

Welcome to Bucktown, Population: Delicious

It must have been a Saturday in something like late June when I introduced one of my good friends to Long Live Beerworks, as I've been quite an evangelist for the relatively new craft brewery on the West Side of Providence. It's a neighborhood I lived in for a few years, led a *Motif* neighborhood profile on, and now, it's a fantastic place to try out some new beer.

This was before the new beer laws were passed, so after running through samples of Long Live's Lonely Weekend and other delicacies, my posse and I decided to head down the street to North or The Avery for a drink. Along the way, we were perplexed by what looked like a renovated shack, clearly in the later stages of being outfitted for becoming a restaurant; seating and all manner of kitchen equipment was piled inside. It was halfway between Whittaker and Carpenter on W Fountain Street. Buzzed, we pressed our faces against the glass windows and anxiously peered about looking for a sign. *What was this place?*

It was only days later that I discovered via Long Live's Instagram that the location was a new restaurant that would be something of a chicken and fish shack with local beer (so local, they probably just rolled a keg from Long Live straight down the street for the opening on Friday, June 24). This was Bucktown, in a location I'm told used to be the old Fountain Spa.

Opening night wound up being an oddly eventful evening for me, as I had to drop my fiancée off at the Block Island ferry for a weekend of bachelorette party revelry. A fish sandwich at Jimmy's Portside in Galilee - of all things in all places - kicked things off. After a lengthy drive back into the city, I spent some time at the Ocean State BBQ Festival at The Steel Yard. I was new to the urban green space, and loved it as a venue for that type of event, especially when Pork Belly and Brisket Tacos from El Rancho Grande were involved, along with a Fanny IPA from Revival Brewing Company.

After a brief Me Party enjoying these fares in the sun, I dashed out to catch an early showing of the short but immensely fun *The Shallows*, in which Blake Lively's adventurous surfer angst is on display more than her LA face and Oakland booty as she battles both shark and Millennial listlessness.

The enjoyable viewing left me more thirsty than hungry, which made a journey back to the West Side to see Bucktown in action perfect. In this first foray, I was greeted by a narrow but packed drinking porch out front and a pretty densely seated interior. The cooking area is to the right with ample dining space throughout. Polished hardwood high tabletops with stool seating sits atop a concrete floor; it was an ideal juxtaposition of class and grit.

The back door was wide open, revealing a foldable table with one of those cooler kegerator systems you always see at beerfests. Shamefully, I brought a thirst but no appetite, and opted for a Lonely Weekend IPA from Long Live Beerworks. Oddly enough, after paying for my drink, I was awarded a red solo cup and was directed out back to where I filled up my own beer. I scored a seat right at the quiet corner of the aforementioned tiny porch. A group of friends jovially chatted across from me while I silently took in the night of West Fountain Street. The character of Bucktown is so comforting and welcoming that I couldn't help but feel content.

More than a month later, when I went back for a less contemplative and more engaging encounter with Bucktown, I was not displeased.

I went back on an extremely hot Monday evening, and though they were clearly running some sort of AC it was still pretty warm inside, but straddling the Goldilocks zone of comfort, especially with a can of ice cold Flying Jenny Pale Ale from Grey Sail. The smell of fried chicken and waffle fries wafted throughout, and a decent number of people were enjoying the Cajun-styled fried cuisine.

The vibe of the place off as rather casual; the high top tables are large, basically requiring groups of diners to share space. Instead of napkins, there are rolls of paper towels, and cardboard six-packs hold the condiments, which mainly consist of honey and hot sauce. Ketchup is found in the corner in packets, next to the plastic utensils.

The person who took my order recommended either the chicken or fish fried sandwich, but I've also heard great things about the burgers. In looking at the menu, I was puzzled by the appearance of "hush puppies," so also tossed in an order of those. Upon ordering, I was given a card - the eight of diamonds - a surprising service method not unlike what Ogie's does with license plates.

While waiting for my food and sipping my beer, I was again struck by a feeling of comfort in this small locale. "Open" by Rhye was playing, a bit of a haunting song focused on the nebulous nature of love. It set the contemplative mood that was unceremoniously destroyed by my ravenous appetite at the sight of my sandwich and hush puppies, which are savory fried balls of cornmeal-based batter with a bit of what I'm guessing was green pepper or scallions mixed in. They were served with honeyed butter, which is a thing I'm seeing everywhere these days. The spice gave them a bit of a kick, but they were largely a wonderful blend of sweet and savory flavors.

The fish sandwich was a beaut: far too large and far too hot for the bun and my mouth, which is never really a bad thing. The texture was neither too flaky nor too crispy, and the spices offered up a real kick. There was some sort of Cajun or southern creole spice going on that left my face and neck hot and sweaty for several minutes (have mercy on my poor, French Canadian body), but it was also served with slaw and tomato on the bun, which you really don't see on most fish sandwiches.

The food at Bucktown really is something special. Though neighboring eateries like North Bakery, Slow Rhode and North aren't exactly the cheapest around either, Bucktown suffers from a bit of an identity crisis in that its vibe is very hole-in-the-wall but most of its menu prices say a bit the opposite. But to me, paying for quality this high is always worthwhile, especially when it's as exceptional as Bucktown.

Bucktown Chicken and Fish is located just off of Luongo Square at 471 West Fountain Street serving up Southern-style seafood and other fried deliciousness.