

Fitzgerald's Genoa Junction Restaurant

By Denise Schultz

For over 100 years vacationers have flocked to Door County, Wisconsin to enjoy a tradition called a 'fish boil.' The good news for Geneva Lakes area residents and visitors is we don't need to drive nearly that far. Right in our own "backyard", the Fitzgerald family has been serving their own mouth-watering variation for over 30 years - literally cooked in their back yard!

Fitzgerald's Genoa Junction is located



in Genoa City, just 10 minutes south of Lake Geneva and just 2 minutes northwest of Richmond, Illinois. The address is 727 Main Street, which is also County Highway B. This hidden treasure is definitely worth exploring.

The Fitzgerald's serve North Atlantic Cod boiled in traditional outdoor kettles year-round. They begin by boiling fresh potatoes and whole onions over a wood fire. Depending on the flow of the evening's guests, they may add the cod to that batch or have a separate batch of fish boiling in one or more kettles. Even early on a Thursday evening when I visited, the cooks never stopped stirring the boiling kettles, adding wood to the fire and simultaneously grilling chicken and ribs.

"Many of our customers visit Door County for their famous fish boils, and then come back here and tell us how disappointed they were," Sue Fitzgerald said proudly. "That's because they serve Whitefish or trout," her son Kevin added, "which means there are often skin and bones included. The cod we serve is completely free of skin and bones."

Some guests who are unfamiliar with boiled fish are skeptical upon their first visit. Sue encourages them to at least try a bite of the fish because over the years she has seen many skeptics transform instantly into raving fans. Served with drawn butter, the sweet taste of the boiled cod is very close to that of lobster.

Serving the fish boil every night they are open, a unique all-you-care-to-eat dining experience. For only a few dollars more, guests enjoy combinations including honey-BBQ chicken and BBQ pork ribs with a secret whiskey-based sauce. Other accompaniments include coleslaw and fresh rye bread, potato and onions which are boiled in the pots with the fish. For dessert a frosted apple square nicely rounds out the meal. Help yourself to regular or decaffeinated coffee. A cocktail waitress is available to serve you from the full service bar featuring a full selection of martinis, highballs, red and white wines, coffee drinks, cordials and more. I noticed the house specialty is a secret recipe for a martini named "Chocolate Heaven," which sounds like another nice option for winding down at the end of a nice meal and evening.

When you enter the historical octagon house on Genoa City's main street you instantly feel relaxed and welcome. The charming old home makes you feel as if you are visiting a favorite relative, and the gracious hospitality of the Fitzgeralds further enhances that impression.

Whether you are visiting Fitzgerald's with friends, family, business associates or alone you will find an appropriate place to sit. With both lower and upper level dining rooms, there are plenty of options including high chairs and anything else you may require. In the warm weather guests enjoy dining outside on the deck or under the tent at picnic tables. Tina's hard work in the lovely gardens adds to the cozy atmosphere of the towering mature trees and quaint backyard where you'll smell the aroma of the wood fires burning. You may want to stop and watch the unique outdoor cooking operation, before or after your meal.

The indoor dining rooms are non-smoking, with smoking allowed outdoors and at the full-service bar just inside the front entrance.

Those who enjoy history, particularly that of an architectural nature, should allow plenty of time to meander the grounds and look closely at the charming octagon Victorian. One of the few remaining eight-sided beauties of her kind, the house has many stories of her own. Historic photographs on the walls allow a glimpse into the lives of the Welcome J. Miller family before the turn of the century. W.J. Miller and his family settled in the area in the late 1830's building this home and establishing the Miller & Sons



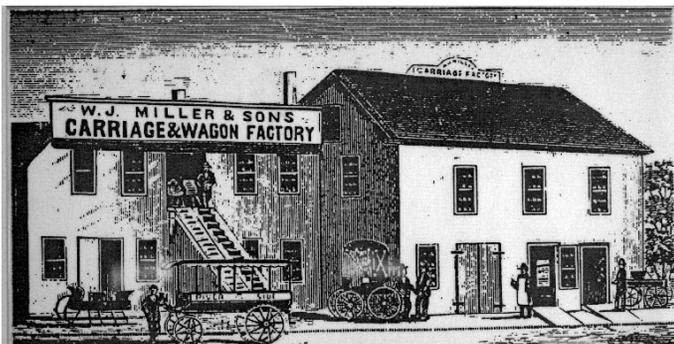
Carriage and Wagon Factory, formerly on the existing parking lot for the restaurant. The current building was known as "the Wagon Maker's home." Be sure to notice the recycled wood and wooden doors used to make the buffet, the bar and the dividers in the ladies room. The family re-used as much wood as possible when making necessary renovations to the classic beauty to bring the building up to current code for commercial use. The soft pinks, greens, lace curtains and special touches remind us of an era gone by.

The Fitzgerald family has been providing hospitality to lakes area visitors and residents much longer than these past 15 years in Genoa City. They were well-known for the hospitality at their Twin Lakes Resort - Olde Fitzgerald's Resort, which they owned and operated from 1976 until purchasing the existing property in 1989. If you haven't been to Fitzgerald's yet - you don't know what you're missing.

And if you haven't been there lately, invite a friend and enjoy the experience again soon.

Home Of The Wagon Maker

Welcome J. Miller, son of a Baptist minister and native of New York, first settled in Genoa City in the late 1830's. Shortly after, Mr. Miller went to Kenosha to learn the wagon trade, He returned in 1849 and began an enterprise of his own titled... W.J. Miller & sons Carriage & Wagon Factory. Many a job came to his first little shop with the straw roof and the business was off to a resounding success!



The business ran quite successfully until about 1885 when intense competition greatly reduced the profitability of new work, limiting the shop to mostly repairs. At this time the Miller family expanded into well drilling, doing business on the liberal proposition of getting water or no pay! This feature to was successful and the Miller's began to handle a complete line of pumps, windmills, agricultural implements of all kinds, and a large stock of hardware. The business was eventually destroyed by fire, but the octagon house still stands on the property.

Welcome's brother Amos, planned to marry and build a house on the land, but his plans were delayed due to the civil war, During the war he received a "dear John" letter and remained single all his life. In 1865 the war ended and Amos returned to Genoa and built his octagon home shortly after. While the exact date of the home's origins are not known, some say the materials were delivered before the civil War. It was this era however that the octagon mode of building was becoming more and more popular in Wisconsin.

The home has remained in the same family until the recent purchase by the Fitzgerald's. The Welcome Miller's, Amos and a sister all lived in the house until they died. The property was an estate from 1885 till 1900 when Welcome's son Frank Miller, took possession. Later, Frank's brother, John Miller, took over the property. In later years, John's daughter, Majorie Miller Davis, had possession and finally in 1956 it passed to Mrs. Davis daughter, Mrs. Kautz until the Fitzgeralds purchase. Ending 150 years ownership by the descendents of Welcome J. Miller.

The Octagon Mode Of Building

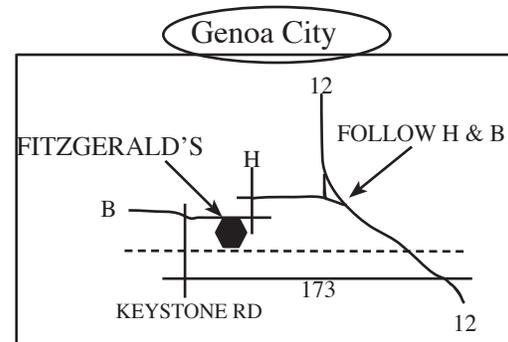
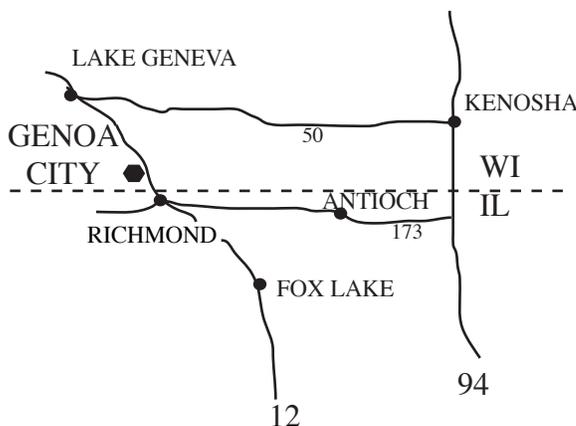
A Home For All was the title of a book first published in 1848 by a former theology student and 1834 graduate of Amherst college. It was this book that inspired the original mid nineteenth century popularity of the octagon mode of building.

Orson Squire Fowler questioned the traditional square and rectangle concept of building homes. In his book Fowler pointed out the "...nature's forms are mostly SPHERICAL" " she makes ten thousand curvilinear to one square figure. Then why not apply her forms to houses?"

In 1850 Fowler met Joseph Goodrich, a founding father of Milton WI while lecturing in Janesville, Fowler was intrigued upon hearing of Goodrich's gravel-walled hexagon building in Milton. "I visited Milton," wrote Fowler, "to examine the house put up by Mr. Goodrich, the original discoverer of this mode of building, and found his walls as hard as stone itself, and harder than brick walls." (Some of this new material was uncovered during the recent

remodeling of Genoa Junction). This new material, being some of the earliest known concrete in the country provoked Fowler to return to Fishkill New York and level the octagon house he was working on at the time and reconstruct it, filling the walls with this new grout.

At this time he rewrote A Home For All under a new subtitle: The Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of building, New, cheap, convenient, Superior and Adapted to Rich and Poor. Some of the advantages Fowler found in this eight sided style were and overall brighter interior due to windows on eight sides instead of only four. The homes were also less expensive to construct as its exterior walls would enclose more space than a rectangle. It was also easier to heat in the winter and vent in the summer with a cupola on top of the house.



If you have any questions or would like to inquire about booking a private party or special event, contact the restaurant at (262) 279-5200. Fitzgerald's is open year round from 5:00-9:00 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, and 3:00-8:00 on Sunday. Call for fall and winter hours.