Winkler, George

George Winkler Dies; Owned Steak House

George Winkler, who could and often would spin tales of large amounts of money won and lost at gambling as he served dinners and poured drinks at his Middle Street Steak House in downtown Providence, died today at Rhode Island Hospital after an illness of four weeks. He was 68 years old.

Mr. Winkler had operated his small, intimate restaurant off Dorrance Street for more than 20 years. Frequently he would join his clientele of East Side residents, businessmen and salesmen and, after ordering them a drink, describe his horse racing successes and failures in hushed tones.

The restaurant operator harked to an era when wagers were made in betting parlors, rather than over the telephone. He claimed acquaintance with some of the more colorful figures active during Prohibition in Rhode Island and would, on occasion, describe with relish the days when the former Narragansett Hotel was a gathering spot for politicians and Rhode Island's "sporting crowd."



George Winkler

Mr. Winkler appeared to operate his restaurant in a relaxed, casual manner. But he shuttled frequently between the dining room and the kitchen, keeping a close eye on the food and the quality of service by his all male crew of waiters, some of whom have worked at the steak house for many years. He knew most of his customers, even those he served only occasionally, by name and occupation.

Earlier in life, Mr. Winkler's name made headlines as he became involved with the police because of his gambling activities. He also had run-ins with the Internal Revenue Service.

WINKLER GEORGE

In 1950, Mr. Winkler, then listed as a novelty salesman, voluntarily removed two of the three telephones in the Edgewood home at 130 Grand Ave. where he has lived in for years. The Cranston police, citing previous arrests of Mr. Winkler dating back into the 1930s, said they had received information that the house was a "layoff center" where other bookies placed bets too large for them to handle.

In 1955, Mr. Winkler received a one-year prison term and a $5,000 fine on a charge of willfully failing to file an income tax for 1951. The conviction later was overturned by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The IRS filed a tax lien of nearly $30,000 against Mr. Winkler in 1953, claiming he owed the amount for the years 1947 to 1951. The lien was dropped in 1956 with the explanation that the IRS code had been satisfied.

Mr. Winkler, the husband of Hilmer (Ross) Winkler, was born in Providence, a son of the late Morris and Ethel (Goldstein) Winkler. He was a member of the Rhode Island Restaurant Association.

Besides his wife, he is survived by three brothers, Eli Winkler of Pawtucket, Harry Winkler and Dr. Malcolm Winkler, both of Providence, and a sister, Mrs. Charles Vine of Brookline, Mass.

The funeral will be tomorrow at 2 p.m. at the Sugarman Memorial Chapel, 458 Hope St. Burial will be in Lincoln Park Cemetery, Warwick.