

# Taverns and Hotels at the Corner of Fall and State Streets in Seneca Falls

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The corner of Fall and State Streets has been the location of a tavern/hotel since the earliest settlers along the Seneca River in what is today Seneca Falls. The first such tavern was



the Clinton House. Early travelers following the road west to Buffalo, etc. frequently stopped there. At some point the Clinton House was destroyed or torn down<sup>1</sup> and replaced by the Carr's hotel. It was in 1866 that Milton Hoag purchased Carr's hotel at the corner of Fall and State streets, and spent a large sum of money in greatly improving the building.<sup>2</sup>

In 1877, Mr. Hoag took personal charge of his hotel which he named Hoag's Hotel. He conducted it until it was burned in the big fire of July 30, 1890, which swept away a large portion of the business section of Seneca Falls, and in which Mr. Hoag lost over \$55,000 over and above all insurance for the several businesses he owned in Seneca Falls.<sup>3</sup> *The Reveille* reported the Hoag's Hotel losses (including contents) at \$30,000, with insurance coverage of \$7,600.<sup>4</sup>



A new Hoag House was built in 1895. Given its location on the trolley lines connecting Geneva, Waterloo, and Seneca Falls, with cars operating every half-hour, as described in *Grip's Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, the Hoag House became a favorite of “the transient trade, catering as it does exclusively to that class, and is generally made the headquarters for traveling men having business in those three towns.”<sup>5</sup>



This new Hoag House was said to possess “all modern improvements.” It was an imposing three-story brick building with stone trimmings and entrances on two streets—Fall and State. The interior was finished throughout in oak wood. The main floor was laid with tile. The office, lobbies, vestibules, writing room and barber shop were lighted with plate glass windows. There were fifty rooms in the hotel and a seating capacity of one hundred in the dining room.<sup>6</sup>

A Mr. C. M. Bills of New York City took over as proprietor on August 1, 1903. *Grip's Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls* described him as having “the faculty and good sense to keep a competent office staff and the best help throughout the house.” Grip’s publication goes on to say that “Seneca Falls which in the beginning contributed so liberally to secure the erection of a first class hotel building has not been disappointed in getting the man who was needed to make the house what the traveling public wanted.”<sup>7</sup>

In late December 1905, a new bowling alley at the Hoag House opened for business. It was described as one of the finest professional alleys in Central New York. It was built by R.A. Shindel, clerk of the Hoag House.<sup>8</sup>



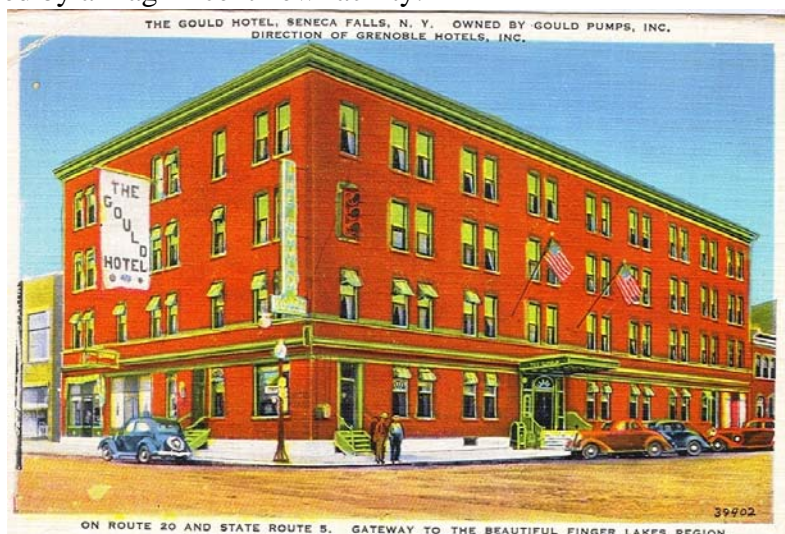
[This 1913 postcard shows the livery stables building next to the Hoag House. The livery building becomes the Kellogg Garage.]

In late May 1912, the Hoag House, which for nine years had been under the management of C. M. Bills, was acquired by Louis Stauff of Geneva. Stauff purchased the building from Charles McKeivitt.<sup>9</sup>

Tragedy struck on Thanksgiving morning in 1918, when a fire began in the basement of The Hoag House. By noon the building was a total loss, with nearly all of the equipment destroyed. Four blackened walls stood where the hotel had stood just six hours before. Villagers declared that this was the end of the hotel business in Seneca Falls. This was not the case, however, because the Goulds Manufacturing Company stepped forward. Desirous of having a good hotel facility for its business use, the Goulds company furnished the \$250,000 capital needed to build a new hotel. This new hotel, appropriately named the Gould Hotel, opened on February 11, 1920. The Hoag House was gone, but it was replaced by a magnificent new facility.<sup>10</sup>

This new Gould Hotel was described in the *Syracuse Journal* as “the most complete and perfectly equipped of the smaller hotels of New York State. Four stories in height, absolutely fireproof in construction and equipped in perfect taste and convenience, it is scheduled to become the mecca for travelers and autoists between Rochester and Syracuse.”<sup>11</sup>

The plans were drawn up by George B. Post and Son



of New York City, and provided for a building of four floors, with a main entrance on State Street. Stores would be located on the Fall Street side of the building. Actual construction work was done by the Amsterdam Building Company, starting in the winter of 1919. The new hotel building was of concrete and steel construction throughout. The door and window sills and the picture moldings were the only things of the building itself that could burn. In addition to the large lobby, the double dining rooms and a well-arrange kitchen, the hotel itself had 72 rooms and 8 apartments. Fifty of the rooms were equipped with baths, including hot and cold water, and telephone connections.<sup>12</sup>

L.J. Stauf, who had operated the Hoag House, was given a contract to manage the Gould Hotel for 10 years. In an experiment that other hotels might have adopted if it had proved successful, Stauf operated a laundry which, besides doing primarily the hotel's laundry, also did commercial work. Mr. Stauf also operated a candy store, catering to the hotel trade and the Seneca Falls community. H.E. Moyers operated the barber shop. The Auto Club, which had had offices in the Hoag House, opened an office in the new Gould Hotel building.<sup>13</sup>

A feature of this hotel, which no other small hotel establishment in all of New York State had, was a ground level promenade. It consisted of a walled-in court at the rear of the building, with landscaping in the form of a formal garden. This promenade had direct access to the dining and dancing rooms, and was used for summer parties.<sup>14</sup>

The dining rooms were so arranged that they could be one big room for banquets or separate so that one could be used as a ball room and the other for dining. The dining room décor was colonial in style, with the walls painted café au lait and ivory white ceilings and Windsor mahogany chairs and tables.<sup>15</sup>

There was also a third room with a seating capacity of 30 people. This private dining room could be set up as one long table or a group of small tables. This room had a dark green rug and pearl gray walls and velour drapes. Both the woodwork and the furniture were Jacobean in style.<sup>16</sup>

The lobby had a Spanish-style appearance, with the furniture covered with heavy morocco leather. Heavy rugs covered the lobby floor, with table and floor lamps adding a quiet but luxurious feeling. The walls were finished in imitation Caen Stone and velour drapes.<sup>17</sup>

There were reading and writing rooms which opened off the lobby. These rooms were equipped with wicker ware and the walls were hung with tapestries. Eight desks were provided for the use of hotel guests.<sup>18</sup> The guest rooms had a mahogany dresser, desk, straight and rocker chairs, and portable and fixed lamps. The Simmons' beds had fine hair mattresses.<sup>19</sup>

The hotel promoters were especially proud of their kitchens. They were equipped by the Brumball Dean Company of New York City. There were three large gas ranges, with broilers, roasters and grills along one side of the room. Steam tables were arranged so that the foods can be prepared and kept hot and still be ready for instant service. On the other side of the room a large battery of coffee urns. There were large ice boxes where entire halves of beef could be kept in such a way that kitchen help could do their carving without bringing the meat into the kitchen proper. The Jewell Refrigeration Company provided these large ice boxes. The Hoag House had enjoyed a reputation throughout the state of fine cuisine and Mr. Stauf promised to maintain that reputation.<sup>20</sup>

The hotel was immediately adjoining two of the larger garages of the town, namely the Boyce Garage and the W.D. Kellogg service station. This became important for the Gould Hotel, as an increasing number of guests each year were to come by their own cars.<sup>21</sup> [The postcard shows the Boyce Garage and Fisher Theater, both of which were on Fall Street just west of the Gould Hotel.]



Because of the fireproof construction, Mr. W.E. Dickey, the sales manager for the Goulds Manufacturing Company and who had leased the main apartment on the second floor, now felt safe to hang his collection of valuable paintings (valued at about \$30,000) on the walls of his apartment. Fortunately, he had not felt the

Hoag House was safe from fire, so these valuable paintings had not been lost in the fire which destroyed the Hoag House in 1918.<sup>22</sup>

The Gould Hotel flourished for many years. Its Alps Restaurant was widely advertised.



George Bantuvanias owned the facility from 1960 to 1980.<sup>23</sup> He sold it to the GPM Corporation. Later it was owned by Phil Jordan. The Bedford Falls Enterprises acquired this property on August 31, 2007.<sup>24</sup>

Currently the Bedford Falls Enterprises is renovating the building to be re-opened in summer 2009 as the Hotel Clarence, named after the angel in the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*.

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- <sup>1</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel, *The Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>2</sup> “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 91
- <sup>3</sup> “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1991 reprint by the Seneca Falls Historical Society of the 1904 publication by Grip Publishing in Syracuse, NY, p 90
- <sup>4</sup> “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 123
- <sup>5</sup> “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 135
- <sup>6</sup> “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 136
- <sup>7</sup> “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 136
- <sup>8</sup> *The Syracuse Journal*, December 23, 1905.
- <sup>9</sup> “Hoag House Changes Hands,” *The Auburn Citizen*, May 31, 1912.
- <sup>10</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel, *The Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>11</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>12</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>13</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>14</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>15</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>16</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>17</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>18</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>19</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>20</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>21</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>22</sup> “Seneca Falls Opens \$250,000 Hotel,” *Syracuse Journal*, 1920.
- <sup>23</sup> Information supplied by Angeline Bantuvan in a December 3, 2008, phone call.
- <sup>24</sup> Information obtained in deeds records at the Seneca County Clerk’s Office.