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Seeking Legacy through Sam's Drive-In

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Staff Creative Residencies Summer 2024 Self-Assessment

Seeking Legacy through Sam's Drive-In

William Teer, Program Director for Student Leadership Programs and Financial Well-Being in the Center for Community Engagement, researched and wrote the story of the late West Sanford “Sam” Forsythe, owner of Sam’s Drive-In in Ripley, TN.



From August 15 - 16, I began my personal research project on uncovering the fuller story of Sam's Drive-In, my late grandfather's beloved burger restaurant in Ripley, TN. My project has begun to uncover Sam's story through conversations with Ripley community members, family members, and research conducted in the Lauderdale County Library, The Enterprise newspaper facility, and Ripley City Hall.

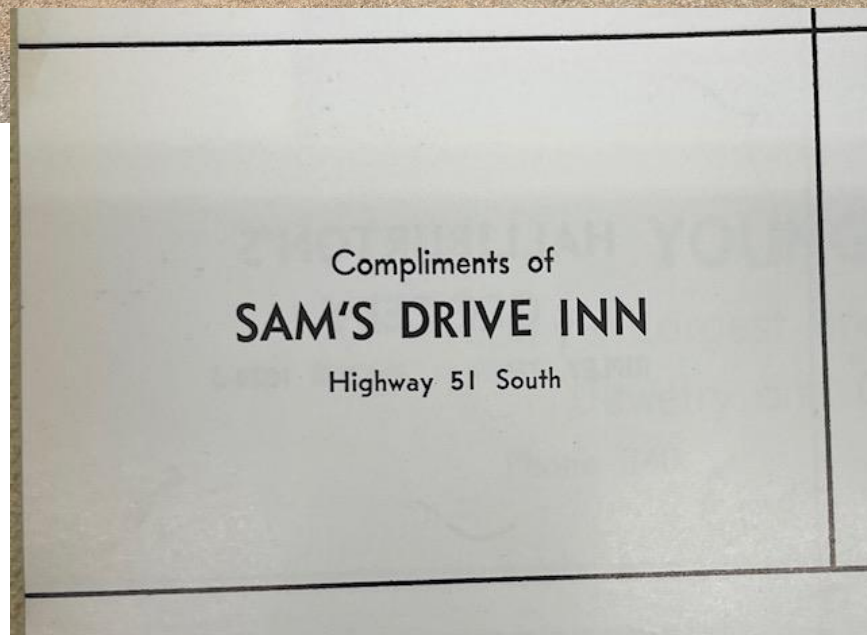
I had a wonderful conversation over lunch with members of the Ripley High School Class of 1971 and equally great conversations with local librarians, deeds title officers, record keepers in Ripley City Hall, and my grandmother. While my project is ongoing (I will complete the final three days of my residency in early December 2024), I'm thrilled to have already secured over 1.5 hours of recorded conversations, two property deeds titles that confirm the original purchase and selling of the Sam's Drive-In property, one picture of the original property as it stands today, and one Sam's Drive-in advertisement from the 1965 Ripley High School Yearbook.



I imagine my final piece to be a written narrative telling this story and others of Sam's Drive-In with hopes of completion by the end of 2024. My stipend has assisted me tremendously so far in making progress towards this goal. Currently, I have spent funds on a six month newspapers.com subscription, interview recording purchases on the Rev.com app, one lunch when researching in Ripley, and gas money while travelling.

The biggest obstacles so far have been securing physical memories aka photographs. While many folks I've encountered have gone on at lengths to share happy memories of Sam's Drive-In, it's been quite difficult to secure any original photos of the place. Folks just didn't take many pictures in those days, especially in small rural communities like Ripley. I hope to find some sort of documentation by going through additional newspapers archives at the Lauderdale County Enterprise offices when I return to Ripley for my final three days in early December 2024.





Photos here show my grandfather at the original site of Sam's Drive-Inn, researching microfilm at the Lauderdale County Enterprise, and the one photo of Sam's Drive-Inn secured so far: a small advertisement featured in the 1965 Ripley High School Library.