

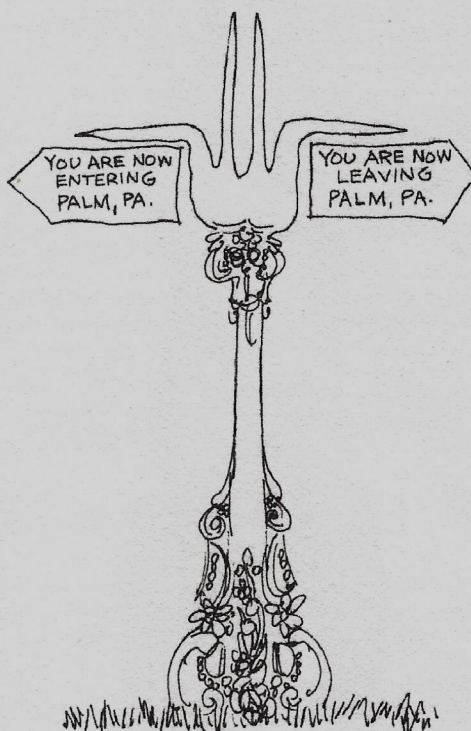
Far Out

BY BARBARA ANN ROSENBERG

Palm, Pennsylvania, is scarcely big enough to appear on the map. As a matter of fact, it's only a rather pleasant little way-stop perched on the crest of a hill in western Montgomery County on Route 29 above Collegeville—about a 40-minute drive from City Hall. Its sole claim to fame is that it boasts two restaurants, one at each end of town. More accurately, you might say it boasts one and should apologize for the other. Just as you can't tell a book by its cover, neither can you tell which is which from the outside; they're both pleasant and attractive. As you approach Palm from the south, the first landmark you see is **Millside Inn** on your right. If you start out from the Philadelphia area, you'll have come a considerable distance over some lovely rolling terrain so by now you're probably ready for some grub, and the Millside looks pretty inviting. If you give into your impulse to stop, be forewarned: the atmosphere is pleasant, the food isn't. As a matter of fact, it's near disaster with hardly a redeeming feature.

The menu reads well. For instance, a featured entree is chateaubriand for one with onion rings, Béarnaise sauce and mushrooms. Forget it. The steak is coarse, chewy and tasteless, the onion rings akin to the pale, frozen variety, the Béarnaise lackluster and the microscopic portion of chopped mushrooms straight from the can. The rest of the entrees are about equally divided between indifferent (at best) beef selections and incredibly poor seafood concoctions, all with intriguing descriptions.

Now that the caveat is over, consider the *other* end of town—worth every second of the extra mile or so it takes to get there: **Cab Frye's Tavern**. Again, pleasant from the outside. Not spectacular, but pleasant. And for those who'd like, for one reason or another, to spend the night,



there's a small motel overlooking a pond right next door.

As might be expected, this up-country menu is predominantly American—with a difference in Swiss overtones.

The Swiss onion soup that arrives in a French tinned covered pot isn't the dark brown variety you're probably used to, but it's well worth a try (75¢). Light golden in color and full of runny cheese, it's a subtle treat. And the chef's specialty appetizer—baked mushrooms—are firm, not one whit mushy and deliciously stuffed with crumbs and seafood (\$1.75). Escargots Bourguignonne (\$1.75) are fine, buttery and garlicky, but unfortunately the soft rolls that come with the meal just don't provide the oomph in sopping up the oozing goodness that French bread would have given. Steak at Cab Frye's, in contrast to the *other* place, is really excellent: broiled as you request it and sometimes accompanied by properly handmade and lovingly seasoned Béarnaise (if it doesn't come with, ask for it if you're a Béarnaise freak and they'll

be glad to oblige). Sautéed pepper steak au cognac (\$6.50) is outstanding—a big sirloin redolent of but not overwhelmed by the spicing. Duck, crisp and tender, expertly seasoned with orange and Cointreau (\$4.50) and veal Oscar (\$5.85) carefully assembled with snow-white veal morsels, generous chunks of crab, that gorgeous Béarnaise, but a bit skimpy on the asparagus, are all super and there are some other funny-sounding Swiss dishes along with more familiar items.

But even with the continental overtones this place doesn't give much attention to any vegetable except, perhaps, potatoes. Salads are just all right, with the house dressing very much on the sharp side and other vegetables indifferent, at best. But the appetizers and beef and fish and duck help compensate.

Be sure to allow plenty of time to enjoy your repast—you can't rush even if you want to, because the service is pleasant and willing but definitely on the slow side. It's probably a good idea to phone in a reservation.

Just by way of warning, don't go to Palm with your city slicker manners prepared to bowl over the country bumpkins because they're liable to surprise you. For instance, the hostesses at both Cab Frye's and the Millside are already sporting hoop pants. And both restaurants feature creditable wine lists—nothing really knock-'em-dead, but certainly better than one might expect in such an out-of-the-way spot. Both places list a Chateau Kirwan Medoc, for instance. Even if the year isn't the best, it's nothing to be sneezed at.

When you're in the mood for an up-country jaunt, you just might want to put Palm on your list. You could do lots worse than Cab Frye's. You're on your own at Millside. ■