

46 West Main Street
Bartleby's Cafe/Kretzer's
Working Script

Bartleby's Café is a place to sit, talk, meet new people, and, of course, grab a cup of coffee. From 1842 to today this building, has been home to some of the most impactful businesses in Mystic.

William Niles was the first owner of the building which is located on the corner of Pearl and West Main streets. It was his home, and his boat building shop was next door.¹ At that time, the building was actually on waterfront property looking south toward an inlet of the Mystic River which was later filled in.²

In 1857, Niles sold the building to Isaac D Miner, who then sold it in the same year to Amos Tift.

Tift sold the building to Lucious M. Guernsey who ran a bookstore & printing press in the storefront, renting part to Tom Hazard's Harness shop.^{1,2}

In 1881 Conrad Kretzer purchased the building and started a general store that would become a keystone of the Mystic community for over a half century. Kretzer's store sold "candy, cigars, tobacco, cigarettes, fountain service, periodicals, and newspapers" and a "beautiful assortment of Meerscham pipes with individual cases." Conrad Kretzer even advertised that he would give a "nice basket of fruit" to the first baby born in Mystic in 1927.^{1, 3}

Kretzers was also a popular place for checking out news - even sports news like baseball. On October 16, 1917, an excited crowd gathered at the general store to hear about the final game of the World Series between The New York Nationals and The Chicago Sox. By a special arrangement with the New London Day newspaper, Conrad Kretzer announced the scores by innings until the Chicago Sox clinched the final game!³

In addition to catching up on daily news in print or in person, visitors to Kretzer's could do anything from pick up town reports or attend birthday parties in the store to use the upstairs meeting rooms or, later in the 1950s, attend Red Cross functions.³

Conrad Kretzer was politically active in his Mystic: he was a member of several lodge organizations, on the executive committee of the Mystic Fire District, and first selectman for 14 years.^{1, 3} Conrad's wife, Lucy Kretzer, also became involved in politics, twice serving as 18th district state representative in the 1930s.³

In 1970, Isabel Hermes Marchand, granddaughter of Lucy and Conrad Kretzer, sold the building to Elaine Williams. At the point she sold it, the business had been in the Kretzer family for about 80 years.³

The building continued to be a convenience store, although the name & ownership changed twice more to Sunrise Farms, and then Cricket's General store.³

In 1995, the storefront became a Ben & Jerry's - officially the 5th ice cream store on West Main Street at the time.³

In 1999 Bartleby's Cafe took over the space and once again became a gathering place.³ Visitors can get together, catch up on the news, and - even today - many longtime locals can fondly reminisce about Kretzer's.

Archive Sources:

1 Mystic River Historical Society

2 Mystic Seaport Museum

3 The (New London) Day newspaper