

A Homemade Food Store

An Interview with Dean Poll



Dean Poll in front of Gallagher's Restaurant

EDITORS' NOTE Dean Poll was born and raised on Long Island, New York, in a family with a long line of famous food personalities and restaurateurs. After working with his father in New York City, Poll and his brothers came back to Long Island and opened a restaurant, naming it "Pappas" after their father's Brooklyn restaurant. In 1987, Poll and his brothers proceeded to open Bryant & Cooper, a prime steakhouse in Roslyn. In 2000, Poll took on his most ambitious project alone, the Loeb Boathouse in Central Park. After he painstakingly restored it to its glory as one of New York's most beloved, successful and visited institutions, Poll sought to identify other famous New York institutions in need of similar restoration. In January 2013, Poll acquired the legendary Gallagher's Steakhouse on 52nd Street and Broadway and, after a nine-month renovation, reopened it in 2014. Most recently, in 2020, he became a partner in William Poll (williampoll.com), a specialty gourmet food market on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

Will you highlight the history of William Poll and its importance in New York?

William Poll was established by my grandfather, Angelos Poll, in 1921 on 81st and Lexington Avenue. At that time, it was a store that had house accounts and primarily served the affluent families living on the Upper East Side. In addition to the store, they also offered catering services. During the summer months they would close up shop in Manhattan and open a summer location

in Southampton, due to the store's clientele summering on the East End of Long Island. As a result, my father grew up in Southampton in the 1920s and early '30s.

In 1927 the store moved from 81st to 78th and Lexington. In 1932 my grandfather had an untimely death and his brother, William, took over the operation of the store. In 1939 the store, then called "A. Poll," was renamed "William Poll." In 1957 the store was relocated to its current address, 1051 Lexington Avenue, between 74th Street and 75th Street.

In 2020 I became a partner in the operation of William Poll, joining my cousin Stanley Poll, who is the son of my grandfather's brother, William.

What interested you in becoming involved in this family legacy business and made you feel it was the right timing?

I decided to partner with my cousin, Stanley, for a number of reasons. One is that there was no succession plan in my Uncle Bill's family. I just felt like 100 years of a successful business should be nurtured and celebrated. Another reason I got involved is that with COVID there has been a tremendous return to eating at home. William Poll is not a grocery store; it is really a "homemade food" store. We make very fine meals for people to enjoy at home, as well as offer elegant canapés for small cocktail parties. What we really are is an off-premise kitchen, preparing food for home consumption and entertaining. I believe that the market for homemade foods is going to expand in the coming years.

A third reason, as we've all heard, is that during the pandemic there are people who have left New York and now miss the city. What we offer is a piece of the city they love. Every day we ship to Palm Beach, Texas, Colorado, California and the Carolinas. While those relocated New Yorkers are away, they want the quality foods they enjoyed in Manhattan that simply cannot be found elsewhere.

Who is the William Poll clientele?

Our clientele is everybody. We serve school-teachers, hospital workers and other locals who come

in during their breaks. A great deal of our business comes in by phone from the captains of industry and hosts of society who direct their staffs to call in an order. We also provide meals, sandwiches and snacks for those who fly by private aircraft out of Teterboro – often times that snack is caviar.

How would you describe William Poll's food and what are some of its signature items?

Our food is classic American gourmet. We're known for our perfectly trimmed domestic and imported smoked salmon, baked potato thins and delicate sandwiches. They're the opposite of the overstuffed deli sandwich. People always say they're "to die for." As a result, our sandwich platters are very popular at corporate board meetings. We're known to be expensive and we're equally known for delivering the highest quality and the best service. That's why people who demand the best love William Poll.

What are your priorities for William Poll as you look to the future?

During the first quarter of 2022, we are prepared to close to remodel our building and to create a shipping department on the second floor. We are also considering, once again, opening a satellite location in Southampton as well as having a store in Palm Beach. Because we ship quite a bit to Beverly Hills, we would like to have a store there as well, but family management cross-country presents obstacles. However, we will not rule that out in the future. ●



A vintage photo of William Poll (middle)