

The way it was

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In 1886, hotels made room for everything

Recent newspaper stories on the expansion of the Heritage Inn bring to mind other Chelmsford hostleries of the past.

A century ago, the large "hotel block" in Central Square was in its second year as a boarding house and hotel.

A change of ownership was about to take place with an expansion of services which included an ice cream parlor.

The local newspaper stated, "During the season W.S. Simons (the new owner) will devote one room in his hotel in the village to supplying ice cream to those who may patronize him. He believes, and rightly, too, that this community will prefer an ice cream parlor to a liquor saloon. The room will be open day and evening."

This hotel, known as the "Central House," was a popular spot for parties, with groups coming from out of town by horse drawn sleigh or "barge" and later by street car and train.

The report of one such occasion read: "A party of girls, numbering 26, from the Green school, Lowell, improved weather and sleighing Wednesday afternoon by riding out to the "Central House" and partaking of



one of Landlord Simon's excellent suppers, and in the evening returning via the North Village. A good way for Lowell parties to try the wintry atmosphere and test the merits of Mr. Simon's cuisine. Both are warranted to prove bracing." (The use of the word "improved" here to mean "made the most of" was common in the 19th century.)

At another time, a group came from Littleton by "barge" (translate: large horse drawn vehicle with several seats, or benches, to accommodate a large number of people.) to the "Central House" for a dinner party. The hotel was looked upon as a sort of summer resort for city folk who wanted to get out into the country air. A social item that appeared in the paper of May 30, 1890 was typical: "At the Central House are Dr. and Mrs. Campbell of Lowell, and Mr. and Mrs. Geo. H. Wilson of Boston, who will spend the summer here."

There have been many taverns in town in the early days. One was in the so-called Fiske House at number 1 Billerica Road, built about 1798. It was operated as the "Lafayette House" for a few years around 1835. Just up the street, the house at 32 Billerica Road was a tavern before 1831. Members of the Manning family operated taverns at both 109 and 110 Billerica Road in the early 1800's, probably at the time the Boston-Concord, N.H. stage coaches traveled the Middlessex Turnpike and had to stop at the toll house across the street.

About 1790 the house at 145 Park Road in South Chelmsford was a tavern and relay station for the pony express. The Marshall

house at 61 Carlisle Street in East Chelmsford was a tavern about 1753.

The Burnham Hotel at number 8 Middlesex Street in North Chelmsford (beside the present Picken Printing building) solved an interesting problem. The tavern/hotel was built in the early 1800's and is shown on an 1875 map as being situated close to the street. However, at a later date (probably in 1894 when the present North Chelmsford Congregational Church was built) it was moved back from the street to comply with the law regarding the minimum distance that a tavern or bar could be from a church.

There were, of course, many more taverns in town but the buildings are not still standing.

Laws regarding the sale of liquor date back many years.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony passed laws forbidding tipping at inns, and fines were prescribed for drunkenness, and, lest the attractions of the tavern might cause some to neglect their religious duties, it was ordered "That in all places where Weekday Lectures are kept, all Taverners, Victuallers and Ordinaries, that are within one mile of the Meeting-house to which they belong, shall from time to time clear their Houses of all persons able to go to Meeting, during the time of the exercise."

This law may have been disregarded at times in later years as Rev. Ebenezer Bridge (1716-1792) wrote in his diary that at one time he discontinued the weekly lecture, on account of those who went to the tavern upon lecture days.

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