

THE GENERALS' RESTAURANT

BY RICH BELMONT

The DeSoto House Hotel in Galena, IL is named in honor of Hernando De Soto. He was the Spanish explorer and conquistador who is documented as the first European to cross the Mississippi River.

The DeSoto House opened in April 9, 1855 and was promoted as "The largest hotel in the West". It had 225 guest rooms and many public rooms on five floors. Through the years it suffered economic hard times, fires and floods. The upper two floors were removed in 1880.

In 1978 the hotel was closed for restoration and remodeling. It took 8 years to restore it to its original Victorian Grandeur and it was officially reopened on April 19, 1986. After 19 months of operating under a Chapter 11 reorganization it was finally declared bankrupt and was padlocked in November 1988.

In March 1989 Alan Brown, Daniel Kelley and Ted Siorek formed a company called Galena Associates. They purchased the DeSoto House at auction. In December 1993 Daniel Kelley and his wife became the sole owners and have now owned it for 28 years. They continue to pour their hearts and treasure into this elegant and historic lady that is "Illinois' Oldest Operating Hotel".

Evidence of the historic significance is seen throughout the building. A few of the many interesting furnishings include the elegant Front Desk in the lobby, the Wooden Ice Display Case in the Green Street Tavern, the Square Grand Piano on the catwalk, the Wardrobe from the 1860s and the 1960s Italian Espresso machine both in the Generals' Restaurant.

The walls and display cases are adorned with photographs of notable people who have been in this hotel. They include:

POLITICIANS

- Ulysses S. Grant. The hotel was his Presidential Campaign Headquarters in 1868.
- Abraham Lincoln
- Stephen A. Douglas
- Theodore Roosevelt
- William McKinley
- Wm. Jennings Bryan

LITERARY MEN

- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Mark Twain
- Herman Melville

FAMOUS WOMEN

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- Dorothea Dix
- Susan B. Anthony

AFRICAN AMERICANS

- Frederick Douglas
- Booker T. Washington
- Satchel Paige

Today the DeSoto House Hotel has three restaurants: The Green Street Tavern known for serving lunch all day. The Courtyard four story atrium where breakfast and lunch is served daily and Breakfast Buffets are presented on Sunday mornings and holidays. The Generals' Restaurant where old world fine dining is at its finest.

The Generals' Restaurant is named in honor of the nine Civil War Generals that called Galena home. Can any of you Civil War History buffs name all nine? (Hint: they are listed at the end of this column.)

The key personnel at the Generals' know how to do fine dining:

- Deborah Bertucci is Director of Sales & Marketing. She is from Chicago and has been at the DeSoto House for 16 years.
- Lupe Hernandez is from Vera Cruz, Mexico and came to the United States in 1993. He has been at the DeSoto House for 25 years and is the Executive Chef.
- Gail Schultz is the general supervisor and Jeff Ward is the Assistant Supervisor. Jeff was my waiter during both of my dinner visits and did a great job in providing menu knowledge and attentive service.



Once again, on July 28, 2011, the DeSoto House suffered another flood. Heavy rains flooded the Generals' Restaurant



with four feet of rainwater. Daniel Kelley had to arrange for millions of dollar worth of restorations. The heating and the air conditioning systems had to be replaced, the kitchen needed to be completely redone, and the Atrium ceiling required extensive repairs. The walls had to be removed and replaced after the brick walls behind the wallboards were dried out. The restaurant stayed closed for about a year. This was when the story of "The Lady in Black" gained more notoriety. Many years ago a kitchen worker started her shift every morning at 4 am. She was the first person to report seeing a lady dressed in black going down the stairs and disappearing through a wall. When the walls were removed it was discovered there used to be a doorway at the spot where she always vanished. The hole in the brick wall is now on display.

The Generals' Menu is just what you would expect in a fine dining restaurant. First your server will ask you for your cocktail or wine order. You might want to try the Bar Specialty "Lady in Black" or perhaps a Mini Martini Flight. Pick 3 of 6 mini martinis from these options: Cosmo, Watermelon, Green Apple, Pineapple, Chocolate or Raspberry Lemon.

Then you will be brought a fresh loaf of Focaccia (foh-KAHT-chah). This is an Italian bread flavored with olive oil and herbs and liberally sprinkled with fresh parmesan cheese.

The appetizers are all wonderful. They include:

- Wisconsin Cheese and Sausage – an assortment of cheeses from Maple Leaf Cheesemakers in Monroe, WI.
- Crispy Fried Duck Legs – the duck legs are tasty particularly when dipped in the Chipotle BBQ sauce. The legs are supplied by Maple Leaf Farms Duck Purveyors headquartered in Leesburg, IN and has facilities in 5 states including Wisconsin.
- Infantry on Horseback – size U-12 meaning under 12 shrimp per pound designated on the shrimp chart as Super Colossal. They come with a "Snappy Sauce" which is homemade from about 20 ingredients including chili pepper to add a little zing.
- Beef Tenderloin Pesto Crostini – Angus tenderloin on toast points with freshly made basil and olive oil pesto topped with diced tomatoes and Asiago cheese.



The salads are fresh and the soups are all homemade and fantastic. Here are a few examples:

- French Onion – made from yellow onions, beef stock, red wine, seasonings and covered with Gruyère cheese. (Fun Fact: Gruyère (groo-yair) is a cheese from Switzerland and is now also produced in France.
- Crab Bisque – crab meat is cooked in heavy cream, a little chicken base and finely chopped onions and celery.
- Crème of Bleu Cheese Soup – this is my favorite and it is so popular you can get a copy of the recipe from the hotel front desk. It is creamy with just a subtle taste of blue cheese! It contains butter, sherry, flour, chicken stock, heavy cream, mozzarella, parmesan and crumbled blue cheese. (Fun Fact: The Blue Cheese is Maytag Blue from Newton, IA. Their production facility was closed for 10 months last year while it was renovated in order to exceed new requirements mandated by the Federal Food Safety Modernization Act.)



The entrées are all specialties of the house. Here are some of the most popular and most elegant:

- The Steaks and Chops – supplied by Iowa Premium Beef. They are Est. 8 Angus, Highest Quality 100% corn fed beef from Angus cattle known for rich, savory and beefy flavor. (Fun Fact: Est. 8 means Establishment 8. The USDA requires all processing facilities to have an Establishment Number and Iowa Premium Beef's number is 8.) The most popular steaks are Ribeye, New York Strip and Filet Mignon. If you like a deep beef flavor try the Flat Iron Steak. This is sometimes called a top blade or patio steak. It is well marbled and is well suited for grilling on the Generals' charbroiler.



- Blackberry BBQ Ribs – Saint Louis style ribs with a homemade BBQ sauce made with mashed blackberries.
- Pretzel Crusted Walleye – this is the number one seller. A walleye filet is coated in pretzel crumbs then topped with a whole grain mustard sauce which is an Alfredo with just a little mustard added in. The flavor of the walleye comes through with only a hint of pretzel and mustard.

- Chicken Parmesan – the chicken breast is pounded flat, then breaded and topped with marinara. It is cooked on the flat top then covered with mozzarella and parmesan and finished in the oven.



- Parmesan Reggiano Ravioli – stuffed with Parmesan and Romano cheeses and tossed in a delicious creamy sauce. The sauce is unusual because Chef Lupe mixes Marinara with Alfredo.

- Pan Seared Jumbo Diver Scallops – these very large U-12, meaning less than 12 to a pound, sea scallops are an excellent dinner choice. They are pan seared in butter and covered with a tasty



- Citrus Beurre Blanc (burr blank) sauce. The sauce is made with white wine, butter and a little heavy cream. (Fun Fact: scallops are supplied as wet, dry or diver. Diver Scallops are hand harvested from the ocean floor by professional fishermen who are licensed scuba divers. So of course they are the most expensive!)



Diners will be well advised to never pass up desserts at The Generals' Restaurant. They are supplied by Pikant Dessert Company in Scales Mound, IL. Some of the recent scrumptious choices are New York Vanilla,

Chocolate, Dutch Apple, Key Lime and Pumpkin Cheesecakes, Chocolate and Carrot Cake and a flourless Cappuccino Tort. The desserts are showcased in a beautiful silver-plated mahogany French Christophe 1930s serving trolley.

Sunday Breakfast Buffet is served in the Courtyard Atrium. Omelets are made to order and there is a carving station with ham and roast round of beef. True breakfast people will enjoy scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, French toast, biscuits and gravy, fresh fruit and other choices too numerous to mention here.

The nine Civil War Generals are: Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant; Major Generals Augustus L. Chetlain, John R. Rawlins and John Eugene Smith and Brigadier Generals Jasper A. Maltby, William R. Rowley, Ely S. Parker, John O. Duer and John Corson Smith.

THE GENERALS' RESTAURANT DESOTO HOUSE HOTEL

230 SOUTH MAIN STREET, GALENA, IL 61036
815-777-0090 • DESOTOHOUSE.COM

Hours: Sun–Thu: 5–9 PM; Fri–Sat: 5–10 PM

Dining Style: Casual

Noise Level: Comfortable

Recommendations: Crispy Fried Duck Legs, Infantry on Horseback, Beef Tenderloin Pesto Crostini, Maryland Jumbo Crab Cakes, Bleu Cheese or Crab Bisque Soup, Chicken Parmesan, Ribeye or Flat Iron Steak, Filet Mignon, Bone-In Pork Chop, Pretzel Crusted Walleye, Grilled Halibut Bruschetta, Pan Seared Caramelized Jumbo Diver Scallops, Prosciutto Stuffed Chicken Breasts, Blackberry BBQ Ribs, All Pikant Desserts

Liquor Service: Premium Bar

Prices: Appetizers: \$12–\$16; Entrées: \$10–\$33

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, Personal Checks

Accessibility: Front Door to Elevator, Rear Door, All Restrooms

Kids Policy: Menu, High Chair, Booster

Reservations: Highly Recommended

Catering: In-house Only • **Take Out:** Yes

Delivery: No • **Parking:** On Street