White Castle Encyclopedia Article

White Castle

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White Castle

White Castle was the world's original fast-food restaurant chain. From humble beginnings in Wichita, Kansas, White Castle grew into a large-scale multi-state operation that was copied by innumerable competitors. It all began when Walter Anderson, a short-order cook, developed a process in 1916 for making the lowly regarded hamburger more palatable to a distrusting public. He soon had a growing business of three shops. In 1921, Anderson took on a partner, Edward Ingram, a real estate and insurance salesman. Ingram coined the name and image of "White Castle," based on the theory that "'White' signifies purity and 'Castle' represents strength, permanence and stability." By 1931 there were 115 standardized outlets in ten states. Previously, only grocery or variety stores had used the chain system. By providing inexpensive food in a clean environment at uniform locations over a wide territory, White Castle helped shape the fast-food industry that would dominate the lives and landscape of America at the end of the twentieth century.

Further Reading:

Hogan, David Gerald. *Selling 'em by the Sack: White Castle and the Creation of American Food.* New York, New York University Press, 1998.

Ingram, E.W., Sr. *All This from a 5-cent Hamburger!* New York, Newcomen Society in North America, 1975.

Langdon, Philip. *Orange Roofs, Golden Arches: The Architecture of America's Chain Restaurants.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.