Would you eat blindfolded?

The principle of uninhibited city growth seems to be firmly fixed in the minds of the Lawrence city planners. No where is this more evident than on West 23rd street. Between Massachusetts and Iowa lies a virtual Disneyland of taco joints, car lots, franchised all-night restaurants and hamburger mills. All with one purpose and one purpose only--to sell as much as possible to as many as possible, at the highest possible price.

While it's perfectly true that this is the goal of nearly all retail businesses, the merchants of 23rd take this to its surreal extreme. This is Texas Tom's territory --a kind of homesteading act signed by Ronald McDonald and Mayor McCheese...an all too familar world of created wants and needs...a world that produces consumer junkies groping for product identification and instant gratification...an ecological disaster at best.

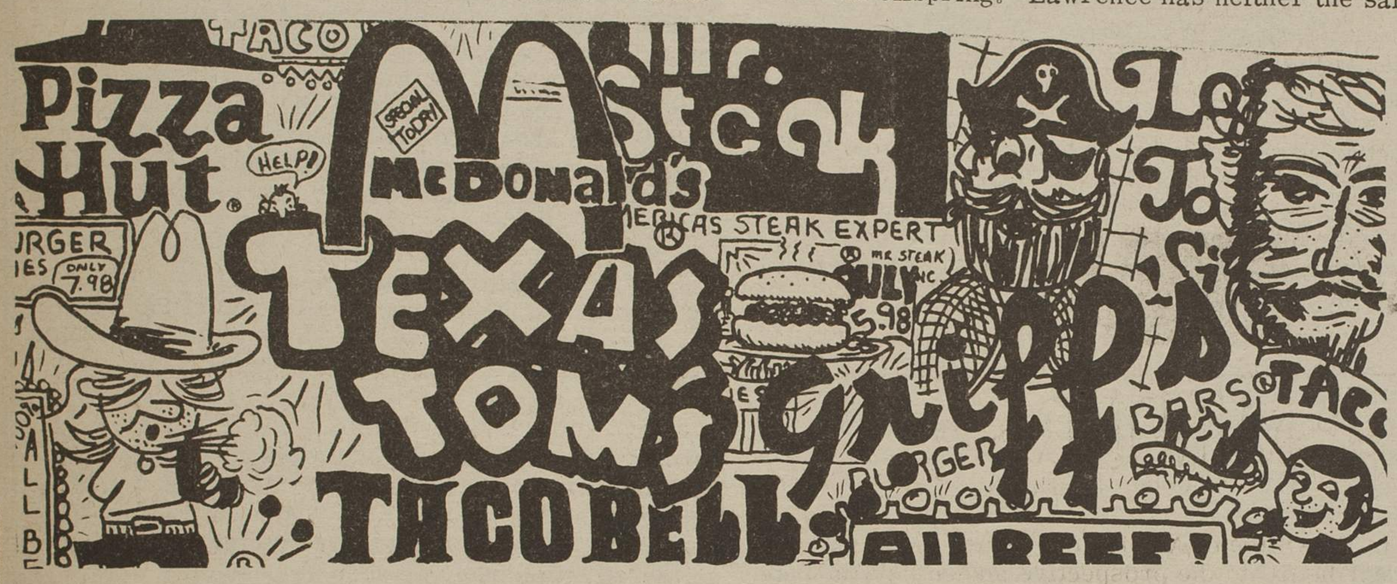
West 6th and Iowa streets represent the very directions in city growth that Lawrence cannot afford to take. Similar areas in big cities are unlivable. The typical fast-food, car-lot strip is a direct outgrowth of the automobile and really cannot exist without it. Without large volumes of high speed private transportation, it would be impractical to construct these eateries. Inevitably, as these areas grow so does the traffic problem. As the traffic flow increases this stimulates further growth of the strip. And so--not unexpectedly--the faster the strip grows, the faster the strip grows.

A good question at this point is what is meant by the word 'growth'. Clearly there can be at least two definitions: the populist-environmentalist version and the Barkley Clark-Ronald McDonald definition. For our friend Ronald, growth means selling that extra billion quarter-pounders with cheese a year. It means consuming fantastic amounts of electricity to heat their stoves and light their signs. All this energy is expended to produce food of questionable nutritional value for the sake of convience. Growth that is represented by these corporate clowns is the same as the mentality that sees, Lawrence as the logical extention of Kansas City and that pushes for the Haskell Loop.

But clearly, Lawrence is not Kansas City nor is Lawrence its offspring. Lawrence has neither the same problems or resources and thus most of the "progresive" solutions to big-city economic growth and planning problems simply do not apply here. Building super highways through neighborhoods does nothing to relieve the traffic problems in other parts of the city--it only aggravates them. Simply allocating X number of dollars for highway development through East Lawrence or promoting franchised taco joints throughout the the town still leaves houses in need of upgrading, people in need of more efficient social services, and the city in need of a responsive government. It's coping with these problems in a human way that represents the real challenge.

McDonaldland is not a place where economics and planning took place as though people mattered. Lawrence, with just a little effort, can be. West 23rd street need not happen again and the pattern of haphazard growth can be averted if Mayor Clark and his friends can rid themselves of their desire to compete with Kansas City and Topeka.

You, we, I deserve a break today from McDonalds!



We can't afford all this noise!

It's round-up time here at T-T-Texas Tom's tortiaria out on the 23rd street trail to the south and west of greater downtown Lawrence, Kansas. On a cold and frosty night three PUBLIC NOTICE staffers tired, hungry and curious drove to the strip. We were on assignment; a dietary check on one of the newest eatin' places in town.

We arrived on the strip. Twenty-two!! My God, there's actually 22 consumption spots on this avenue. A new burgeria is to open soon at 23rd and Naismith. The town should celebrate the gala opening of the 23rd on 23rd.

A VISTA worker, an enviromental studies major and a journalism major; three people who should have known better, who did know better. But we were there.

'This is Texas Tom's territory." The sign told of 21 other locations in the U.S.A. Glaring yellow neon lights circled the menu. Order. We must order some food. We were starved.

Better get something special. A treat at ol' Tom's. We ask for a Texas Burger Basket, 88 cents. A People Book coupon entitles us to a little number called the Round-up special: taco, burger, fries, onion rings and a drink, all for 99 cents. A real deal in a meal in this year of the buy-centenial fest.

The girl behind the counter instructs us to answer the numbers of the two slips of paper she hands us. One other person sits in the vast, shiny emptiness of the place. His eyes reflect the sani-white ceiling lights. He's obviously stoned. We all seem a bit nervous. It's our first adventure in Texas Tom's. We sit down at one of many vacant tables. The gold-flecked, white table top is cold. A chilling draft seeps in through the giant plate glass windows. It's chili and hot apple cider weather outside. The snow has brown edges along the 23rd street drag. I think about good chicken tacos in Mexico. Street grinders sell chicken, beef, or chili pepper tacos for a peso or two Texas Tom charges 39 cents, not 8 or 12 cents. The girl calls our numbers. We request ketchup, pay and return to our icy table and to the January view of 23rd street. The traffic never stops. The ketchup has a picture of Tom in blazing red; it was manufactured in Cincinnati, Ohio. We dig in. It was terrible. The fries were yellow and greasy, the burger was tiny and dry with wilted green and brown shreds of lettuce scattered over the patty and the taco. The bun was in a state similar to the poinsettias dying by the cash register. It was the taco and the onion ring that finally convinced us to cease our sample test. Tomatoe paste a la H.L. Hunt, thick&zesty like plaster was smeared on top. The taco shell was banana yellow&tough. The onion rings, all two of them, smelled. They tasted worse.

The strip along 23rd street boggles the mind. The diversity and ingenuity of American enterprise is here displayed. The all-American franchise on the rise! Gimme-a-hamburga-fries-to-go-if-you-please! A sign boasts: 17 billion burger macs devoured beneath the golden arches. Statistics aren't as visible at neighboring establishments. No doubt someone has counted the chicken-bone remains at the Colonel's. The digested tacos and burritos? Billions, to be sure. Soda and ice purchased in the millions upon millions of paper cups, but only a small number of the waxy, deluxe containers, lids and straws dot the strip in Lawrence. We keep a clean ship here.

The door opens and a shivering figure enters Tom's place. He stands in front of the counter. A minute passes, and he drops a quarter on the floor. He looks nervous. He drops the quarter again and bends once more to retrieve it. He glances toward 23rd street and his eyes tell how long he's been high. He's in Texas Tom's territory now. He orders.

"You know we could go down to Shorty's some time... on a Saturday night and do another food review," Mark suggested.

"Yea, you know it's places like this that are running the Shortys' and the Moore Burgers out of business," Steve said.

"Texas Tom's used to be just a small drive-in in Kansas City a few years ago," Mark said, examining one of the french fries. 'Someone must have bought 'em out. Gonna make this a prospering business. There will be hundreds of Texas Tom's soon."

"Yea, and the 23rd street strip will extend westward all the way to Clinton Reservoir...eateries, quick shops, gas'n'gos', and bait shops sprinkled in with boat yards," Steve said. 'The more businesses there are, the more traffic there will be and soon 23rd street will have to be widened again which will create more traffic and more businesses..."

Ride your pinto pony to Texas Tom's Restaurant on West 23rd street. Taco John's is just east of it. You can't miss Taco John's because it is painted violently in red and orange. Running down Texas Tom's is like running down heroin , it's too obvious to either be fun or enlightening. Texas Tom's was flown to Lawrence in an airplane big enough to swallow a whale. It was dropped from the plane and it parachuted to the earth where it landed on an asphalt slab. This is its present location.

Outside of Texas Tom's, cattle are unloaded by the hundreds each day. They are slaughtered in the rear parking lot. Texas Tom's chefs can be seen at 9 o'clock every morning, standing in the lot holding clipboards, waiting for another shipment of the delicious Colby Cattle whose flesh is the most delicate in the world because their feet are tied together from their birth, and they are never moved until they are taken to the slaughter.

And so the burgers in Texas Tom's are the very best anywhere, thick sizzling patties of the tenderest ground chuck, smeared with catsup and mustard, draped with onions and pickles and tomatoes, served in a small damp white cloth on a marble top counter. Heft that hamburger, where will you find another one like it in Lawrence?

The rumor is that next year they will be expanding. They plan to carry a modest supply of stereo equipment then, and it is possible that there will be a new t-shirt shop specializing in iron-on goods.

The superb landscaping outside, and the lack of harsh colors within, the tall pines arching to the heavens and the soft carpets, the Texas Tom Experience is one that Lawrence needed.

Let those who say the restaurant has no decor, no scheme or class, look again. The waitresses wearing pink tights and short white dresses serve you with a crisp orderliness. Some of them are wearing the cowboy hats, when they can afford them. Plus the ones who can't afford them can dance naked in the kitchen. You can see them if you stand where the door swings open. They want to let you see the inside workings of this masterfully engineered food service unit.

A real bonus was the King Oliver, New Orleans West End Jazz Band playing quiet music when we walked in. The quiet walk over thick carpet put us at ease, and the shutters held in the artificial light overhead.

When you have finished, walking out the door pick your teeth with one of the minted toothpicks. Make your pony gallop back down 23rd. Don't think about the cost, think about the pleasure.

100 PER CENT PURE BEEF