

# Three Nights in the Country



BY BARBARA ANN ROSENBERG

Pennsylvania's rural delights are pretty well understood—rolling countryside, nearly unpolluted air, trees and lots of green grass. And depending on your taste, your inclination and your pocketbook, you can also find culinary pleasures lurking along some of those byways. It's possible to do a vaguely continental "gourmet" thing, or dine on simple farm fare, or partake of something that falls somewhere between the two in level of sophistication and preparation.

For a crack at continental-type country dining, try **Fagleysville Country Hotel**, Swamp Pike, R.D. #1, Gilbertsville (near Collegeville) in Montgomery County (1-323-1425), a brick and frame structure dating roughly from Civil War days. It looms up out of nowhere and overlooks a gorgeous pastoral vista of lush valleys and ranges of hills. Following a French country-inn tradition, Papa Jack Gleason acts as official greeter here and reigns over the dining room while he keeps Mama padlocked to the stove in the kitchen.

Along with a regular menu offering an eclectic assortment from several lands, Mama Gleason prepares a special "gourmet" dinner, by advance reservation only (2-3 days notice) for

a minimum of six people and served any night but Saturday or Sunday. The entire meal is geared to your choice of entree, but if coaxed she will discuss each course when you call to reserve and certainly makes allowances for individual idiosyncracies of taste, as long as the substitutions you request come from the regular menu.

Dinner goes on and on, a succession of adequate but not overwhelming portions, designed around such specialties of the house as *Coeur de Filet* in Croustade (the chef's own broiled version of Beef Wellington), *Canard à la Fagleysville* or *Filet of Turbot* with a lobster sauce, all well

prepared. Be alerted to the fact, however, that whatever your choice of entrée and no matter what its cost on the regular menu, you should be prepared to part with \$14 a person for the works.

A delicious first course like tender, fresh scallops pickled in lime juice or a dessert choice of orange sabayon, ultra-light and redolent of Cointreau, complement the entree. There is also a soup, a salad and undistinguished vegetables. Rich strong espresso tops off the meal. The wine list is limited but includes a few extra-interesting (and expensive) choices.

The night we were there it was personal service all the way, and the young waiters and waitresses were well trained to provide courteous attention without the slightest hint of pretentiousness. We've heard about other people who haven't been as lucky with their service, though.

For a swing from fancy to straight, simple country fare, there's **Groff's Farm Restaurant**, Pinkerton Rd., Mt. Joy (1-717-653-1520). The name is the tip-off—*Farm Restaurant*. There's nothing hokey here, though—no demure maidens decked out in Pennsylvania Dutch attire, no hex-type

## Bethlehem revisited

*We've gotten word from our restaurant reviewer who discovered some unexpectedly good food at the Bethlehem Hotel and wrote about it a few months ago that the maitre d' from the Four Seasons who ran a splendid show the night she dined is no longer there. We have heard from a few readers that the dining picture has changed considerably. We'll try to get back for a recheck soon.*





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souvenirs for sale—just old-fashioned farm food, fresh if it's in season or, if not, frozen or otherwise preserved by loving hands-at-home.

A note of caution if you decide to go: you *must* reserve in advance. No drop-in trade here, as they only serve about 40 people a night, solely by prior arrangement. And anyway, who drops in in Mount Joy, a curious not-so-little community about 90 miles from Philadelphia (between Lancaster and Lebanon)?

And no wonder that the place is busy because it *is* unique. It represents a slice of American life that's disappearing so fast that Groff's is almost an anachronism. When you arrive at the real, honest, working farm, you'll find your way past the barns up the drive into the main house of pre-Revolutionary vintage, charmingly underplayed. You'll be greeted as though you were a personal guest of the family and seated at *your* table, already set up for you with appropriate country-style simple plates on an immaculate white cloth.

Some of the table appointments are genuine antiques and some are early hardware store but it's all just right.

Your appetizer is in place (they really are expecting you at the time you reserved). They only serve one sitting a night at each table so you can linger as long as you like, and you're encouraged to ... and you need to in order to digest the mountain of food they serve.

Crusty, warm, homemade bread comes along shortly after you're seated, followed in timely succession by a platter of ham or roast beef (you indicate your preference when you reserve) plus a platter of chicken, fried or Stoltzfus and, while the fried is excellent, the Stoltzfus is better, steamed and sauced with thick rich cream and served over incredibly short pastry diamonds, which somehow remain flaky and crisp even when topped with the hot gravy. Bowls of vegetables, too, and the sugar peas and fresh corn and whipped potatoes have to be sampled to be believed. They taste like everybody's grandmother's food was supposed to and probably didn't. Mrs. Groff's theory is that if a little butter is good, a lot is better. Home-churned, of course. And then there's a variety of relishes on the table and, just in case you still have a cubic inch somewhere inside you after they've refilled all those platters and bowls as fast as you finish them, there's a sauce dish of a Groff specialty called cracker pudding that's meant to be nibbled while

you're waiting for dessert!

Warning: No liquor is served or welcomed, so if you must, stop at a pub somewhere along the way. But be brave, it's worth the inconvenience, and all for the amazing price of \$5.

Allow two hours from center city for a leisurely drive. They'll give you directions when you call for a reservation. Open Monday through Saturday evenings and by very special arrangement for lunch.

Somewhere between plain and fancy there's **Marshallton Inn**, Americana all the way. Located four miles west of West Chester on Route 162 in the delightful village from which it takes its name (only they can't agree on the authentic spelling, since the town uses two l's), the Inn dishes up a variety of excellent regional Chesapeake Bay specialties like snapper soup (75¢), crab Marshallton, rather

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like a mild Imperial (\$5.25) and in season the real specialty of the house, and oysters stuffed with crabmeat (\$5.50). The Inn also does gorgeously broiled lamb chops (\$6.25) and steak (\$6.50) (ask for them "Pittsburgh" if you like them charred on the outside and rare on the in) and a few other less outstanding choices. Vegetables vary—sometimes imaginative, sometimes not so and they leave the salad up to you; assemble your own from a huge bowl of greens and side-dish goodies. Desserts are fairly routine, except when strawberries are in season. Then, in honor of the noble fruit the Inn whips real heavy cream to grace the shortcake or douses them in port.

The ambience is straight Colonial, a bit of Williamsburg in Pennsylvania, with candles all round in the succession of small, authentically restored dining rooms, seating up to 140. Except for the Old English printed menu (that mixes up its f's and s's), they resist the temptation to get cutesie, a rarity in Colonial-type restaurants.