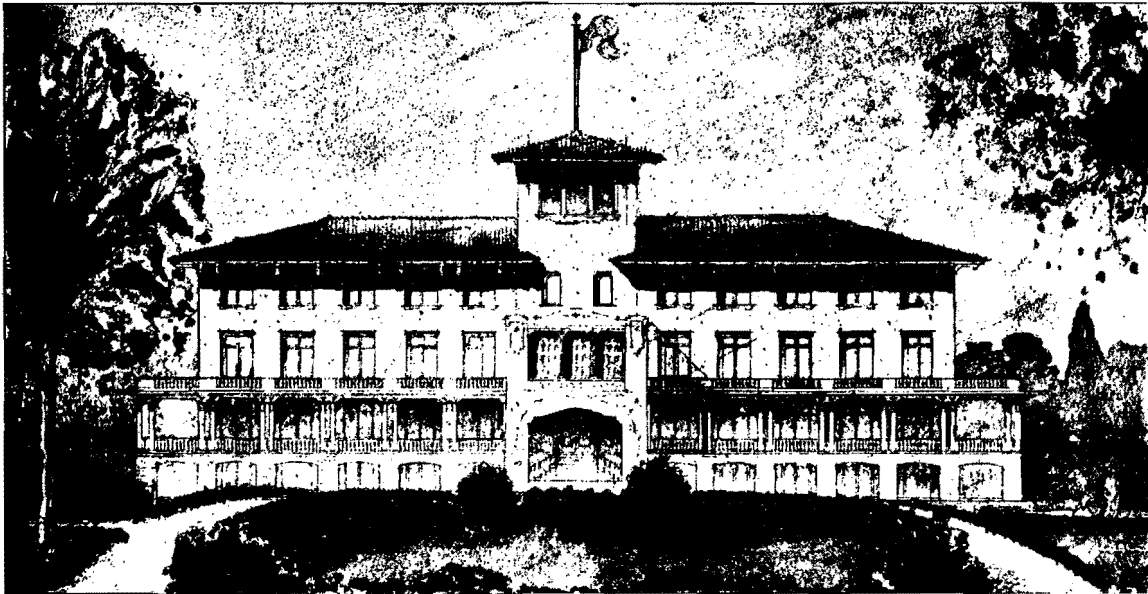


The Alfred Club
and
Hotel Association



Monograph No. 11
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The Alfred Club and Hotel Association

The Alfred Sun of Wednesday, October 11, 1911 printed a front page story under the headline, "Alfred To Have Club Hotel."

In announcing this venture, the news item opened the chapter on what is today a little known facet of our local history, The Alfred Club and Hotel Association.

The lead paragraph of the story informed the readers of The Sun that a large number of the representative business men of the village of Alfred met at Fireman's Hall the previous Sunday evening, October 8, to take steps for the building of a Club Hotel in Alfred. This group pledged \$1,000.00 at that meeting to get the project off the ground and to raise the funds to finance the project.

The principal thrust for the Club Hotel appears to have come from three business men in the village: D. Sherman Burdick, Frank A. Crumb, and Charles Stillman. Sherm Burdick was an insurance agent. Frank Crumb was the editor and business manager of The Alfred Sun. Charlie Stillman was in the real estate business. The latter was George Place's uncle. He was village Police Justice. In 1911, he had been Clerk of the Allegany County Board of Supervisors for thirty-one years, and Assistant Clerk for seven years, previous to his appointment as Clerk.

The newspaper article of October 11 observed that Harry D. Moore, son of Colonel J. Lansing Moore, superintendent of the State farm, "had consented to come to Alfred and assume the direction of raising the money to put up the hotel and after its completion, to become its manager."

Commenting upon Moore's qualifications, the article described him as "a man who has had large experience in the hotel business and in catering to the wants of the traveling public, being recently head steward for the St. Regis Hotel in New York City."

The lengthy article continued with a description of the building and its location, as well as with an outline of the stock subscription plan by which the project was to be financed.

The news item concluded by emphasizing some of the advantages of the proposal to the community:

There is not a comfortable hotel within a radius of fifty miles of Alfred where a commercial traveler will go out of his way to stay over Sunday. If we have a hotel of the character proposed, these men will all lay out their routes to spend the weekend in Alfred. When these men come to the hotel and meet with such home-like and comfortable accommodations, they are going to tell their friends, and these friends are coming here to spend a portion of their summers. While here, they will all learn of our educational advantages, and in a short time, you will see a large increase of students from this source alone.

And, so, as the article emphasized, "The long needed hotel will be ours before next commencement if all do their part." It was expected to have the stock all subscribed as early as January 1, 1912, and the ground broken during the fall of 1911, if possible, assuring the opening by the first of June of 1912.

The proposed Club Hotel was to be in the center of a large plot of ground on the side hill at the north of the residence of Prof. Binns (now the site of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity). The front of the building would be placed about on a line with the rear of the Binns' home. Access would be by an extension of State Street. The Club Hotel would, therefore, be located in what is now the area of the former Industrial Building of the Agricultural and Technical College.

The prospectus of the association, describing this location, observed:

An option has been obtained upon the most desirable site, situated well upon the eastern wall of the valley, adjoining the grounds of the State schools and the campus of Alfred University, thus assuring that the adjoining property will always be under exceptional care, and thereby adding to, and not detracting from, the beauty of its own grounds.

The association was organized with a capital stock of \$60,000.00, with shares of a par value of \$50.00 each, for the purposes of building the hotel and providing the furnishings. It was under the immediate control of a board of directors with Burdick as president, Crumb as secretary, and Stillman as treasurer.

The association was a business venture with a club feature. It was not a summer boarding or resort proposition of only three months in the year with nine idle months. The hotel was to be a year-round proposition to provide accommodations for the general public, as well as for students at the State schools and the University between September and Commencement Day. The prospectus noted that even in 1911-1912, there was a demand for housing for students, commenting, "for whom there is, at present, inadequate accommodations." The prospectus also pointed out that the nearest hotel was twelve miles away. Consequently, there was a lack of accommodations in Alfred during the winter months for those who visited the schools and the University, either on business or to see their sons and daughters. (We look into the past and see ourselves.) During the summer months, the hotel would be open to visitors, including alumni, who would be provided with accommodations while visiting the scenes of their college days.

Commenting upon Alfred as a desirable place to spend one's summer vacation, the prospectus noted:

Located nearly 2,000 feet above sea level, with its pleasant homes, its well-kept lawns, its tree-lined streets and wooded hills which rise to even higher altitudes, no more healthful location than this can be conceived. It is a Summerland of Sunshine with dry air, where malaria is unknown; where the tuneful mosquito is not heard a half dozen times the summer through; where the summer nights are cool and humidity seldom ever comes, and where the very air is satisfying and invigorating. Where would one find a more suitable place to spend a vacation than at Alfred, right at the very crest of the Atlantic slope?

Where, indeed, one might add!

The hotel was to be, then, a business proposition with a club feature. There were two categories of stock subscriptions. Under one plan, each share of stock would have attached to it fifty per cent of its face value or \$25.00 in coupons. Each coupon had a value of fifty cents and would be accepted in payment of room rent for one person for one day, to the extent of \$5.00 per year or ten days, for

five consecutive years. These coupons were transferable. This coupon stock plan, thus, would enable each subscriber to get back one-half of his investment the first five years, besides his share in the profits of the enterprise.

Those who did not prefer to purchase the coupons as part of the stock shares could avail themselves of the second plan by purchasing shares as a simple business investment for the profits to be realized.

In addition, any stockholder might become a club member with the payment of \$2.50 per year if he were a non-resident of the village and \$5.00 per year if he were a resident. This additional fee would entitle the share holder to the use of all club privileges without extra charge. These privileges included use of the bowling alleys, billiard room, tennis court, croquet areas, and the club and lounge room.

The shares of stock were purchased on a time-payment plan with \$10.00 to be paid at the time of application and \$10.00 on the first day of each succeeding month until the total amount of \$50.00 was paid. An individual might purchase as many shares as he wished to buy. Dividends were to be paid on the investment.

What of the hotel itself? What sort of building did these men of vision propose?

Designed by George J. Metzger, an architect from Buffalo, it was to be a first class, modern hotel, a three story and basement structure, 126 feet in length and 44 feet in width with concrete foundations. The outside walls of the three floors would be of terra-cotta hollow tile blocks finished on the exterior with stucco and with cobblestone posts to the piazza or veranda railing. The entire front of the building and both ends would be bounded by a piazza twelve feet in width to provide a promenade over 200 feet in length. An observation tower on the roof crowned this imposing structure.

Guests would arrive by means of a circular drive connecting to State Street stopping under a cobblestone porte cochere, attached to the veranda, from which they could enter directly into the lobby.

The basement would be light and airy. Here were to be located the billiard parlor, bowling alleys, the students' dining room, an employees' dining room, store rooms, boilers and engine room. A steam plant was planned for heating and for operating the ice and refrigerating machinery. A section of the basement was to be arranged as a children's playroom with sand piles to be used on rainy days. An elevator would run from the basement to the roof-top tower. (See Addendum A)

The first floor consisted of the office, a lounging and club room, general or commercial dining room, an a la carte dining room, three private dining rooms, kitchens and pantries. The club and lounging room, the general dining room, and the a la carte dining rooms were to all have beamed ceilings. Each was to have a large rough stone fire place. The private dining area was to be arranged with removable partitions, so that the three rooms could be combined into one large dining room for banquets and conventions, which were to be made a special feature of the hotel. This floor would contain also telegraph and local and long distance telephone facilities. (See Addendum B)

The second floor would contain twenty rooms, arranged as suites with private baths and lavatories. There would be public baths, also. A ladies' sitting and writing room was to be located on this floor, leading directly to a sun parlor over the porte cochere. (See Addendum C)

The third floor would have twenty-two rooms, arranged to accommodate the general public during the summer months and students during the winter months. Four baths and lavatories would be on this floor. (See Addendum D)

All bedrooms were to have hot and cold running water. The bathrooms were to be tiled. The general style of interior decorations would be "Mission." The furniture and equipment was to be modern and of good quality. The service was to be the best obtainable. The tables were to be supplied with fresh milk, cream, butter, eggs, and vegetables in season from the farm of the New York State School for Agriculture.

The grounds would be completely and artfully landscaped with trees and shrubs and laid out and well kept with lawns, flower beds, tennis courts, and croquet areas.

In connection with the hotel, and under the same management, was to be a garage, where tourists, hotel guests, and local auto owners could purchase supplies, such as gasoline, oil, and minor parts. A capable mechanic, qualified and competent to make light repairs, would be on hand during the hours the garage was open. The male employees of the hotel would sleep over the garage. It is not exactly clear where the female employees were to have been housed since no provisions were made for them in the planning.

The prospectus made much of the new fad of automobiling. It emphasized the feature of good roads in and around Alfred, as appealing to those who seek the pleasures of automobile driving, in addition to carriage driving, and adding, "The hotel will be only two miles, over a splendid macadam road, from the new state highway which will soon be built."

The prospectus also referred to the good postal and railroad services. Commenting upon the latter, it noted, "Alfred is located on the main line of the Erie railroad between New York and Chicago and is just a night's ride from New York City. You can leave New York after dinner in the evening -- say about 8 o'clock -- have a comfortable night's rest in a Pullman sleeper, and arrive at Alfred at 8 o'clock in the morning, where the bus will meet and convey you to the hotel, in time for breakfast."

This venture had the blessing and support of one no less than Boothe Colwell Davis, then president of Alfred University. In a letter on University stationery, which accompanied the prospectus, he wrote:

October 1911.

Dear Friend,-

I am adding this word to the hotel literature enclosed herewith, to assure you of my solicitude for the success of the hotel movement.

It would be a great boon to Alfred University to have a modern hotel in Alfred. Many people do not come to Commencements because of lack of hotel accommodations. Many more alumni and friends of Alfred would visit and keep in touch with the Alma Mater if desirable accommodations were to be had.

The growth of the University makes such an enterprise imperative, and I hope you will co-operate with Mr. Harry D. Moore of Alfred, N.Y. by subscribing to the fund, - thus helping to bring the enterprise to a successful completion.

Very truly yours,
Boothe C. Davis.
President

In addition to outlining the business proposition and setting forth the plan for the hotel and its operation, the well-illustrated prospectus, printed by the Alfred Press, publisher of The Alfred Sun, and released in December of 1911, presented some of the beautiful and interesting spots in and around Alfred. It set forth also the many natural and educational advantages the village offered.

After such an auspicious beginning, what happened to this venture?

The three men who provided the major thrust for the project were hopeful of its success. They believed, as the prospectus observed, "with the management which we have in view and the advantages of a hotel built and operated on the lines proposed, it will be in a short time a dividend-paying investment." In a letter which accompanied the prospectus, they reiterated that the hotel would not only be a paying investment, "but that we will be compelled shortly to build additional sleeping quarters to accommodate our patrons." Certainly, there must have been a recognized need for the hotel. The financial plan appears to have been sound. The president of Alfred University, Boothe Colwell Davis, a man of impeccable integrity, strongly supported the proposition. Few people would deny the healthful, relaxing, invigorating, and refreshing advantages of summertime in Alfred in 1911. Even today, summer is a delightful experience in this village. Then, there was the building itself -- a first class, modern hotel of grandiose and imposing design, which offered the advantages of a private club to those who wished to avail themselves of this privilege.

What happened, then, to this proposed club and hotel?

The Alfred Sun and the pages from the association's account book tell us an interesting and fascinating, but a most revealing story, in answer to this question. It is to that story we now turn.

The issue of The Sun of Wednesday, October 18, 1911, carried a front-page center "box" directly under the masthead, or name of the newspaper:

Alfred's New Hotel

Arrangements are being pushed as rapidly as possible for the whirlwind campaign for raising funds for the Alfred Club Hotel. Everyone should make plans to take at least one share of stock in this enterprise that means so much for our town and schools. Many of us do not hesitate to put our money into mining schemes, located in some God forsaken country where we know nothing about the management of the concern or the properties in which we invest, and we feel sure that we will all come to the front on this proposition, which is at home where we can look after our interests.

Apparently, the "whirlwind campaign," to which this item referred, had begun already -- in fact, before the announcement of the new project in the previous week's issue of The Sun. The account books show that on Monday, October 9, the first share of stock was purchased by Lyle Bennehoff, an Alfred merchant. Two other shares were subscribed to on that same day by J. D. Bennehoff and Charles Stillman, both of whom were also Alfred business men. D. S. Burdick and Frank Crumb each purchased a share on Monday, October 16, two days before this plea appeared in the newspaper.

A week later, a similar "box" occurred in The Sun in the same location on page one as the first item. This message was addressed to "The Alfred Householder":

To Alfred Householders

There are nearly 200 householders in the village of Alfred.

Everyone of them should be interested in the Hotel project, and if you are one of them, do you hope to be benefitted at the expense of your neighbor or are you going to BOOST?

You may or may not be able to do much, but you can do something.

The shares cost fifty dollars, and you get half of this amount back in five years anyway.

Every dollar you invest in this proposition leaves a dollar at home, and adds to every dollar you now have, "a little more."

Mr. Householder, Mr. Business Man, you should be interested parties. Your assistance is needed, not next year, but NOW.

Subscription blanks can be obtained at this office, at the Post Office, at the office of Charles Stillman, at D. S. Burdick's, or the manager, Mr. Moore, would be glad to accommodate you.

How was the "whirlwind campaign" progressing? In Alfred, sixteen shares of stock were subscribed to during October, mostly by local business men.

However, Mr. Moore was busy elsewhere. He had not arrived in Alfred yet, as the following newspaper item attests, which was prominently placed, also, on page one of The Sun in a box:

New Grand Hotel, Broadway and 31st St.
New York City, Oct. 30, 1911

My Dear Mr. Crumb:--

As you are well aware, I am making a preliminary canvas relative to the sale of stock of our hotel. It affords me considerable pleasure to inform you that I have placed considerable amount of the stock and as soon as the prospectus is ready for mailing I am confident that it will not take very long to sell the balance, so I would advise the Alfred people who have not subscribed for some of the stock to get busy as they are the people who will be benefitted by our project. I have an appointment on Thursday with Mr. Metzger, our architect, at his office in Buffalo to go over the plans, and expect to be in Alfred on Saturday or Sunday. Hoping to find a number of subscriptions awaiting me I am

Yours very truly,
H. D. Moore, manager
Alfred Club and Hotel Association

The manager's references to his "preliminary canvas" of the sale of the stock and to having placed "a considerable amount of the stock" are interesting. I have no reason to doubt Moore's integrity; however, the association's account books do not indicate any transactions occurring in regard to the sale of stock outside of the village of Alfred. We can assume only, therefore, that Moore's "placing of stock" referred to verbal pledges. Perhaps, to refer to such promises as "placing the stock" may be something of an overstatement.

The next item in The Sun appeared in the issue of Wednesday, November 15, 1911. This one was placed in the same prominent location as the previous items. The manner in which this "box" was printed in The Sun is revealing. It was edged with heavy, black lines and set in bold-faced type:

The Hotel
IS SURELY COMING!

Do the people of Alfred want a hand in its management? If so, the only way is to become stockholders.

Business men cannot afford to let the project go through without buying stock. The stockholders are the ones that are going to get the hotel patronage. Just remember this when asked to subscribe for stock.

One cannot help sensing the growing desperation which prompted this item. The black lines, outlining the box, create the impression of an obituary. The "whirlwind campaign," according to the account books, had yielded only the sixteen subscriptions during October previously referred to, and none during the first two weeks of November.

The Alfred Sun on Wednesday, December 20, 1911 published another item about the Club Hotel. This, too, was a front page story, illustrated with a picture of the front facade of the proposed building. The item contained the information that the association's prospectus had been mailed to a list of 5,000 names. The newspaper story included, also, copies of the two letters which accompanied the prospectus, the one from B. C. Davis, the president of the University, which we have already quoted, and the other from D. S. Burdick and H. D. Moore, to which we have referred previously. Finally, this article noted that the floor plans of the new building would be published in the next issue of The Sun. However, this item did not appear the next week, or in any subsequent issue of that newspaper.

Meanwhile, apparently, Manager Moore had been actively engaged in selling stock in the village, for, in The Alfred Sun of Wednesday, January 17, 1912, the following brief item appeared:

The Alfred Club Hotel

Our proposed hotel is now an assured fact. Manager Moore states that it is very gratifying to him to see that the residents of the village of Alfred who have the welfare of the village at heart are assisting it by subscribing to the stock. The subscription list in Alfred now amounts to over three thousand dollars. He, with the assistance of the officers of the company, have inaugurated a campaign whereby he hopes to raise two thousand more in Alfred within the next week. By subscribing now you will enable Mr. Moore to start out side and be in a position to present the proposition in a most favorable manner.

The placement of this item is revealing. It was carried on the front page, but not in the prominent position of the previous appeals. Rather, it appeared in the lower right center column at the bottom of the page.

I said that "apparently" the manager had been busy in the village obtaining subscriptions to the stock. The association's account books reveal a different situation. At no time in this period do the bookkeeping entries show this amount of stock sold to investors. As early as November 5, 1911 there was a balance of only \$3.00 in the treasury. Between November 5 and November 20, the books show five payments of \$10.00 each for shares that were purchased in early October. The

balance was reduced again to \$3.00 on November 20 because of a \$50.00 debit entry. Installment payments continued to be made on the stock purchased by the sixteen investors from October. The account books just do not show any entries for new stock subscriptions between October 25 and the date of this item in The Alfred Sun. In fact, the balance in the account books on January 19, 1912 was down to \$3.00 again. What conclusions may be drawn from this discrepancy between this newspaper item on the one hand, detailing the sale of \$3,000.00 of the stock, and the account books, on the other hand, indicating no new subscriptions during this time? Two conclusions suggest themselves: (1) Either Moore had verbal pledges in this amount, or (2) the newspaper item was an attempt to sell the stock by giving the impression that the subscription sale was progressing better than it actually was.

One is tempted to accept the latter of these two conclusions in the light of the last sentence of the newspaper item which refers to putting the proposition in "a most favorable light" by increasing the subscriptions in the village, thus enabling Moore to press the campaign outside of the village. One wonders what happened to all those shares that the manager had placed in and around New York in his "preliminary canvas" back in October. One is reminded also of the optimistic view of the newspaper article of October 11 with its expectation that the \$60,000.00 worth of stock would be subscribed to by January 1, 1912.

A week later, on Wednesday, January 24, the following item, accompanied by a picture of the front of the hotel, appeared in The Alfred Sun:

The subscription list for stock of the Club Hotel has increased so that it only requires the sale of three more shares to swell the list to four thousand dollars. Manager Moore states that, if there are a few more public spirited people in Alfred who will subscribe to twenty more shares of the stock, that will mean that the residents of Alfred have subscribed to the amount of five thousand dollars, and he will start out and endeavor to raise the balance necessary to insure the building of the hotel. Now, my dear reader, if you have not subscribed, do so at once and show your loyalty to your home town if you expect to receive any help from your friends.

Once again, the placement of this item is revealing. It was an inside page article, appearing on page three. One again wonders about the reported sale of the stock in Alfred in the \$4,000 - \$5,000 range, for the account books of the association indicate there were no stock subscriptions during this period.

Even more revealing than the placement of this item is that this article is the last reference to the Club Hotel project in The Sun.

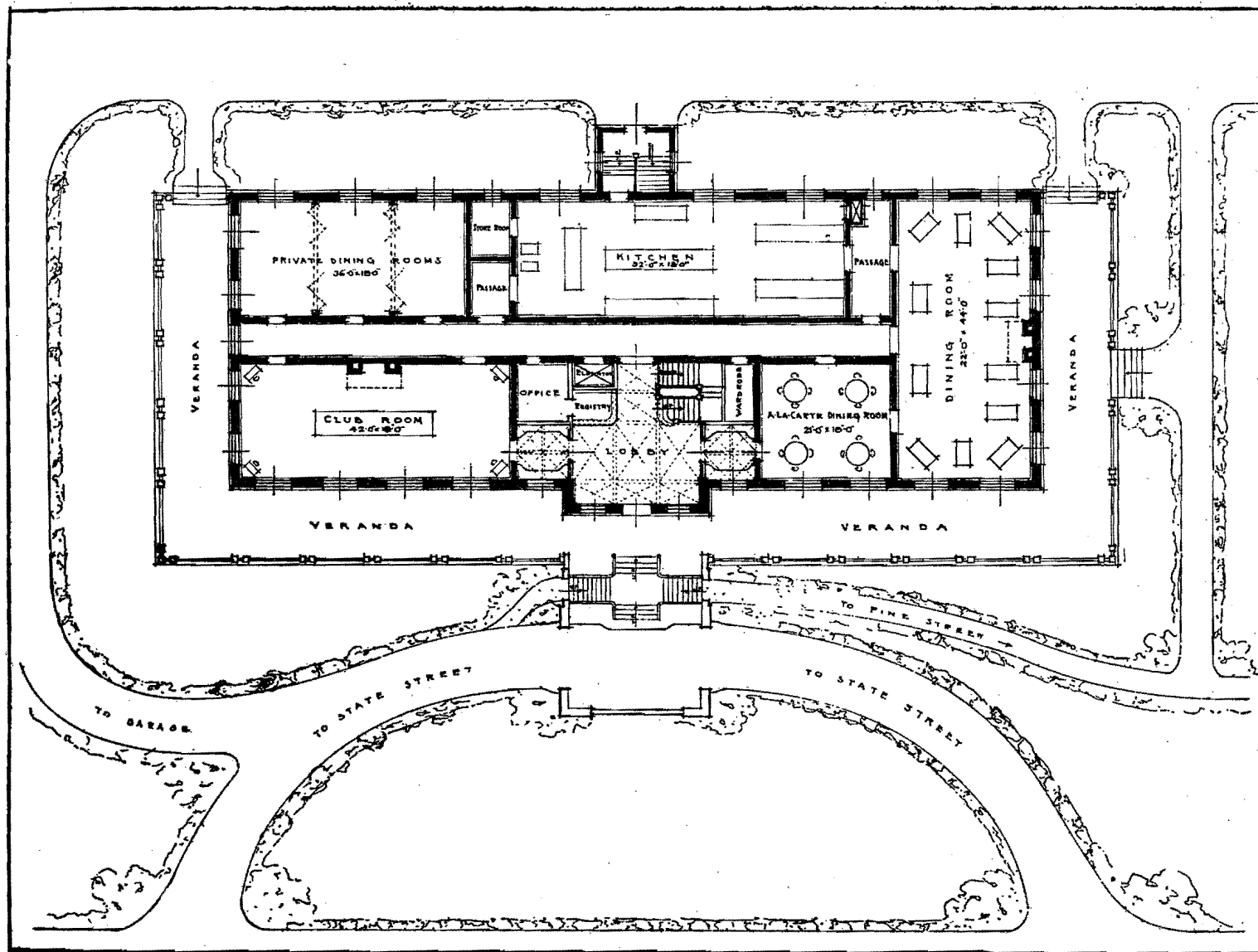
The association had been experiencing financial problems, almost from the beginning, as we have seen. The idea just did not take. Whatever the reasons might have been, we can only surmise. By the early spring of 1912, the association was in serious financial difficulty. The first "red-ink" entry in the account books occurred on March 26. By the end of that month, the directors were reduced to selling half shares of stock in a last, frantic, and futile attempt to remain solvent and to keep the venture alive. On May 31, the date of the last entry, the debit column shows \$1,019.00. With that entry, the Alfred Club and Hotel Association appears to have come to an end.

Apparently, the twenty-two investors from Alfred (for that sum is the total number of investors the account books show) never recovered their money. Of the last six of these investors, only Boothe Colwell Davis, paid the entire \$50.00, in three monthly installments of \$10.00 on February 27 when he subscribed to the

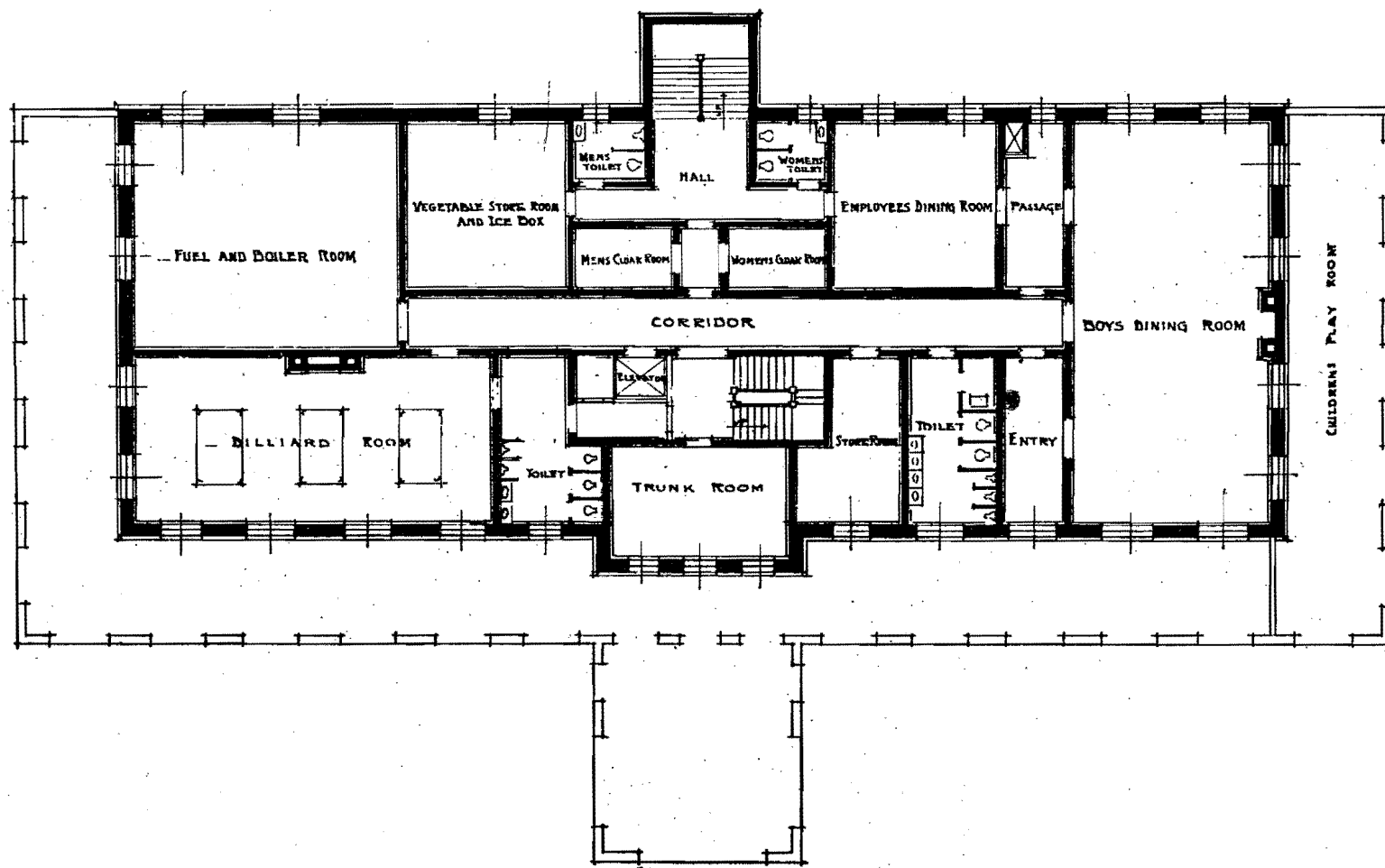
stock, a second \$10.00 on March 25, and the additional \$30.00 at the end of April. Three of these final six investors had purchased half shares on the installment plan. From the evidence of the account books, the 5,000 copies of the prospectus that were mailed in early December yielded no subscribers.

The account books yield one other final and interesting facet to this story. Apparently, H. D. Moore was to have been paid \$125.00 a month in his capacity as manager. The first debit entry made to him in that amount occurred on October 22, 1911. The only other such entry was on March 31, 1912. We may assume, therefore, that he received only \$250.00 for whatever services he provided during his managership. I have not been able to determine what happened to him after the project failed. Possibly, he returned to New York City to resume his career as a hotel man.

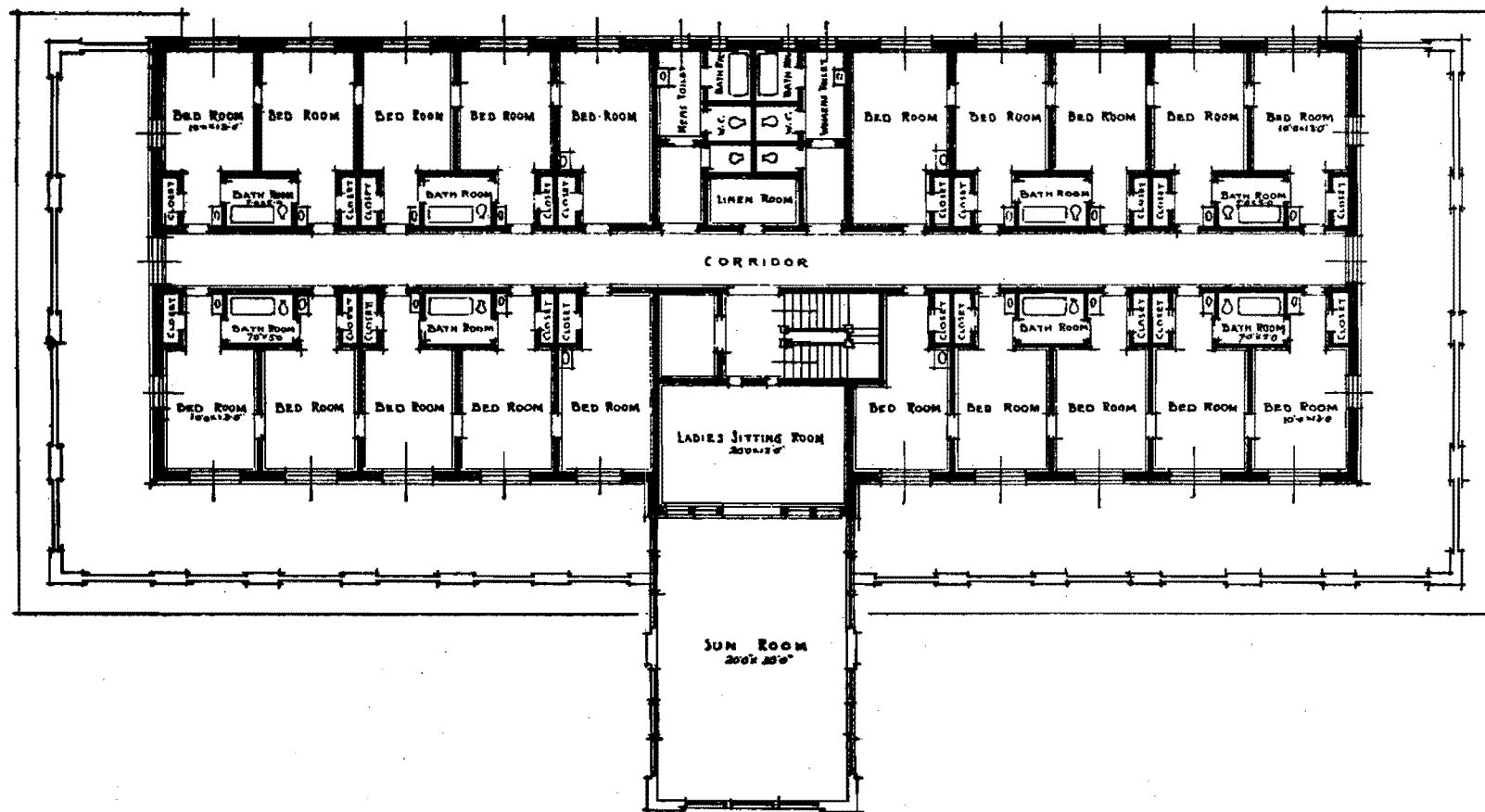
And, so ends our account of another interesting chapter of our local history -- the Alfred Club and Hotel Association.



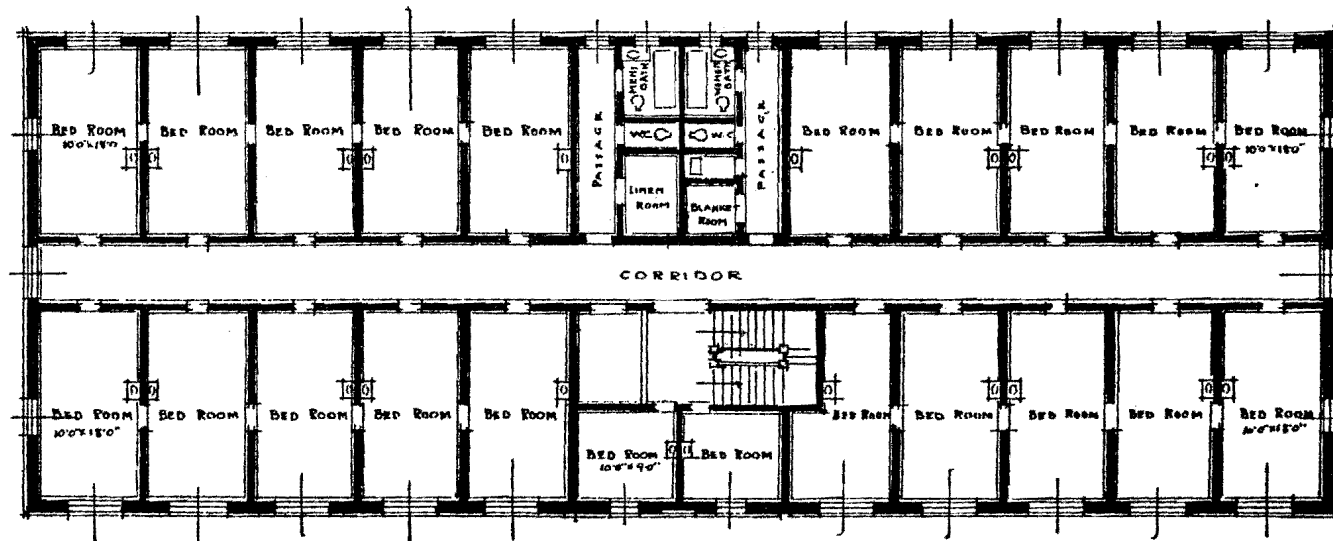
THE HOTEL---Plan of Main Floor



PLAN OF BASEMENT



PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR



PLAN OF THIRD FLOOR