

Rhinelander's Early Gas Stations

During the early 1920s, if someone wanted to buy gas in Rhinelander, they purchased it at a pump owned by a service garage or dealership. Or they bought it by the can at a hardware store. It wasn't until around 1924 that gas stations were constructed along the most popular city routes.

In Rhinelander, there were nine stand-alone filling stations by 1927. Three were within one block of each other in the downtown area -- the Deep Rock Oil Co. was the first to establish a station (157 S. Anderson) and was quickly followed by Standard Service nearby at 186 S. Anderson. Within walking distance at 120 S. Brown, William McRae opened a Sinclair station in 1925, only to sell it to the Wadham Oil Co. two months later. Next, the Northwestern Oil Company constructed a station at 304 Lincoln. Directly opposite to the north, Wadham Oil owned a second station (today's Burger King site). At the eastern city limits was East Side Service on Newell Street.

The Soo Filling Station was located across from the taverns in the Hollow at 301 Thayer. Further to the north, Art Larson established Northside Service at 1451 Eagle St., a prized location since during this time period, Stevens Street had not yet been extended and the highway to Eagle River (63) ran from Eagle St., across the bridge and along today's Highway W. Years later, other stations were constructed along the way. Leaving the city to the west, the Genett family poured gas at the Hillcrest Station, 1430 River St. This gas business was the only one owned by a woman -- Edna Genett.

Of these nine, four of the buildings are still standing, but only one is still in use as a gas station. The Marathon station on S. Anderson, currently owned by Jason Loka, has the honor of not only being the first gas station in Rhinelander, but the only one of the original nine which is still active. During the following years, filling stations popped up "like jack pines", reported one newspaper. The Standard Oil Co. built a second station on N. Brown St in 1930. This building later became Jet's Dairy Bar. Further north, the Rhinelander Oil Co. built across from Ruekert's Grocery (today's Thrift Shop) and Delore Plankey managed a station at the triangle of Pinos and N. Stevens.

The number of stations within the city limits or immediately outside, peaked around 1953 at 29. Most were small, new buildings, but some took advantage of various empty businesses along a well-traveled street, like the Track-Side Station which occupied the old, stone jail on Davenport.



In this photo from 1952, Davenport Street was the main route leaving the city to the west since the Kemp St. bridge was not built until a few years later. Within a three-block drive, from Stevens St. to the Wisconsin River, six filling stations of various sizes offered a variety of services.

Besides those previously mentioned, the list of gas stations in 1960 within city limits included the following:

West Davenport:

- 130 -- Dekker's, behind M&I Bank
- 131 -- Weighner's Service Station
- 201 -- Molzberger's Service, in former stone jail, razed
- 209 -- Rhinelander Motors; Moritz's, now Pomp's Tire
- 215 -- Flatley's Service
- 407 -- Walt's Central Service, most recently L&E internet auction service
- 685 -- West Side Cities Service

716 River St -- McKuen's Service, later Riis Oil, razed a few years ago

Pinos:

- 920 -- Dobbe's Complete Service
- 933 -- Ernie's Service Station, site now occupied by Northland Printing
- 1123 -- Yankee's Service Station, site now occupied by a home

1419 Eagle -- Sparby's Service, razed

1471 Eagle -- Lake Region Oil, now Buck's Sheet Metal

12 N. Stevens -- Gene's Service, now Associated Bank drive-in

6 S. Stevens -- O'Melia's Standard Service, site now O'Melia building

227 S. Pelham -- Lytle's Service, most recently Little Caesar's, razed

430 S. Pelham -- Dick's Service Station, now Winkler's



For over 25 years, Clayton Flatley had been an agent for Texaco and head of the Oneida Oil Co., but in 1957, he made the change to Zephyr when he purchased the station formerly owned by Rhinelander Motors.

48 W. King -- Hill's Super Service, now AT&T

Lincoln:

538 -- Webster's Texaco Service, now empty remodeled building

738 -- Schoeneck's Shell Service, on site of today's Citgo

915 -- Flatley Zephyr, most recently Hodag Gas, razed

921 -- Buettner's

There have, of course, been other gas stations since 1960 as the various oil companies vied for each franchise. Many of these buildings are still standing. Anyone having photos of early gas stations, please call me at 369-3092.

For those interested in gas station history, visit the Northwoods Petroleum Museum on Hwy 45, two miles north of Three Lakes. The museum will be hosting authors of *Fill'er Up - the Glory Days of Wisconsin Gas Stations* on July 19 at 2 p.m.

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