before the Cooks opened their place in Garland, Mantle eventually wandered in. He tried unsuccessfully to convince Dorothy Cook that her formula belonged in New York City.

We hereby request parents to keep their children at home until the proper hour arrives for them to report at school. It often occurs that numerous children arrive on the grounds before seven o'clock, when the hour for beginning school work is 8:15. The regulations of the school forbid this unnecessary assemblage, and we shall enforce the regulation this year. The large bell will be rung every morning at 8 o'clock, which will permit every pupil to arrive in due time if he starts then.

*The Garland News* September 10, 1909

A total of \$4,543 was netted for the Jaycee-sponsored swimming pool development fund at Garland's annual Labor Day Jubilee.

*The Garland News* September 6, 1951

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Send your stories to:

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