A collaborative effort by Christine Hiner and Karen McDonald, "The Spread Eagle Tavern" offers a unique look at a historical landmark that currently operates as a four-star restaurant. Hiner and McDonald cover everything from how to get there, to the quality of the food, to a late night walk around the town of Hanoverton. In doing so, they allow the reader to journey with them into another time and place and to delay "The inevitable return to the twentieth century."

The Spread Eagle Tavern

Our journey began with the setting sun at our backs as we left Canton on Route 30. The fading sunlight illuminated the few houses and dormant farmland as we drove through several sleepy little burgs on our way to Hanoverton. Forty minutes later, as the last rays of sunlight lit up the sky, we arrived at Plymouth Street and turned left into another century. Just past the gateway of churches, the Spread Eagle Tavern & Inn was visible. Although the tavern is an imposing three-story brick building from a bygone era, the back entryway is an inviting single story of rough-hewn wood, which is heated on cold winter evenings. The tavern was originally constructed in 1837 by William Rhodes to accommodate the traffic of the Sandy & Beaver Canal and has only recently been renovated into its current standing as a four-star restaurant.

As dusk settled in around us, we stepped through the foyer into the tavern itself. After giving our names to the cordial hostess, we turned with interest to the display of commendations which the restaurant has received in the seven years it has been open. From some of the articles exhibited on the wall, we learned some of the history of the tavern. The Spread Eagle thrived from 1837 until the railroad went through Ohio in the 1850’s, taking almost all of the business from the canal and, subsequently, the Spread Eagle. The tavern was kept open by the second owner, Oliver Nicholas, into the late 1800’s, but eventually it was forced to close. After nearly a century of being used as a private residence, the Spread Eagle Tavern was bought for $55,000 by Peter Johnson and his son David. The Johnsons oversaw the meticulous twenty-two month restoration, which included extensive historic research and acquisition of many antiques as well as major reconstruction. For this great effort, the Johnsons are now rewarded with a beautiful and successful four-star restaurant which has been praised extensively in the area’s newspapers and magazines.

Turning away from these accolades, our attention was drawn to the large wrought-iron gate which guards the stairwell leading down to Gaver’s Rathskeller. On the nights when there is a wait to be seated, the rathskeller offers a unique atmosphere for its patrons to relax in before, or even after, dinner. Some of its engaging features include a full-service bar, hors d’oeuvres, and
12-foot vaulted brick ceilings. The bricks used to build the rathskeller came from Gideon Gaver's old wine cellar and were reconstructed in their original design. Enclosed in the hand-chiseled stone walls of the rathskeller are several intimate tables at which patrons can sit and enjoy live piano music on Saturday nights. Also included in Gaver's is the only existing portion of the slave tunnels that once ran under the tavern and connected it to several other buildings on Plymouth Street. Five tables are set in the tunnel for those who are interested, but our reservations were for another room.

As we followed the hostess through the barn room and the Patriot's Tavern Room, we were immersed in their rustic, Colonial decor and candlelit ambiance. These rooms are decorated to make the diners feel as if they are frequenting a tavern in the mid-nineteenth century. The open-hearth fireplaces which host functional ovens, the dark, rough-hewn wooden paneling, and the sconces bearing lit tapers all contribute to the feeling that these rooms are somehow not part of this century. A few antiques on display in the rooms also add to the historical feeling. In the Patriot's Tavern Room a 1779 Cowpens, South Carolina Revolutionary War battle flag is flanked by portraits of Jefferson and Washington. The barn room offers three six-person booths that were once the horse stalls in the original barn. Only the attentive servers and immaculate table service reminded us that we had not stepped through a temporal gateway, but were merely beneficiaries of a carefully crafted atmosphere. From the Patriot's Tavern Room, we continued our journey across the uneven plank floor into a narrow hallway. Along one side of the hallway runs a staircase that leads either down to Gaver's Rathskeller or up to the William McKinley Room on the second floor. The end of the hallway, dominated by the original entrance which is no longer used, offers only two choices—either turn left or right. We followed the hostess to the left and entered the Barbara Bush Room.

Bathed in a rosy glow from the combined effects of the pink walls and candlelight, the Barbara Bush Room is much more elegant than the barn room and the Patriot's Tavern Room. Occupied by only three tables, this room is also much more intimate than the other two rooms. The hostess showed us to a table for two by the windows looking out onto Plymouth Street. Across the street is a house of the same period as the tavern, so the atmosphere is continued in the view from the windows. The fireplace in the Barbara Bush Room, one of five functional fireplaces in the tavern, and the strong, cream-colored woodwork give the impression that while the barn room and Patriot's Tavern would have served the common traveler, this more elegant and intimate room was reserved for those of higher standing.

In addition to the formal William McKinley and Barbara Bush rooms and the rustic Patriot's Tavern and "barn" rooms, the Spread Eagle has three other dining rooms to choose from. Upstairs, the Hanna room, named for Marcus
Hanna, the founder of Lisbon, Ohio, offers a subdued dining atmosphere as well as a commanding view of the surrounding buildings and Plymouth Street. Below the Hanna room, the Hanover Room is a combination of elegant and rustic with its pale blue plaster walls and rough-hewn wooden crossbeams. This room is also quite intimate, containing only a handful of tables for couples and foursomes. For larger parties, the Taft Room is available. This room, while smaller than the others, offers a larger table at which a party of several people can be seated comfortably. Displayed on the pink and white pinstripe wallpaper in this room is an autographed portrait of President Taft that his grandson donated to the restaurant. The Hanover, Taft, and Barbara Bush rooms all form a circle with the kitchen because these rooms are part of the original saltbox house that was constructed in 1820. When the Spread Eagle was built, it connected the barn and the saltbox, resulting in an eclectic combination of rooms, hallways, and stairwells.

No matter what room they dine in, patrons are welcome to relax in the Ascher Benjamin Room after dinner. Ascher Benjamin was the famous architect whose structures inspired the design of the Spread Eagle Tavern. Located across the hall from the Barbara Bush Room, this inviting sitting room is reminiscent of a nineteenth-century parlor. The genteel furnishings in this room include a colorful sofa and two wingback chairs, illuminated by the soft glow from the fireplace, chandelier, and small reading lamp. The most eye-catching feature of this room, however, is the tiling encompassing the hearth. Though not original, these tiles are quality reproductions of the pictorial tiling popular in the early centuries of this country.

As we took in our surroundings before dinner, we noted that much of the elegance of the Spread Eagle is subtle and graceful. The table service in the Barbara Bush Room, for instance, is simple, but the white linens and ivory china speak of a very refined simplicity. After a member of the wait staff filled our water glasses for us, we settled into the task of deciding which of the enticing foods on the menu to indulge in.

Browsing through the leather-bound wine list, we saw that it has an extensive selection with something for every wine drinker's palette. After ordering two glasses of wine, we turned our attention to the equally impressive leather-bound dinner menu. The first decision that had to be made was about the appetizers. Since the Spread Eagle offers everything from portabella mushrooms to escargot, it was a difficult decision, but we finally selected the sautéed shrimp in garlic with chardonnay and cream and the whole lump crab cocktail with remoulade sauce. Once that was decided, we began the task of choosing our entrees. After some deliberating over the duck breast au poivre over wilted spinach, the prime rib, and several other gourmet offerings, we selected the seasoned grilled haddock, which was one of the evening specials, and the sautéed rock shrimp in garlic cream over fettuccine. By the time we
made these decisions, Ryan, our exceptional waiter, brought us our appetizers and fresh baked bread, which is prepared in the hearth ovens of the Patriot’s Tavern. Slowly, we savored every bite because the Spread Eagle has an environment in which it is a pleasure to linger. After the appetizers were completely enjoyed and carried away in the continental serving style, our dinner salads were brought out. When the food was delivered to our table, we realized even though the entrees are in gourmet portions, neither of us would leave the establishment hungry. The haddock was served slightly breaded, but with an exceptional flavor, and came with a medley of freshly prepared vegetables. The same vegetables accented the rich garlic sauce and shrimp over al dente fettuccine. In addition to everything else, the Spread Eagle Tavern has a fabulous dessert menu. Besides the Kentucky Derby pecan pie and almond cheesecake that we sampled, there were also chocolate decadence, candy apple pie, and creme brulee.

When our meal was over and the check came, we were not surprised at the bill. After all, prices are not something to worry about when choosing an establishment like the Spread Eagle Tavern. To make the most of the evening it is best to plan to ignore them and order whatever exquisite item catches the eye. However, since it is nice to know in advance an estimation of what an evening will cost, the prices range from $15 to $25 for most of the entrees, though the lobster at market value was $36 the evening we were there. In order to truly experience the Spread Eagle Tavern at its best, we recommend dining on a Saturday evening. Though the tavern is quite busy and reservations are strongly suggested, when the rooms are full of patrons enjoying themselves, the Spread Eagle is at its most engaging. For those who would like a quieter dinner, Friday evenings are bit slower, but Gaver’s Rathskeller is not open, so the tavern cannot be fully appreciated. The tavern also offers a lunch menu ranging in price from $4 to $12. This menu includes some entrees as well as soups, salads, and sandwiches. No matter what the night, the tavern offers just as much, if not more, with its atmosphere than with its food.

Another attractive feature of the Spread Eagle is its six stately guest rooms. Prices of these rooms range from $75 to $150 for a night, depending on the style of the bed and whether a private bath is included. Though the rooms have an historical appearance, they do include modern amenities such as private phones, televisions, and air conditioning to maintain the ultimate in comfort for the guests. On top of its queen-sized bed and private bath, the Thomas Jefferson suite offers its guests a ghost story. The legend surrounding this room involves Olvinia, the sister of the first owner, and her tragic fate. Olvinia had left home to gain fame and fortune on the stages of New York. Unfortunately, Olvinia was not a success, so she came home to Hanoverton and lost her mind. Her brother and his wife took care of Olvinia, basically confining her to her third story, corner bedroom. One morning, when Olvinia did not answer her door, they unlocked it to find that she had hanged herself.
To this day, staff and guests claim that Olivinia has still not left her beloved home. Of course, for those who would not like to stay in Olivinia’s former chambers, there are still the Lincoln suite, the Dolly Madison Room, the Martin van Buren Room, and the George Washington and Martha Washington Rooms to choose from.

After we had finished our dinner, we decided to take a stroll along historic Plymouth Street. Besides the Spread Eagle Tavern, twenty-one buildings in Hanoverton are on the Federal Registry for Historic Places, many of which are on Plymouth Street, so there is plenty to see. While the tavern has only one existing slave tunnel, the main attraction along that line is the Robertson house across the street. This big, brick residence on the corner, constructed in 1817, was once a safe house along the Underground Railroad. Also of particular note are the churches near the corner of Plymouth and Route 30. Both the Hanoverton Presbyterian Church (ca. 1900) and the Christian Church (ca. 1859) are well-maintained structures which seem to have come straight out of the heyday of Hanoverton, but they still have regular services for the residents of the town. In addition to these structures, there are also many private residences on the street which, though they have the look of the early 1800’s, have the soft light of televisions and electric lamps streaming out of their windows at night. Since the parking lot for the Spread Eagle is in the rear, we would have missed the experience of walking along Plymouth Street if we had not made the effort. After a superlative meal at the historic Spread Eagle Tavern, a self-guided tour of the whole building and Plymouth Street is an enjoyable way to delay the drive home and the inevitable return to the twentieth century.

**Additional Information**

**Open for Dinner:**
- Monday through Thursday 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.
- Friday and Saturday 5:00 - 10:00 p.m.
- Sunday 12:00 - 6:00 p.m.

**Open for Lunch:**
- Monday through Saturday 11:30 am - 2:00 p.m.

**Directions:** I-77 to Rt. 30 East. Follow Rt. 30 for about forty minutes. Just past Kensington there is a sign for the Spread Eagle. One mile past this sign, turn left onto Plymouth Street. At the first stop sign, turn right onto Howard Street. The parking lot will be on the left.

For More Information, call or write:
Spread Eagle Tavern
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(330) 223-1583