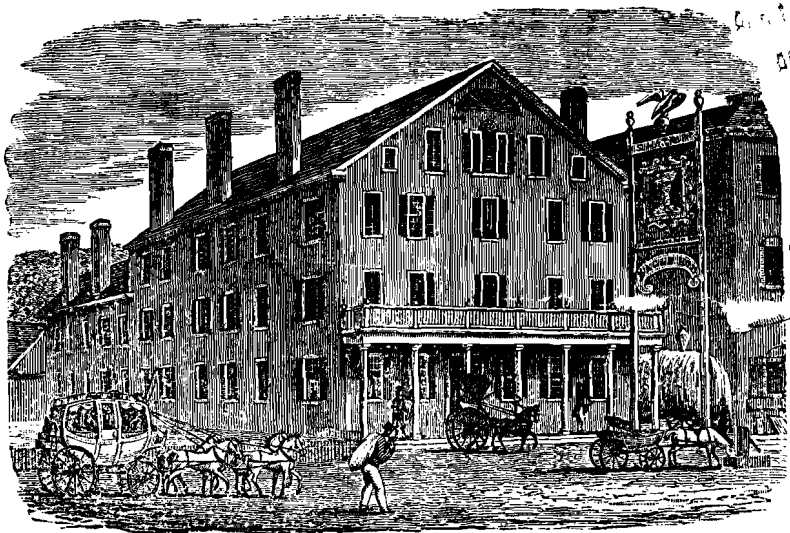


Story of 125 Years

1806 - 1931



The Eagle Hotel in 1831

Compliments of the

EAGLE HOTEL *and* **RESTAURANT**

DANIEL E. O'NEIL, Proprietor

110.112 Main Street

KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

: The Eagle Hotel was destroyed by fire Nov. 11, 1968

(Reprinted from Keene Evening Sentinel)

EAGLE HOTEL OPENED ON MAY 1, 1806, AND KEENE HOSTELRY HAS SERVED THE PUBLIC CONTINUOUSLY FOR 125 YEARS

By CLIFFORD C. WILBER

The Eagle hotel is 125 years old today. On 'May 1, 1806, Horace Wells threw open the doors of this establishment which for a century and a quarter has sheltered the weary, hungry and thirsty traveler.

At its opening Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States, and we more clearly realize the respectable antiquity of this public house by mentally reviewing the progress in science and invention during the past 125 years, from the memorable voyage of Fulton's "Clermont" to wireless telephony, and the kaleidoscope of political events which has transformed a weak confederacy of 17 thinly populated states into a world power, numbering more than 120,000,000 inhabitants.

Population Then About 1600

In 1806 the population of Keene was about 1600, and of the village, considerably less than one-half of that number, the total number of buildings in the village proper being about 100.

The Eagle, Keene's first brick tavern house, was built in 1805 by Luther Smith. He was a clockmaker, and that the excellence of his product entitled him to a greater degree of fame than was accorded him in his lifetime, seems evident from the recent encomiums which experts have lavished upon surviving specimens of his handicraft. His shop was near the site of the present hotel, where in 1794 he made Keene's first town clock, which was installed in the old meeting-house at the head of the street, where for many years it measured the march of time upon its one dial, facing to the south,

Street Was Once "Federal Row"

The locality of the hotel was then known as "Federal Row," from the establishment in 1795, just below the tavern, of the first Federal postoffice, and the opposite side of

the street was known as "The Haymarket." Our Main street, of which Thoreau wrote in 1850, as being so "wide, level and straight that you could see a chicken run across it a mile off," was then a strip of greensward, 8 rods wide. Its sides and center lined with three wagon tracks, with the grass short-cropped by horses and cattle running at large, from which circumstance the street was sometimes called "Keene Long Pasture." In 1809 a by-law was adopted by the town to regulate the practice, but not until about 1820 was it abolished.

On June 7, 1808, Horace Wells resigned the proprietorship of the tavern to Benoni Shurtliff, who came from Marlboro, and who fully sustained the good reputation of the house through an ownership of some fifteen years. When Mr. Shurtliff took possession, Jefferson's extremely unpopular "Embargo act," forbidding all American shipping leaving port, was in force, with a resulting complete paralysis of business throughout New England. Soon after came the War of 1812, and the tavern became the recruiting rendezvous for this section of the country, and for the benefit of those who have vivid recollections of the late selective draft, the ages of recruits were from 18 to 45, the term of enlistment five years, with \$24 advance pay, \$40 bounty, \$8 per month, and three months' pay and 160 acres of land at honorable discharge.

Noted Jurists Were Guests

Mr. Shurtliff's wife died March 19, 1813, but his daughters were of great assistance in conducting the affairs of the hotel, being young ladies of intelligence and gentility, ambitious of display, and of setting

a rich and elegant table. "Here the elite of the New Hampshire bar were wont to assemble during the sittings of the court. In 1815 the company consisted of Chief Justice Jeremiah Smith, Judge Caleb Ellis, Daniel Webster, George Baxter Upham, Roger Vose, Judge Hubbard, J. C. Chamberlain, and his younger brother, Levi Chamberlain, and when this company were seated at the table, the result was a rich repast for both body and soul. For comic wit Vose was not surpassed in all New England; for refined, intellectual acumen, Judge Smith excelled. Daniel Webster, then in his 34th year, was gracious and dignified in manner, uttering but few words, but those always forcible and to the point."

Sporting Fraternity Patronized Hostelry

From Revolutionary times the street had been the race course for fast horses. In the fall turkey shoots were regularly held in the vicinity of the hotel. On Nov. 26, 1822, a grand ox and turkey shoot lasting two days was held. 65 shots at \$1 each were sold to be fired at a target 30 rods distant, the 5 nearest to have equal shares in an ox weighing 1200 pounds, and at the same match 100 turkeys were also contested for. Small traveling companies held theatricals in the hall of the hotel, and professors of the art of legerdemain, those gentlemen who break eggs into your hat which come out pancakes, also paid frequent visits, as well as the operators of the physiognotrace, which delineated your features in profile to be sent to the folks at home, nor must we forget that remote ancestor of the moving picture, the phantasmagoria, and with the good cheer which the bar afforded, who shall say that the sojourner at the tavern in by-gone days found life entirely desolate?

Nelson Man Becomes Proprietor

After the marriage of his daughters, Mr. Shurtliff sold the hotel to Col. Stephen Harrington, of Nelson, who took possession Jan. 27, 1823. Col. Harrington had been commander of the 12th regiment of militia, and was a well known man of pleasing personality. One who knew him well said; "He was a

whole-souled man, who knew how to keep a hotel, and besides, he could make a good mug of flip and always had the irons hot." Such a combination of qualities naturally brought about a steady increase in the popularity of the house, not only with itinerants, but also with the folks at home.

The house was enlarged by building a new front which extended nearly to the street line. At first known as "Harrington's Coffee House," patriotism ran so high at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of American independence in 1826 that it may have suggested to Col. Harrington the name of "Eagle hotel" which was adopted at about this time. An elegant swing sign, painted by Charles Ingalls, a Keene artist, was put up in front of the hotel. On one side was a view of a portion of Main street, and on the other, a bold and striking picture of Niagara falls. The whole was surmounted by a bronze eagle, made by another Keene boy. Amos Holbrook, then an apprentice with Abijah Wilder. From its perch the eagle looked down upon the march of events for about 57 years, but at a change in ownership of the property, was sold at auction, Jan. 3, 1883, for \$102.50. It is now preserved as a historical relic. In 1919 it was temporarily mounted on a wooden pedestal on Main street to greet the returning soldiers of the World war, as it had done at the close of many previous conflicts.

Headquarters for Stage Travelers

One hundred years ago the daily average number of arrivals in town by the different stage lines was about 60. The Eagle was the headquarters of the Boston, Fitchburg, Burlington, Montreal and Quebec stage, having its Boston office at Hastings' Suffolk hotel, Elm street, the advertisements of which inform us that "Stages leaving Boston at 4 A. M. arrive at Harrington's Eagle hotel in Keene at 7 P. M. the same day." In heavy going it was no uncommon experience for the passengers to be occupied 19 hours in making the journey. However, on Dec. 27, 1831, the mail stage from Boston to Keene via Ashby, established a record of 9 hours and 35 minutes, which we believe still stands. Upon arrival, the stages were greeted by an assembly of citizens to whom

this event furnished a real sensation, and was their only daily contact with the outside world, and each morning the hotel presented a scene of great activity as the guests were routed from their slumbers at 3 o'clock in order that they might take the stage leaving for Boston at four.

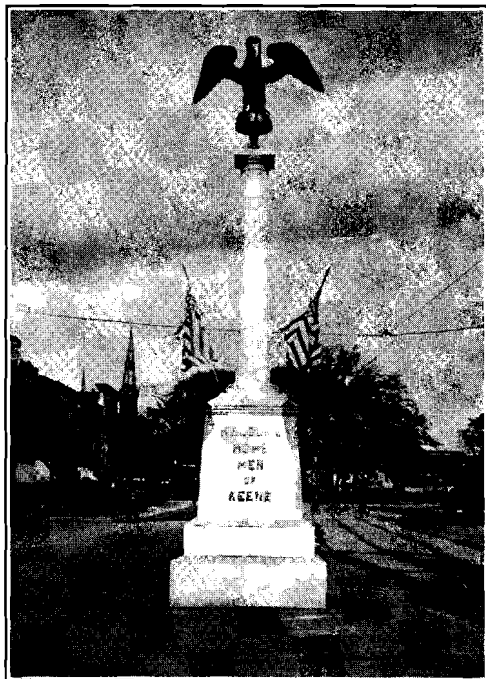
Big Menagerie Here In 1832

On Oct. 6, 1832, the New England menagerie exhibited on the grounds

leaving behind him a local topic of conversation which never grew threadbare. Mr. Sears, then perhaps the oldest showman in the country, died in Boston, May 5, 1875, aged 76, from an infection caused by the bite of a baboon in his menagerie.

Famous Siamese Twins at Hotel

May 21, 1838, the Siamese twins, Eng-Chang, held levee at the Eagle. Their fame had preceded them, at-



Last Public Appearance of the Hotel Sign, April 1919

at the rear of the hotel, and in the hotel hall was displayed a collection of wax works, "Louis Philippe, Robert Bruce, George Washington, Gen. Marion, the Siamese twins," and for good measure, and an exhibit which must have been highly edifying to the audience, "an Indian in the act of killing Mrs. Williams." Accompanying this aggregation was its proprietor, John Sears, who was born in Keene, and the first man in this country to enter a lion's cage, and at 4 P. M., before a large gathering of old acquaintances, he performed his act,

tracting to the hotel a great throng of curiosity seekers, and after repeated visits to the bar, then a respectable institution, no doubt many persisted in "seeing double" long after the exhibition had closed.

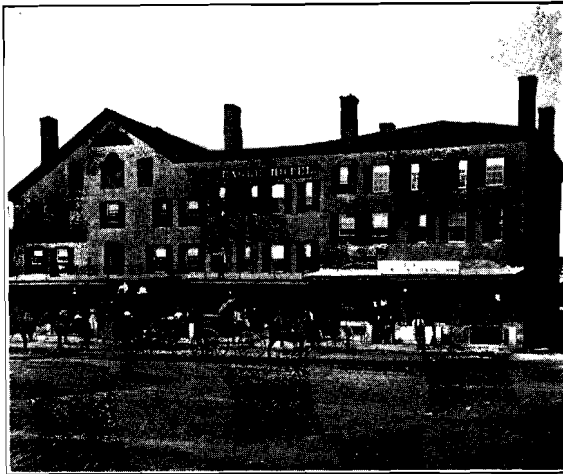
For about 25 years prior to the building of the Cheshire railroad, large sleighing parties from the neighboring towns were the vogue, and with the many assemblies of local people, Col. Harrington's hall was kept "pretty well warmed up" by these parties. On Jan. 21, 1836, 66 teams from Walpole brought to the Eagle a party numbering 178 to dine

and dance. The dancing would commence at 6 P. M. and last until daylight. Verily, our grandparents were not all sedate, and might have shown us things to make our so-called "wild life" seem tame by comparison.

Threatened by Flames in 1836

In its 125 years of history no serious damage has been occasioned to the hotel by fire, the greatest conflagration on the premises having been that of Aug. 24, 1836, when the barns in the rear, together with a small wooden house standing in the present Eagle court, and then occupied by Col. Harrington as his residence, were completely destroyed.

Keene. From early morning people began to gather in the street and by 1:30 there had congregated a milling crowd of more than 5,000 persons. When the long train of 15 cars, three of them open, drawn by two fire-belching monsters, gaily trimmed for the occasion with flags and evergreen, pulled across Main street, bringing the mayor of Boston and many other dignitaries in a trainload of 1200 people, one ancient man, footsore and weary, who for hours had awaited its arrival, stood with uncovered head, and raising his eyes to heaven, said, "Now, O Lord, I am ready to go!" In truth, this man had a fine appreciation of the epochal event



Eagle Hotel about 1870

As the Phenix hotel had burned in the previous April, there was great lack of accommodation for travelers, which caused Col. Harrington to again enlarge the Eagle by joining to it the three-story brick building on the south which had been occupied by him and his son-in-law, William King, as a leather store, an adjunct of their tanning and currying business carried on in the vicinity of the hotel. Col. Stephen Harrington died Oct. 25, 1847, and was succeeded by his son, Asaph, and who for the next 20 years successfully upheld its enviable reputation.

May 16, 1848 Big Day for Keene

On May 16, 1848, the Cheshire railroad was formally opened to

which a kind providence had allowed him to witness, for under the revivifying influence of the railroad, new industries were called into being, and within the walls of the Eagle our captains of industry conceived many major projects which were successfully completed and which endure to the present day, and it was for many years the chosen place of meeting for the directorate of many corporations.

Prince of Landlords

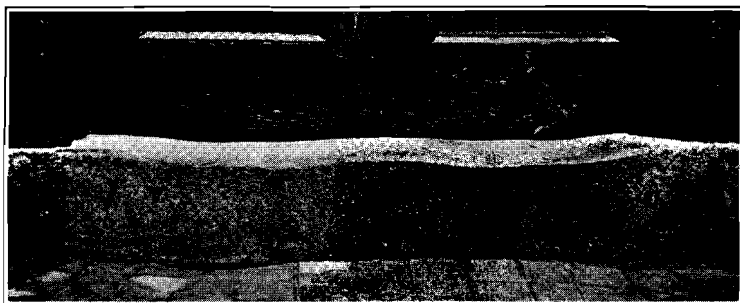
Under the management of Asaph Harrington, few public houses in the country were more widely or favorably known. One of the most obliging of men, he was styled by the traveling public as the "prince of landlords," and a guest stopping

with him once was sure to call again. There are people living today who remember him about the hotel in his wheel-chair in the latter years of his life, almost helpless, and a great sufferer. At his death, on May 27, 1867, at the age of 57, it was said of him: "Tens of thousands who tarried at his house treasured the memory of his kindly welcome and benevolent farewell. The very genius of hospitality, it seemed to illuminate his house, and always to be sending rays of cheer into the homes of his friends, and by his constant thought for the happiness of others, and a fine forgetfulness of self, he wove into his character those higher Christian qualities which men with much superior advantages seldom attain."

O'Neil, became landlords of the Eagle. Mr. White withdrew from the firm on March 15, 1911, and for the past 20 years the business has been carried on by the present proprietor, Daniel E. O'Neil, who has greatly enlarged and improved the property, and whose long record of service to the public is at this time exceeded in the history of the only by the 24 year term of. Col. Stephen Harrington.

Many Distinguished Guests

In a sketch of this length to do more than touch upon a few events is impossible, nor can we write of the distinguished personages who have for longer or shorter periods been its guests, of Commodore William Bainbridge, commander of



Old Door-stone of the Eagle Hotel

Many Changes in Management

Mr. Harrington was succeeded by John W. Starkey, and during the period of about 40 years next ensuing, the hotel was carried on at different times by a number of firms and individuals, L. W. Cumings, Cumings & Wright, Wright & Mason, Andrew R. Mason, Mason & Roberts, Wright & Bent, F. H. Demmg & Co., William March, Henry Ward and Putney & Buckminster, but as we approach the present day, the events of our narrative would be contained in the memories of many citizens now living, and the limitations of our space forbids their recital. Suffice it to say that with a long record of success behind them as a pattern, the Eagle still maintained its popularity with the traveling public.

Under Present Ownership

On Oct. 4, 1909, James E. White and Daniel E. O'Neil, as White &

the frigate "Constitution" in the War of 1812; of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, a scion of royalty; of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, famous authority on the American Indian; Franklin Pierce, afterward president of the United States; Horace Greeley, of the New York Tribune, and one time candidate for the presidency; Bayard Taylor, poet and journalist, Oliver Wendell Holmes, author and lecturer, and so on through a long list of well known names, not forgetting one, to some the greatest hero of them all, - the late John L. Sullivan, and as through the necromancy of imagination we picture the never ending procession of humanity, of the rich and the poor, the great and the near-great, that wore thin the old door stone, we conclude this article, not without a sense of gratitude to the kindly fate which has preserved to us this house, so rich in historic association and sentiment.