

Babcock's Grove House

The history of this building is nearly a history of Lombard. A substantial stone building in the center of the downtown and historical center of the downtown, this building remains the oldest remaining structure in downtown Lombard.

Originally called the Babcock's Grove House, it was built in 1858 of hand-hewn limestone, one foot thick, with a chimney rising from each corner. A porch ran along three sides of the hotel and one can imagine guests sitting on the porch enjoying the weather and perhaps some gossip among the men and women of the town. Certainly, it was a gathering place of the townsfolk of Babcock's Grove.

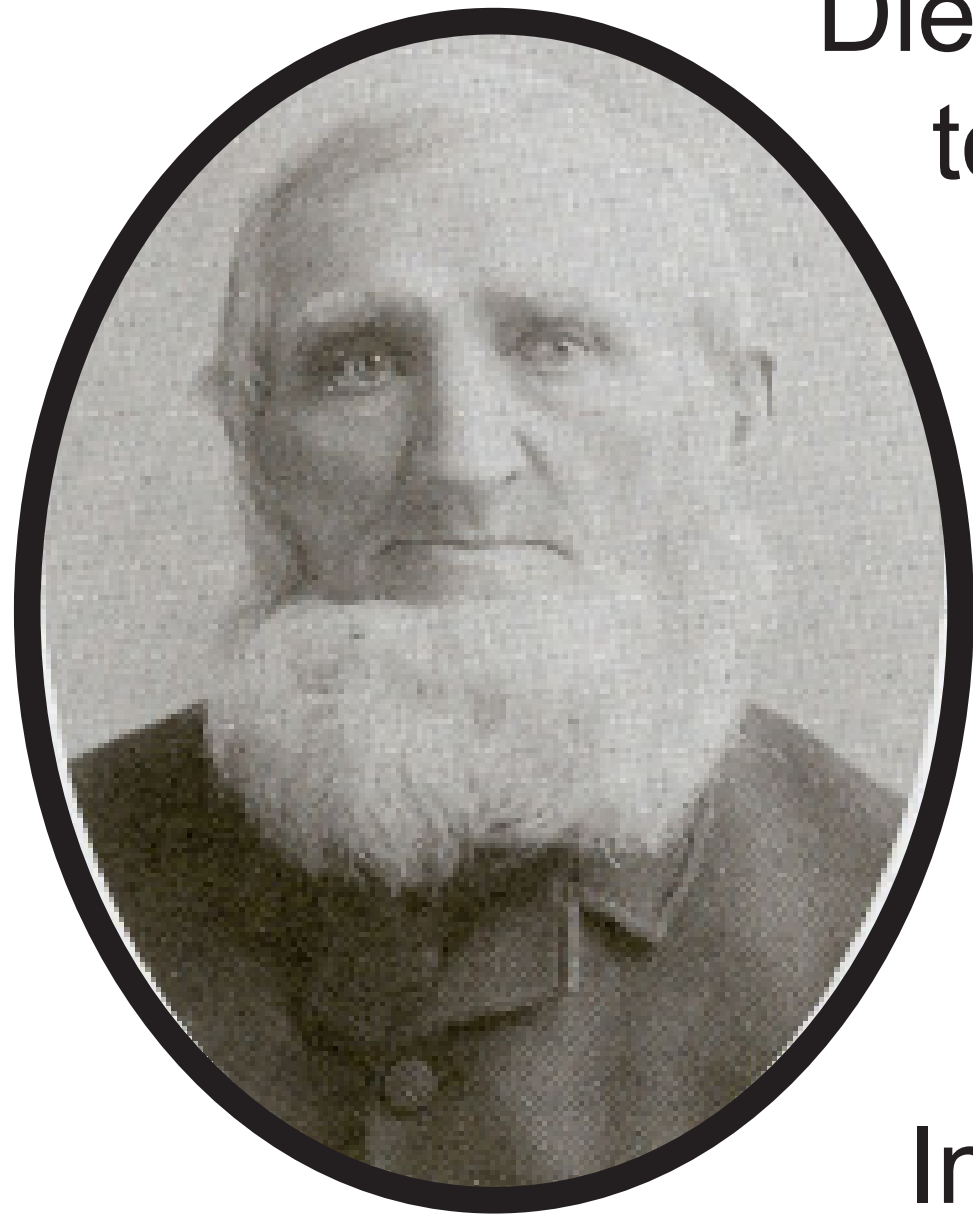
It is rumored that the building was built along the train line in order to accommodate all of the travelers to Downtown Chicago. This was due to the frenzy of the soon to happen Republican Convention in 1860 that was to nominate Abraham Lincoln as the next President. Although a great story, no substantiation can be found of this great folklore.



The building stands at the center of downtown Lombard and is one example of nineteenth century architecture that still stands today in Lombard.



Dietrich Klusmeyer



Dietrich Klusmeyer was the builder of the building you see today and the original owner of the hotel. Klusmeyer moved to Babcock's Grove in 1857 and purchased the property at the Southwest corner of Lake Street (now St. Charles Rd.) and Park Avenue in 1858 from A. E. Dann. At the time of the purchase there was a small frame hotel on the property that Klusmeyer demolished in order to construct his stone building.

In the 1860 census, Dietrich Klusmeyer was listed as a "Tavern Keeper" (a tavern is another name for Inn in 1860). He lived on the property with his wife, Louisa, two small children, brother, Henry and domestic servant, Frederic Balls. The family lived on the property until 1878 when they built a family home on Lake Street to what is now approximately the Lombard Veterinary Hospital. Klusmeyer owned the hotel off and on until 1876. The owner and tax payer in 1870 is Dietrich's son-in-law, Henry Golterman. Through the years 1870 and 1881, ownership shifts from the Klusmeyer family to the Golterman's and back again.

Also interesting to note about Dietrich is that he and his brother Henry, as property owners, were both listed on the original plat of Lombard.



Phillip Schempp & Peter Weigand

Philip Schempp came from Germany and settled in Philadelphia. He owned a Lager Beer Business in 1860 and owned a Wine and Liquor establishment in 1870. Philip was in ill health and he hired Peter Weigand to run the hotel in about 1888 – 1889. Philip had a daughter, Mary with his second wife. Mary married Peter Weigand. Mr. Weigand bought the hotel from his in-law's in 1900 and owned the property until 1910. Peter also built the first theatre in Lombard along Parkside Ave.

This was a wild place in its day. It is said that the cowboys over in Glen Ellyn and Wheaton used to work 5 1/2 days a week. It is said that the cowboys over in Glen Ellyn and Wheaton would get cleaned up on Saturday night and ride their horses down Lake Street to this bar, often times getting too drunk to ride home so they would sleep it off upstairs in the hotel and go home on Sunday.



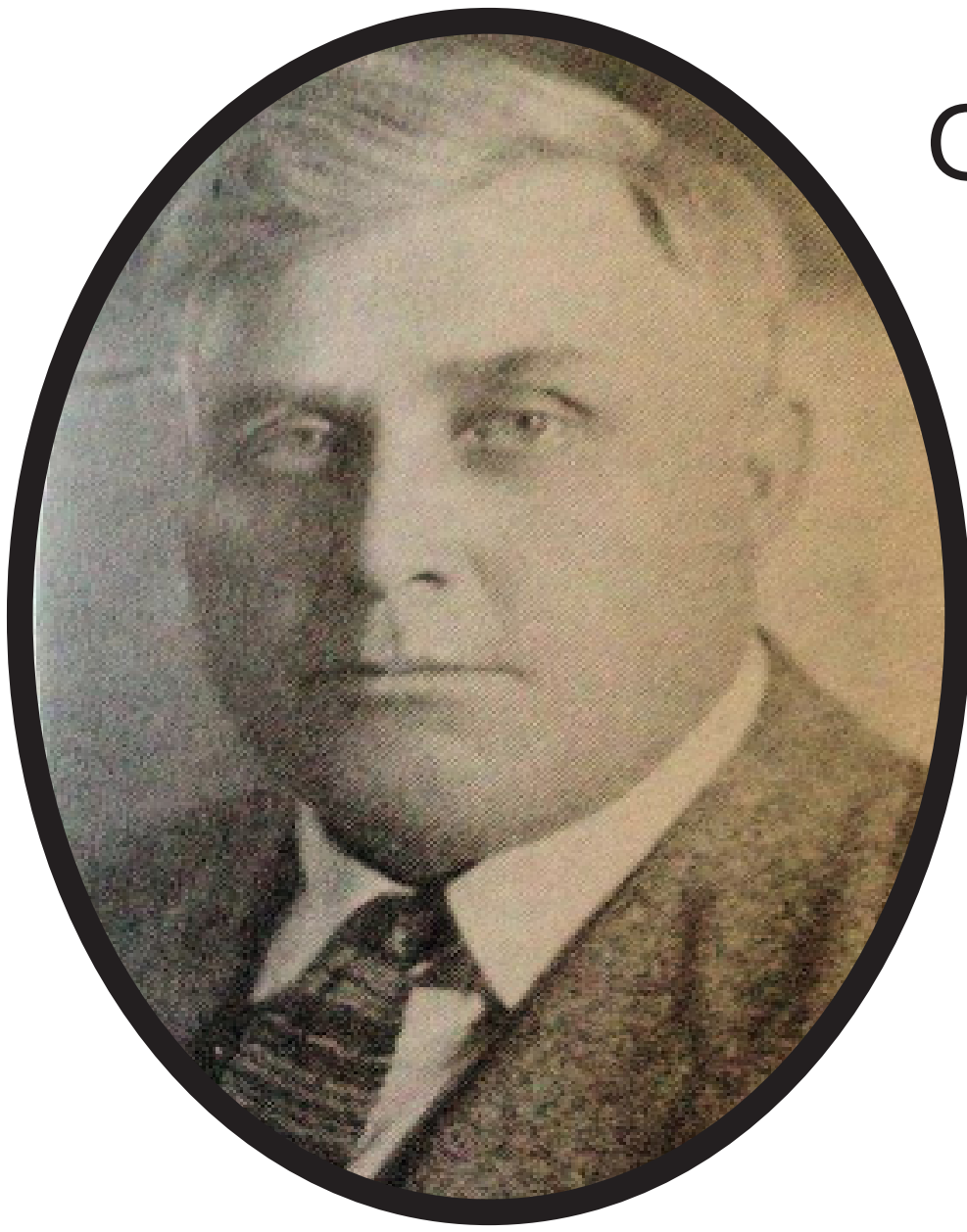
This image from the late 1800s shows the original Saloon and Restaurant sign. Horse trough and pump can be seen in picture.



The dram shop originally occupied a portion of the first story of the hotel. Picture from Left to Right: (behind bar) Peter Weigand, owner, Tony Klusmeyer and Charles Mech. In Front: William Zabel, Charles Assmann, and Jon Fischer.



George O'Connor



George O'Connor (1876-1929) first came to DuPage County about 1905 to work as milk wagon driver for Christian Nadelhoffer and also worked for Nadelhoffer's livery stable in Glen Ellyn. In around 1911 he came to Lombard and rented the livery stable connected to the Lombard Hotel from Peter Weigand. He rented horses and buggies as well as arranged teaming with his horses. Teaming is the predecessor to moving trucks and Uhaul businesses.

In 1912, he married Mathilda Nadelhoffer, the daughter of Christian Nadelhoffer and Mary Langreder Nadelhoffer. George and Mathilda O'Connor purchased the Lombard Hotel from Peter Weigand and remodeled the building, tearing off the old porch and installing the original stone steps. At this time, the building ceased being a hotel and saloon because the town was both dry and George was not a drinker.

The O'Connors took up residence in the building and George turned from livery man into a real estate developer, entering into the business with Wheatonian Bert Rathje. George was also responsible for two financial institutions that had offices in the old building, which had been renamed The O'Connor Building. Those two institutions were the First Trust Bank of Lombard and the York Building and Loan Association.



This image of the hotel is most likely from before 1912-1915 as the building still has its original porch. George O'Connor purchased the building from Peter Weigand in 1912.



Mathilda Nadelhoffer O'Connor



Throughout the time that the O'Connor's owned the building it underwent several changes. The porches were removed, concrete steps added and the first floor retail spaces were altered, removing one entrance on St. Charles and added modern storefronts on Park.

Mathilda Nadelhofer O'Connor (1888-1976) was born in 1888 in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Her father ran a livery stable in Glen Ellyn and presumably, Mathilda met her future husband, George O'Connor at this time.

After George's death in 1929, Mathilda and her children continued to live and work out of the old stone building. In Mathilda's 1976 obituary in the Lombardian, it mentions that Mathilda had lived at 2 S. Park Ave for 60 years. The obituary also mentions that Mathilda was very active in local organizations including the Lombard Woman's Club and was a charter member of Grace Lutheran Church in Glen Ellyn.

Zitt Family

The Zitt family purchased the property in 1976 after Mrs. O'Connor passed away. They owned the property directly to the west where the barn once stood. He operated a feed store which had an infamous monkey in the window. The Zitts never operated a business on the third floor, but rented out the basement, first and second floors. When Mr. Zitt died, the property went to his wife until her passing in December of 2012. The property went into a trust until taken over by Tom and Margret Smith.



Tom and Margret Smith

Tom and Margret Smith bought this property on December 22, 2014. Tom, a native of Lombard, recognized the historical significance of this building and importance to the social and cultural fabric of the Lombard community. This building is near and dear to Tom and Margret as Tom grew up in Lombard and his family forged a strong relationship within the Lombard community.



Tom remembers purchasing his first letterman jacket from a sporting goods store that once occupied the building and frequented stores in downtown Lombard while growing up. Tom and Margret have a great fondness for this building and respect its history.

As Tom and Margret continue with renovations to this historic structure they do so in honor and memory of Tom's parents. Mary and Bill Smith met in Chicago during World War II and moved their family of five children to Lombard in 1953. They bought a small, Cape Cod-style house in a development built in a cornfield west of Grace Street in Lombard's northeast quadrant.

Like many Lombard families, they were not wealthy, but they were honest, hard working and completely

devoted to their family. With children

involved in Lombard's many diverse activities, Mary Smith, was well known by everyone. Bill Smith was an avid reader and served on the board of the Friends of the Helen Plum Library. He was the family's stabilizing force whose foremost wish was for the family to stay united. Their children learned sportsmanship in village youth sports programs. Most worked as teenagers in Lombard businesses and a daughter participated in Lombard's Lilac Queen festivities.

Passing away within a year of each other in the early 1980s, the legacy of Mary and Bill live on through their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and most-importantly this building. The work has led other members of the family to return to Lombard in support of this effort.



Tom's parents, Bill and Mary Smith, were an important part of the Lombard community. Some people give their communities their time and expertise; some give themselves and some give their money. Bill and Mary gave Lombard a family.



Preserved in Time

Few changes have been made to the building since its construction in 1858. Early pictures of the building show a variety of architectural features, some of which have changed over the years. The porches were removed between 1912 and 1915 and the concrete stairs were added. Incredibly, the original basement level doors are still in place beneath the concrete stairs. The roof crest was also removed at some point, however pieces remain so it could be reinstated and reproduced. The windows and doors on the first floor were also reconfigured. The original chimneys were removed at different times. Below are several examples of original pieces of the building that remain.



Hidden beneath the concrete steps in the basement of the old hotel are the original doors and windows at the basement level for the building.



Parts of the building still maintain some of their original decoration, including the original tin ceiling in part of the first floor.



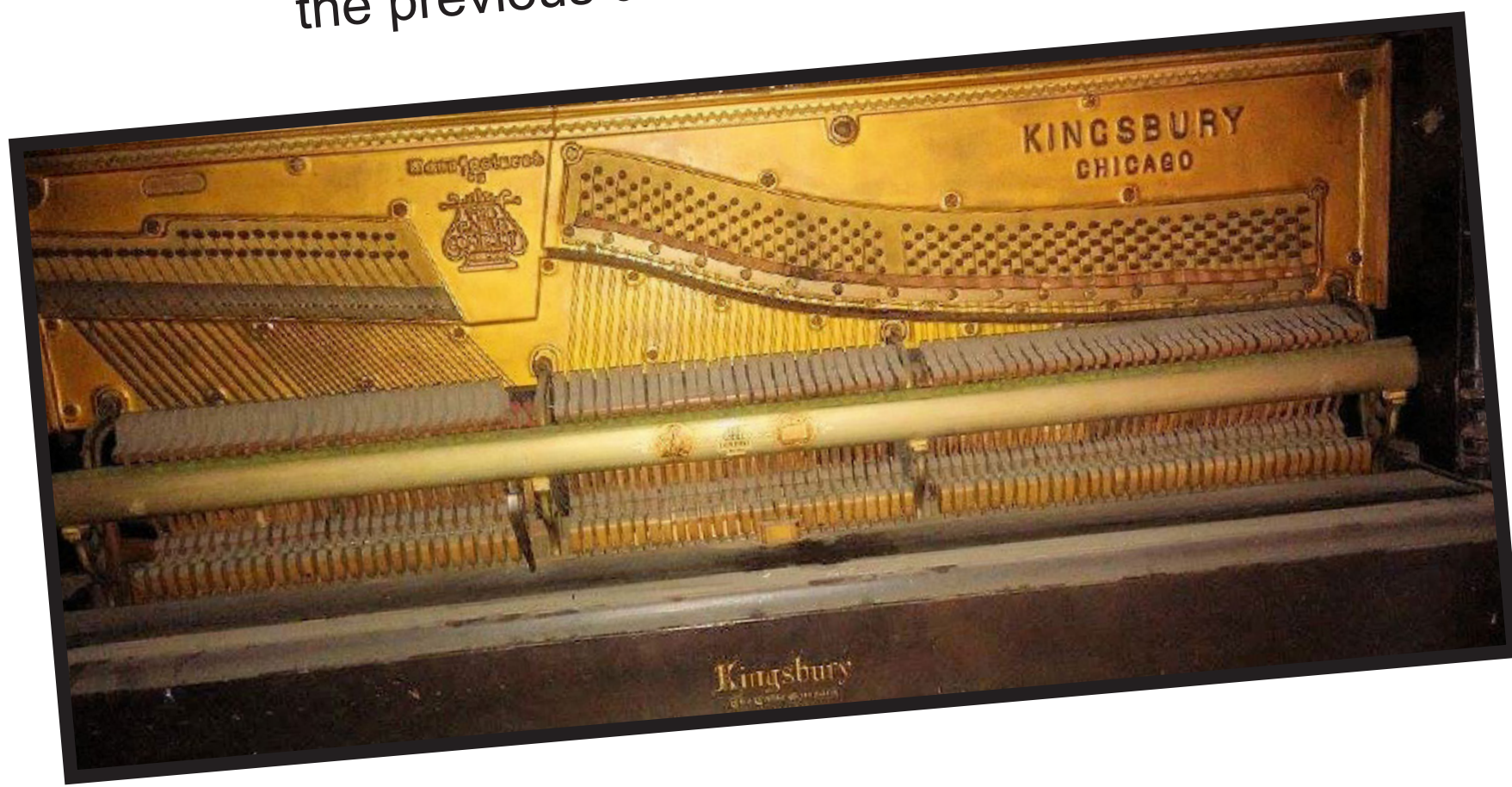
Pictures of the building throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century show a roof crest along the roof of the building. There were originally 48 pieces of this along the roof and only a few exist today.



Found in the Building

Remnants of the building's past exist throughout the entire building. Hidden in the walls, stored in the attic, tucked away in the basement, or simply left in the rooms as they were, much can be learned about the history of this building, the people who owned it and Lombard from these items.

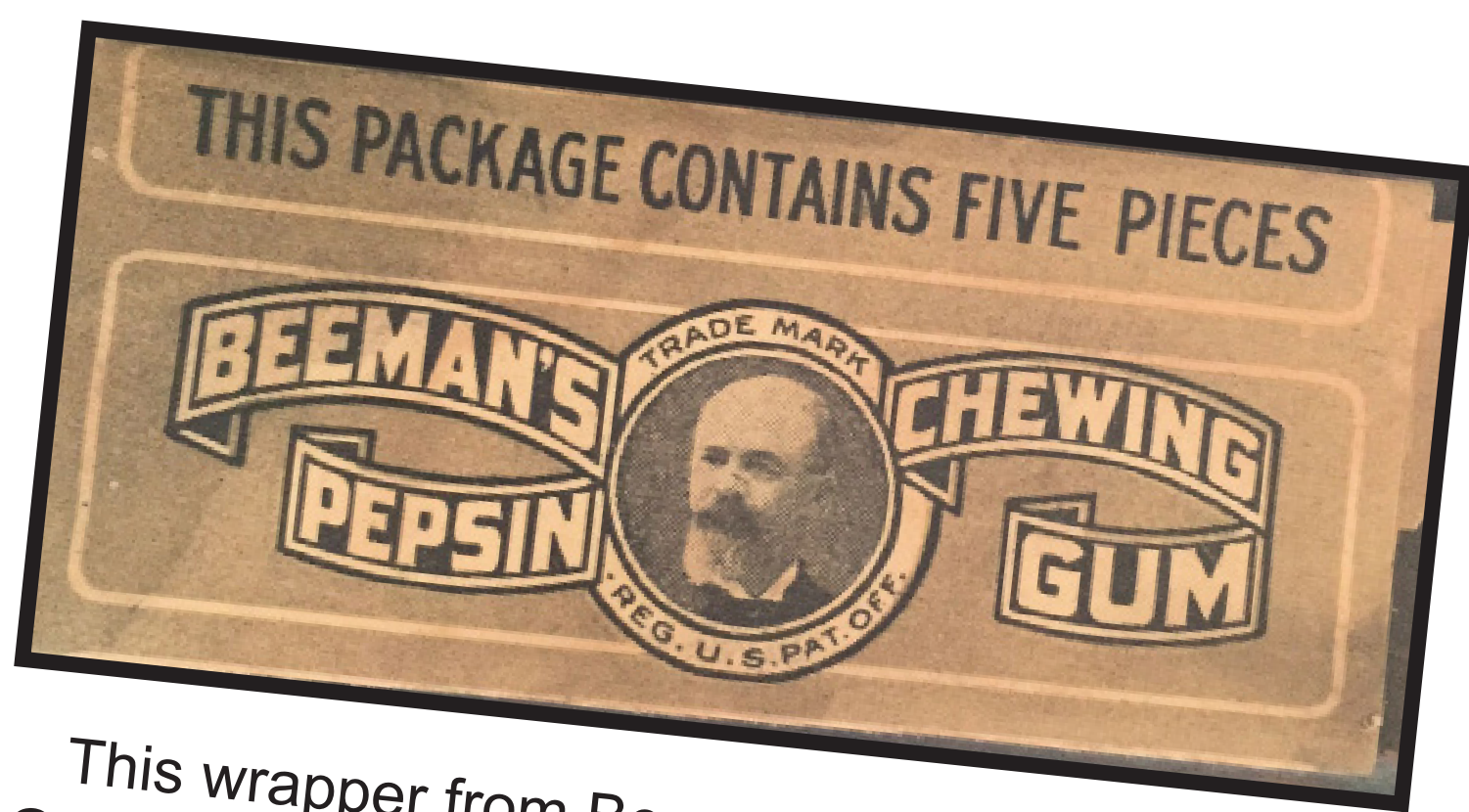
Two pianos were found in the building as renovations began. This particular piano model was made during 1904-1905 in the Cable Piano Company factory in St. Charles, IL. Founded by Herman D. Cable in 1880, the company claimed to be the world's greatest manufacturer of pianos and organs. Finding pianos makes sense given the previous uses of the third floor.



This wooden alphabet spelling board is one of the many items found in the building. Patented in 1886, this spelling board was advertised in the Sears and Roebuck Catalog. The game was patented by Alonzo F. Smith, Milwaukee, WI.



Among the items found in the building were a variety of jars and bottles that originally contained beer, drinks, medicines, and foods. This particular jar is from Libby, McNeill, and Libby yellow cling peaches. Libby, McNeill, and Libby opened in Chicago in 1875.



This wrapper from Beeman's Pepsin Chewing Gum is most likely from the early 1900s. The gum was invented by Ohio physician Dr. Edward E. Beeman in the late 19th century. Beeman originally marketed the gum, which is made of pepsin powder and chicle, as an aid to digestion.



Manufactured by the Hall's Safe Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio this safe had the words "Town of Lombard" painted along its top edge. It is unclear when or if this safe was used in the hotel.



Preserving the Building

The plans for this building are very simple. Clean it up and rent the space to quality businesses. Tom and Margret have a simple philosophy when it comes to rehabilitating an older structure. If it works where it is or how it was originally built, do not disturb it, just repair it. They are renovating the building as a centerpiece of downtown Lombard and helping to preserve the history of the town where the family grew up.

The building not only housed a hotel, but also many other businesses. The dram shop (first tavern) was originally in this building on the first floor. The second floor held hotel rooms and residential units and the third floor has been a ballroom, dance hall, and meeting space. Other businesses in this building have included: Real estate, doctors, lawyers; Sears and Roebuck catalog office and a sporting goods store.

As they move forward Tom and Margret are working with the Lombard Historical Society, Lombard Historical Commission, and Lombard Town Centre, ensuring that the hotel will live a new life in the twenty-first century, hopefully becoming a gathering place for the people of Lombard. A special thanks also goes to the Lombard Historical Society for providing various images for these panels.



Brian Failing

These panels were written by Brian Failing, a local historian and graduate student in the Historical Administration Program at Eastern Illinois University. A native of DuPage County, Brian understands the importance of preserving the history within his own backyard and making history accessible to the public. History exists behind every corner; you just have to look for it.



A Lombard Family:

Bill and Mary Smith

Lombard began to expand from its rural origins during the post-war period and attracted a population in search of an affordable location with room to accommodate growing families. Similar communities developed on the Chicago periphery and each was uniquely defined, not by organizers and promoters, but by the men and women who settled there to raise their families.



Mary and Bill Smith moved their family to Lombard in 1953 and the family continues to be united because of Lombard.

Mary and Bill Smith met in Chicago during World War II and moved their family of five children to Lombard in 1953 after they were able to save a down payment. They bought a small, Cape Cod-style house in a development built in a cornfield west of Grace Street in Lombard's northeast quadrant. Five more children followed: four girls, six boys and an infant who died during childbirth. Bill Smith commuted by train to downtown Chicago where he worked as a clothing salesman until he retired in the mid-1970s. His wife, Mary, was a full-time mother and homemaker taking an occasional part time job around Christmas to help with holiday expenses.

Like many Lombard families, they were not wealthy but they were honest, hard-working and completely devoted to their family. These characteristics came to epitomize the fabric of the Lombard community. With children involved in Lombard's many diverse activities, Mary Smith, was well-known by everyone. As she proudly watched her children achieve success, the only recognition she ever asked for was that of being their mother. Bill Smith was an avid reader and served on the board of the Friends of the Helen Plum Library. He was the family's stabilizing force whose foremost wish was for the family to stay united.



A Lombard Family:

Bill and Mary Smith Continued

Mary and Bill never attended college but all of their children did, many earning four year and post-graduate degrees. Growing in the fertile family environment of Lombard, their children learned sportsmanship in village youth sports programs. Most worked as teenagers in Lombard businesses and a daughter participated in Lombard's Lilac Queen festivities. Some became educators, some served in the U.S. military and many became traders at Chicago's Board of Trade. One followed in Bill Smith's footsteps selling men's clothing. Others became bankers. Bill and Mary were members of Sacred Heart parish and one son became a Catholic priest.



Lombard is a very special place for Tom and Margret. Both have an interest in preserving the atmosphere of a town near and dear to their hearts.

Another son, Tom, became a real estate investor. He and his wife, Margret, bought the historic 167 year-old Lombard hotel in December 2014 and are renovating it as a centerpiece of downtown Lombard and helping to preserve the history of the town where the family grew up. Other members of the family have returned to Lombard in support of that effort.

Over the years, the family of Bill and Mary Smith continued to grow. Thanks to a daughter with the airlines, they took several trips to Europe during retirement. Both passed away within a year of each other in the early 1980s. Their 11 children produced 25 grandchildren and, so far, 17 great-grandchildren. Somewhere, they must certainly be beaming with pride.

Some people give their communities their time and expertise; some give themselves and some give their money. Mary and Bill Smith gave Lombard a family. Special thanks to Gregory Smith for contributing this story of his family, one in which residents of Lombard can relate to and coincides with the history encapsulated within the Babcock's Grove House.

