

The Mattaquasson Hotel

AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

by spencer grey

When the Hotel Chatham closed forever in 1894, it gave birth to a new hotel on the shores of Pleasant Bay, the Hotel Mattaquasson. Originally known as the Dill House, the Mattaquasson was created in September 1894 when Marcellus Eldredge bought a boarding house known as the Watts House and made additions to it because it was too small to be a successful hotel. Joshua Dill, a relative of Eldredge's wife Mary Dill, was appointed manager of the Watts House and changed its name to the Dill House.

In April 1895 the Hotel Chatham was sold at auction to Marcellus Eldredge for \$11,000, who then paid an additional \$5,000 for the furnishings. In May several teams carted furniture from the hotel to the Dill House, and Mr. and Mrs. Dill went to Boston to select more furnishings as well as linens and glassware. By the end of June of that year guests were being checked in to the new hotel by its desk clerk, Heman Harding. Mrs. Dill was the head waitress and Joshua Dill was the chef.

When Marcellus Eldredge died suddenly at the Hotel Touraine on March 14, 1898, his brother, Fisher Eldredge, inherited the Dill House, but in 1901 he sold it to Frederick Wilkey, who renamed it the Mattaquasson Hotel. Being situated on a sandy beach adjacent to Watch Hill, the estate of Marcellus Eldredge, it was popular with summer visitors, who customarily stayed for a month or more.

Drawings in the hotel's brochure show that the public rooms, such as the spacious lobby, were sparsely furnished with only a few chairs near the fireplace but always with the requisite billiard table. The dining room was equally unadorned and furnished with plain tables, usually seating eight people each.

A Mrs. Wilson and her daughter who stayed at the hotel in 1928 described their arrival in this way: "The desk clerk greeted us as though we had returned home, and informed us of those who had already arrived. Following the bell-hop up the broad, curving staircase, we were taken to our usual room with its twin, white enamel bed, and a commode with a large iron stone basin on top, in which stood the customary water pitcher. Between the windows, fronting the flagpole, hung a hefty rope with instructions for use in case of fire."

When shown to their table in the dining room, Mrs. Wilson asked if they could have a table by the window. The hostess replied, "Oh no, Mrs. Wilson, those are for the guests who have been coming for 15 years or longer. This is only the fifth year for you..." Until recent years most hotel guests in Chatham usually stayed for at least two weeks, and often for a month or more. Not far from the Mattaquasson Hotel was The Traveler's Home (now the Cranberry Inn), which was first opened to guests by Sylvester Small in 1884, when the Ocean House (now the Wayside Inn) had recently closed. In 1886 the Chatham Monitor reported that "Captain Small, proprietor of the Traveler's Home, is having a good run o'summer company, and his guests express themselves as well pleased with the bed and board."

It was the Traveler's Home that the Norfolk Hunt used as its headquarters. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Hunt Club hired railroad cars to transport their members to Chatham. As many as 25 or 30 hunters engaged two special cars for themselves, their grooms, their horses, and their dogs. When it was known that they were coming to town, residents would gather at the Depot to see them debark and ride through the town in their brilliant red coats, followed by their dogs. There is no record of exactly where they hunted what for what, but

there are photographs in the archives at the Atwood House showing them riding past the town hall on Main Street.

Although the Mattaquasson Hotel was replaced by house lots several years ago, the Cranberry Inn continues to welcome guests, but without horses and dogs.

