

Logan Trading Company and the Seaboard Café

From a former Seaboard Railway station in Raleigh, one of the area's largest plant nurseries blooms with flowers, statuary, fountains, and a delightful café serving fresh food in a relaxing atmosphere.

BY JANET C. PITTARD



Lunch at the Seaboard Café is a "great interlude in a busy day."

Looking for a little peace and quiet? A garden oasis where you can casually stroll along paths of plants and flowers, undisturbed by the hectic pace of downtown Raleigh? You wouldn't expect to find it in a train station, but tucked away on the site of the old Seaboard station off Peace Street are Logan Trading Company, one of the area's largest plant nurseries, and the Seaboard Café, a delightful and unpretentious eatery.

The station was built by Seaboard Railway along the Southern Colonial Lines during World War II and named the Eugene C. Bagwell Station in honor of a former company official from Raleigh.

But today, instead of well-dressed travelers standing in line to board the train, state workers and other downtown professionals, amateur gardeners, tourists, and mothers with small children in tow peruse seasonal flowers, shrubbery, fountains, and statuary, or sit at tables enjoying soup and sandwiches in what used to be the old station's cafeteria. Occasionally, a freight train rumbles through, and children jump excitedly while adults smile and nod in acknowledgement of this token apparition of a bygone era, perhaps conjuring the memory of some past hello or goodbye.

Station to greenhouse

Logan Trading Company, a family owned and operated nursery, purchased the station from CSX Railroad and spent a year renovating the property before opening in February 1991. The nursery relocated from the State Farmers Market on Hodges Street, where Robert M. Logan Sr., now deceased, opened the business in 1965. Interestingly, prior to beginning the nursery business, he worked for many years as a trainman with Seaboard Railroad. Logan's son Robert Jr. now runs the business with the help of two of his five sisters,



Jason Taberi

Debby Logan and Linda O’Keeffe, and a staff of 28.

Robert Logan Jr. has lived in Raleigh since he was four years old and has memories of the old Seaboard Station when it was in operation. “I remember sitting right over there with my dad waiting to pick up my sister. She was coming home from a trip to Cuba,” he says and motions to a section of the canopied waiting area now crowded with plants and statuary.

The business occupies about five acres, including two acres not part of the original Seaboard complex. The outdoor waiting area has been enclosed to create the nursery’s greenhouse, but the brick exterior of the station remains virtually unchanged, and the canopies still extend the length of the station property, providing shelter for some of the more light- and heat-sensitive plants. As well as a massive inventory of “green goods,” the nursery also offers a complete landscaping service, including consultation, design, delivery, and installation.



Jason Taberi

Left: Tom Deak (left), a partner and cashier, handles the menu planning while Rick Perales is responsible for food preparation at the Seaboard Café. Above and far left: Logan Trading Company offers a massive inventory of “green goods,” as evidenced by the colorful floral display.

Soup, sandwiches, and shrubbery

The Seaboard Café opened in May 1991, just a few months after the nursery, and occupies the space where the original cafeteria served refreshments to travelers. Texas native Rick Perales, who worked with Logan Trading Company for a couple of years between jobs in the electronics distribution field, approached Logan with a proposal for the diner space when he saw the old Seaboard Café sign on the dilapidated building prior to the station’s renovation.

Logan recalls: “I don’t know anything about food. I knew he (Perales) could cook. He used to bring us breakfast tacos in the morning

when he was working with us. And I knew he had the desire.” A deal was struck, and Perales began selling hot dogs, hamburgers, and fajitas in the station’s cafeteria.

Perales was joined a year later by Mary Farrar, and they added fresh salads and homemade muffins and soups to the menu. Partner Tom Deak left Northern Telecom and joined the café full time a couple of years later to handle the menu planning and serve as the cashier.

Perales says Farrar, who passed away in November 2002, taught him much of what he knows about food preparation, and the rest they learned together. When they first started out,



Logan Trading Company renovated the old Seaboard Train Station and opened in 1991.

Perales recalls Farrar knew how to make vegetable soup, and he knew how to make chili. Now, the café staff can make 30 different kinds of soup and offer a choice of two or three each day.

In addition to the soups, the menu, while not extensive, regularly includes a couple of daily specials and sandwiches. The popular Veggies on Sunflower sandwich includes cheddar and Swiss cheese layered with lettuce, onion, sprouts, mayo, cucumber, and pickle and is served on sunflower bread. The cheeseburger contains a generous eight-ounce patty. Other favorites are the grilled chicken sandwich with the café's own peach pepper relish, chicken salad, and the club sandwich. Servings are garnished with the café's homemade pickled carrot strips.

Fresh baked cookies and Fruity Bars, all-natural fruit popsicles, are available for those with a sweet tooth. Be sure to try the cranberry-walnut cookies. For the calorie-conscious, there are five different salads from which to choose and a fat-free ziti pasta salad served as a side order. While prices have increased since the five-cent cup of coffee, a staple at the old station diner, they are still reasonable — ranging from \$2.25 for a cup of soup and crackers to \$6.95 for some of the specially featured items.

Outside or in

Customers can sit outside when weather permits or inside a glassed porch adjoining the nursery's

greenhouse. Perennials, herbs, and fountain and statuary displays surround the café's outside dining area. Nursery customers browse among the plants displayed in abundance along the station's canopied waiting area.

While the nursery and café share many of their customers, the café is a destination on its own and is a

if you're going

Logan Trading Company

707 Semart Drive
Raleigh, N.C. 27604
(919) 828-5337

Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Seaboard Café

707-A Semart Drive
Raleigh, N.C. 27604
(919) 821-7553

Monday through Saturday, Grill: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Deli: 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.


Holiday closings are between Christmas and New Year's Day and July 4th week. Heading east on Peace Street, turn left at the North Wilmington Street intersection stoplight onto Halifax Street. Turn left onto Seaboard Avenue, then right onto Semart Drive. Enter at the main building for the café.



favorite for government and other downtown workers who are only a short walk away. Amateur gardeners shopping for their latest projects and tourists enjoying the historic sites close by comprise the largest part of the customer base.

Café advertising is by word of mouth only, so what attracts the lunch crowd to the Seaboard? Nina Yeager, Director of Medical Assistance for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, has been coming to the café for about eight years and describes the experience as a "great interlude in a busy day."

Yeager says she takes pleasure in the greenery surrounding the café and adds, "If you need to get your spirits raised, you just go out and look at the pansies or whatever other flowers are in season. The food is fresh, and Perales and his staff are always friendly and welcoming. I always feel more relaxed when I leave."

It's hard to say whether people come to Logan's to shop for plants and then decide to enjoy a bite to eat at the café because it's so convenient, or if people come to the café for lunch and are inspired by the surroundings to plan or make a purchase for their garden. Whatever the original intention, this unique destination is worth the trip. 

Janet C. Pittard lives in Raleigh.