



The Lakewood Historical Society

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Mahall's a Fun Neighborhood Center

By Mazie Adams, Adapted from Dan Chabek's Lakewood Lore

Mahall's Twenty Lanes at 13200 Madison Avenue is a piece of Lakewood history that has evolved through the years as a favorite neighborhood center for fun, food and fellowship on a first-name basis.

One of the oldest family-owned businesses in our community, it was founded in 1924 by John K. Mahall, a Slovak by birth. After migrating from the old country to Pittsburgh and later Wheeling, West Virginia, he and his wife Theresa came to Lakewood in 1913, where they first opened a butcher shop and grocery on Quail Street in the city's old Carbon District.

The couple had five children. Theresa died during the flu epidemic in 1918, and afterwards the elder Mahall took another wife, Vincentina. From that second union, there were five more offspring. At one time or another, all ten children of the founder helped in its operation. John Mahall died at 63 in 1946, and wife Vincentina died at 66 in 1965.

When the business opened 76 years ago, its two-story brick building housed six bowling alleys, a poolroom, confectionery store, barbershop and dance hall and party center upstairs. In 1929, four more lanes were added. Then, with the end of prohibition in the early 1930s, a bar and restaurant became part of the complex.

"In 1933, with Mom cooking, a complete blue-plate lunch was only 25 cents," son Arthur remembered. Bandleader Sammy Kaye of "Swing and Sway" fame played at Mahall's in 1936, and customers paid five cents a dance to enjoy his music. "Sammy, a Lakewood native, came up to perform, fresh out of Ohio University, with his first band, known as "The Ohioans" said son Cornie. "The dance hall was renamed the Sunset Ballroom for him. Before that, when a full evening of dancing cost only 30 cents, it was called the Roxy Ballroom." The dance area was converted into ten more bowling lanes in 1937, and a building next door was bought in 1958 in an expansion move to provide a new wing for more pool tables