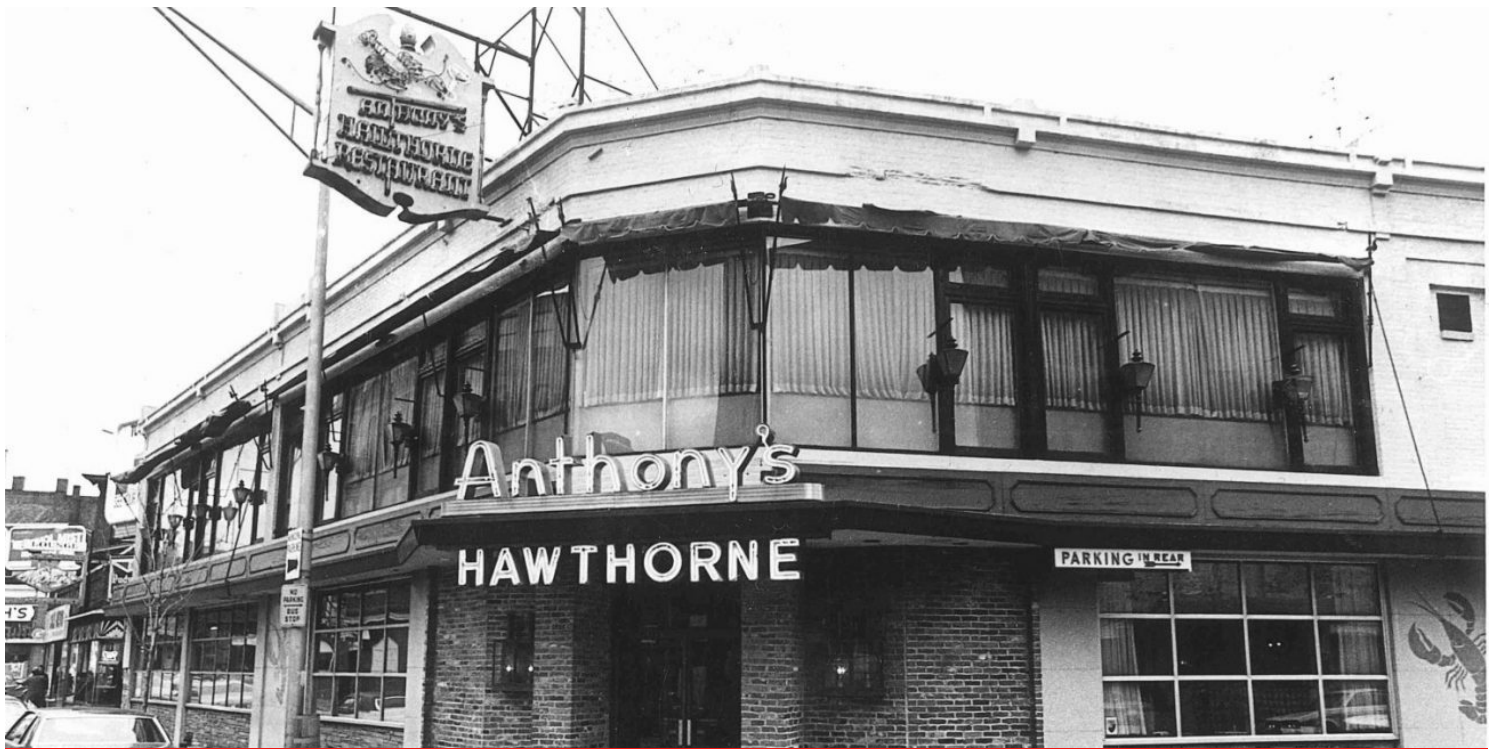


BUSINESS, NEWS

FORMER ANTHONY'S HAWTHORNE RESTAURANT, A DOWNTOWN LYNN STAPLE, TO BE DEMOLISHED

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | July 1, 2019



Under the ownership of Anthony Athanas, Hawthorne grew from two employees and 45 seats to a restaurant that employed 150 and could seat more than 400. (Item file photo)

LYNN — One of the best known restaurants on the North Shore at its peak, Anthony's Hawthorne was known for its signature dish, "Lobster a la Hawthorne," which was "lobster stuffed with lobster." The latter description became one of the restaurant's slogans until it closed in 2003.

The building that housed the downtown staple that was the highest grossing restaurant in Massachusetts in its heyday, will soon be demolished.

Wig Zamore, an Athanas family representative, said the family has contracted New Hampshire Demolition to raze the long-vacant building at the corner of Central Avenue and Oxford Street, which city officials say has become an eyesore. The family is speaking with potential developers, but there are no plans in place to sell or redevelop the property.

"We have had developers say they would be happy to do demolition as part of a development deal with us, but we felt they couldn't accelerate the development quickly enough," said Zamore. "We agree with the city that it needs to be taken care of now. There's no good reason to wait. We need to work with the city to get it down as quickly and safely as possible."

Lynn attorney James D. Moore, a longtime patron of the restaurant, started frequenting the place in 1968 when he was 23. He said it was the place to be in the city. It was a popular place to meet up for lunch, after work and for dinner, and a large function hall upstairs was often in use for various events.

City councilors and School Committee members were often seen dining there after their meetings and City Hall employees could often be found at Anthony's, usually on payday. It was a different time, where people actually went out to eat during the work day, with businessmen also indulging in cocktails on their extended lunch breaks. The place was always crowded until it faded in its later years, Moore said.

"It was the best place in town," Moore said. "It was a style of restaurant that pretty much doesn't exist anymore. The floors had rugs. There were curtains on the windows. Unlike restaurants today, you could actually hear yourself talking. It was the combination of the great food and if you were from the North Shore, you would always see someone you knew."

All that is gone now.

The late Anthony Athanas bought the small restaurant, formerly called The Hawthorne Cafe, in 1938 for a few thousand dollars. To do so, he had to borrow \$2,500 from his employer, the owner of Steuben's Restaurant in Boston, where Athanas was head waiter, according to his son, Paul Athanas.

Under the ownership of Athanas, the restaurant grew from two employees and 45 seats to one that employed 150 people and could seat more than 400 by the early 1950s, when it became the highest volume restaurant in Massachusetts, grossing more than \$1 million a year.

By the early 1960s, restaurant ownership claimed that more people ate lobster at Anthony's Hawthorne than any other restaurant in New England. Perhaps ownership was basing the claim on an often-cited statistic at the time that showed the Hawthorne was one of the top three restaurants in New England in volume, according to a 1961 *Daily Evening Item* article.

"People would wait in line, which wrapped around the building," said Paul Athanas.

Athanas' expansion of the Lynn restaurant included purchasing the land on either side and the Olympia Theater behind it, which he tore down to build a parking lot, Paul Athanas said.

Eventually, he expanded out of Lynn to open Hawthorne-By-The-Sea in Swampscott in 1947, and later Anthony's Pier 4 Restaurant in Boston, the General Glover House on the Swampscott-Marblehead-Salem line, and Anthony's Cummaquid Inn in Yarmouthport on Cape Cod. Only Hawthorne-By-The-Sea remains open.

A bragging point for the late Athanas, who died in 2005, was his claim that Anthony's Hawthorne was the only restaurant in Massachusetts with a central General Electric air-conditioning system, which was at a time when GE was at its production peak and restaurants didn't typically have air conditioning.

But despite a storied history in the city, the former building has become a thorn in the side of city officials since its closure. When it closed its doors in 2003, the family said it was for renovations and planned to reopen, but those plans never transpired.

With development happening all around Anthony's Hawthorne in downtown Lynn, the building has remained vacant and become dilapidated and an "embarrassment to the city," according to James M. Cowdell, Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn) executive director.

"No matter what, that building is coming down," Cowdell said. "It's dangerous and it's a nuisance and it's an embarrassment. It's frustrating from the city's perspective because there is significant development occurring around them."

Asbestos remediation work is expected to start at the site this week with demolition expected a short time after its completion. New Hampshire Demolition has filed the necessary permits with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) for the asbestos work, but has yet to file a demolition permit with the city's Department of Inspectional Services. Zamore declined to provide the cost of demolition.

One of the obstacles hindering development is that the ground underneath the building is contaminated with chemicals from the former Whyte's Laundromat. The contaminated land must be cleaned up before development can occur, which would be a cost incurred by a potential developer. But Zamore said he expects that work would be fairly routine.

Even with the contaminated land, there are people who want to buy the property. "We can't get the Athanas family to pull the trigger and sell," Cowdell said.

Along with Cowdell's assertions that the Athanas family has not maintained the property properly, records from the city's assessors' office show that the family owes three years' worth of property taxes, totaling \$88,364. The property is assessed at \$626,400, according to city records.

Zamore refutes claims of a lack of upkeep and said there are ongoing preliminary discussions with developers to sell the property.

"I'm planning to help the family move it toward redevelopment that would fit in with what's going on in downtown Lynn," Zamore said. "We're not trying to delay that at all."

Whenever Anne Marie Tobin, a sports reporter for the *Daily Item* and its sister publications, *The Lynnfield Weekly News* and *Peabody Weekly News*, looks at the building, she thinks back to when Anthony's Hawthorne was thriving.

Tobin and her husband, Jim, had their wedding rehearsal dinner at Anthony's in 1980, something she said wasn't really a choice. Her mother and her husband's parents were all from Lynn, and the restaurant was the place to be for any resident's special occasion.

Her father-in-law and his law partner had lunch there every Friday, walking over from their Exchange Street office, returning three martinis later and more ready for naps than additional work, Tobin said.

"It was just one of those special restaurants when the city was vibrant and that was the place to go," Tobin said. "You always knew you would get great food, great service and you would see people you knew. It was a familiar place. Some places today, you walk in and nobody knows you. There, someone always knew you."

Although Athanas spent more time at Pier 4 after he opened in Boston, Moore said the Lynn Hawthorne was always his best restaurant.

"Anthony's restaurants were known for value," Moore said. "You never left his restaurant hungry and it was always a good value. You could pay more money somewhere else, but it wouldn't be as good. Anthony, he would kill the competition with value."



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