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Shop's Baloney Best, Humor Wurst

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THREE OAKS, MICH. — Even on a slow kind of street like South Elm, where American flags wave without need of holiday and a Potawatomi Indian in full regalia could stand without stares, Drier's Butcher Shop looks like a bunch of baloney.

There's a painted wooden cow from a French merry-go-round in the window. The head of a wooden steer is overhead. Ceiling fans, old lamps, hanging clocks, wall clocks, ornate mirrors, Saturday Evening Post cover, wrought iron hangers and framed photographs are jammed like ground sausage into the long, narrow shop with sawdust on the floor.

But Drier's is real. Real baloney, if you will, spiced with plenty of schmaltz and razzmatazz.

The baloney — “just salt and pepper, no aftertaste” -- is made in the back room. And the hams, brought in from Chicago, are smoked for 30 hours in an original wood burning oven.

Tourists en route to the Michigan shores stop by this butcher shop for a \$5 ring of warm, homemade baloney, a pound of smoked ham or a “thing of cheese” from Drier's, much like they did at the turn of the century.

“Early fast food, that's what it was,” says Ed Drier, whose father and grandfather before him made sausage the same way. Drier is a big man with little hair, a foggy voice and endless stories:

“Larry Hagman, a friend, started visiting here about 15 years ago,”

says Drier, thumbing through a stack of yellowed papers and newsclippings for the script from the 1979 royal marriage scene in “Dallas.” “He was in here every day, drinking whiskey and eating baloney.”

“We've had everyone here from Mayor Daley to Dick Gregory. . . . Bill Blass made me this butcher apron. . . . Bill Mauldin did this cartoon. . . . Ivan Albright did this

sketch of a steer.” Some had summer homes in the area; others just passed through.

Forty years ago when bread was bought at a bakery and milk was delivered to the house, Drier’s served much of southwest Michigan with fresh beef, homemade sausage, and hams.

“Then supermarkets came in, and the food business changed,” Drier says. Shoppers found it easier to do all their shopping at one place, and small business like the little meat shop had to change to survive.

“The profit is in the sausage, not the first three ribs of the beef,”

Drier says. So Drier’s began specializing in its homemade sausage.

Drier’s opened a branch store a scant mile away on U.S. Hwy. 12 to catch Chicago area tourists traveling on Saturdays and Sundays.

“Free Baby Sitting Service” reads a sign on a wooden cage outside the roadside store. “The wurst is yet to come.”

It’s show biz” as well as meat business at Elm Street and along U.S. 12. Pure baloney at its best.