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# Americana

Wikipedia defines Americana as artifacts “related to the history, geography, folklore and cultural heritage of the United States of America. Americana is any collection of materials and things concerning or characteristic of the United States or of the American people, and is representative or even stereotypical of American culture as a whole.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Three very common examples of this are apple pie, baseball, and the American flag. For me the word conjures up images of places and things which were common in my youth but have either disappeared or have been radically changed today.

One in particular was Woolworth’s, the originator of the five-and-ten, or nickel-and-dime, store which offered a wide variety of inexpensive items for personal and household use. The 100-yen shops found in Japan today are very similar in that respect. Woolworth’s began in 1879 and its five-and-ten stores sprung up around the country during the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century. The stores initially sold items that only cost five cents, a nickel, or ten cents, a dime. In the early 20th century some of the stores also had lunch counters or soda fountains. Soda fountains served carbonated drinks, such as Coca-Cola, as well as ice cream and other light dishes. Soda fountains were also located in drug stores at one time. There was even a Woolworth’s in my small hometown when I was a child.

Lunch counters and soda fountains were inexpensive places to go have a soda drink, ice cream, or coffee as well as diner-style food. A diner[[2]](#footnote-2) is a small restaurant that served American-style food, such as hamburgers, french fries, and other types of sandwiches, and milk shakes. I especially liked going to a diner to get a hamburger, fries, and milk shake! Diners first sprang up in the Northeastern United States and quickly spread to the Midwest. Initially they were lunch wagons pulled by a horse and then later old train cars were converted into diners, making them long and narrow and looking like a train car from the outside.

Johnny Rockets is a diner chain in America that still preserves that traditional style and the interior of the shops is nostalgically from the 1940s and 1950s. There used to be a Johnny Rockets in Roppongi near the crossing in the 1980s, but it has long since disappeared. It was the only place where I could get a real chocolate malted milk shake!

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americana> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diner> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)