

Milford Times, April 21, 1876

From a Widow's Tavern to the Ye Olde Hotel

No business in Milford's almost 150 years had a more varied ownership and interesting history than the hotel which used to be located on Main Street on the present site of the Breen's IGA parking. Lot. From 1935 until the building was demolished in the mid-1960's the hotel was known as the Ye Olde Hotel.

However, the three-story building torn down about ten years began on a much more modest scale. In 1836, the Widow Edmunds Tavern, a 20-foot by 30-foot building, was located on the site and continued in operation for some years.

According to information in the March 27, 1907 issue of The Milford Times, the remains of an old log house were unearthed on the site, along with a smoothly laid cellar floor composed of two-inch log planks. The planks were found about nine feet below the (then) present sidewalk grade and the story says this substantiates the site as that of the widow's tavern. The discovery of the house remains and the plank floor came during an excavation in front of the hotel.

Booth House

Little is apparently known about the Widow Edmunds Tavern, but by the 1860's the establishment was owned by a man named Booth who called the hotel, strangely enough, the Booth House. By 1877, the name had changed again, this time Central Hotel. The Thornhill Brothers, a prominent business pair in Milford, owned the structure at that time.

In 1892, the hotel was acquired by the Gleeson family who also owned and operated the Oakland Hotel [in South Milford].

A fire on July 4, 1918 destroyed a portion of the third story, the original kitchen and ballroom and the original hotel barn. However, such a calamity did not stop various individuals from continuing the hotel operations.

Although there may have been other owners after the Gleesons, it is known for certain that a James Barnes of Pontiac owned the facility for some time, as did Isabel Schumacher and her mother, Mrs. Meeker. Barnes added steam heat and running water, but the women kept the hotel closed most of the time during the Depression. Apparently, they opened it only in the summer, especially during the popular Oakland County Fair, an event then being held in Milford.

Ye Olde Hotel

In 1935, the structure was christened the Ye Olde Hotel by its new owners, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Fawcett of Pontiac. According to their daughter, Mrs. Robert (Mary Lou) Gharrity, they came to Milford in anticipation of the new Ford carburetor plant.

Mrs. Gharrity says that various facilities were located on the main floor at that time, including private banquet rooms, the main dining room, the lobby, the tap room and what was for a time the ladies bar. Later attorney Bartlett Smith had his office in the former ladies bar and it is now the site of the Village Florist – the only part of the hotel still standing.

The Fawcetts used the second and third floors for bedrooms, but there were no sanitary facilities on the third floor so it was used only in times of overcrowding.

Outside the back door to the tap room was the entrance to the old stone beer cellar. Mrs. Gharrity says that kegs were rolled on planks, using grappling hooks, and stored at an even temperature in the cellar.

Reminiscences

She offers a number of personal observations about the hotel, several of which reflect much credit both on the hotel and Milford.

--she remembers seeing the names of at least two prominent Americans on the hotel register: Lillian Russell and P.T. Barnum;

--many of the men who were responsible for the development of the Ford plant were frequent luncheon guests during the 1930's, often staying after the dining room closed at 2 p.m. to hash out construction problems; one of them was actress Irene Dunne's brother, but on another occasion the men became so involved in their discussions they drew a diagram on a tablecloth which they subsequently had to purchase from Mrs. Fawcett;

--the dining room was closed by the Fawcetts during World War II when help was scarce, but she says it was fashionable to take a Sunday drive to Milford to enjoy the menu of chicken and steak;

--one particularly hectic Sunday Mrs. Fawcett became ill after too much cooking and she closed the dining room the next day.

For some time, the dining room was leased to Hiram and Mary VanLeuven and later to Bill and Ada Keary.

Other Owners

In March, 1948, the hotel was sold to Arnold and Molly Baddis, and they were succeeded by Jim Colegrove and Felix Bucellato and later by Edward Dean.

There is one other reminder of the presence of the hotel which served Milford for so many years—the rear exit from Breen's parking lot. The hotel was rare in that it had access from two streets, Main and Union. When the Fawcetts sold part of the hotel site to the General Telephone Company, they retained the driveway exit to the rear and that driveway is now the rear exit from the parking lot.

There were other hotels in Milford, including the Oakland Hotel at the northwest corner of South Main and Huron Streets on Milford's south side, but none has had as varied and interesting a history as the widow's tavern which had at least the proverbial nine lives.