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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Horace Chapman Tells of the Old Days at the Bangor House

Date: November 18th, 1954

Recording number: Tape 4, Track 1

Length of recording: 16:03

[transcript begins]

OWEN: The scene for tonight's transcribed feature story is a comfortable room in a building that is a landmark something of a tradition in Bangor not only in Bangor but in New England and this is a familiar building a familiar institution to people I might even say from all over the country and that is the famous old Bangor house and a notification I'm talking with a member of the third generation of his family to be in charge of this hostelry Mr. Horace Chapman and I thought we'd talk today about some of the past history of this Bangor house Mr. Chapman and of course everything has to have a beginning so perhaps you can tell me going back through the years of how this hotel had its beginning when it was built and so on

CHAPMAN: Bangor house was a community project by a group of lumbermen in Bangor who wanted to have a hotel which would impress the visitors that was at the time of the big boom in Bangor and Maine and Penobscot timberlands and they were selling timberlands rights for timber lands of more or less doubtful value perhaps and timber. It was the Bangor house was opened in 1834 with a big ball much ceremony and at that time it was very much in the headlines the American Magazine of that day stated that it was a most luxurious hotel that even boasted a bathing room and was only equaled by the Tremont House in Boston for its luxury.

OWEN: That was quite an endorsement that by that was built on more or less the same location where the Bangor House now stands?

CHAPMAN: Yes the original building was the brick building now at the corner of Union and Main and Main streets the original entrance was on Union Street and it came to the second floor. The dining room and the office and so forth were on the second floor then the street was cut down and the office was dropped to the floor below.

OWEN: And that's the where they structure lies generally now. I understand from what I've heard about this Bangor House that you had a very distinguished guest here at a big banquet the first year that it was open there back in 1800s.

CHAPMAN: Daniel Webster at that time was a candidate for president of the United States and of course was very enthusiastically received by all the people in New England and he was a guest of honor at a banquet with many flowery speeches telling what a wonderful man he was.

OWEN: I don't know whether you would be sympathetic with this gentleman's problem we're going to mention now you were telling me before we started to make this recording that the first manager had some sort of difficulty with the owners of the original Bangor house.

CHAPMAN: Well the first manager was a Mr. Wood of Providence who who would run a hotel in Providence and he leased it from the owners and after about a year he ran into difficulties with the owners and in a public speech he complained that they attempted to break the lease on the pretext that a guest had written to the Boston paper says you've been overcharged three cents for stationery when in fact he was only charged two cents for stationery two cents for pen.

OWEN: Preferably we better make a mental comparison of the cost of living between now and then. I believe too that shortly after that a new manager was appointed here at the Bangor house.

CHAPMAN: Yes it fell in the hard times and actually they seized all Mr. Wood's furniture and for several years he ran it as a boarding house and then it came back in as a hotel again.

OWEN: I know there are many famous people in addition to Mr. Daniel Webster who have stayed here at the Bangor house perhaps we'll talk about them a little bit later Mr. Chapman

but now I think we should consider the the physical structure of the Bangor house the the many changes it's undergone since the original building was built.

CHAPMAN: I spoke of the lowering of the street dropping down of the first floor. After they ran into found that they needed more room they purchased a brick building which was then standing at the corner of May and Main streets and bought two old apartment houses moved them in between and connected them to make the present structure. Then my grandfather built the wooden wing on Union Street and the present kitchens sometime between 1890 and 1905.

OWEN: I noticed that's HC Chapman you have the same name as your grandfather?

CHAPMAN: My first name Horace his name was Horace Crockett.

OWEN: Mmm-hmm. Now that goes back near the turn of the century. I'm correct and saying this is the third generation of Chapman's.

CHAPMAN: That's right and the fourth one is in the hotel now, my son.

OWEN: Well this the name stands an excellent chance of being perpetuated then in the field of management. Oh, I was going to say jumping to the present day and recently you made extensive renovations here too at the Bangor house.

CHAPMAN: We've done over about a hundred rooms in the past year but that's only a small part of the changes that have been made in the interior. The original Bangor house the only heat was fireplaces in each room and since that time gas lighting piping has been added then steam heat with all the piping that they had to put in. Later water for bars and rooms with running water. And finally the electrical wiring have all been added since that time. It's a wonder there's any inside left of the hotel.

OWEN: Actually if you could go through all these stages and have records of what happened then the changes in the Bangor house would certainly be I'm a marvelous history of our times from from its beginning back in 1834 up to the present time. Now I know there are many delightful anecdotes that have come out of the history of the Bangor house I think that one

about a Carry Nation is worth repeating in our discussion of the Bangor House Mr. Chapman. Could you tell us a bit about that?

CHAPMAN: Carry Nation who was a great prohibitionist and used a hatchet to destroy barrooms and so forth came to Bangor with the purpose of cleaning up Bangor and she hit the Bangor house first. Bangor at that time was run under the so called Bangor plan where you ran a bar and twice a year you paid a fine and that took the place of a license. Well Carry came to Bangor. My grandfather had been forewarned that she was coming and the bar was tightly locked. She came in asked for a drink and was told no liquor was sold roamed around and was unable to find the bar. She then went to the dining room and ordered a drink in the dining room. Very politely told that Bangor House sold no liquor. She said she knew better but they said no. Then a friend of my grandfather's Mr. Hersey who was sitting right near her table called the boy over and said he would have a whiskey and soda. Carry whereupon blew up and jumped to her feet and started making a scene. My grandfather was waiting outside the door rushed in grabbed her around the waist and started to drag her out. She threw both arms around one of the pillars at the rear entrance to the dining room and hung on and a quite a tug-of-war ensued for a while until the same Mr. Hersey reached up with a cigar and put it on the back of a hand. She let go quickly and grandfather carried her downstairs and out very firmly out through the front office and that was the last of Carry Nation in the Bangor House.

OWEN: And I think that also proves that Maine people are made of mighty stern stuff if anyone can thwart the could have thwarted the efforts of a very determined lady Carry Nation. Well on the more serious side where famous visitors are concerned I know there have been well you mentioned Daniel Webster as a presidential candidate and some of our our presidents have spent time here at the Bangor House.

CHAPMAN: Among the presidents Ulysses Grant who we have pictures of leaving the Bangor House on it for triumphal tour. President McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt and Taft. I can remember Teddy Roosevelt as a small boy coming to our apartment and where my father showed him his rifles and talked hunting with him. Among other famous people Admiral Perry spoke from the front balcony I think his first public appearance after he had reached the North Pole during the

days of the Eastern Maine festival practically every musical celebrity in the world of that day stayed at the Bangor house at some time and sang or appear at that festival.

OWEN: I was just going to say I can recall listening to people older than I am and older than you are that a number of famous musical and stage personalities spent time here during their theatrical tours. I believe that Madam Schumann-Heink for example was here. And someone to once that one of the Barrymore's had been through Bangor in some appearance I don't know whether that's true or not.

CHAPMAN: I know Ethel Barrymore appeared here in Captain Jenks and stayed at the Bangor House.

OWEN: Let's see that must have been a performance at the at the the old Opera House just down the street a ways.

CHAPMAN: That's right it was the old rock Opera House before it burned probably around 1900 to 1905. John McCormack stayed at the Bangor House several times and sang here and he used to go down the street and chin with the man that ran the bookstore just down the street a ways and he corresponds with with him for years after he left Bangor.

OWEN: I imagine a lot of people who were great celebrities then the ones still living have a lot of pleasant memories of being here in Maine. By the way you mentioned when Mr. McCormack sang here do you mean when he made appearances at a local theater auditorium or whether he gave any or even gave any private concerts or semi-public ones here in the hotel.

CHAPMAN: I think he each time he appeared here was at the Bangor Festival the Eastern Maine festival.

OWEN: That must've been a really tremendous event in those days.

CHAPMAN: That was a great event I can always remember being thrown out of my room as a small child and parked with my mother and father so that they could use that room to take

care of some of the people that came here for the festival. They came from all over Eastern Maine.

OWEN: I imagine space was at a premium. There are so many fascinating aspects to a discussion about this hotel I can't think offhand of any that we've overlooked now but I know there must be many more of course the day has long since passed when horses and carriages were the transportation but I imagine you've seen some some fine vehicles of that type draw up in front of the Bangor House here

CHAPMA: Yes they I can remember the days when people traveled by Austin team and the early days of the automobile when a man came in to Bangor in May and bragged that he had only been stuck twice between Portland and Bangor and had to be pulled out.

OWEN: I imagine that was a long trip too in those days.

CHAPMA: That was in good weather it was probably six or seven hours by car from Portland and the bad weather almost indefinite

OWEN: Almost indefinitely. Well I suppose in the say during the winter when there are bad storms some of your guests extended their stay quite a bit until the roads cleared up or they could get horses through.

CHAPMAN: Yes they did. Of course in the days of early automobile days nobody travelled in the wintertime by car all the traffic then was by railroad.

OWEN: They put their cars up and on blocks and wintertime threw an old horse blanket over it and hoped that it would run in the spring when they started it up again.

CHAPMAN: I know my grandfather's first car the period of running was from June to October the rest of the time it was on the blocks.

OWEN: That was a do you recall what make of car that was?

CHAPMAN: It was an old Pierce-Arrow

OWEN: That was a marvelous car

CHAPMAN: It was a very fine car at that time it was a big open car with a hardtop I think one of the first hardtop cars that was ever put out.

OWEN: I imagine you were very happy youngster when you had an opportunity to ride around in that.

CHAPMAN: That was a lot of fun.

OWEN: I'll bet it was. Well if as the old saying goes if only these walls could talk I imagine we'd have some wonderful stories from the Bangor House. You were saying that there is yet another generation of the Chapman family to be concerned with the management of this hotel. That of course would be your son.

CHAPMAN: That's my son John Chapman. He came to the hotel out of the Navy the first of this year.

OWEN: And I imagine that you still have a many years ahead of you when you still be very much in the midst of this managerial business. I suppose it's just like like the theater this gets in your blood especially when it's practically a family tradition in hotel business.

CHAPMAN: Yes I think it does I don't think that I want... Would like to die with my boots on.

OWEN: I know what you mean after the years I've been in in radio I think it'd be very difficult to get far away from it. Well we're getting a little bit away from the time we plan to take for this and I don't believe we've we've yet tapped the tremendous amount of anecdotes that could be told about this family. Can you think of any other amusing stories from the past at the moment Mr. Chapman, or can we reserve those for some future time?

CHAPMAN: Well I think probably those would wait for another day.

OWEN: Well I shall I shall be waiting for them too because it's I think it's great fun to sit down and talk over the old days from someone who was in a position to recall or to have access to many stories about the past and now we are in the present day Bangor House the one that was opened in 1834 and it's a far cry from the days of the the horse and the carriage and all

those things but judging with all that we've learned and we know that the Bangor House has many happy and constructive years ahead of it.

CHAPMAN: Thank you very much.

OWEN: And we thank you Mr. Chapman and by the way I might mention that I know one of your greatest hobbies and interests is concerned with skiing and someday I want to come back here sometime and we'll talk about a bit the as the Penobscot Valley ski club isn't it?

CHAPMAN: That's right be glad always glad to talk about skiing anytime.

OWEN: Okay well we'll reserve a section of feature story for the sports page and skiing and talk with you again thank you very much Mr. Chapman.

[transcript ends]

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