

Readers found National Hotel gossip entertaining

The National Hotel will soon undergo a change that will make it a beautiful, convenient and commodious modern hotel. Its owners are James D. Showers, William N. Showers, John Waldron, W.J. Allen and T.E. Lawes, and the mere mention of their names is a guarantee that whatever is done will be done well," *Bloomington World*, Jan. 23, 1895.

As the turn of the century approached, Bloomington was transforming itself from a little college town to a city. One of the signs of growth was the quality of accommodations for visitors.

The National Hotel was by no means the first and foremost place to stay. The old, established one had been the Orchard House, which was an impressive size — three stories high.

Then there was the National House between Walnut and Washington streets on the north side of Kirkwood Avenue. Its refurbishing in 1895 may have been due to the competition — a brand-new Gentry Hotel.

Whatever their reason, the local businessmen were determined to make their hotel "a palace of beauty." They told a



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

World reporter that their plans included extension of the building to Washington Street on the east side, modernization of the front, the addition of a mansard roof, and a porch extending the entire length of the building.

There were other plans for the hotel. Explained the newspaper, "The office will be on the ground floor in the new addition, and its floor will be tile. The rooms will be high and light. Reading rooms will join the office."

Other changes revealed to the reporter were steam heat and a system of electrical bells. Of even more interest to visitors were plans for hot and cold water in the hotel bathrooms. The *World* reporter added, "Under the management of Mr. and Mrs. T.E. Lawes the National has made a wide reputation, and with the changes now contemplated it will at once take rank with the leading hotels of the West in cities of similar size."

The newspapers in 1895 had a curious custom of publicizing the names of newly-arrived hotel guests, making it rather difficult for anyone to sneak in and out of town for whatever reason. On Jan. 25, the *World* reported that the three hotels (Walnut Street, National and Gentry) had varied clientele.

At the Walnut Street Hotel the guests were from Cincinnati, Harrodsburg, Indianapolis and Chicago. The Gentry Hotel had guests from St. Louis, South Bend, New York City, Hamilton, Ohio, Louisville, Danville, Chicago, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Elizabethtown, Rochester and Stinesville. At the National Hotel there were people from Anderson, Louisville, New Albany, Bedford, Elizabethtown, Battle Creek, Mich., New York City, Greencastle, Chicago, Martinsville, Richmond, Peru, Fort Wayne, Harrodsburg, Scottsburg and Mitchell.

The National Hotel's guest, who said he was from Chicago, caused them considerable trouble and some embarrassment. The Feb. 2, 1895, edition of the *World* described the problem.

On the register the visitor gave his name as Benjamin G. Granst. On Monday, Jan. 28, he had eaten at the hotel

and engaged a room. The next morning he remained in bed, saying that he was not well.

In fact, he was "sick" for three days. Finally, Lawes decided he'd have a look at the ailing guest. Continued the *World* article, "When Mr. Lawes entered the room he found his guest sitting up in the bed, but as soon as he entered, the man threw the book down, pulled the bed clothes up over him, and began moaning like he was going to quit this vale of tear without any further notice."

Apparently, Lawes was not impressed with "Mr. Granst's" acting ability and demanded that the guest pay the bill immediately. The newspaper explained what happened next. "His suffering friend (Granst) said that he thought he would be well enough to go down to the office the next morning and would settle then for his entertainment."

The end of the story was certainly predictable. "He didn't go down the next morning. The clerk went to his room and found it empty. He had skipped in the night and taken away everything he had brought with him and some other things besides."

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