

5 of Cincinnati's oldest restaurants (and what to order at each one)



[Keith Pandolfi](#)

Cincinnati Enquirer

Published 12:30 a.m. ET May 10, 2024 | Updated 12:30 a.m. ET May 10, 2024

It's hard to figure out why certain restaurants have more staying power than others. Are they family-owned? Do they offer a mix of updated and classic dishes? Is their longevity based on pure nostalgia? No matter what the answer is, Cincinnatians are lucky to have so many restaurants that are a century (or in one case, more than two centuries) old.

Below are five of our oldest restaurants and my recommendations on the must-try dishes at each one. As an added bonus, I've included who was president of the United States when they opened.

The Golden Lamb, Lebanon

Year it opened: 1803.

Who was president? Thomas Jefferson.

I understand if you still think of this 220-year-old restaurant as that fussy old place your parents took you to for Easter dinners or special occasions when you were a kid. I was one of those kids, too. And The Golden Lamb does feel like a special-occasion restaurant with its Shaker (the original minimalism) decor and well-dressed – and often well-heeled – clientele. But boy what a treasure it is. Literary figures including Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and Alex Haley have bedded down here for the night. And U.S. presidents – from Ulysses Grant to Ronald Reagan – have, too. Heck, even Kesha stayed here once. If you're in the mood for something more casual, the Black Horse Tavern, which is located in the back of the restaurant, offers a more tavern-style vibe.

Need a break? Play the USA TODAY Daily Crossword Puzzle.

What to order: Despite its traditional feel, The Lamb still has some surprises up its sleeve. The kitchen churns out top-level cuisine such as Faroe Island salmon with honey butter dill sauce, smashed red skin potatoes tossed in chimichurri, cheese curds, Saratoga chip nachos and a braised lamb shank plunged in a bed of polenta. Despite all of these delicious-sounding options, I almost always order the same thing: the roast turkey dinner. The turkey is brined and roasted, served with sage, sausage and apple dressing, seasonal vegetables, cranberry chutney and, yes, mashed potatoes with a rich turkey gravy. Writing about The Golden Lamb a few years ago, I said it would be my request for a last meal, and I still stand by it.

27 S. Broadway St., Lebanon, 513-932-5065, goldenlamb.com.

Arnold's Bar & Grill, Downtown

Year it opened: 1861.

Who was president? Abraham Lincoln.

Located in a circa-1830s building, Arnold's was originally a feed store until 1861 when Simon Arnold opened a tavern in the space. Since then, it's had many owners, most famously Cincinnati icon Jim Tarbell, who handed the taps over to Ronda Breeden in the late 1990s. Rhonda's son, Chris Breeden, now runs the place, maintaining it as a welcoming gathering spot for a well-poured pint of Guinness and live music, from bluegrass to zydeco.

What to order: There are plenty of good burgers and sandwiches on the menu, but I almost always order the Greek Spaghetti Deluxe, which has been available at Arnold's since 1957. The spaghetti is tossed in garlic sauce, bacon, olives, tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms and Romano. But that's just the sum of its parts. Together, they create something pretty extraordinary.

210 E. Eighth St., Downtown, 513-421-6234, arnoldsbarandgrill.com.

Scotti's, Downtown

Year it opened: 1912.

Who was president? Woodrow Wilson.

It feels like Scotti's has always been here and that the city of Cincinnati was just built around it. That's partially true given the number of skyscrapers that have risen around the red-sauce Italian joint since it was opened in 1912 by Philadelphian Salvatore Scoleri. He named his restaurant after the famous opera singer Antonio Scotti, and there's still a portrait of him in the dining room. Dark, moody and, with its mosaic tile walls, a little bit quirky, Scotti's is a Cincinnati treasure.

What to order: Many of the dishes at Scotti's look remarkably alike: pastas covered in deep red sauce and lots and lots of cheese. Among them, I like the Canelloni Lombardi the best. It's basically a stuffed pasta with meat filling topped with marsala wine cream sauce and melted mozzarella cheese. Oh, and always order the garlic bread.

919 Vine St., Downtown, 513-721-9484, scottisitalianrestaurant.com.

Greyhound Tavern, Fort Mitchell

Year it opened: 1921.

Who was president? Warren G. Harding.

Greyhound Tavern is something akin to a Southern-style country club restaurant that doesn't require a membership fee. The dining rooms are fancy, decorated with antiques and pastel-print wallpaper. But a more casual vibe can be found in the wood-paneled tavern where you can order a frosty glass of beer, catch a Reds game and watch regulars greet each other with bear hugs or friendly pats on the back. The Greyhound's name came courtesy of Benny Frisch. In the 1930s, Benny's brother, Al, wanted to buy the Dixie Tea Room, which opened in 1921. Benny agreed to be its primary investor and, as a show of gratitude, Al renamed it the Greyhound Grill to honor Benny, who ran a greyhound training business in Florida. Around 1988, it was sold to Butch Wainscott and Bill Remke (owner of Remke grocery stores), who changed the name to Greyhound Tavern.

What to order: The fried chicken is a must. Like another famous fried chicken joint in Kentucky, it's made with a secret blend of herbs and spices, though this version far outshines the other. I also love the Greyhound's hot slaw, a mixture of cabbage and carrots cooked in a skillet and tossed with hot vinegar and mouthwatering chunks of bacon. And don't miss out on the famous onion rings, made with slices of sweet onion so thick that I'll bet the chef can only get two rings per onion.

2500 Dixie Highway, Fort Mitchell, 859-331-3767, greyhoundtaavern.com.

Zip's Cafe, Mount Lookout

Year it opened: 1926.

Who was president? Calvin Coolidge.

A lot of people might not realize that Zip's is one of the oldest restaurants in Cincinnati. Mainly because it's still one of the most popular spots in town. Opened by Zip Kirschner in 1926, it is filled with historic knick-knacks, including a toy train that circles the dining room all day long. The cafe is now owned by Mike Burke, who started working there in high school.

What to order: The Zip Burger of course. Its level of fame among Cincinnatians rivals the Skyline cheese coney, Montgomery Inn ribs or a slice of LaRosa's pizza. The beef is ground daily by Avril-Bleh butcher shop, Downtown, and each burger is served on a Klosterman bun with tomato, lettuce and onion. Order it with a side of onion rings, which are on par with the ones I mentioned above from Greyhound Tavern. For the Cincinnati-style chili averse, Zip's also offers the best non-Cincy chili in town.

1036 Delta Ave., Mount Lookout, 513-871-9876, zipscafe.com.

Still hungry? These non-chili dishes at local chili parlors are absolute fire 🔥