

Orleans Hotel Site of Prohibition-Era Raids



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This photograph, taken around 1920, shows the dining room of the Orleans Hotel located on the southwest corner of East Bank and Platt streets. After the Platt House burned in the early 1860s, Charles A. Harrington constructed this building in 1862/3 and operated it as a hotel. The business was originally known as the Orleans House, but records seem to indicate that the name changed to the Orleans Hotel in the 1890s when Anson R. Dunshee took ownership of the building.

Fresh on the coattails of the 18th Amendment, the United States was “enjoying” the consequences of Prohibition when this photograph was taken. Other interior photographs of the Orleans Hotel show a bar void of liquor bottles and barstools. It is no surprise, perhaps, that in 1922 the Orleans Hotel was one of six local businesses raided by Sheriff Scott Porter under the suspicion of selling illegal intoxicating liquor. The manager of the hotel, Herbert S. Field, pleaded not guilty on a charge of “having maintained a common nuisance” where intoxicating liquor was sold in violation of the state. Bartender Sylvester Bragg was also charged in connection with the illegal sale of liquor; he pleaded not guilty to selling alcohol to Egbert Delano.

A typical stay at the Orleans Hotel would run a guest \$2.00 to \$2.50 per night and the building became a popular location for political conventions, reunions, business dinners, and parties for groups throughout Orleans County. On March 8, 1920, President William Howard Taft stayed at the Orleans Hotel while visiting Albion as a guest of the Chamber of Commerce. At the time, Taft was a faculty member at Yale Law School, one year before his selection as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

On March 15, 1923 Anson Dunshee committed suicide in his home on Ingersoll Street by slitting his throat with a razor. The hotel closed its doors immediately following the tragedy and Albion remained practically void of hotel accommodations until William Lysitt leased the McMann Hotel on Main Street. Florida Dunshee, Anson's widow, would later lease the Orleans Hotel to J. J. Collins.