



# The Bradford Springs Hotel

A 1858 map shows an isolated clump of buildings in the SW corner of the tipped rectangle that is the town of Bradford. Now, cellar holes are the only remnants of a community that developed here around a curious spring and a clever marketing strategy.

General Sam Andrews, born in Hillsboro in 1813, was a soldier and entrepreneur. He made, and occasionally lost, fortunes in lumber, mills and stores of various sorts, and land development. In 1840, he built a small hotel he called the Hermitage "a few feet from the spring". The Indians knew of the odiferous spring that never froze long before. A 1770 story tells of the natives who camped here with their sick by its supposedly curative waters.

Nearby, the General built a store and a tannery. The landscape was drier then, beaver had been extirpated years ago, trapped out for the fashion industry and altering the hydrology. Moose, wolf, mountain lion, turkey, bear, rattlesnake, and fisher were also among the missing.

A dam behind the tannery temporarily created the seven and a half acre Lovewell Lake, used by the tourists for fishing and canoeing. The farms of Deer Valley Road and the East Washington Road provisioned the hotel. By 1843, they also supplied enough children to warrant funding of the #10 Springs school located on the north side of the road by the big rocks.

The hotel, meanwhile, was a success. In 1858, heavily advertising the 'healthful sulfur waters', the General moved the building forty rods further down the road, renaming it the Bradford Springs Hotel. It was expanded to 100' X 40', and as a mark of his organizational skills or his stern countenance, it was said to have been rebuilt, furnished, and open for business in ten weeks, bowling alley included. It was \$6-10 per week and 25 cents extra to have meals brought to your room.

Departing on the 1pm train from Boston, vacationers arrived at the Bradford station, now the Merrimack Farm Store, at 4:30pm and were met by the hotel coach. In 1850 the busy town had reached its peak population of 1350 souls. Close to 80% of the land had been cleared and sheep were everywhere. The views of Lovewell and Haystack mountains would have been unobstructed.

The speeches of the Centennial Celebration of 1887, with the Civil War still fresh on their minds, included laments about the declining population, by that time down to 900. But the hotel business was such that an addition was added to the hotel in 1882, expanding its capacity to 150. This was an era of recreational botanizing and egg collecting. Meadowlark, bobolink, night hawk and whippoorwill were likely common in the pastures. The odd occurrence of Atlantic white cedar and carnivorous pitcher plants at the Bog would have been noted.

In July of 1886, Charles Kezar came up from Salem, Mass. seeking a cure for what ailed him. The hotel proprietor at that time was Henry McCoy. Apparently his health was retrieved by the odiferous waters and Mr. Kezar bought the farm across the road in 1888. Here select overflow patrons were housed in "the cottages", away from the bustle of the main hotel.

In 1905, the spring water was piped directly to the hotel. Now past its heyday, the hotel remained open for another dozen years, May to October. In 1921, it was purchased and taken down to be rebuilt as the Maplehurst Inn in Antrim.

Farms that dotted the once open landscape burned or were recycled. The forest closed in. Beaver and turkey were reintroduced. Moose, bear, and other expatriates returned and the sheep moved west. Meadow birds departed replaced by warblers. Again the human population has risen and vacations are not as leisurely. The renovated spring house now lives at Musterfield Farm in Sutton. Its brick foundation is still out there amidst the marsh sedges. Now the hotel site is a park, donated to the town by an ancestor of the restored Mr. Kezar. The quaking bog and much of the cedar swamp has been preserved for the special environment it is.

*Rewritten from an article originally appearing in the Bradford Bridge by J. Ann Eldridge.*