

# Franconia Heritage News



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## Forest Hills Hotel

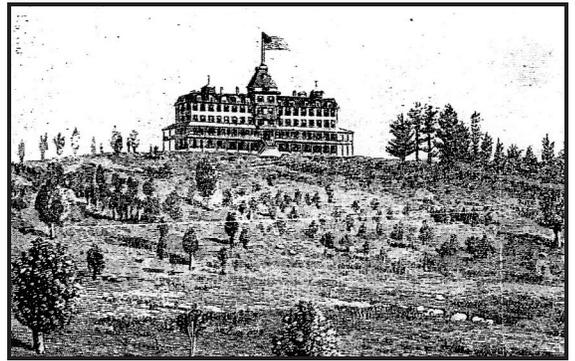
In 1882 Harry W. Priest and James W. Dudley formed a partnership to build a hotel in Franconia. Harry was a Franconia native, born in 1852 at what is now Lovett's Inn. He learned the hotel business while working at the Profile House and as the proprietor of the Franconia House for a few years. James, also born in 1852, was from Raymond NH but was living in Boston where he was a plumber. His connection to Franconia was through his wife, Mary Knight, the daughter of Horace and Jacynthia Knight who owned the Mountain View House on Main Street (later Raynor's and then Cannon Mt. View), located just below the hotel site.

The new hotel, called the Forest Hills Hotel, opened for the 1883 summer season. It was said to be built from local timber from a mill on the Gale River near today's Hillwinds Lodge, and it was located on what was then called Pine Hill, just a short distance up the road (now route 142) to Bethlehem. The hotel had 60 rooms to accommodate 150 guests and was situated on 160 acres. It offered spectacular views of the mountains and of the village which could be seen from 500 feet of double-tiered verandas and from the open lawn area. An early advertising flier boasted: "There is an abundance of pure spring water, and hot and cold water will be found in bathrooms, on every floor. Every room is provided with gas and electric bell, and is lighted with two or more windows. The best of spring beds, with heavy hair mattresses, are used. Steam heat, open fires, telegraph office, billiard room, bowling alleys, barber's shop, tennis courts, reasonable livery, and all desirable means of being comfortable, and enjoying the delightful air of the mountains, are to be found here."

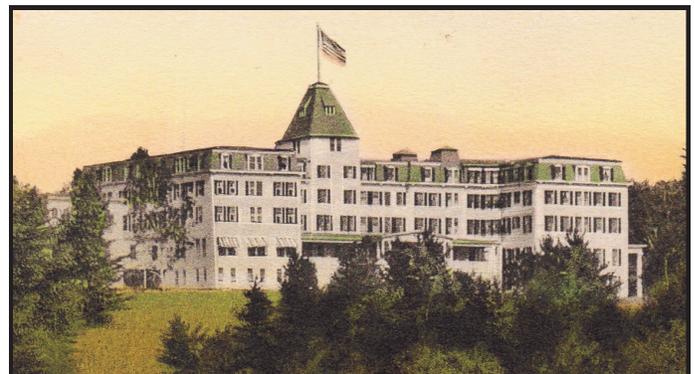
Franconia was growing in popularity as a summer resort. Guests could take a train from New York City or Boston to Littleton, and be transported over to Franconia in a comfortable hotel carriage. Or, they could take the stage coach from the train station in North Woodstock, just below the Notch. The Forest Hills Hotel was an instant success.

A large barn, over a hundred feet in length, was soon added. Also a heated cottage, known as "The Lodge,"

[continued on page 2]



Early picture of the Forest Hills Hotel. Part of an engraving from *Summer Saunterings* by B. & L. (1885)



Two more views of the Forest Hills Hotel. The one on the left (postcard no. 1393 by The Atkinson News Co. Tilton NH) shows a new building or addition to the hotel; the one on the right (postcard by The Albertype Co. in Brooklyn NY) shows two added wings and the removal of the double-tiered porch.

## Forest Hills Hotel continued

was erected behind the hotel to be used primarily for winter use when the hotel itself was closed. During the 1890's the hotel complex grew to include a log cabin and an adjoining farm that was stocked as a milk farm. A large addition was added to the main building that included 75 sleeping rooms, a main dining room and several smaller ones, a kitchen and a sun parlor. The hotel could now accommodate 300 guests. Two more cottages were constructed. A new casino was built that included a bowling alley, billiards room and a gentleman's smoking room. By August 1897, golf was being played on the hotel grounds.

In the fall of 1892 it was announced that the firm of Priest & Dudley was being dissolved by mutual consent, Mr. Dudley purchased Mr. Priest's interest. Dudley continued to operate and expand the hotel until it was sold in 1902 to Herbert F. Hunt who is reported to have been an excellent manager/owner of Hunt's Forest Hills Hotel and Cottages. He renovated the music room, built a new cottage, laid out new croquet grounds, erected a building to house servants' quarters and a kitchen, and established a new golf course. In 1907 a stock company, with Hunt as manager, was formed to take over the property. Extensive improvements and enlargements were scheduled to be made in 1908 but they never took place.

Robert Wardwell of Swampscott MA became the new owner in the spring of 1910. After one season he sold the hotel to George Hilliard and Frank Green, both Boston men with hotel experience. According to *The Littleton Courier* on March 9, 1911: "The hotel has been rather unfortunate during the past few years, but it is believed that,

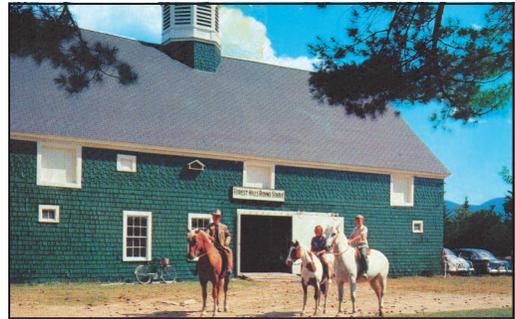


Dining Room at Forest Hills Hotel  
[Hannau Color Productions postcard]

if rightly managed, it can be a money maker." Next came Frank H. Abbott and Son, well known hotel proprietors in Bethlehem and Florida, who acquired the property in 1918. After one season, they started making improvements, adding 60 rooms and baths, a new foyer, a dining room and a ball room. Outdoors, a new pond was added on the expanded golf course. Several years later yet another guest room addition was made, a new entrance to

accommodate automobiles, and a swimming pool. *The Littleton Courier* headlines in July 1922 were: "Sports Popular at Forest Hills—Young People Play Golf and Tennis—Dancing for Old and Young Every Evening" The Forest Hills property was successfully managed by Karl P. Abbott for nearly 20 years.

Norman Pancoast of Miami Beach took over ownership in 1936. He made extensive renovations to the bedrooms, added a cocktail room and a telephone system to every room. There were ballroom dancing les-



Forest Hills Riding Stable  
[Hannau Color Productions postcard]

sons and horse shows. The hotel was bought by Ross Thompson of Boston in 1944. He renovated a kitchen, had a golf pro and a Boston orchestra. The cheapest room, a single with a sink, cost \$11/day; a double with bathroom for two persons cost \$22-\$28/day; the most expensive was a two-room suite connected by a bathroom for four persons at \$44-\$56/day. This included all meals, swimming pool, tennis court, golf and riding stables.

In 1954 George Collier of Wilmington DE became the last individual owner. The hotel complex now consisted of 200 acres, could accommodate 250 guests, had two cottages, a palatial lodge, a sports house, a large garden, riding stable, a 9-hole golf course, an outdoor swimming pool, private trout pond, a trap shoot range, putting green and croquet. Indoor entertainment included an orchestra, dancing and a cocktail lounge. Collier is reported to have spent a quarter million dollars on the hotel from 1954 to 1958 including new wall-to-wall carpeting in the lobby and in all corridors and a sprinkler system. 1959 was the hotel's 75 Anniversary Season which included special events such as the annual trap shoot, Joe Kirkwood the famous trick shot golfer, and Christopher King's radio show. Sadly, there apparently just weren't enough guests to support the elaborate hotel resort.

The grand hotel era in the White Mountains had already ended. Train travel had been replaced by the

automobile and highways. Families no longer came to the mountains for an entire summer season but took short vacations here and there, staying at less expensive roadside tourist cabins and motels. At the close of the 1959 season, George Collier gave the hotel to the University of New Hampshire to be used in its hotel administration program. After one season, UNH sold the hotel to the trustees of Franconia College. The hotel building was initially used as the main school administration center, dormitory and classrooms.

In 1978 Franconia College went into foreclosure and the much renovated hotel building was abandoned after the contents were auctioned off, salvagers removed usable materials and one wing was removed by a demolition crew. The hazardous collapsing remains were burned as a practice in fire control by the Franconia Fire Department in early January of 1986. Forest Hills was the last of the big hotels standing in the Franconia-Sugar Hill area.

**Recollections about the Forest Hills Hotel -**

“A shooting range for clay pigeons was up in the meadow behind the principal pond on the north side of Forest Hills Road. My sons, about 10 and 12 years old, were hired to load the traps from which the clay pigeons were sprung into the air for the sportsmen. They paid the boys pretty good for doing that. There was a whole gang standing there with loaded guns shooting at the clay pigeons. I had to keep the field mowed, and the

short road up to the shooting range had to be kept in good condition for the guests, who drove big Cadillac cars.” [1994 interview with A. Ellsworth Wright who worked at the hotel when George Collier was the owner.]

“One of the things that 13, 14, 15-year old boys did at that time was to caddy on the golf courses in Franconia. There was a nice 9-hole course at the Forest Hills Hotel, and another one up on the north end of Franconia Notch, or west end of it, that was known as the Profile golf course. I started at Forest Hills and had a wonderful time there. The guests that came usually would come for close to a month at a time, at least, so if you had somebody who liked the way you caddied, you would end up having them all the time that they were there. And the tips were pretty good. One of the worst things about Forest Hills is there were two holes that were on a very steep hill, and you had to go down one and then climb back up the other.” [1997 interview with Allen E. Grass]



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**Diphtheria Epidemic of 1880**

Diphtheria used to be a major cause of sickness and death among children. The disease began with a sore throat, loss of appetite, and fever followed by the formation of a thick gray substance called a pseudomembrane over the throat area, swelling the neck and blocking the airways. It was very contagious for several weeks. Effective immunization began in the 1920’s.

A diphtheria epidemic hit Franconia in late 1879/early 1880. The *White Mountain Republic Journal* reported in their January 15, 1880 issue: “The mortality occasioned by diphtheria is abating. Several families [in Franconia] have been left in sadness by this fatal contagion. Mr. Henry Noyes has lost all his children, two in number; Mr. John Bickford, two; David Dexter, three; Willis Knapp, one; Stephen Eaton, one; Jacob Knapp, one; Sanford Dailey, one; Emery Aldrich, one. Mrs. Henry Spooner has also been taken.” Two more children died a few days later—Mamie Glover, age 8, and Ann Louisa Streeter, age 14.

The same newspaper ran A Cure for Diphtheria on January 1, 1880 submitted by a correspondent of the *New York Ledger*. “I read in the Ledger some time ago, about many people dying with diphtheria because they did not know of any remedy for it. I will tell you how I can cure it. When the small, yellow blisters come in the throat, do not wait an

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Time to renew your membership for the year October 2015 to October 2016.  
Please show your support by returning the enclosed remittance envelope. Thank you.

### 2016 Season Hours

The Franconia Heritage Museum will be open on Saturdays from 1-4 p.m. during the 2016 season, Memorial Day to the end of October. We often hold work sessions on Tuesday mornings throughout the year, so if you see some cars in the parking lot, feel free to stop by and take an informal tour.

### Membership Contributions

Membership contributions, gift shop sales, museum tour donations, along with our fund raisers (plant and yard sales this past June) pay for the museum operating and exhibit expenses and allow us to sponsor more than one NH Humanities Council program each season. We sincerely thank you for your continued support.

### Annual Meeting and Dinner

Wednesday November 11th 2015  
at the Dutch Treat

6:00 Meeting      6:30 Social      7:00 Dinner

Members will vote to elect officers for the 2015-2016 season. The proposed slate is: Dot Wiggins President; Barbara Holt Vice President; Phil Krill Treasurer; Nancy Heinemann Recording Secretary; Kay Whitcomb Corresponding Secretary

Dinner: \$30.00 per person (includes tax and tip)  
Entrée choices: beef, chicken, salmon

Note: All drinks to be paid separately by recipient.

Please RSVP by November 6th by mailing your check, made out to Phil Krill, to Phil Krill, Box 136, Franconia NH 03580. Be sure to state your dinner choice.

**Everyone is welcome!**