

The Mount Pleasant, Bretton Woods



Glen House Dining Hall



Crawford House

The Grand Hotels, The Glory and the Conflagration

BY RANDALL E. SPALDING

Randall E. Spalding was born in Lancaster, New Hampshire, graduated from Lancaster Academy, the Chauncy Hall School, Boston, and studied for three years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During summer vacations he worked in various capacities in the summer hotels of the area. Preferring a career in the resort hotel industry to one in engineering, he founded Spalding Inn Club, together with his wife Anna, in 1926. They operated this internationally famous resort for forty-three years, transferring it to a corporation formed by their three sons in 1969.

The adjective *grand* as defined by Webster covers many connotations but when used in this context the following appears to be the most appropriate: "That which makes a strong impression because of its great size, dignity and excellence, and is higher in rank or status than others in the same category."

With this definition in mind I have selected nineteen of the proliferation of summer hotels which took place during the latter half of the 1800's and the early 1900's in the White Mountains region. These with a very few exceptions, the Wentworth at Newcastle being the most notable, comprised the majority of the grand hotels in the entire state.

Also in addressing this subject I doubt very much if anywhere on this continent there existed any such concentration of palatial wooden structures as here in the White Mountains region of New Hampshire during this period.

Jefferson alone had nineteen establishments and the caption "Bethlehem 30 Hotels" became its widely known trademark. With almost every one of the area's forty-six towns adding to the list the total number was well up in the hundreds. Doubtless there will be many good folks with valid reasons for taking exceptions to my choice - but any omissions are due solely to the vastness of the subject and the exigencies of time and space.

Obviously size has to be a major consideration and to qualify for inclusion in the exalted nineteen, the establishment had to have a guest capacity well in excess of two hundred. Here again this arbitrarily rules out many fine hotels which set a very high standard of excellence such as Peckett's-on-Sugar Hill.

In the accompanying box are the names, locations and present status of the chosen nineteen and I might add that I have either viewed or visited all but two, an accomplishment which I share with only a very few contemporaries. This affords one the prerogative of making assertions which are difficult to be challenged, controversial even though they might be.

It will be seen that following the title of this essay "The Glory And The Conflagration," ten were consumed by fire, three were demolished, three remain as ghostly reminders of happier years, and three have survived to preserve the heritage of a bygone era. Furthermore these last three also constitute a continuing example of the enterprise of the North Country, in that they have successfully adapted their modes of operation to the demands of a different age and the changing life styles of their patrons. Some of our Grand Hotels sprung from very small begin-

CLAIMED CAPACITY

600	2nd Profile House	Franconia Notch	Destroyed by fire
400	Fabyan House	Fabyans	Fire
400	2nd Crawford House	Crawfords	Fire
500	The Maplewood	Bethlehem	Fire
350	The Sinclair House	Bethlehem	Fire
450	The Waumbek	Jefferson	Fire
300	The Kearsarge	North Conway	Fire
300	Intervale House	Intervale	Fire
250	The Deer Park	North Woodstock	Fire
500	2nd Glen House	Glen	Fire
250	The Mt. Pleasant	Bretton Woods	Torn down
300	Twin Mt. House	Twin Mt.	Torn down
300	Sunset Hill House	Sugar Hill	Torn down
250	Wentworth Hall	Jackson	Unused and still standing
225	4th Gray's Inn	Jackson	Unused and still standing
250	Forest Hills Hotel	Franconia	Unused and still standing
550	The Mt. Washington	Bretton Woods	In operation
400	The Balsams	Dixville Notch	In operation
300	The Mt. View House	Whitefield	In operation

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nings, and were continually enlarged over a considerable period of time. In fact, the Mountain View House was operated and added to by four generations of the Dodge Family extending over a span of one hundred and fourteen years. There is no resort hotel property in the entire United States that can match this record.

Others such as the Mount Washington and the second Profile House were designed and built as a complete unit, construction of the former taking place over a period of two years and climaxed with a magnificent opening ball on August 1, 1902. Hordes of workers were employed in the process, including 250 stone masons and other artisans imported from Italy.

Several of the grand hotels, the Waumbek and the Profile House for example, added to their capacity by numbers of huge cottages. All construction was of wood, excepting the Mount Washington which has a steel frame

and the steel and concrete wing added to the Balsams in 1917.

Many of the grand hotels such as the Maplewood and the Balsams for instance, carried on enormous farms supplying their own dairy products, eggs, poultry, vegetables etc. The latter was unique in this regard, raising not only the above items but also livestock and even trout from a hatchery on the premises. The Balsams with it's own power generating facilities, water supply and other adjuncts was the most completely self sustained resort hotel in the state and quite probably in the nation. The northernmost of all the grand hotels, guests were met at the Whitefield station, a distance of sixty miles.

It goes without saying that there was and had to be some variation in accommodations, furnishings and service. Some were more luxurious and more ornate than others but none of the grand hotels lacked quality. The main lobby of the Profile House was 250 feet long with massive plate glass picture windows on both sides. Imported Irish lace curtains draped each window from ceiling to floor. One became damaged and the replacement cost was \$1200.00 and that was three quarters of a century ago.

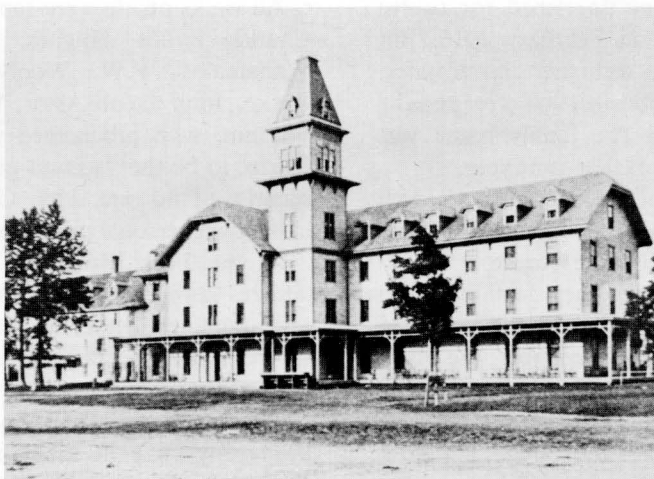
They all had characteristics which were common to all, but at the same time each had some special noteworthy feature or features which distinguished it from the rest.

Clearly the all wood frame construction, numerous fireplaces and lack of such later incorporated devices as automatic sprinkler systems were major causes of the conflagrations which raged repeatedly during the period. However these losses failed to discourage the stalwart entrepreneurs who started to rebuild in many instances almost before the embers had cooled.

The first Glen House, completed in 1866 following a series of additions, was according to the History of Coos County, "One of the most fashionable places of resort in the country" and boasted the largest parlor in the United States, 100 x 44 ft. It burned in 1884. Its successor, of magnificent British Cottage architecture, was built and



Dining Hall of Profile House



Kearsarge House, North Conway



Henry Ward Beecher's Tent at Twin Mountain House



Twin Mountain House



Coaching Parade



Profile House

open for business only one year later in 1885. Unfortunately this too, like its predecessor, succumbed to fire after a very short life of only eight years. There was a third and even a fourth Glen House destroyed by fire but neither could qualify as a grand hotel.

Another example of the enterprise of these White Mountain entrepreneurs in dealing with the all too frequent conflagrations concerns the next to last Crawford House which burned on Saturday, May first 1859. The following Monday, Col. Eastman, one of the owners, drew up plans for a replacement 600 feet long and three stories high. He told his unbelieving partners that he would guarantee to have this new hotel ready to receive guests in 60 days, given three days grace. Incredible as it may seem, on July 13th, 1859, forty guests were served dinner and 100 were provided accommodations for the night.

Gray's Inn, Jackson, provides yet another instance of the courage and perseverance of the grand hotel proprietors of the times. Originally constructed in 1885, it burned to the ground in 1902. Only one year later, the second Gray's Inn had almost been completed when like its predecessor it was destroyed by fire.

Undaunted, C.W. Gray immediately proceeded to rebuild again and the third Gray's Inn opened for business in August, 1904. This replacement flourished for twelve years until it too was consumed in February 1916. But far from being defeated by these recurrent catastrophes, Mr. Gray once more assembled a construction crew and the fourth and present hotel bearing the family name was ready to receive guests the summer of that same year.

Despite the epidemic of destructive fires, my research does not indicate any panics and only the loss of one life. In fact, when the 600-guest Profile House and Cottages were consumed at the height of the vacation season on August 3, 1923, not a single person was injured nor a piece of baggage lost. This was probably the most spectacular of all the conflagrations, a blazing inferno which included not only the hotel and cottages but also the employees' dormitory, the stables and garage, a quarter of a mile distant.

For a few days following the fire, serious consideration was given to rebuilding and preliminary plans for a huge

Swiss chalet type structure were drawn up. However, the then owner, Karl P. Abbott, and his father, Frank H. Abbott, decided that Franconia Notch should properly belong to the people, and the Profile House site was sold to the state of New Hampshire along with the other properties to become Franconia Notch State Park.

The patrons who frequented the grand hotels during this period were possessed of great wealth and the majority of impeccable social standing. Many were numbered among Ward McAllister's prestigious 400. They came mainly from the Atlantic Seaboard, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and intermediate cities.

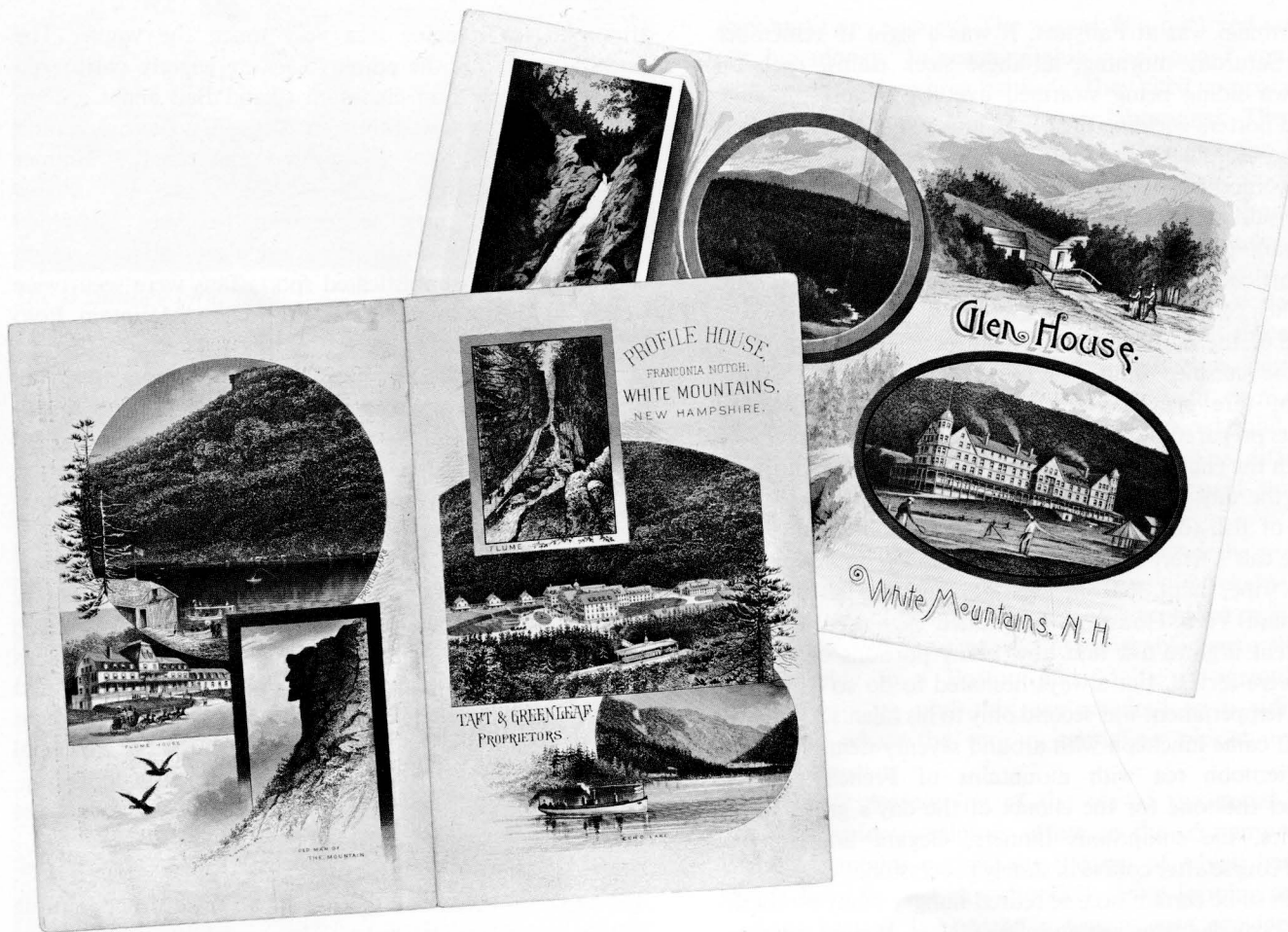
With mountains of luggage, retinues of personal servants, governesses and tutors for their children, entire families, many comprising three generations, returned year after year for the whole summer. One prominent dowager who sojourned at the Profile House, added to her entourage by bringing along a flunky, attired in a uniform resplendent with gold lace, to stand guard outside of her suite.

The signatures of five United States presidents appeared on various hotel registers of the era; Franklin Pierce, Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield and Warren G. Harding. So did two British prime ministers, Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden.

All walks of life were represented: John D. Rockefeller, Charles Evans Hughes, Thomas A. Edison, John Wanamaker, F.W. Woolworth, Mary Pickford, Billie Burke, John Jacob Astor, Diamond Jim Brady and P.T. Barnum, who proclaimed the area's spectacular autumn foliage to be the "second greatest show on earth." To the surprise of no one, Mrs. George Pullman always arrived in her own personal private car.

At the Twin Mountain House, Henry Ward Beecher and his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe vacationed summer after summer. Here he preached every Sunday, first in the ballroom and later in a tent erected to accommodate the overflow.

Travel was principally by rail and there were no finer trains anywhere in the United States than those which served the area such as the famed White Mountains Express. Spur lines extended from the main tracks to the Profile House, the Maplewood and the Waumbek, while



* MENU *			
MOCK TURTLE	PRINTANER		
BAKED WHITEFISH, SHERRY WINE SAUCE	POTATOES PARISIENNE		
BOILED FOWL WITH PORK, EGG SAUCE	LEG OF LAMB, CAPER SAUCE		
ROAST BEEF	TURKEY, CRANBERRY SAUCE	LAMB, MINT SAUCE	
SOUTH-DOWN MUTTON, JELLY SAUCE	CHICKEN POT PIE	TAKE DUCK, APPLE SAUCE	
TENDERLOIN OF BEEF, A LA DUCHESSE	CHICKEN CROQUETTES WITH FRENCH PEAS	SMALL GAME PATTIES WITH TRUFFLES	
LOIN OF VEAL, A LA JARDONNIERE	BAKED MACARONI WITH CREAM	PINEAPPLE FRITTERS, BRANDY	
CHAMPAGNE PUNCH	PANCAKE, SHELL SAUCE	CORDED BEEF	
COLD HAM	RAW TOMATOES	CUCUMBERS	
BOILED AND MASHED POTATOES	GREEN CORN	SQUASH	STEWED TOMATOES
BOILED RICE	MALTED TURKEY	SPRING BEANS	PEAS
SUCCOTASH	SHALLOTTES	TRANSPARENT PUDDING	CUSTARD PIE
SLICED APPLE PIE	CHOCOLATE ECLAIRS	COCONUT MERINGUES	STAR KISSES
CHARLOTTE RUSSE	BUTTER SPONGE CAKE	CONFECTIONERY	NEAPOLITAN CAKE
SWISS CAKE	SHERRY, ST. CROIX RUM, AND CALIFORNIA WINE JELLIES	BLACKBERRIES	APPLES
PEANUTS	CALIFORNIA GRAPE	PINEAPPLES	BANANAS
MUSMELON	MIXED NUTS	RAISINS	COFFEES
WATER CRACKERS	EGGS, CHEESE, AND AMERICAN CHEESE		

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 1885.

Sunday July 10th.	
Little Neck Clams	
SOUPS	
Tomato, aux Croûtons	
FISH	
Boiled Penobscot Salmon, Hollandaise Sauce	
Pommes Châtaignes	
BOILED	
Boiled Philadelphia Capon, à l'Allumande	
ROASTS	
Roast Prime Ribs of Beef, Dish Gravy	Roast Spring Lamb, Mint Sauce
Dressed Lettuce	
ENTREES	
Chicken Sauté, à la Marengo	Stewed Lobster, à la Newburgh
Queen Fritters, à la Imperatrice	
Potato Salad	
VEGETABLES	
Steamed New Potatoes	Mashed Potatoes
Green Peas	Mashed Turnip
Pickled Beets	String Beans
DESSERT	
Cranberry Pie	Baked Indian Pudding
American Cheese	Apple Pie
	Assorted Cake
	Strawberry Ice Cream
	Lemon Pie
	Water Crackers
	Demi Tasse

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the terminal was at Fabyans. It was a sight to remember on a Saturday morning, all these sleek trains, each on it's own siding being swarmed over by a host of white coated porters wielding their long handled brushes, buckets and hoses. Then on Sunday night, section by section, each composed of eight sleeping cars and one baggage car, would glide away so that the various bankers, brokers, merchant princes, captains of industry etc., could be in their offices on Monday morning, after a pleasant weekend with their families.

One of the most important features of the grand hotels was the cuisine. Bountiful by any standard, the daily bills of fare provided a super abundance of gustatory delights prepared by the top chefs in the resort industry.

With the charcoal broilers fired up early for the morning meal, the day began with a hearty repast including three kinds of fish (one fresh and two salt) sirloin steak, lamb chops, calf's liver, spring chicken, fresh or pickled honeycomb tripe, ham, bacon, sausage, and the chef at the Mountain View House always added pigs feet. I had a persistent urge to ask him how many portions of the last item were served, but always hesitated to do so as a head chef's temperament was second only to his talents.

Next came luncheon with around seventy items followed by afternoon tea with mountains of French pastries. This set the tone for the climax of the day's gastronomic activities, the sumptuous dinners, elegant and formal, served course after course in stately procession.

Then to be certain no one retired hungry many establishments provided late evening refreshments. Weight watchers and the diet prone had no place in this environment and the hundreds of rocking chairs on the endless porches creaked and groaned as these trenchermen relaxed and napped awaiting the line up in front of the dining room doors to form again.

For the vacationing "city folks" who preferred not to limit their daily exercise to the manipulation of knives and forks a variety of sports facilities were available. Sedate croquet and walks suited the dowagers with their ever present parasols. There was no "cult of the sun" in those days. There was golf and putting, badminton and tennis, bicycle riding, swimming, boating and fishing, horseback riding, and the Mountain Wagons drawn by four and six horses, galloping gaily hither and yon. And for the hardier and more adventurous souls the omnipresent mountains provided a challenge.

Perhaps the champion in the last mentioned was the lady from the Glen House who walked to the top of Mt. Washington and back on the same day and danced at a ball that evening. By the accomplishment of this feat she won a bet of \$1000. She was of medium height and was reported to weigh 230 pounds. History does not record whether this was before the exercise or after.

Itinerant magicians, choral groups, lecturers and thespians furnished a variety of entertainment. Every establishment featured a resident orchestra, with many of the musicians recruited from the Boston Symphony. Dance instructors were part of the regular hotel staffs, and

afternoon tea dancing was very much the vogue. The weekly dances for the employees were eagerly patronized by the guests and an elaborate Grand Ball and Cotillion climaxed the season. Summer romances flourished and as one observer put it "Summer Romances and Summer Not."

There was a baseball league with the teams assembled from various colleges which played a regularly scheduled series. The more sophisticated sports fans were seen twice weekly at the polo games at the White Mountain Polo Ranch in Whitefield.

The most spectacular events of the season were the coaching parades of elaborately decorated vehicles drawn by teams of 4, 6, 8, and even 12 horses. Competition among the participating hotels was exceedingly keen and the cost of readying some of the entries ranged as high as \$3500.

The proprietors of these huge White Mountain caravansaries were an ilk apart. Gracious, friendly, impeccably attired, they were always concerned with the well being of their guests and employees. In a sense they were jacks of all trades. They had to be, for the daily problems and situations arising in the housing, feeding and entertainment of hundreds of patrons and staff constituted a continual demand upon their judgment, knowledge and ingenuity. Truly captains of the ship, they were on the bridge 24 hours of every day throughout the entire season.

The list includes Frank H. Abbott and his son, Karl P. Abbott, of the Forest Hills, Upland Terrace and Profile House; Col. Charles Greenleaf, who preceded Karl Abbott at the Profile House; the three Barrons, Asa Taylor, Oscar G., Col. William A., proprietors of the Twin Mountain House, the Fabyan House and Crawford House respectively; Carl Hoskins of the Sunset Hill House; Captain Frank Doudera of the Balsams; and Van H. and Frank S. Dodge, of the Mountain View House.

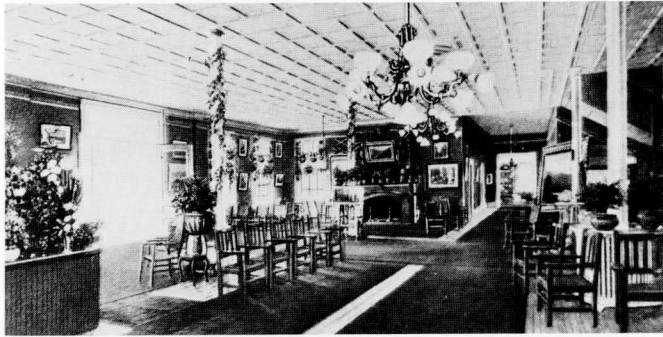
Obviously here again space limitations preclude my listing of only a few but among those mentioned there are several whom I am proud to say I had the privilege of knowing personally.

I do not sense that there was any great rivalry or competition for patronage between these various enterprises, but there was considerable good natured dispute as to which establishment provided the best view, or was sited on the highest elevation. A surveyor's level manned by Nathan R. Perkins in Jefferson persistently focused over Bethlehem's main street on the crest of Mount Agassiz just beyond, but John G. Sinclair refused to accept this and would demonstrate by plane trigonometry coupled with which he alleged to be "plainer common sense" that his town sat on a higher eminence. Perhaps the best answer to this controversy was given long before it erupted when Thomas Starr King proclaimed that "The finest view of the White Mountains is from Jefferson Hill," and suggested the building of the Waumbek.

The problem of obtaining the hundreds of employees needed to staff the Grand Hotels was solved to a considerable extent by hiring students, both from the local



The Waumbek Fire, 1928



The Lobby, Fabyan House



Mt. Washington Hotel

schools and from the colleges. This enabled many educators to be paid for in whole or in part from wages and tips received by waitresses, bellmen, chambermaids, porters, caddies and others. Department heads and the chefs and cooks were expert professionals who migrated to the grand hotels of Florida, the Carolinas and Georgia during the winter months.

Towards the end of the 1800's the going rate at most of the grand hotels ranged from \$4.00 to \$5.00 per day per person full American Plan. That dastardly word inflation in it's present context did not even appear in the dictionary. However, with the opening of the Mt. Washington in 1902, owner Joseph P. Stickney doubled this figure to \$10.00. The only effect to increase patronage, which necessitated an addition to the dining room plus sixty-five more guest rooms in 1906. This brought the combined guest count of the Mt. Washington and the Mt. Pleasant in excess of 800. This same year marked the completion of the second Profile House accommodating 600 guests and found none other than Winston Churchill stumping the area to raise funds for his political campaigns. His timing was excellent as 1906 was a very prosperous year with all the hotels overflowing.

The question has arisen, were the hotels profitable, did

they make any money? The answer is a qualified yes, but not big money. In reaching this conclusion I conferred with several retired area bankers. They cited comparatively low investment, low taxes and low labor costs. Then too, the long arms of government regulation and the I.R.S. were not probing into every nook and corner. In many instances bookkeeping was quite simple, fancy items like reserves for depreciation and deferred maintenance came later.

One prominent boniface initiated a system of deferred payment. He never paid any of his bills until the end of the season. Then he would journey to Boston, put up at the Parker House or the Touraine, call on each of his purveyors, thank them for services rendered, and settle all of his outstanding accounts in cash. The difference between what he took in and what he paid out was profit.

Boston was the main source of supply for the majority of the hotels in the region, and the old reliable New England firm of S.S. Pierce (proper Bostonians pronounce it Purse) served most of them. Perishables were shipped twice weekly in a Boston and Maine refrigerator car packed with ice and this was shunted to a siding in Whitefield where the various consignees picked up their respective orders.

Obviously the coming of the era of the grand hotels had a tremendous salutary effect on the economy of the White Mountains region, the income of which had previously been derived almost entirely from farming and the forest industries. It brought in new money, provided employment, more markets for farmers, increased property values and railroad facilities. However this discourse should not end by leaving one with the impression that the sole benefits to the area were economic, as witness this final quotation from the History of Coos County:

"Not only was business extended but for the local citizenry intelligence on necessary and popular topics was more generally diffused."

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R.E.S.