

The Byrnes Hotel II

Byrnesville, Barnesboro, Northern Cambria, Cambria County, Pennsylvania

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monday, january 5, 2009

The Byrnes Hotel II



Byrnes Hotel 101+ years.

In the rear there was a frame building called a 'Summer House' where blocks of ice were stored after being cut in the winter. The blocks of ice were cut from the frozen reservoir up the hill behind the Byrnes Hotel. The Hotel had acetylene lights at first and later changed to electricity.

For many years the water supply came from a spring and reservoir on the hills above the Hotel. The spring was destroyed when coal was illegally removed from the area. A well was then dug downhill from the hotel and water was pumped by gasoline engine up to the reservoir. The Hotel had steam heat in radiators on the first two floors and parlor (that was seldom used) on the third floor. No heat on fourth floor. There were many brawls in the barroom and Daddy Byrnes (Thomas J.) was quick to squelch them. Some local taverns would let the men fight it out, but not Daddy Byrnes.

Byrnesville was named after the Byrnes family. Local people traveled by horse and surrey. Coal was moved out of local mines (Allport, Cymbria, and Manion) by rail through Byrnesville and railroad tracks were used by local people as a walkway (carrying lanterns at night) to Barnesboro.

(Editor's note. As a teenager, in the summers we used to walk the railroad tracks to Barnesboro in the dark. In Barnesboro we could buy a slice of pizza for a dime from a house on Philadelphia Avenue near Mt. Carmel Church. The pizza place was just a window on a home on the sidewalk. We would also walk to the firehall in Barnesboro on Friday or maybe Saturday night to attend dances. The guys stood in groups by the wall while the girls walked in an oval shaped path in the middle of the second floor 'hall'.)

Byrnesville stores included Foxalls Candy Store (where kids loafed), Sampsons (Mr. Sampson became blind but still tended the store) and Pete DeFazio's grocery near the railroad crossing. Herman James Byrnes (1881-1911) had the second or third automobile (EMF Touring Car) in Barnesboro; Thomas Barnes had the first car, Bill Byrnes had a 1912 Model-T Ford; his father signed a note for it with banker Jim McClem, the car was originally owned by Dr. Ealy.

There was a dance hall near the hotel that also was used for wedding receptions, etc. Bill Byrnes bought the building and made it into a garage. The garage was later bought and used by Landy (Orlando) Byrnes in his trucking business.

The photographs here and in the last entry of the Byrnes Hotel were taken by Edward A. Byrnes in October 2003; the hotel was 101 years old at that time. It is now used like a warehouse. In 2005 I tracked down the current owner of the structure and was able to get an antique 1930's ceramic ceiling light fixture from inside.

I used Photoshop to edit the image of the hotel in the picture above in an attempt to fix up the old hotel. I copied and pasted one of the better windows to replace broken windows in the photograph, got rid of dust, and enhanced the color.

As a child I remember sitting on the steps of the hotel and watching men walk home from the mines. The miners, their clothes, their skin, and even their lunchboxes were midnight ebony black with coal dust. The scary contrast was their ivory white eyes. I had friends whose parents rented apartments in the hotel; this was in the 1950's.

We would run up the steps and play on the porch on rainy days. Other relatives, the Yinglings lived on the first floor and would yell at us for knocking dirt from the porch. Paul Byrnes told me he remembered Thomas J. Byrnes living on the first floor and sitting on the first floor "porch" overlooking the garden across the street. Later, this garden became my grandfather's garden where he grew corn and all kinds of vegetables.

On a sad note, Marilyn Kline Washington wrote in a RootsWeb posting on 5 Apr 2004 and referring to the Byrnes Hotel: "This ended up as a low rent apartment, and the landlord did not provide coal, so the residents burned pieces of the hotel to



Byrnesville Hotel.



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