

Historic Hotels of the Past in Fairmont- Part 2

Part two of historic hotels in Fairmont begins in the early 1900's, a time when hotels were popular for travelers as well as for those families wishing to spend some time on a vacation in and around Fairmont and its beautiful lakes. Many of these hotels of the past were just as well known for their fine dining as for their room accommodations and décor.

A *Sentinel* article from March 14, 1950, entitled "Local Hotels, City's 3rd Industry, Serve 52,000 Guests A Year." The article went on to state that the city's five hotels of that time offered 225 rooms and more than 1,000 persons stay at various times during the week. The five hotels listed included the Gilbert, the Augusta, the Fairmont, the Edgewater, and the Potter. Today, Fairmont offers approximately 295 hotel rooms.

Looking back in time, the Interlaken Inn and Cottages opened its doors in June of 1916. It stretched along the high bank of Hall Lake west to the Chain of Lakes Yacht Club. The hotel was built primarily for summer use, the rooms had porch areas overlooking Hall Lake, and it had a dining room. Colonel Needham was hired when the Inn first opened and he brought in a chef, waiters and porters from Minneapolis rather than to spend time training local persons. Sunday dinners and evening meals were seventy-five cents, and other meals were fifty cents. Dining room business was lively and bustling with as many as 200 dinners served for some meals. Conventions and banquets were quite common as well.

The Fairmont Hotel was located at 217 North North Avenue, now Downtown Plaza, across the street to the west from the present location of Enderson's Clothing. The hotel was built in about 1916-1917 by a farmer named Julius Reihs, a German immigrant who came to this country around 1900 with an estimated \$80.00 to his name. He was considered somewhat eccentric in that he would always wear a cap with the earflaps down whether it was winter or summer. In 1940 their menu had a filet mignon or a porter house steak for \$1.00, broiled lamb chops were \$0.85, roast chicken and dressing, prime rib, roast leg of lamb, grilled ham steak, and chicken ala king all went for \$0.75. The meal included mashed potatoes, rolls, vegetable, coffee, tea, or milk and pudding. Guests were told to "kindly write their entire order as waitresses are instructed to serve only on written order." The hotel was well known for its excellent meals and service and it was considered "quite the proper thing to go to the Fairmont Hotel dining room for a Sunday dinner."

The Augusta Hotel, located at 121 E. Blue Earth Avenue, was built by Jack Croissant in the late 1920's. It had forty-four rooms and a nice restaurant. The hotel's location formerly served as a boarding house. In addition, there was a large and very popular meeting room in the basement, known as the Fiesta Room, and part of the building also included a barber shop and a beauty shop. The Fairmont Building and Loan at one time had offices there, the hotel was used by the Greyhound Bus Depot for about five years in the 1930s, and Gene's Cleaners was also located in the building as well. The Augusta operated as a hotel until the 1970's. Its location is presently the site of First Farmers & Merchants Bank.

The Gilbert Hotel, 1200 East Blue Earth Ave., was purchased by Harry Gilbert in 1940. It had at one time been the Ward Orphan Home; however, it had long since been abandoned. The Ward

Home for Dependent Children had been built in about 1915. In 1921, Mr. Ward is said to have given up maintaining the home and, except for a caretaker, it had stood empty for a long time. A 1941 *Sentinel* article informing the public of an open house at the Gilbert Hotel boasted that it had sixty-two rooms, many with two beds and fireplaces, running water, electric lights, and either a shower or tub bath. In addition, it had a coffee shop downstairs with seating for fifty people. The renovation of the Ward Orphanage into a hotel apparently sparked further expansion and building in that part of the city at that time.

Of course, there were, and are, other hotels and motels as well as those previously mentioned. There was the Heidel House located near the present site of Bank Midwest on Downtown Plaza, the Lakeside Inn which occupied the former hospital which is now the site of Albion Place Condominiums, the Wilken Motel, the Bell Motel, Colvin's Cabins, the Highland House Motel, and many more. The hotel and motel industry has played a significant role in the history and economic development of this area over the years. Their presence continues to have a positive impact today as well.

For more information on this topic, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.







HOTEL

FIREPROOF

GILBERT

HOTEL GILBERT FAIRMONT MINN.
L-56



WORLD INFORMATION
HARBOR'S
CERTIFIED
GASOLINE
LARGEST CLEAN BEST BURNING

WATER
TIGHT
RESTROOM

HARBOR'S LAKE SIDE TOURISTS-COTTAGES.
ON LAKE Sisseton-Fairmont, Minn.



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INTERLAKEN INN
FAIRMONT, MINN.



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