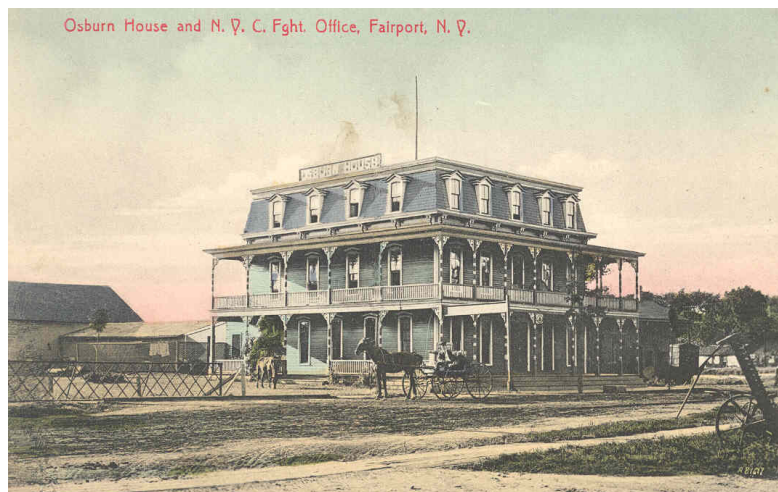


THE OSBURN HOUSE

An imposing three-storied building with a mansard roof, a wrap-around porch, and a second floor balcony was a welcoming sight to travelers arriving in Fairport for over seventy years. It was the Osburn House, located between the two sets of railroad tracks on North Main Street. The need for hotels and restaurants had been growing since the coming of the canal in 1825, and the laying of the first railroad tracks through Fairport in the 1850's only increased that need. Mallett's Tavern on the banks of the canal was the only hotel in town until the Osburn House was built.



The hotel was built in 1860, 1868, or 1870 by either Patrick Doyle or Robert Mars, depending on the source. What is clear, however, is that it was an imposing building and a well-equipped hotel. It had floor to ceiling windows and double doors that led into a wide hall on the first floor, which had an office, parlor, bar, and dining room that could accommodate up to fifty people. The second and third floors provided eight to ten bedrooms for guests, and living quarters for the hotel owner. There was a kitchen wing in the back and an ice house and livery stable as well. Ice came either from the adjacent mill pond or from the Oxbow. It was certainly more elegant than the earlier canal inns where a dormitory was the most common accommodation.

During the first decade of its existence, the hotel had several owners. Lanson Osburn purchased the hotel in 1872 and ran it for five years. He sold it to Robert Conant who owned it for three years before selling out. Several others owned the hotel before A.J. Cornwell and W.B. Burris, experienced hoteliers, purchased the establishment in 1886. They refurbished the hotel and added modern conveniences such as central heating, plumbing, and electricity. Their livery stable offered eight to ten horses and wagons and carriages by the day or week. Undertaker Henry Reylea's hearse was also housed there.

By the early 1900's, the hotel was owned by Edward J. Cary, whose letterhead advertised the Osburn House as heated by steam, having electric lights, and also having a first-class livery. During this time, the hotel became a popular eating place, offering an "old-fashioned chicken dinner" on Sunday for thirty-five cents. Regular items on the weekly menu included roast beef, pork, and corned beef and cabbage. Mr. Cary and his family lived in the hotel and his son Arthur was born there. A photograph taken in one of the rooms in the hotel shows both Edward Cary and his son Arthur.

The twentieth century brought changes to American life in general, and the Osburn House was no exception. Although the Sunday dinners and the livery were still mentioned, by 1915, ads talk about catering to "automobile and special parties." The proprietor changed as well; Nicholas Kelly purchased the hotel in 1907, and owned it until 1922. Sometime during this period, the second floor was converted to a meeting hall for the Fairport Grange. They created two large rooms, one with an attached kitchen. One room was used for dining and the other for meetings. A variety of social events including dances, weddings, and, apparently, even the occasional basketball game were held there. Jack Ryan's bar on the first floor, however, was still

a popular destination.

W. Lines Baker purchased the building in 1922. (His daughter, Eunice Skeates, is still a Fairport resident.) He completely renovated and rebuilt, converting the hotel, according to one source, into “one of the most complete gas and auto service stations in the state.” His father, Frank J. Baker, joined him in the business that they named the Fairport Oil Company. The Bakers operated a Chevrolet sales agency there as well. They also had service stations in the village of Fairport, East Rochester, and Pittsford. After the untimely death of W. Lines, who was hit by a car and killed in front of his Pittsford facility, and Frank’s death several years later, Lois Baker leased the building to Max Humphrey, who had worked there for a number of years. He used the facility to store auto parts and tires and sold American Gas from the gas pump that stood where the front porch canopy had been. The old gas tanks were above the ground and kept filled so that when customers came, the fuel would run down and into their tanks.

In 1938, the elegant old Osburn Hotel was demolished and a rather ordinary, but functional, concrete building was constructed on the site which Max Humphrey continued to lease and to run as an Amoco gas station until his retirement. The building was subsequently leased and then sold to Sidney Spafford and then to the Conking and Calabrese building supply company. It has housed several businesses in the past ten years. Currently, the structure is the home of the “Higher Ground” coffee shop. The H.P. Neun Box Company buildings were constructed on another portion of the old hotel property.