

Franconia Heritage News



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Franconia House, formerly the Edson House

On Monday night, November 3, 1913, a fire of suspicious origin destroyed the Franconia House, a local landmark for nearly 100 years. It was built as the agent's house for the New Hampshire Iron Factory Company, and was located across the road from the iron furnace, at the foot of the Sugar Hill bridge in the area that was then the village square. About 75 feet to the east of the house was the store and hall of Fred Sanborn and next to that the W. F. Parker general store.

"Church bells were rung and soon there were a number of men on the scene, but it was readily seen that it would be impossible to save any of the burning structure and all work was directed towards saving the surrounding property. In the barns connected with the hotel were a number of head of livestock belonging to Joseph Begin, a meat man, but it was possible to save all of them, although the fire was discovered in the barn soon after it was seen in the house. Mr. Begin had a bull in the barn and when let out during the fire it caused considerable excitement for a few moments before it left the scene of the fire."

"The volunteer firemen had the hardest job saving the house and barns of Wilbur Nute, who lived in the first house on the west within 100 feet of the burning buildings. There was considerable wind which swept the flames in that direction. Several times the barns caught fire and once the flames got under the barn floor, but were finally subdued. The men formed a bucket line from the river to the buildings and kept the side and roof of the stores drenched. It took nearly 50 men to save the stores."

Charles Edson, at age 29, was an operative for the Franconia Iron Works in 1860. By 1870 he was their agent and lived with his wife Eliza Jane (Sampson) and their two children in the agent's house. They never owned the property but had some kind of lease arrangement with the iron company, and by the late 1870's, the former agent's house was known as the Edson House. *Snow's Hand Book on Northern Pleasure Travel*, published in 1879, described this enterprise: "EDSON HOUSE, Charles Edson, 30 [capacity]. Located at the entrance of the village. Profile House stages pass the door. Open through the year. Post Office connected with

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- On the far left at foot of the Sugar Hill bridge is the second Franconia House, formerly known as the Edson House and Agent's House.
 - The long building in the center was Sanborn's store and hall, later owned by Lynn Bowles, and later Casey's Grill which burned down.
 - Perpendicular to Sanborn's behind the tree was W. F. Parker's general store, now Ahead apartments.
 - On the right by the band stand is today's yellow apartment building before the 3-tier porches were added.



Photo from glass plate negative by Olcott Aldrich

Franconia House, formerly the Edson House continued

the House, also an excellent livery. Numerous drives and walks. Table supplied with the products of the farm. Rates, \$7 to \$10 per week.”

The Edson House livery was quite extensive. In June of 1877 Charles Edson took out a mortgage, using as collateral – one nine seated stage wagon, one box buggy, one top buggy, one Portland sleigh, one new two-horse traverse sled, one second-hand traverse sled, one new one-horse traverse sled, one set of stage harnesses and four buggy harnesses, one twelve-seated passenger sleigh, “all of said property is now in my possession.” Sadly, Mr. Edson had a fatal accident in early January of 1886. He was found dead by the roadside about a mile from his house when returning from Littleton, apparently kicked in the head by his horse after it was spooked and had thrown its rider. The household goods of his widow were sold at auction that spring, everything going at full value, a reflection of the community’s high regard for her and her late husband.

Shortly after the demise of Charles Edson, Charles Knapp leased the Edson House and managed it for three years until Judge Pierson took over in 1889. By 1890, the hotel had been renamed the Franconia House; the first Franconia House, located on the road to the notch (today’s Profile Road/Rte 18), having burned to the ground in late February of 1884. This second Franconia House changed hands several times in the 1890’s and early 1900’s,

owned by John M. Bickford, then Charles H. and Sarah Locke, followed by Henry Harri-man, E. H. Goodnow, and Martha Ella Glines. Osman Parker may also have been a proprietor, or perhaps he was a manager under one of the other mentioned names.

The last owner was George A. Quimby, a local farmer, who bought the property from Mrs. Glines for \$1,450 in November 1906. George and his wife Nellie and their family ran the hotel for seven years, right up to about ten days before the buildings burned down. “Without doubt the fire was of incendiary origin, as no one had been seen about the premises since the departure of the owner Monday morning. Those who first saw the fire stated that it was burning in the barn soon after dis-



The Franconia House burned to the ground on November 3, 1913.
Photo from glass plate negative by Olcott Aldrich.

covered in the main house, which would give the impression that two distinct fires had started. When seen Tuesday morning several property owners whose buildings were near the scene of the fire stated that its occurrence was not unlooked for, in fact one owner of buildings nearby had only recently increased his insurance as a precautionary measure and had advised another to do the same. The entire village was deeply aroused over the matter and it is probable that the matter will be thoroughly investigated.”

About a month after the fire George Quimby was held on an arson charge. Proceedings moved quickly in those days. “Mr. Quimby was arrested Saturday night and kept at Littleton until the trial was called Monday morning. It was then put over until the afternoon in order that the defendant could obtain counsel.” Mrs. Quimby started off the trial with an incredible tale.

“She claimed that she had been away from home about two weeks visiting friends in Newport, Vt., and on the Monday, November 3 she came to Wells River, Vt., where she met her husband and her 16 year old daughter, Mildred. There they left the daughter and Mr. and Mrs. Quimby then came to Lisbon on the train that arrives there soon after 7 o’clock in the evening. She then testified that Mr. Quimby was so intoxicated that she was obliged to help him off the train and they walked up the Landaff road as far as the cemetery where they sat down and the defendant went to sleep. She then walked down to the village and bought some food which she and her husband ate. Later they both walked to the village. Mrs. Quimby went to the Boston & Maine station and waited for the mid-

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Franconia House, formerly the Edson House continued

night train south. According to Mrs. Quimby's testimony she went to Woodsville and there found her husband on the platform, although she did not see him on the train. From Woodsville she went to Wells River where she boarded the night train and reached Newport, Vt., just about dawn of Tuesday November 4. She claimed that her husband went to Newport on the same train, but did not ride with her and that they did not know of the fire until several days later when they heard of it from their daughter Mildred."

Mrs. Quimby's testimony was contested when "Lunette A. Taylor of Franconia testified that she came from Haverhill to Lisbon on the afternoon train on November 3 and that she saw Mr. and Mrs. Quimby on that train." Her alibi was further challenged by an employee of a livery stable in Lisbon who testified that Mr. Quimby hired a horse about 5 o'clock on November 3 to go to Sugar Hill to get his wife, and by another witness who also saw the couple on the afternoon train from Lisbon and that he had talked to Mr. Quimby who seemed quite sober to him. Several Franconia men testified that they had seen Mr. Quimby with a horse and hayrack loaded with furniture on the Saturday night before the fire. "The counsel for both defendant and state agreed that the buildings had been burned and that there was insurance of \$1250 on the real estate and \$350 on the personal property, \$600 payable to mortgagee." The case was held over for the April term of the Superior Court.

In May, the trial resumed and George Quimby was acquitted. "When the case against Mr. Quimby was brought into court at Plymouth, he was arraigned on a charge of being an accessory to the crime rather than committing the act and it was upon this charge that he was finally acquitted. Nearly 20 witnesses testified in Plymouth for the prosecution but none testified for the defense. The prosecution presented a statement made by the defendant to the effect that he and his wife had been at the house just previous to the fire and that while driving away they turned back and noticed the flames in the vicinity of the hotel. The jury however, did not see fit to hold the defendant as the instructions from the judge were to the effect that it must first be shown, beyond reasonable doubt, that the fire had been set before the charge against Quimby could be found. It appears that the jury were unable to do this, and the acquittal resulted."

"The outcome of this trial will be the cause for considerable feeling in Franconia where the facts are known. The fire, which threatened the whole village, was undoubtedly of an incendiary nature, and although not encouraging any offense against justice, the people of the town would probably have taken steps to make the guilt of the parties concerned more positive had there been any doubt as to their conviction."

Franconia residents apparently missed not having a village hotel as they voted to pass warrant article 13 at the March 1915 town meeting which read: To see if the town will vote to offer any inducements in any way, to any person or persons, who will build, maintain, and operate a suitable year round hotel, at an expense of not less than \$4,000, on the site of the old Franconia House. There were no takers of this \$1,500 inducement.

[Quoted sections are from The Littleton Courier on November 6 and December 4, 1913 and on May 28, 1914.]

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Fact Or Fiction: Franconia was once called Indian Head.

My research indicates that this is fiction. The only places I have seen Franconia called "Indian Head" are in several reference books which include undocumented listings of former town names, and in some recent Franconia write-ups which no doubt quoted these so-called former names. I have never come across "Indian Head" used in lieu of Franconia on an old document, such as a deed, nor in any history book that covers the early days of Franconia. The township was first called Franconia when it was granted in 1764, then called Morrystown after being re-granted in 1772. The name went back to Franconia in 1782. Franconia's Old Man of the Mountain, discovered in 1805, has always been referred to as the Old Man, the Profile, or the Great Stone Face.

The Indian Head profile in Lincoln on Mt. Pemigewasset is said to have been discovered in 1901 when it was exposed during a forest fire. The current Indian Head Resort had its beginnings in 1913. Early picture postcards of their roadside cabins were labeled: Indian Head White Mts N.H., Indian Head Franconia Notch N.H., and just Indian Head, N.H. It is possible that someone incorrectly concluded from these headings that "Indian Head" was an early name for Franconia.

If anyone has information connecting "Indian Head" with Franconia, please contact me, Barbara Holt.

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The museum is open from Memorial Day to the end of October on Saturdays 1-4 p.m.
The Stone Stack, bridge & exhibit panels at the Besaw Interpretive Center can be viewed anytime.

Recent Donations * * Thank you

Tony Ferrelli — Bicentennial guest book & program
Thomas & Pauline Palmer — Forest Hills direction finder
chart & antique milk centrifuge/tester
Kevin Johnson — Postal History of Franconia
Tucker Scheffer — aluminum skis
Joel Peabody — Knights of Pythias cap & 16 Eastern Ski
Bulletins 1954-55
Eileen Ball — DVD History of Skiing & Ski Tales by
Norwood Ball in 1979
Violet Naas — ceramic souvenir dish "The Echoes"
Ken & Linda Ford — 1925 book *The Business of Being a
Club Woman* once owned by Dr. Sarah Johnson
Maxine Aldrich—many Grange ledgers, pamphlets, banner

Working on your Franconia family tree? The museum has a wealth of local resources: census records, vital records, cemetery inscriptions, obituaries, newspaper articles, Dow Academy yearbooks. The museum historian, Barbara Holt, is very willing to lend a hand and offer guidance. She can be contacted using the above email address or by leaving a message on the museum phone. If coming from out of town, it is best to make advance arrangements.

CALENDAR Upcoming Events

May 28 Museum Opens for Season
June 14 Humanities to Go Program—Steve
Taylor on *N.H.'s Grange Movement*
Aug. 1 Grange Cookout
Aug. 15 Humanities to Go Program—Kevin
Gardner on *Discovering New
England Stone Walls*



Crockery sets were used in bedrooms before there were indoor bathrooms with running water. This lovely set, on display at the museum, was donated in 1998 by Ruth Vaill.