Gasner's, on Foley Square, Closes Doors
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The auctioneer held up a green glass — Lot 44 — and resumed his machine - gun patter.

“What am I bid . . . 6 . . 6 . . . 6 ‘n’ half . . . 6 ‘n’ half ... 7 ... 7....”

Jack Gasner, standing in the kitchen doorway, tried to ignore the sound. He lighted a cigarette, said he felt sick and clutched his midriff.

“You've got to have an iron stomach,” he said. “I told myself, ‘This is it.’ I made the decision and that's all. Otherwise, you die. This way you just feel sick.”

Thus passed the last day for Gasner's Restaurant, which once seemed much a fixture of Foley Square as the pillars on the Federal Court Building. For 40 years, lawyers, judges, prosecutors and defendants traipsed through the double doors at 76 Duane Street to eat the best Long Island flounder and cheese blintzes south of Canal Street.

In its heyday, the clientele included, according to the proprietor, every mayor from Fiorello H. La Guardia to John V. Lindsay and every Governor from Herbert H. Lehman to Nelson A. Rockefeller.

In recent years the restaurant had seen a decline in business, brought on in part by extensive construction in the Duane Street area. This uprooted some of Gasner's faithful customers.

Upstairs, in the spacious second-floor dining room, political functions were as common as backyard barbecues in Scarsdale. As a candidate for the United States Senate, Robert F. Kennedy addressed the Civil Service Unions there.

When W. Averell Harriman was running for Governor, he insisted on touring the kitchen and shaking the hands of the help who served up the specialty of the house —a $4.95 chopped steak.

And then there were the famous lawsuits.

When Thomas E. Dewey was the racket-busting Manhattan District Attorney, he dined there almost every day. He was served in a special room on the third floor, partitioned off from the bakery, to give his three bodyguards a rest.

At the twisting mahogany bar, underworld figures such as John Dioguardi and Louie Buchholzer spent liberally during noontime breaks from the courthouse. Often, lesser crime figures could be seen in the basement dining room, sitting as close together as Siamese twins. When they got up to go, the handcuffs that held them together could be seen.

In the mid-nineteen-fifties, when Senator Joseph R. Mc Carthy was holding hearings into subversion, particularly at the Army installation of Fort Monmouth, N.J., he came almost daily to savor the double manhattans.

With him was his committee counsel Roy M. Cohn. Mr. Cohn continued to frequent Gasner's in the mid-nineteen sixties as the attorney for Lewis F. Rosenstiel, the chairman of the board of Schenley Industries, Inc., in the liquor magnate's bitterly fought five-year, estrangement battle.

That proved somewhat embarassing, because Louis Nizer, the lawyer for Susan Rosensteil, also ate there.

Mr. Nizer was not unaccustomed to the experience. Years before, another of his clients, Quentin Reynolds, would bump into his own adversary there—Westbrook Petgler, whom he was suing for libel.

“There's been many a day,” recalled Mr. Gasner, now 55 years old, “when we'd have a big case and we'd get the defendants, the prosecutors, the judge and sometimes even the jury. We'd sit them all in opposite corners.”

The restaurant was founded 60 years ago by his father, Max Gasner, in a tiny niche near the Williamsburg Bridge. It was pushed out two years later when extensions to the bridge were built, and the restaurant was moved to Brooklyn, then to Rochester and then to Washington Heights. In 1933, it was moved to its present location and soon expanded to take over an adjacent building.

The restaurant survived two serious fires—one in 1935 and one in 1957—which almost put it out of business. In 1965, Jack Gasner learned that his establishment was on the site for the planned multi million-dollar civic center. After spearheading the opposition, his property was condemned and lie became a tenant of the city.