

October 2021 E-NEWSLETTER

Edited by Eric Hooglund

This month is the 65th anniversary of the fire that destroyed The Belgrade, the grand hotel that put Belgrade on the national tourist map. The fire started during a windy afternoon on October 3, 1956. The summer season was over, The Belgrade's electricity and water had been disconnected, and the huge three-and-one-half story landmark with its famed 400-foot long veranda had been secured for the winter. The fire started about five pm and rapidly spread through the entire building. Belgrade fire trucks arrived on the scene swiftly, but the strong wind off Long Pond blew much of the water from their hoses back toward the lake. By six pm, the elegant and storied hotel was a large heap of ashes. To quote the Heritage Committee that put together the photo book, *Past and Present*, in 1976 to commemorate our country's bicentennial, "A part of the town of Belgrade died with the hotel."



The Belgrade, ca. 1909. Note the 400-foot veranda. The grass in front of the hotel is part of the 9-hole golf. After the 1956 fire, Tobey Development acquired the property, created Lakeshore Drive and sold lots for private homes and camps.

The Belgrade was constructed in accordance with the vision of Waterville business entrepreneur Charles Albert Hill (1852-1931), who in 1899 purchased several acres of undeveloped land between the West Road and Long Pond at the southern end of Belgrade Lakes village. This is the property on which he developed his luxury hotel. The grand elmwood-shingled building had 100 large, sumptuously furnished rooms with private bathrooms; a formal dining room where guests ate dinner while a trio of musicians provided live music, a large lobby where guests informally could chat and/or read books, a game room, and a playroom for children. And The Belgrade had electricity, still a novelty in rural Maine in 1900! He wanted electric lights for ALL the rooms, and to operate the elevators. To get electricity in rural Maine in 1900 meant that an entire electricity-producing network had to be created. That was done in record time, with the help of the waterpower at the dam. Thus, The Belgrade opened with electricity and the residents of Belgrade Lakes were among the select few villagers in the state to get electricity into their homes! By 1910, Hill even had persuaded Western Union to install a telegraph office in the hotel. On the expansive grounds outside the hotel were a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, a renown sunken garden, several guest cottages, which large groups rented for the summer, a swimming beach on Long Pond, boat houses for canoes and larger craft and trails through the woods along Long Pond south of the developed beach area and boat docks.



Belgrade Lakes was not the name of the village when Hill decided it would be an ideal place for his hotel. It was known as Belgrade Mills because it was the location of many mills, including a spool factory, sawmill, and several smaller wood workshops, all of which were situated near the dam at the north end of the village, where the stream from Great Pond flows over a natural 8-foot drop into Long Pond. Hill felt that a name like Belgrade Mills would not attract the wealthy tourists he wanted as paying guests. Thus, he lobbied the town's leaders and the US Post Office to change the village's name to Belgrade Lakes, the name he used in his earliest advertising brochures. His efforts did not meet with much opposition, and by 1903, Belgrade Mills officially had become Belgrade Lakes.

During World War I, Hill's son, Lawrence Boyd Hill (1894-1939), began helping his father in the management of The Belgrade, and in the early 1920s, he became a full partner. The father-son team worked well until 1931, when Charles Hill died in May, just as the hotel was gearing up for the summer season, and two weeks before his 79th birthday; his wife, Abigail *Boyd* Hill had passed away

15 months earlier. Lawrence Hill managed the hotel on his own for nine summers, and he also managed the elegant year-round Elmwood Hotel in Waterville. However, he died unexpectedly at the end of the 1939 summer season, one day before his 45th birthday. His sisters subsequently sold The Belgrade to the Acheson family, who operated it until the fateful fire on October 3, 1956.

Also, Hot off the Press!

***Eighty-Eight Years on a Maine Farm*, by Will and Minnie Penney**

Reprint of the 1970 edition by *Down East Books*.

Retail price: \$19.95

BHS price: \$17, plus \$4 postage and packaging if mailed

A reprint of The Belgrade Grange cookbook is available at Hello Good Pie and Oliver and Friends Bookstore in Belgrade Lakes Village.

It is also available from the Belgrade Historical Society for \$15.00 + a \$3.00 for Postage. To order from BHS send an email to belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com

**BELGRADE,
A
HISTORY**

EXCERPTED FROM

Illustrated History
of Kennebec County, Maine
1625-1799-1892

Editors: Henry D. Kingsbury, Simon L. Deyo



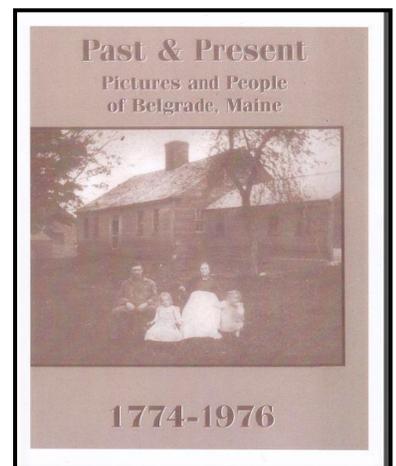
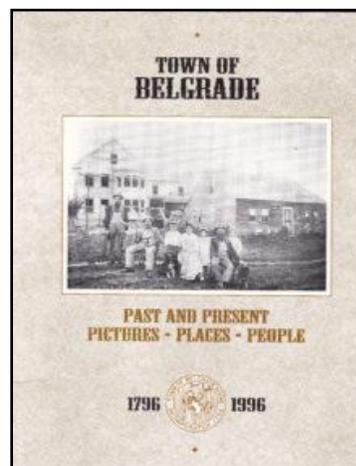
Also available is 'The History,' reprint of 1892 history compiled by Belgrade native John Clair Minot who eventually moved to Boston and became editor of *Youth's Companion*, a popular magazine for boys & an editor for Boston's Herald newspaper. \$10.00 includes postage.

Town of Belgrade Past and Present Pictures of People and Places

A special hardbound photo and text book for the coffee table!

Special price: \$26.00, featuring over 100 old photographs, each with historically

accurate descriptions! \$18.00 includes postage. includes postage and handling



The Past and Present, reprint of 1976 Bicentennial book featuring over 100 old photographs, each with historically accurate descriptions! \$18.00 includes postage.

BHS Capital Campaign



Rendering of Townhouse after complete Renovation

Sketch by Artist Erik Johnson

For those who want to give and have not yet done so, it is not too late.

Use your return envelope or send your own to BHS, P.O. Box 36A, Belgrade, Maine 04917. Use PayPal as an alternative by going to our website <http://belgradehistoricalsociety.org>

Or contact us through email at the following email address:
belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Don't forget that BHS is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization, so all contributions to its capital campaign to renovate the Old Town House are tax deductible. Any donation you make to BHS can be deducted from your income tax to the extent allowable by law. Please think of making an end-of-year donation to our worthy cause and help to preserve our history.

Remember...history not recorded is history lost!

Don't forget our face book for the most up to date news and
information onThe Belgrade Historical Society at
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/httpwww.belgradehistoricalsociety.org>