HOTEL BETHLEHEM

Find a road that is frequently traveled and you will find a hotel on it. In Bethlehem, this statement is as true today as it has been in the past. Today, Bethlehem's most frequently traveled road is the New York Thruway and there are two hotels within sight of the thruway -- the Comfort Inn and the Econo Lodge. The inn is a frequent sight for travelers, as it rests right next to the thruway. The Econo Lodge is just south of the Comfort Inn and can also be seen from the thruway. Both hotels can be reached by passing through the tollgate at exit 23 and heading south on Route 9W.

Not far from the Comfort Inn and the Econo Lodge was Bethlehem's first hotel -- the Abbey Hotel. It was built early in the eighteenth century just a little over a mile to the southeast of the current hotels near the intersection of today's Route 144 and Glenmont Road. Route 144 parallels the New York Thruway and in earlier times, it was known as the Albany-Bethlehem Turnpike. Coincidently, the turnpike was a toll road and to reach the hotel one also had to pass through a tollgate to get there. The tollgate was located at Kenwood about a mile north of the Abbey, near the intersection of today's Route 32.

The Abbey Hotel was an important way stop between Albany and Van Wie Point on the Hudson River. During the 19th century, Van Wie Point was a popular docking area for passengers going to Albany. Docking in Albany was considered hazardous due to shallows in the river but was corrected by dredging in the early 20th century. The Abbey Hotel was about halfway between Albany and Van Wie Point.

During the height of its popularity, the Abbey Hotel was a center of activity for travelers, politicians and local clubs. Activities included picnics, clambakes and harness racing. The racing track was on the flats near the Hudson River just east of the hotel. The hotel was raised in the early 1960's after serving the community for more than 250 years.

Other Bethlehem hotels were also located south of the Abbey Hotel along the well-traveled route near the Hudson River. They include Crum's Hotel and the Cedar Hill Hotel. Crum's Hotel was up on a hill overlooking the Albany-Bethlehem Turnpike and the Hudson River. The Cedar Hill Hotel was further south near today's Henry Hudson Town Park.
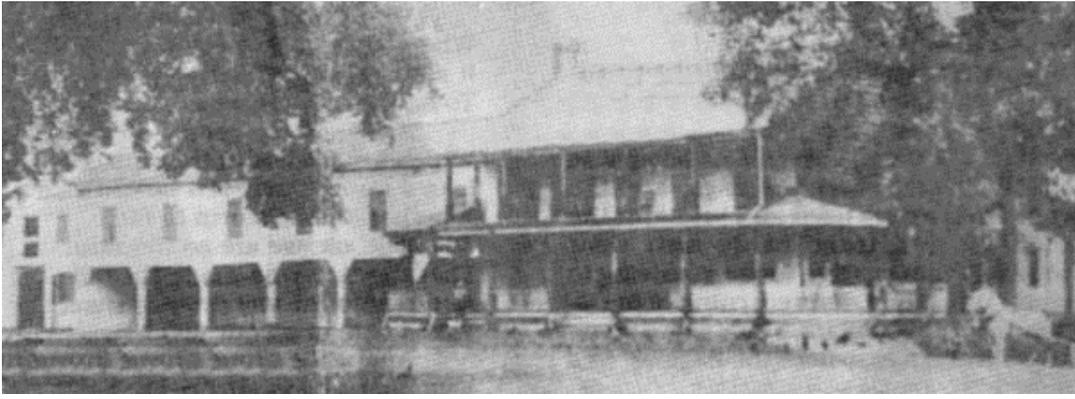
Another Albany-Bethlehem road also had its share of hotels for travelers. In 1805, the Albany and Delaware Turnpike Company was chartered to construct this road, which is today's Delaware Avenue. The road was abandoned as a turnpike in 1863 and later paved with yellow bricks when it became known as the Yellow Brick Road.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a very popular hotel, the Hinkel Hotel, was located on the Normans Kill just off the Yellow Brick Road. It was located on a small lake that was created by two dams. From the large porch that surrounded the hotel, overnight guests could relax and watch people swimming in the lake and sunning themselves on the beach near the lake. They could also pitch coins to the children who would dive for them. The hotel included a bar, restaurant, store and even a little passenger boat that took guests on a short cruise between the dams. It eventually closed due to a lack of business and was later destroyed by fire.

Other Bethlehem hotels were also located south of the Normans Kill along the well-traveled route that is today's Delaware Avenue. One of the first hotels on the Albany and Delaware Turnpike was the Adams Hotel. Nathaniel Adams built his hotel in 1838 and the building still stands today near the Delmar Fire Department. Other hotels were located at today's Four Corners and at the location of today's Cherry Arms Apartments.

A third Albany-Bethlehem road also had hotels for travelers. In 1859, the Albany, Rensselaerville and Schoharie Plank Road Company was chartered to construct the road that is today's New Scotland Road. The charter called for the use of wooden planks on a large part of a road that passed through Hurstville, Slingerlands and on to New Scotland.

Hurstville, which at one time was a Bethlehem hamlet, was later annexed by the City of Albany. It was located near the intersection of Whitehall Road. William Hurst, for whom the hamlet was named, built the Hurstville Hotel within a few years after the road was chartered. Like the Abbey Hotel, he also built a race track for horses nearby. During the Roaring 20's, the hotel was a happening place with dance bands, floorshows and a lot of excitement. In 1929, it was destroyed by fire.

Another Bethlehem hotel was located south of the Hurstville Hotel along the well-traveled route that is today's New Scotland Road. The Home Lawn Hotel was located in the heart of Slingerlands just across from today's Slingerlands Fire Department. The hotel building still exists and today is a residence.

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