

# THE ORIGINAL PANTRY CAFE

## High-Calorie History That Never Closes

At the foot of a 35-story building in a forest of soaring high-rises, the Original Pantry Café looks as humble and plain as the food it serves.

The landmark downtown eatery, open around the clock and famed for its long lines and enormous portions, is an anachronism both for what it serves and the clientele it attracts.

It opened for business in 1924, and on any given night its high-calorie comfort-food fare draws patrons of all sorts, at all hours: urban professionals, truck drivers, artists, teachers, hipsters, police officers, theatergoers and suburbanites looking for an urban thrill.

The Pantry is not the place for haute cuisine with fancy names. Its only sauces come in Tabasco bottles. The Pantry is about basics, traditional foods to give a heart specialist heart failure: T-bone steaks, stews, roasts, and lamb chops.

## Never Missed a Meal

The restaurant has hardly changed since it opened in 1924 in its original home. Its founder, Dewey Logan, a dishwasher from Denver, started with five employees and a hot plate.

Its only brush with extinction came in 1961 when the new Harbor Freeway roared through its original location on Ninth Street. Logan claimed he had served lunch at the old building and dinner at the new, without interruption.



Dewey Logan



Los Angeles from 9th Street looking northwest from the Pantry, c. 1906.

The Pantry's front doors have no keyholes or locks. Even after the 1906 earthquake knocked out power before breakfast, employees worked by candlelight.



The A.W. Francisco House looking north on Figueroa and Ninth Streets.

Big-name guys with big appetites once frequented the place—actors Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, Henry Fonda, and mobster Mickey Cohen. A signed photograph hangs in the Pantry's bake shop: "To the Pantry, great food, laughs! H. Bogart." In 1956, the year before Bogart died, night waiter Rene Frisan started work here. He resembled Bogart so strikingly that everyone called him Bogie.

A rumor that has refused to die still lends the Pantry a curious mystique. It began in the 1950s, when a Midwestern reporter covering the Rose Bowl game dropped in. A couple of the waiters had some fun with the out-of-towner, telling him that all the employees were ex-convicts. He duly wrote it up as the legend, for that's all there is to it, and to this day. (For years, management received dozens of letters from paroled prisoners across the nation asking for jobs.)

## Employees as Loyal as the Customers

The people who work there like the place and tend to stick around. Harvey Lamb began work in 1929, and labored on for 54 years. He didn't like taking vacations and wouldn't stand for retirement talk, working full-time as a cashier until he died in 1983, at age 93.

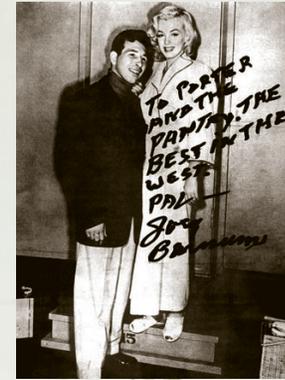


Harvey Lamb

Lamb lived three blocks away—he never learned to drive—a self-proclaimed bantering with the regulars, and treated the ladies with old-fashioned courtesy.

Lamb's picture graces the Pantry's wall, as does that of counterman Ray Addington, a former vaudeville hooper so light on his feet that no one could match his moves, and waiter Bobby Pavilas, the "fastest plate-carrying human."

The patrons can be as passionate as the employees. On the Pantry's 75th anniversary, a woman who had been a customer for 62 years said she was dating a man who once had dinner at the Pantry, "and he said he didn't care for it. I dumped him."



Marilyn Monroe with bodyguard and Hall of Fame boxer Joey Barrow.

For all the Pantry's heavy fare, founder Logan, worried about diners' health, refused to serve soft drinks or beer and offered only milk, juices and coffee. After he died in 1972, the new owners finally allowed Coca-Cola on the premises.

The Original Pantry still retains its original ambience and original recipes. Menu



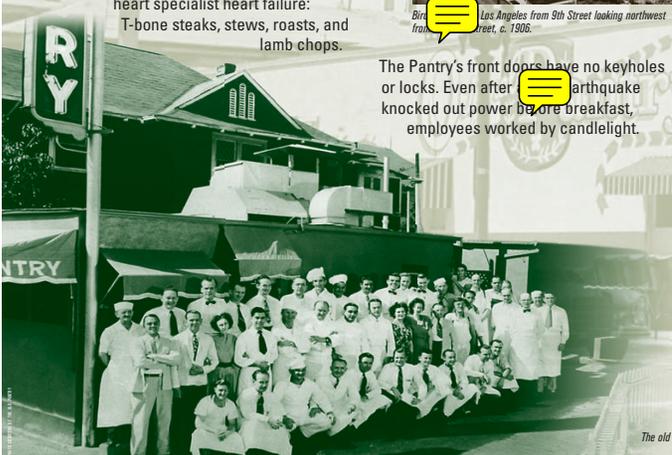
Robbie Eisenberg celebrating the Pantry's 75th anniversary on the same day as the original opening. From left: Josephine Baker, Jimmy Brock and Mayor Richard Riordan.

choices are written in chalk each day on boards along the walls.

In 1980, downtown's redevelopment threatened once again to obliterate the diner and scatter its regulars like so much spilled table salt. But Richard Riordan, the city's future mayor, was charmed by the place and decided to save it, buying the Pantry and several other adjoining parcels for \$3.5 million. He didn't change a thing.



Ray Addington



The old Pantry and staff.