

Article and photos courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society/Written by Paul Carnahan, librarian



VERMONT HISTORY

Saving the Pavilion

Reconstructing one of Montpelier's most significant historic buildings preserved the downtown's ambience and saved money in the process.

FIFTY YEARS AGO A BATTLE WAS SIMMERING IN Montpelier over the future of one of the capital city's most historic structures, the shuttered and dilapidated Pavilion Hotel. The debate pitted preservations against modernists in a struggle over the character of the state's governmental district, and the economics of reusing the old instead of building anew.

The Pavilion Hotel had stood a stone's throw away from the State House as long as there had been a State House. The first hotel on the premier spot in the capital was constructed in

1808, the same year as the first Vermont State House. In fact, the first Pavilion lasted longer than the first State House. While the original wooden capitol building was replaced by a granite one in 1837, the first brick Pavilion wasn't replaced until 1876.

The second Pavilion was a 90-room luxury hotel built with bricks salvaged from the first hotel. It featured a two-story veranda that wrapped around two sides of the structure. It had all of the creature comforts of the day: billiard hall, barbershop and laundry in the basement, and a suite for the governor. The city of Montpelier expended \$40,000 in city funds to rebuild the

hotel to fend off attempts by legislators to move the capital from Montpelier. Twelve years later a new owner renovated the building, adding an elevator, electric lights, and modern plumbing. He also increased the building's capacity by 35 rooms by adding a new fifth floor covered by a stylish mansard roof. By 1888 the building took on the appearance that is still recognizable today.

Since its initial construction, the hotel had been known as the "Vermont's Third House" because so many legislators stayed there. Legislative policy was made there as often as in the two formal chambers across the lawn, the House and the Senate. The hotel was also marketed as a tourist destination on par with the resorts in Saratoga and the White



The first Pavilion was known as the Davis Tavern, built in 1808 by Thomas Davis, son of Jacob Davis, Montpelier's first permanent settler and donor of the land for Vermont's first statehouse. The building was renamed the Pavilion in 1827 when stage route entrepreneur Mahlon Cotrill purchased the building, enlarged it, and added a two-story porch (or pavilion) that gave guests a grand view of the statehouse and neighboring green.

Mountains. With a railroad station across the street, spring water piped into the rooms and carriage rides to nearby Mount Hunger, the hotel was a popular sanctuary for people seeking a healthy respite in the Gilded Age.

Decades later, in the 1960s the Pavilion Hotel had become a shadow of its former grandeur. The building was in such neglect that a legislator said that he had to bring his own tools to repair the heating system in his room. The hotel developed a seedy reputation and was favored by college students on skiing trips in place of legislators and summer vacationers. The two-story veranda with wooden brackets looked dowdy compared to the clean-lined, modern buildings being constructed in growing cities of the mid-twentieth century.

Furthermore, the economics of transportation and the hospitality industries had changed. Trains no longer brought visitors to the Pavilion's front door. Fewer legislators needed to spend the night in Montpelier, since many, especially those from Chittenden County, could return home at night on the new Interstate highway. And travelers were staying in new, efficient motels that were sprouting up in Vermont and elsewhere. These modern lodgings boasted swimming pools and parking lots. The large, Victorian, in-town hotel had become an outdated relic.

As the Pavilion was declining, state government in the era of the Great Society was growing. In 1965 Governor Philip H. Hoff and the Legislature commissioned a master plan for new government office space in Montpelier. The "Capital Complex Masterplan," produced in 1966 by Waitsfield architect Robert A. Burley, demonstrated how the complex could accommodate 243 more employees and 237 more cars with a combination of restored buildings, new office buildings, and parking garages.

The first stage of the plan was for the State to acquire the Pavilion Hotel for conversion into state offices. Burley's master plan declared, "The Pavilion Hotel makes a major contribution to the identity and texture of the Capital. It can continue to serve the needs of State Government, as it has so well in the past, by offering a unique and attractive environment in which people may work." Burley's statement was fiercely debated by the Legislature over the next three years.

The Legislature recognized the need to protect the State's interests in the Capital Complex by controlling the hotel property that formed a boundary between state buildings near the capitol and downtown Montpelier. In March 1966 the State purchased the Pavilion Hotel, which had an assessed value of \$87,900, for \$148,000. The former owners, Roland and Charlotte Champoux, continued to run the property as a hotel until later that year. An historically themed "last dance" was held on October 27, 1966, to mark the end of the old hostelry.

The State's acquisition of the old hotel came at a time when concern over the loss of historic structures was growing. Within a period of four months in 1963, Montpelier lost both its Romanesque post office building and its Victorian train station to the wrecking ball. Nationally, the U.S. Conference of Mayors published an architectural preservation manifesto entitled *With Heritage So Rich*. This was quickly followed by the U.S. Congress' passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

THE FORMAL OPENING
OF
The New Pavilion
MONTPELIER, VT.,
WILL OCCUR ON
TUESDAY EVENING, FEB. 22, 1876.

Your company with ladies is respectfully solicited.

Return checks given over Central Vt. and M. & W. R. R.

BILL, \$5.00 PER COUPLE.

T. O. BAILEY, PROPRIETOR.

The second Pavilion hotel was built on the foundation of the first Pavilion with bricks from its predecessor. The distinctive two-story veranda with bracketed posts was in the "Steamboat Gothic" style of the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. A gala opening was held in the middle of the winter of 1875-76.

Saratoga and White Mountains:



PAVILION HOTEL,
MONTPELIER, VT.
T. O. BAILEY, PROPRIETOR.

This House is directly in front of the Central Vt. R. R. Station.

What is said about this route and the Pavilion:

"The pleasantest route is via Central Vermont Railroad to Montpelier, thence to Wells River direct and the White Mountain Houses. At Montpelier the tourist will find one of the best appointed hotels in New England. In fact we feel justified in saying, the best in any town or city in our country, taking all things in consideration."—*Hudson River Guide.*

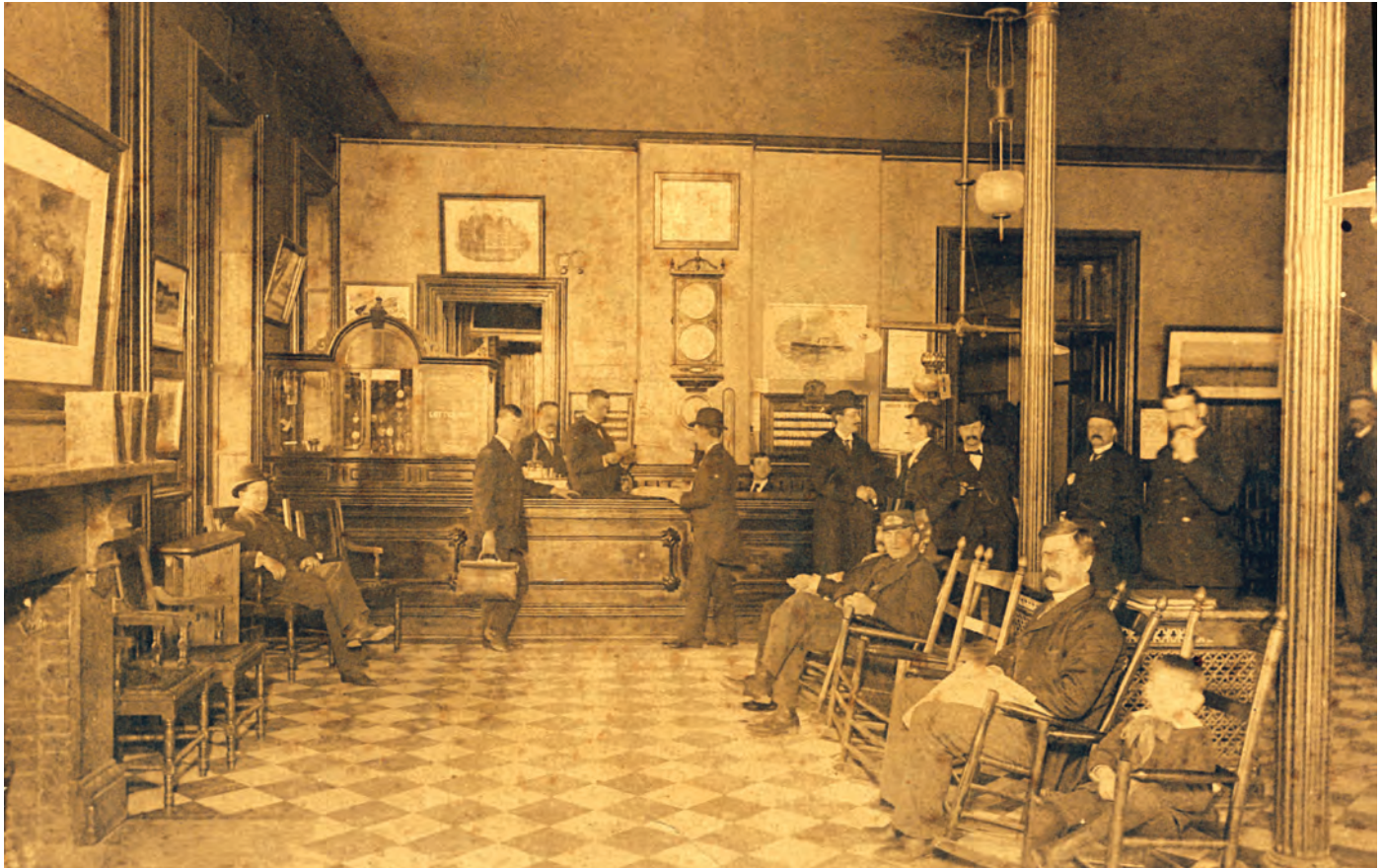
"—to Montpelier, the pleasant capital of Vermont, and we can assure our readers that they have now reached the hotel *par excellence*, not surpassed by any in New England."—*White Mountain Guide.*

PULLMAN PARLOR CARS
running through between Saratoga and Fabyan's, also between Syracuse and Fabyan's without change.

Passengers leaving Saratoga via Rutland, at 9:15 A. M., arrive at Montpelier at 4:35 P. M., for Supper. Depart via Montpelier and Wells River Railroad at 5:05 P. M., reaching the White Mountain Houses at 9:00 P. M.

Passengers leaving Caldwell, via Steamer at 9:15 A. M., arrive at Montpelier at 9:30 P. M. REMAIN OVER NIGHT. Depart at 9:33 A. M., reaching White Mountain Houses in season for dinner.

Proprietor Theron O. Bailey shrewdly marketed the convenience of his hostelry located on the Central Vermont Railroad between Saratoga and the White Mountains.



This undated photograph shows the Pavilion lobby, c. 1880, as the preserve of gentlemen. The columns in the photograph were saved when the building was demolished in 1969 and were reinstalled in the re-creation of the Victorian lobby that is now part of the Vermont History Museum.

Interest in historic preservation was growing nationally and locally, but modern office buildings also had their appeal. The Board of State Buildings, a five-member board appointed by the governor, wanted to tear down the old hotel, but Burley, the state-hired architect and planner, argued that the State might be able to renovate the building for less money. Caught in the middle of the debate, in 1967 the Legislature appropriated funds for a feasibility study for the possible preservation of the building. The study, conducted by a team of engineers and estimators led by Burley, concluded that the building should be preserved and reused. It gave ten reasons, including the savings of nearly half a million dollars.

Also weighing into the debate was a citizen's group formed in April 1968 to advocate for the preservation of the prominent structure. Led by Montpelier resident Thomas S. Conlon, a lawyer for the powerful National Life Insurance Co., the group rallied supporters from around the state and across the nation. Calling themselves the "Friends of the Pavilion," they reached out to regional and national groups for technical know-how. The

group marshalled letters of support from near and far in a sophisticated lobbying effort. The National Park Service even determined that the building was "of unusual merit" and belonged on the prestigious Historic American Building Survey (HABS), bolstering the group's argument that the building should be saved.

Historic significance and financial savings, however, weren't the only factors at play. Victorian architecture was not widely appreciated in the late 1960s and the promise of a sleek, modern office building exerted a strong influence on the imaginations of state and local officials. In December 1968 both the Montpelier City Council and the Planning Commission separately voted in favor of demolition of the building. The city council feared that if the Pavilion was not replaced with a modern office building, then the State would construct office space in neighboring Berlin. This logic failed to recognize that the Burley master plan called for three new large office buildings in the Capital Complex. The Planning Commission, taking a different angle, did not like the aesthetics of the Victorian hotel and wanted a replace-

ment building that would have "New England qualities."

Meanwhile, the Director of the Division of State Buildings Irving Bates, was feeding the Legislature information that made a new office building in that location look very attractive. Bates was a Hoff appointee, and remained officially neutral on the fate of the old hotel, but was suspected of working at cross-purposes to the Governor. The position of "the State," after three years of studies and debates, was muddled and inconsistent.

In February 1969, with the debate dragging on and a new governor setting a deadline, the Vermont House voted solidly in favor of demolition, 100-40. Montpelier's representative, Perry Merrill, a former Commissioner of Forest and Parks who had led state efforts to purchase and preserve forest land, voted on the side of demolition.

The contradictions inherent in the debate prompted prominent New York Times architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable to write an opinion piece on March 2, 1969, entitled "They Know What They Don't Like." She criticized the Vermont legislators for voting against



The Pavilion provided a fitting backdrop when early motorists on the 1910 Munsey Tour stopped in Montpelier. Fifty years later, the popularity of the automobile for transportation would end the Pavilion's usefulness as a hotel.

preservation of the building simply did because they did not like its appearance. She castigated them for ignoring studies and expert opinion that showed that the building could be saved and converted to office space for less money than a new building.

After defeat in the House, the issue moved to the Senate. There, Edward Jane-way (R-Windham) and Dorothy Shea (R-Washington), led the effort to preserve it. In one dramatic moment, while T. Garry Buckley (R-Bennington) was speaking on the floor of the Senate, Senator Olin Gay (R-Windsor), unveiled an artist's drawing of the new building that would replace the Pavilion. Seizing the moment and pointing to the drawing, Sen. Buckley said, "That substantiates what I'm trying to say. This is something that you expect to see in Reno, Nevada. The Vermont image as I understand it lends itself to being reasonably frugal and making do with what you have." Perhaps appalled by the characterlessness of the proposed alternative, the Senators unexpectedly voted 17-13 to save the building.

From there, the proposal to save the Pavilion went back to the House, where



The reconstructed Pavilion building was located 10 feet to west of its predecessors, creating a plaza along its grand side entrance and straightening the city street on the other side of the building.



The Pavilion dining room, seen here in its 1932 décor, was the scene of many banquets during the building's 94-year run. (Photograph by Houston Studio, courtesy of the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration.)



In 1888, Pavilion owner Jesse S. Viles Jr., enlarged the hotel with a stylish mansard roof and fifth floor. This photograph was taken from in front of Montpelier's train station. The capital's Catholic church stood at the far end of Eastern Avenue, a street that ran between the statehouse green and the hotel.



By 1968, when this photograph was taken, the Pavilion Hotel had been closed for two years. Several years prior the bricks under the verandas had been painted white, perhaps to make it look more modern. Although the building had lost some of its charm, its premiere location next to the statehouse remained undiminished.

it failed again. "Supporters will need a miracle to save their building this time," a newspaper opined on April 17. Two days later a new deadline was created and the same newspaper reported that the building had received a "breath of life." A six-member panel was created with a mandate to negotiate a deal by September 1 for the sale of the Pavilion to a private company. The aim was for a private buyer to renovate the building and lease it back to the State; otherwise the building would be torn down on January 1. The belief that no company would be willing to take on such a risky project convinced the "demolishers" to sign on to the compromise.

Negotiations with private companies proceeded through the summer. Much to everyone's surprise, the Pizzagalli Construction Company of South Burlington developed a proposal that the committee liked. Pizzagalli proposed demolishing the old building and reconstructing a replica with a modern steel frame and exterior details identical to the old building. The key to financing the deal was a sale-lease-purchase arrangement in which the State would sell the property to Pizzagalli, the company would build the new building, lease the space back to the State, and then eventually sell it to the State. An important part of the plan was that Burley would be hired to do the architectural work for Pizzagalli, ensuring that the architectural integrity of the building's exterior would be preserved, and that the new building would be located ten feet closer to the Supreme Court building so that Taylor Street could be straightened. The final cost of purchasing the reconstructed building was expected to be \$3 million less than it would have cost the state to build a new structure.

The Legislature accepted the compromise, ending the controversy which had been brewing for four years. The old building came down quickly in the winter of 1969-70. Burley documented the old structure and Pizzagalli preserved pieces of the facade. They kept the granite lintels, keystones, pieces of the veranda, and the name plaque from the top of the building. Bricks for the exterior walls were cast on site to assure the historical authenticity of the materials. Burley designed a modern infill section of the building at the rear to square off

the “L” shape of the hotel’s original plan and to open up floors for modern office needs. The construction company, proudly aware of the significance of their work, created promotional materials and a time-lapse film of the old building coming down and the modern replacement rising again.

The reconstruction process quickly won over converts in the Legislature. During the 1970 legislative session, before the building was finished, the Legislature voted to purchase the Pavilion back from Pizzagalli for \$2.463 million. This was far less than the \$3.5 million cost that Buildings Director Irving Bates had estimated for the renovation.

The building was dedicated on March 25, 1971, with Governor Deane C. Davis and other dignitaries cutting the ribbon and giving speeches. Thus began a new chapter in the life of a modern building that looks like its Victorian predecessor. Now almost fifty years old, the building itself symbolizes the struggle to balance history with the needs of the present. **F**

Paul Carnahan is the librarian of the Vermont Historical Society.

JUST THE FACTS

Vermont History Museum

109 State St.
 Montpelier, VT 05602
 Call (802) 828-2291
 or visit vermonthistory.org.

The reconstructed Pavilion building is today home to the Vermont History Museum, open to visitors from 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Tuesday–Saturday. To view additional photos of the Pavilion through the years and view video of the reconstruction, visit digitalvermont.org/collections/show/3.

Vermont History Center

60 Washington Street
 Barre, VT 05641
 Call (802) 479-8500
 or visit vermonthistory.org.

At the Vermont History Center in Barre, the featured exhibition on Vermont auto racing, *Anything for Speed*, continues through March 30, 2019. The center is open from 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Monday–Friday and also on the second Saturday of each month for the duration of the exhibition.



Dignitaries gathered to cut the ribbon of the new Pavilion building on March 25, 1971. Doing the honors was Gov. Deane C. Davis and his wife Marjorie. Looking on are (left to right) Vermont Historical Society Director Charles Morrissey, who was an early supporter of the renovation project; Commissioner of Administration Richard Mallary, who voted in favor of demolition when he was in the Senate; Director of State Buildings Irving Bates, who preferred a new building; and Angelo Pizzagalli, whose construction company made the renovation possible.



After a few choice architectural elements were removed by owner Pizzagalli Construction, the 94-year-old Pavilion came down quickly in December 1969.