

# Hotels

## Naperville Heritage Society History Stories

Joseph Naper has been credited with many “firsts,” but few know that he may well be the first inn-keeper in Naperville. In 1915, the Illinois State Historical Library published the pioneer memoirs of Harriet Warren Dodson (sister to Julius Warren founder of Warrenville) in which she states, “Emigrants were constantly arriving and departing from [Captain Joseph Naper’s] unpretentious home designated ‘hotel,’... [a] place filled with tired travelers, crying children and all the discomfort incident to such a place...” Once the Naper mill was operational, 1833 - town building truly began and the Napers would have their house to themselves.



In 1834, George Laird began construction of Naperville’s first hotel, the Pre-Emption House, so named for the land acts that governed settlement and land claims. Laird sold the unfinished hotel and management passed to General E. B. Bill, Naperville’s first hotel manager. Located at the corner of Main Street and Jackson along the Plank Road, the Pre-Emption would remain in operation well into the 20th century. It served as a meeting place, a courthouse and land office.

All of Naperville’s earliest hotels were located within a one block stretch of Main Street. The Pre-Emption House (1834) on the southeast corner of Main and Jackson, the New York House (1845) was located on the northeast corner of Main and Jackson, the Washington House (1867) on the southwest corner of Main and Jefferson (though for a short time it re-located to a brand new brick building on Washington Street at Jefferson (1872-79), and the American House (1875) located on the west side on Main between Jackson and Jefferson. These hotels offered a place to stay for those passing through and for the local who may need a place to room and/or board.

An advertisement in the “DuPage County Observer” (Feb. 1, 1854) states that R.N. Murray, Attorney and Counselor at Law, had his office in the New York House, where he and his family lived and managed in the mid-1850s. At the time of the famous Burch Divorce Trial in 1861, there were only two hotels in Naperville, the Pre-Emption House and the New York House, both were claimed by Mrs. Burch’s attorneys leaving Mr. Burch and his attorneys to fend for themselves. In 1874, a devastating fire consumed the New York House. This disaster prompted the Village Trustees to

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purchase the first piece of fire equipment, the Joe Naper Pumper, which is still in working order today.

Established in 1885 by local farmers, Horse Market Day at the Pre-Emption House was perhaps one of Naperville's most famous traditions. On the first Saturday of the month, farmers would bring their horses to town and buyers from across the region, including Chicago streetcar companies, would buy, sell and trade horses. Whether one were trading horses, taking a meal in the dining room, or having a drink in the tavern, Naperville's hotels offered comforts and amenities to ease the weary traveler, visitor or boarder.

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