

This stretch of Monroe Avenue from Kings Boulevard to 21st Street has been one of the busiest areas in town for more than three quarters of a century. From car repair to shoe repair, and from a record store and barbers to popular student restaurants, the businesses have long been a hub for students' off-campus life.

Here the Engineering and Chemistry buildings loom large across the street, an ever-present reminder of the reason many come to Corvallis in the first place: to experiment in class and, for many, with life. Chemistry experiments (to say nothing of brewery experiments) are no doubt important, but in this moment, at least, they take a backseat to the unexpected fact that the grand experiment that is McMenamins began in this very spot some 35 or more years ago. So pause and reflect on how the scenery out these windows has changed over the years. While the windows themselves are very new, folks have been looking out from this spot for a lot longer than you might imagine.

The first, perhaps, was Joseph Friedley, who settled much of the area surrounding the pub in 1852. Friedley's first home, family garden and orchard occupied what is now the north side of Monroe Street, hugging Kings Road for several blocks. Joseph, his wife and ten children saw this settlement grow from a small post along the river known as Marysville to a bustling town, home to one of Oregon's premier educational institutions. The family didn't just witness the growth, they promoted it, eventually donating their land south of Monroe Street (as it was known then) to the growing Oregon Agricultural College (later renamed Oregon State University).

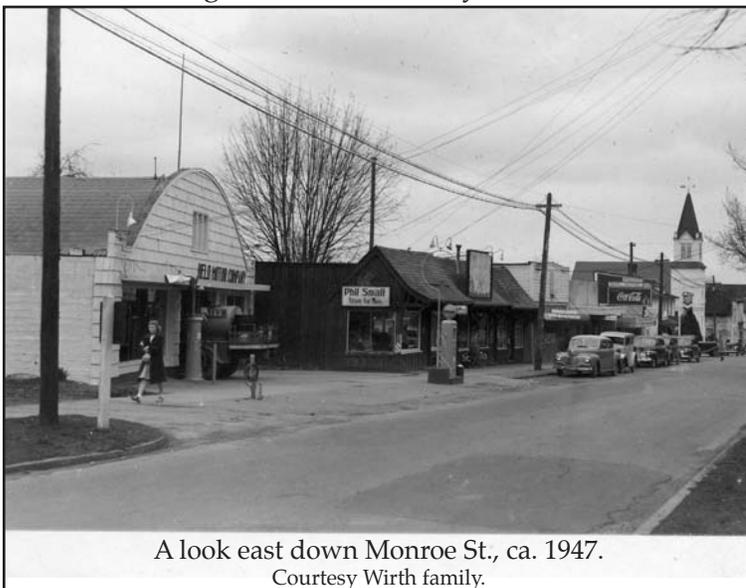


The college expanded from its humble origins downtown to its current site in 1888, spurred by backing from the state legislature and acquisition of land. Its rapid growth motivated businesses to set up shop in this part of town.

The anchor of these businesses along this block seems to have been the Electric Lunch. Located roughly in the middle of the block (and exactly where McMenamins now sits), it was one of the first and longest-lived businesses around. Affectionately known by students as "the El", Bill and Frieda Taylor started the place way back around 1917, originally on Jefferson Street, then relocating to Monroe by 1922.

Quickly, the new El became the hub on an emerging favorite hangout and living area for college students. Crowded with rentals, student housing apartments and the Greek houses, ventures popped up all around the north end that tried to contribute to the culture of student life. By 1935 the College Hill area and Monroe Avenue in particular was dense with businesses. That year, on the small block McMenamins now occupies, there were six businesses: The Campus Store, Walker Grocery, Electric Lunch, College Pharmacy, a barber shop and Bill Hurley's College Hill Garage and Auto Repair.

Many of these businesses remained for decades, an amazing feat considering their customer base—the student body—was constantly turning over. The shopkeepers along this stretch were an exceptionally tight-knit lot, and perhaps their continued popularity was due to the



A look east down Monroe St., ca. 1947.
Courtesy Wirth family.

established and welcoming feel that resonated with the students, many of whom were in a period of major transition. Perhaps the businesses' continued popularity was due to their camaraderie which gave them a down-home atmosphere for the students who had none. Students and business owners affirmed this sentiment with their praise of the Taylors, owners of the El. Younger storeowners along the block looked up to them and former students volunteered that they seemed like grandparents.



Hanging at The El, ca. 1952.
Courtesy Curtz Family.

Occasionally businesses would change hands through this tight social network. Flower shop owner Matt Mathes' daughter and son-in-law, for instance, purchased the Electric Lunch from the Taylors in 1951 when they were becoming too elderly to run the place, and Doug Roisen, son of the owners of Roisen's up the street, owned the Campus Food Market for a time.

Interestingly, the majority of store owners along this strip were OSU graduates who went into business for themselves right out of school (of course, McMenamins does not break from that tradition). The young couple who bought the El from the Taylor's where just out of OSU as well, and they continued its efforts for another decade. At the time of the sale, the El was flanked by Mathes' flower shop and Phil Small's men's clothing store. These shopkeepers and others from the block continued their friendly relations and met frequently over coffee at the El to discuss storefront

improvements, parking issues or whatever suited their fancy.

As the 1960s and '70s brought many changes to the campus of OSU, a new generation of storeowners moved to Monroe Avenue as well. Starting about 1959, the little building on Monroe that formerly housed the El hosted a series of other entertainingly named establishments like The Flame and The Hickory Chip Restaurant. These places were short lived, however, and around 1970 a sandwich shop called Togo's Submarines moved in.

Like the Electric Lunch before it, Togo's Submarines worked to provide food and a decent place for students, but it employed them as well. One of those student employees seems particularly relevant to our story here. You see, an eager, fresh-faced Mike McMenamins took a job at Togo's during the early '70s while a student at OSU. It was there that he cut his teeth on the restaurant business, slinging hoagies at the busy sub shop. At the time he probably didn't know that his experience there would give him the foundation needed to run his own pubs later in life; he just knew that he liked to make a good sandwich.

Still, it's fun to think that at sometime during his employment at Togo's a light bulb went on in his head (it is no big secret that he is obsessed with light bulbs) that illuminated a big idea: "If you add beer to these generous sandwiches, you'd really have something special." There is more than just a little irony that McMenamins now returns to the spot on Monroe Avenue where Mike first dressed a sandwich and shouted, "Order up!" This is ground zero, really, the place where that light bulb first went on. And now McMenamins is ready to continue the tradition of student-friendly hangouts stretching back all the way to WWI.

Like the water in the sinks sculpture, the little idea that spawned McMenamins started here, branched out in a big way, and now, some 35 years later, has trickled back to its place of origin. From record stores to a leather goods shop and from the Eager Beaver to the Electric Lunch and Togo's Submarines, this block of Monroe Avenue in Corvallis has a long and spirited tradition of serving as a focal point for students' off-campus lifestyles. McMenamins is proud to wade into this tradition, open its doors to OSU and the surrounding neighborhoods and say "welcome" (again).