

## Rootin' around Freeport's flavorful past

By SHANNON DAUGHTRY | Posted: Friday, January 6, 2012 2:00 am

**FREEPORT** — Almost 80 years after Antonelli's River Inn opened in 1932, Nat Hickey said he still can remember exactly how its famous root beer floats tasted. To this day, he hasn't found one that's comparable.

In the next few weeks, visitors to the Freeport Historical Museum will have the opportunity to revisit and get a taste — literally — of what Antonelli's River Inn was like years ago, City Manager Jeff Pynes said.

Although it won't be the exact root beer recipe Henry Antonelli used for almost 50 years, Pynes said he hopes it will allow museum guests to enjoy, and for some remember, the Freeport staple.

"It's a work in progress," Pynes said of the stand constructed in the museum. "We want to be able to serve them root beer floats in those frosty mugs like Mr. Antonelli did."

The city is working to put in a small freezer fully stocked with ice cream and root beer, he said.

"They've really done it up in there," said Hickey, a local historian and longtime Freeport resident.

Antonelli's River Inn stood at 1002 W. Second St., with its brightly colored awnings and outdoor picnic benches, said Laura Tolar, special projects coordinator for the city.

Tolar conducted a lot of research in order to comprise a small summary for a commemorative plaque placed at the Antonelli's replica in the museum.

"It was a favorite spot for Freeport residents and Brazoria County residents from all over for almost 50 years," Hickey said. "I remember it so vividly."

Hickey said his father opened a hamburger stand about the same time as Antonelli right before the devastating storm in 1932 that destroyed his father's business.

"He stayed in business and we went out," Hickey said laughing.

Antonelli's opened as a hamburger stand selling burgers for 10 cents each and ice cream at five cents per dip, Hickey said.

"Then he started mixing his own root beer," he said. "He made it right there in a big wooden keg. He had a recipe for root beer and it's a recipe that when he died it went with him."

The original Antonelli's River Inn building now stands at Freeport Municipal Park, Hickey said.

"There are several people who have expressed an interest to open it up at the park," he said. "And it's available if they want to open it up. I'm sure everyone would love to see a place like Antonelli's open back up around here."