

# Baraboo, a City with No Hotels Tales of Earlier Days By Bob Dewel

It is strange but true. Baraboo has not had a single hotel for some 3 or 4 decades. In fact, there appear to be only three motels in the city limits, all located on Eighth Street/Avenue. Get a map and check it out! And this in a city of 12,000!

It is curious, but you have to go to adjacent West Baraboo to find two hotels, plus several motels. The last hotel in the City, the old but prestigious Warren Hotel, burned in 1964, though the old Wellington continued to provide rooms for a few years.

The reason, of course is the 1937 bypass of Baraboo, diverting Highway 12 traffic through West Baraboo. Though the City now includes nearly a mile of that highway from Menards to the Baraboo River Bridge, persistent rumors of a new hotel have gone unfulfilled. The pending new bypass will alter the West Baraboo domination, however.

This is curious, for the West Baraboo village does not participate in many of the responsibilities that make a city, or even a large village. That growing village of 1300 does not participate the way the City of Baraboo does in the support of the adjacent University campus, nor does it support the airport.

They do not support a police department, relying on the rest of our

county to provide its police protection via the Sheriff's Department. But, the village does have Motels and Hotels on Highway 12-33, and they serve the needs of the much larger City of Baraboo industries and businesses.

### The Early Hostelries

It was not always so. In the earliest days the cabin of Roseline Peck served as a temporary hostelry for newly arrived families while the men of Baraboo Rapids gathered to erect a cabin for them. She was sort of a City Hostess in that respect, often receiving no compensation for her hospitality. According to the Baraboo Intensive Survey, one James Webster provided some sort of housing in 1843.

The Baraboo Rapids settlement was only 6 years old in 1847 when Col. Sumner had the Western Hotel erected on the corner of Oak and Fourth Street. Containing several businesses and a bar, it was gradually enlarged, but retained the western look of a frontier rooming house. It was destroyed by fire on November 6, 1878, as detailed in a recent article.

The Western was not without competition, for Lyman Clark erected the Baraboo House in 1847 on the SW corner of Walnut and Railroad Streets (now Servo). Shortly thereafter, in the 1850's, the Wisconsin House, 144 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, was erected. It was torn down in 1912 in anticipation of the erection of the Al. Ringling Theatre. It featured a dining hall and bar room.

### Advent of the Railroad

The small settlement seemed destined for little growth, but the arrival of the railroad in 1871 breathed new life into the young village. Most new hostelries now located south of the river in proximity of the railroad station. The



**The Urban Hotel, at the Southwest corner of Ash and Water Streets, after high winds in 1904**

Baraboo Intensive Survey lists the following:

-Pratt House at 201 Vine by Philomen Pratt, 1873.

-The Commercial House, later the American Hotel, Maple and Walnut.

-By 1890, the Bay State House, Lynn and Vine.

-The Railway House on the corner of Lynn and Vine.

-The Bender House, now the Old Baraboo Inn, traces its roots to the 1859 Bender brewery on the NE corner of Walnut and Lynn. It appears to have become a hostelry in 1874 as a 20 room boarding house. The present structure was erected in 1879, stone coming from the J Pinneo quarry. Stories of ghosts abound here.

#### Additional Hotels

Two structures faced each other across the Ash and Water Street intersection, serving both the railroad and Downtown Square traffic. The Urban Hotel, 123 Ash, replaced a short-lived frame City Hotel in 1888, serving as a hotel with dining room until 1932.

Facing it diagonally across the street was another City Hotel, completed in 1892; though it is possible the first building was replaced by the present brick structure at a later date. As late as 1975 it was called the City Rooming House. Both it and the former Urban Hotel now operate as apartments or rooming houses.

Joe Ward's "History of Commercial and Retail Districts" has extensive information on these structures. Not included in this article are several summer resort hotels of Devils Lake, not designed for winter occupation.

#### Meantime, Downtown

Spurred on by pressure from the business community, the Sumner House

arose in 1878 on the NW corner of Oak and Fourth, to be restored after an 1882 fire. It was replaced by the grand Warren House which dominated the scene until its destruction by fire in 1964.

Curiously, the only other hotel in the dominant downtown area seems to have been the three-story Wellington, 144 Fourth Avenue, erected by E.F. Lueth in 1890. It remained in that family until 1942. Known as the Wellington, the Windsor, and later the Musicale, it finally closed in the late 1970's, and is owned now by Screnock and Screnock, Attorneys.

Thus the vital and growing City of Baraboo, population expected to be 12,000 or so in the upcoming census, suffers the indignity of no Hotels within the city limits! That service is supplied by our much smaller neighbor, West Baraboo. Soon to be available are superb locations along the Baraboo River, from Ash east to the Circus World. Other sites abound also. It is about time for a significant Hotel and dining facility in the City!