

# Franconia Heritage News



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## Rivagale 1860 - 2017

The structure in Franconia at 461 Main Street, now called the Rivagale Professional Building, has been remodeled a number of times over the last 150 years. It has been used as a private home, a medical clinic, a motel, a dormitory, an inn and restaurant, and currently, offices.

According to an 1862 deed, the original house was built in 1860 by Sylvester W. Emmons on half an acre taken off from the southeast corner of the 105-acre farm formerly owned by Otis F. Willis who was a physician and Sylvester's father-in-law. Both generations were living there together in July of 1860. Life was not kind to this family as they were able to enjoy their new home along the Gale River for only a few years. The young Emmons couple and their infant son died in 1862 and 1863, and Otis passed away in 1865 at age 55.

In the fall of 1867, widow Eliza Willis sold the house to Simeon L Burt, who in turn sold it two years later to Marshall A. Bowles who added three adjoining acres to the property and then sold it in December of 1870 to Dr. William B. Moody. Dr. Moody was Franconia's beloved country doctor for 21 years until he died in 1891. A tribute to him in *The Littleton Courier* stated: "He made his house a true home in every sense of the word; it was always open to everyone, and the many who have received his cheerful hospitality will ever remember him in deepest love and gratitude." After his wife Elvira died in 1897, their daughter Eva Moody Noyes sold the house to Herbert M. Smith.

H. M. Smith owned the house from 1898 to 1905 and is reported to have made extensive repairs to the former Dr. Moody place. He sold it to his daughter Mabel in 1905 and she quickly sold it to Frank P. Whitney. The Smiths and Whitneys apparently used the property for rental income as Hiram L. and Mabel Johnson moved into the house in the spring of 1898 but didn't become the rightful owners until 1909.

Hiram was the third doctor to live there. He set up his first medical practice in Franconia in 1897 which lasted for over half a century. His second wife, Sarah E. Coppinger, a former teacher at Dow Academy, was also a doctor, specializing in psychiatric treatment. In 1927, a large ell was added to the rear of the house, and Hiram and Sarah established The Johnsons, a retreat that accommodated six guests. It was a forerunner to modern day assisted living/nursing home facilities. "An institution has been established in Franconia which bids fair to become nationally known, for it is unique and there are few like it in the East. The Johnsons cater especially to invalids, convalescents, and the aged, to the rigid exclusion of all contagious and mental diseases. Physicians and trained nurses are always in attendance and great care as to diet is exercised. Every room has a

(continued on page 2)



Left: Dr. Hiram Johnson and his first wife Mabel. c. 1905  
Above: The Johnson's house and barns before becoming a medical clinic. c. 1912



connecting bath, long distance telephone while several have fire places. There are spacious lounging rooms and a delightful veranda where wonderful views of the mountains may be obtained.” About 1940 the house was again expanded by adding “a playroom to their domain and it has since become a popular meeting place for local women’s clubs and other social groups who are welcome to the free use of the quarters.” After Hiram died in 1950, Sarah sold the property in 1951 for \$35,000 to Donald F. and Martha B. Horne. The Hornes tried to operate the large building as an inn but apparently it was not a financial success as the bank foreclosed on them after four years. However, they are to be credited with creating the Rivagale name.

Next came Phillip N. and Esther W. Prentice, whose purchase included all the furniture, bedding, fixtures, and tools. They continued the lodging business and called it the Prentice Motor Court. Their ownership ended in October 1960 when they sold it to Dow Academy which was in the early stages of becoming Franconia College. The college used the building as a planning office and then as a dormitory called Frost in honor of the poet Robert Frost who was a trustee.

In the late 1970’s and throughout the 1980’s, the building was known again as The Rivagale Inn and included a restaurant. The inn had several owners during this time period: Mark Southard a Littleton native, Peter DiPalma from California, Mark Stinson from Massachusetts, Cathy Ann Johnson from California, and finally Harry and Karen Patterson of Coventry, RI.

Cathy Johnson got good reviews for running “a charming place furnished with refinished antiques. Most beds have beautiful quilts.” Also, “There is something about this restaurant that sets it apart from other eating places and makes dining out the special experience it should be. Prices are truly reasonable and the service is always superb.”

The last innkeepers, the Pattersons, offered nine guest rooms, a lounge, and two dining rooms – formal dining in the front Riverview Room and casual dining in the rear tavern.

In 1992, the Rivagale building was once again renovated and its function changed, this time into office rental suites. 25 years later it remains an attractive building that blends in between the town library and the start of residences along Main Street. The current owner is Ferrelli Holdings LLC.



Expanded building known as The Johnsons, a home for convalescents. c. 1940



The Rivagale Inn and Restaurant in the 1980’s.



Front and side views of Rivagale office complex in 2010.



(Note: Quoted sections in the text on pages 1 and 2 are from *The Littleton Courier*).

# Climbing Mount Lafayette in 1826

People were already starting to climb Mount Lafayette in 1826. This was in the days of horse-drawn buggies and stage coaches – more than 25 years before the Profile House opened in the notch and 50 years before the AMC was founded. What follows is taken from a Letter to the Editor in *The Boston Courier* newspaper that was reprinted in the *New-Hampshire Statesman & Concord Register* on July 29, 1826.

Mr. Editor - Having lately visited this mountain, and remained several months in the vicinity, I cannot forbear to communicate, for the information of those who journey for health, pleasure or curiosity, the new source it affords for attaining that object. Mount Lafayette is situated in Franconia, New Hampshire, and is computed to be the highest mountain in New-England, except Mount Washington, which is supposed to be a very little higher. On the last anniversary of the battle of Yorktown, a respectable assemblage of the citizens of Franconia and the neighbouring towns, with due formality, dedicated the mountain to the name of the illustrious hero of that day, LAFAYETTE.

The summit of this mountain has hitherto been so difficult of access that very few have ever attempted the ascent, and from this circumstance, the beauty of the scenery, from its elevated height is very little known. The obstacles in the way of ascent however, are now removed; and the facilities afforded are such, that no person even in delicate health, need apprehend the least danger from fatigue or exposure, in a tour to the summit. Some of the spirited citizens of Franconia have recently opened a path in the most favourable location to the summit; where for the further convenience of visitors, they have erected a snug shelter on the highest peak, which serves as a screen from sudden changes of the weather and rains, which however seldom reach so high, and afford comfortable lodgings to such as from curiosity or casualty may be detained over night. To an easterly view from the mountain is presented an extensive undulation of hills and mountains covered with

an uninterrupted wilderness, which extends as far as the eye can reach. To the northward there presents itself an equally extensive, though comparatively plain tract of country, with here and there a patch of uncultivated land, from which the forest has been wrested by the “sturdy hand of our country’s pioneers.” To the south maybe seen a considerable extent of Connecticut river, with all the exuberant richness its highly cultivated valleys afford – orchards – farms – villages – public buildings – factories – and the neat though scattered dwellings of the farmer, all contribute to form an extremely interesting contrast with the scenery of the opposite view.

Franconia cannot fail richly to reward the visit of such as are in search of minerals – the curiosities and sublimities of nature – a field for sporting – or means of healthful amusement and diversion. The shortest route from Boston is through Concord and Plymouth, N.H. and thence thro’ the Notch, as it is called, making the distance 140 miles – but at present, the best road though thirty miles further, is through Haverhill, N.H. to Bath, where at Ross’s Tavern a conveyance may be had at any time. Mr. Gibb, who now keeps the Hotel, in Franconia, has been active in promoting the late improvements in the place, which conduce to the comfort and convenience of such as visit it – his is the nearest house of convenient entertainment to the mountain.

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The writer’s name was not given. One can’t help but wonder if it was Mr. Gibb’s himself, or someone in his employ, drumming up business!

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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.

**Scavenger Hunt**— Have you tried our scavenger hunt? Adults and children have lots of fun locating and learning about these items while touring the museum rooms.

As you browse through the museum's exhibits, see how many of these you can find...

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chamber Pot              | <input type="checkbox"/> Bustle           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ladies Work Pocket       | <input type="checkbox"/> Pince-nez        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hand-knit Stockings      | <input type="checkbox"/> Steriopticon     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American Puppet   | <input type="checkbox"/> Hank of Flax     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roller Skate Keys        | <input type="checkbox"/> Horse Hair Wig   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tobacco Flannels         | <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil Sharpener |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horse Blanket Pin        | <input type="checkbox"/> Donut Fryer      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Belt-Driven Hack Saw     | <input type="checkbox"/> Foot Warmer      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Priscilla's Cookbook     | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Starter     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sock Dryer               | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheep Shears     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Old Man on a Cow         | <input type="checkbox"/> Five Back Packs  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Golden Sheaf Award       | <input type="checkbox"/> Ox Shoe          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dolls Parasol            | <input type="checkbox"/> Bellows          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scamozzi                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Eye Stones       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laundry Manual           | <input type="checkbox"/> BIG Butter Churn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing Man              | <input type="checkbox"/> Christening Gown |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apple Peeler             | <input type="checkbox"/> Zither           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cast Iron Printing Press | <input type="checkbox"/> Scythes          |

## CALENDAR Upcoming Events

- May 27 Museum opens for the Season  
 June 8 Adair Mulligan talk on  
*The Connecticut: New England's  
 Great River*  
 July 1 Open House. Come see our exhibit  
 on The Old Man after the parade.



Recent history: Franconia's supermarket in 1981 was Kelley's Foodtown. It came after Aldrich's and before Mac's.