

**North Lansing Was Site of City's First Inn, Hotel History Relates
Many Caravansaries Have Enjoyed Passing Vogue Here, Account Shows.**



The first hotel ever built in Lansing was erected in 1847 on the southwest corner of Center st, and Franklin ave., according to an interesting account of the early hostelries of the city of hotel history compiled by J.P. Edmonds of the Bates & Edmonds Co.

“Prior to the location of the capitol at Lansing,” says Mr. Edmonds’ hotel history, “there were no hotels in the town, but after the legislature of 1847 decided the question, land-lookers and other travelers commenced to arrive in large numbers so it was necessary to provide so means for taking care of them aside from lodgings in the few private residences then in the new town. Besides this, the legislature of 1848 was to hold the first secession in the capitol building just erected, so a hotel had to be provided to accommodate the members and employees.

“The first hotel built in Lansing was the Seymour house, erected in the summer and fall of 1847 by James Seymour of Flushing, Livingston county. This spacious caravansary was located on the southwest corner of Center st., and Franklin ave. It was of frame construction and for some years was the only hotel in town, and was well patronized by members of the legislature and other state officials. The distance from this house to the capitol was about one and a half miles and as the route was not good a narrow plank walk was constructed. This walk extended from Franklin ave., up Washington ave., to the capitol, crossing mud holes and dodging stumps. No doubt it was greatly appreciated by the dignified senators and other officials, especially those from Wayne county and Detroit.

Hauled Timber from Flushing

“It will be remembered that Seymour was the one who made the offer of land and buildings to the legislature in case Lansing should be named capital, an offer which was not accepted. He has a saw mill at Flushing and most of the lumber for the new hotel was hauled from there. The building was about 125 feet long and 40 feet wide and two stories in height. Seymour was a relative of Gov. Horatio Seymour of New York in whose honor the house was named. He owned a large tract of land in Lansing township and furnished most of the money required for the building. In the early days and until the railroads entered Lansing, it was the most prominent house of the town and being situated on the main traveled stage road from Detroit to Grand Rapids was well patronized. The growth of “Middle Town” and the advent of railroads gradually turned the tide of business and the once famous Seymour house became but a memory.

“It was first opened Jan. 1, 1848, with Jesse T. Turner as landlord. Turner was succeeded by several proprietors until 1853 when Seymour sold the property to N.J. Allport. After this it passed through the hands of various owners till 1870 when it was purchased and run by J.H. Hinchey¹. Mr. Hinchey will be remembered by many persons now living as a famous character of north Lansing. He represented the first ward in the city council for many years and being a “dyed in the wool” democrat, successfully resisted all efforts of the first ward republicans to defeat him. He owned the property until his death, about 1888, after which it had several owners being finally purchased and remodeled into an apartment house by E.S. Porter.

Add Two Hostelries

“In 1847 and 1848, two more hotels were built in the south part of the town, on Main st. One of these was the Michigan house on the northwest corner of Main and River sts., the other was the National hotel on the east side of the Grand river near the corner of Main and Cedar sts. Both of these were small and did not long survive the changing business conditions caused by the growth of the...²

“The second hotel and probably the most famous hotel of early Lansing was built in 1853 on the northwest corner of Main st, and Washington ave., where the residence of R.E. Olds now stands. It was erected by Brush, Thomas and Lee and was the first brick building in Lansing. It was named the Benton House in honor of Thomas H. Benton, then U.S. Senator from Missouri, and a celebrated democratic politician. C.P. Brush a member of the firm was the first landlord, but after a few months was succeeded by William Hinman who ran the hotel for about six years. Mr. Hinman had been a clerk in Bush & Thomas’ store and married a daughter of Bush, so he naturally came into the business.³

¹ 1880 census list James W Hinchey as owner.

² The paragraph just ends at this point.

³ Cannot determine is Bush is just misspelled Brush, it is reproduced the way it appeared in the original article.

“In 1859 Dr. James W. Holmes became landlord until 1861, when the house was leased by Martin Hudson, who kept it till April 1863. Shortly after this date, it was abandoned as a hotel for a time, and purchased by Rev. C.C. Olds about 1865, who used it for a select school or academy for several years. Mr. Olds was the father of the late Schuyler S. Olds and his school enjoyed a fine reputation among the people of Lansing and vicinity. He disposed of the property in 1870 to Cyrus B. Packard, who changed the name to the Everett House. The Packard’s ran the house for some years, but finally it was deserted as a hotel and given over to roomers. It gradually fell into disrepute and was purchased in 1904 by Judge Edward Cahill, who tore down the building and sold the land to R.E. Olds.

Famous for Hospitality

“From its first opening, the Benton House was famous for the old time hospitality extended to all. Being the only good hotel in the southern part of town, it was well patronized by the citizens as well as the traveling public and soon became the center of social activities. Balls and other functions were held in the spacious ballroom as many cards of invitation still in existence bear witness. It was the custom for the landlord to give a grand ball and dinner Thanksgiving night, to which the ‘elite’ were all invited. This was an annual event and the eagerly anticipated party of the season.

“The hotel soon became headquarters for politicians, members of the legislature and others who came to town to attend the legislative secessions, and even the governors of the state seem to have liberally extended their patronage. One old invitation reads: ‘Gov. Bingham invites you to attend a reception at the Benton House, Jan. 5, 1885.’ This was no doubt his inaugural party, as he took office Jan. 1 of that year. Zachariah Chandler made the house his base of operations during his first campaign for U.S. senator. He was elected in January 1857. Many are the stories told by the old timers about this campaign and the brand of hospitality extended to all comers by the Honorable Zachariah.

Log Used in Building

“The original Lansing House was the first hotel built in the central part of the city and was located on the southeast corner of Washington ave and Washtenaw st. The first building was constructed of logs about 1849, but afterwards was remodeled and a three story frame addition constructed. The first landlord was Henry Jipson, who owned the property. He was followed by Henry Baker and M.P. Marvin. Martin Hudson was also in charge for a few years. The building was totally destroyed by fire in 1861.

Another well known hotel of the early days was the Columbus house located on Washington ave., where the Strand theater now stands. It was built by Christopher C. Darling, who was the first landlord being followed by C.T. Allen and James Shearer. The property was purchased by Martin Hudson in 1866 and for

about 10 years was not used as a hotel. After Mr. Hudson retired from the new Lansing House in 1877, he rebuilt and largely improved the building, adding a fine dining room in the rear and changing the name to the Hudson House. Under his management the house enjoyed a state wide reputation and for many years was the most popular house in the city. It was political headquarters during the legislative sessions and many a senatorial contest was fought out and settled within its walls. After Mr. Hudson's death the business was continued by some of his heirs. The north half of the property is still owned by his daughter Mrs. Arthur Casterlin who leases it to the Strand Theater.

The "new Lansing House," now the Hotel Downey, was built in 1866 by Gen. L.C. Baker. An interesting historical incident is connected with this building, which is generally not known or has been forgotten. Gen. Baker was during the war, head of the United States secret service, and in this capacity organized the several parties which were sent out from Washington in pursuit of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln. The party that actually found Booth was in command of his brother, Lieut. L.H. Baker, father of Arthur Barker, now of Lansing, Secretary of War Stanton acting under authority of congress offered a reward of \$100,000 for the capture of Booth, dead or alive. After the capture of Booth, so many claimants appeared and so much controversy developed over the distribution of the money that congress appointed a special committee to adjudicate the claims and make awards. Under this decision Gen. Baker, as ranking officer received the largest share, nearly \$20,000. Shortly afterwards he resigned the service, coming to Lansing and commenced building the hotel.

Donate Lots

"The lots on which the building was erected were purchased by a number of citizens and donated to Mr. Baker in consideration of his building a first class hotel on them. Soon after the building was completed in May 1867, Mr. Baker sold the property to a stock company composed Lansing men. This company held it for about four years when it was sold on a mortgage and a bid by the mortgagee, Hiram Sibley of Rochester N.Y., who disposed of it to N. G. Isbell. After his death, it passed through several hands finally being purchased and operated by Jacob Aberle of Owosso. He kept it for some time and about 1890 sold to H.J. Downey of Durand, whose family still retains it.

"The first proprietor and lessee was Martin Hudson, who took possession upon its completion and ran it for ten years, then retiring to open the Hudson house. Mr. Hudson was a born hotel man and was connected at various times with nearly every hotel of any prominence in town.

"The Butler house was still standing at the corner of Washington ave. and kalamazoos st., was built in 1872 by Charles W. Butler, a prominent real estate dealer of Lansing. It was first named the Barnes house in honor of O.M. Barnes, but was afterwards changed. When the old state office which stood on the ground

now occupied by the capitol building was demolished, Mr. Butler purchased the brick and other materials and used them in the building. In 1877 John J. Bush bought the property and owned it for a number of years. Since that time it has had several owners, but is still a hotel.

The Mineral Well house was another well known hotel of Lansing. It was located on the east side of River st., south of Grand river where the Jarvis Engineering company's plant now stands. It was not a commercial hotel but more of a sanitarium built to accommodate the people who came to take the water which was highly recommended for various diseases. In those days the state paid a bounty of about 70 cents a barrel to encourage the production of salt. So in 1869 the firm of Woodhouse and Butler commenced to drill a well with the idea of striking brine and engaging in the manufacture of salt. After going down about 1400 feet, they failed to find brine but did strike a vein of fine mineral water, which by analysis compared favorably with the medical springs at Saratoga and other health resorts.

"In 1870 the hotel was built. It was a large frame structure, three stories and a basement in height. The bath house was located on the west side of the street, directly opposite the hotel and was provided with all modern means for giving mineral baths in the most approved manner. In the south end was a large plunge bath about 40 feet square, the rest of the building being devoted to private rooms. The grounds around the building and extending down to the river were greatly beautified and made very attractive.

Health Hotel



"The hotel opened in the spring of 1870 and soon became a great resort for rheumatic and nervous patients, much as the hotels of Mt. Clemens are at the present time. It had patronage enough so the L.S. & M.S. R.R. which had just entered Lansing from the south, made it a regular stop on its passenger schedule. One of the favorite and most pleasant ways of reaching the hotel in summer was via the steamers "Sea Bird" or "Pickwick", both of which made regular trips on the river between the dam at North Lansing and the

mineral well. The big flood of April 1875 carried away the River st. bridge, so for a time the hotel was somewhat isolated and inconvenient to reach. To remedy this the management maintained a ferry across the river which operated until the bridge was replaced. The builders kept the hotel for a few years and then sold out to C.Y. Edwards & Co. This firm owned it until 1879. In February of that year it was completely destroyed by fire and was not replaced. The bathhouse was not burned and up to a few years ago was still standing in a dilapidate condition — a relic of its former prosperity. For many years the well continued to flow but the casing gradually rusted away and Clem Jarvis, who now owns the property, says it will probably not be replaced.”

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