



Introducing the Dreyfuss Collection

On May 7th, the Hales Corners Historical Society was honored to receive a treasure trove of historic items for our collection. They were donated by **Greg and Karen Tibbetts** of Estero, Florida. Karen is the great-great-granddaughter (along with HCHS Director **Mary Bennett**) of Joseph Dreyfuss, one of our Village's early entrepreneurs. We are tremendously grateful to Greg and Karen for their donation, and to Mary for helping facilitate it.

Joseph and his son Julius operated the Hotel Dreyfuss (formerly the Western Hotel) from 1873 to 1929. The hotel stood near the "Triangle" of Hales Corners, directly across Forest Home Avenue from today's Hale House restaurant. A diorama depicting the hotel was created by HCHS member **Sherman Stock** and is installed near the Ben Hunt Room at the Hales Corners Library.

The Dreyfuss Collection of donated items is extensive, providing a window on the 18th- and early 19th-century expansion of Hales Corners and Milwaukee, the growth and success of the Hotel Dreyfuss, and the activities of Joseph and Julius Dreyfuss and their family. Among the items are many photos (some of which appear here), hotel guest registers, postcards, personal letters,

correspondence with government officials, and newspapers. The collection's size can mostly be credited to Gladys Dreyfuss, Julius's daughter, who perhaps recognized the future historical significance of the items . . . or who, like many of us, just never got around to cleaning out her attic! Whatever the reason, we owe her a debt of gratitude.

Each of the items, whether major or relatively minor, is special in its own way. An example of the former is an actual framed photo of William Hale, taken around 1880, which is far superior to the 1898 newspaper halftone HCHS has had till now. And although a bit more mundane, the Hotel Dreyfuss's records of orders for its famous chicken dinners, handwritten by the waitresses, prove just how popular that item was.

We look forward to displaying items from the Dreyfuss Collection at HCHS members' meetings when we can safely gather together again. In the meantime, we hope you'll enjoy the history in this Special Edition (excerpted and expanded from our Village history book published in 2015) of the Hotel Dreyfuss and the family who owned it.

THE DREYFUSS FAMILY AND THEIR FAMOUS HOTEL

The Hotel Dreyfuss originally was an inn called the Hunters and Trappers Home. It was constructed in 1834 by Simon Shields, a builder and hauler by trade, on land alongside the road now known as Forest Home Avenue. Simon Shields built the structure with hand-hewn beams that still had the bark on them. According to Dreyfuss family records it was the first building in Milwaukee County to be erected before Wisconsin became a state.



The Western Hotel and its long horse barn



Joseph Dreyfuss and an admirer

In 1847, Simon Shields sold the inn and its 5-1/4 acre site to his brother William. The following year, William obtained a loan on the site for \$2,500, and the inn became known as the Western Hotel.

The hotel served an important purpose. At that time, there were no decent roads in Wisconsin, so it was a long and slow process for farmers to travel to a "trading center" like Milwaukee. The distances were sometimes too great for farmers to return home on the same day, so they would stay overnight at wayside inns. The Western Hotel was a popular "farmer hotel" because it featured a long horse barn and shelter sheds. William Shields operated it accordingly for a number of years, eventually selling it to Louis Heineman.

Joseph Dreyfuss Purchases the Hotel

Joseph Dreyfuss (then pronounced Dry-foos), was born in Dachau, Germany, on December 23, 1820 to Moses and Regina Dreyfuss. They had five other sons: Marx, Wendelin, Martin, Julius, and Jacob. Joseph was the first to emigrate to America in 1847. His five brothers and their father joined him in New Orleans between 1854-1856. During those years, Joseph was in charge of a bakery and managed 36 employees.

On February 2, 1858, Joseph married Katherine Spaliner in New

Orleans. They moved to Milwaukee County in 1863, along with Joseph's brothers Marx and Wendelin and their father, Moses. Joseph and Katherine eventually had five children, of whom Julius was the eldest.

In 1873, Joseph Dreyfuss purchased the Western Hotel from Louis Heineman. Joseph had managed several hotels previously, so he was well-suited to the job. He was a small, dapper man, who dressed up with a floppy tie and a flower in his buttonhole, ready to greet his customers. His warmth and hospitality won him many admirers, including the lady at upper left. The inscription on the back of the photo, handwritten by Joseph's granddaughter Gladys, reads, "All the ladies love the 'Old Man,' and the 'Old Man' loves all the ladies."

Each year on his birthday, Joseph would celebrate with an Open House at the hotel. A feast was served for three days, with friends invited to enjoy turkey, goose, and all the festive foods.

Katherine Dreyfuss passed away in 1903. After Joseph followed her in 1910 at age 90, Julius and his wife, Mary Scharles Dreyfuss, took over the management of the hotel and renamed it the Hotel Dreyfuss.



Julius Dreyfuss, 1870s

Julius Dreyfuss and His Family Continue the Tradition

Julius and Mary had three children: Gladys (1897-1987), Joseph (1901-1904), and Harriet (1908-1987). Mary was a generous soul who gladly took in whoever was orphaned, or otherwise needed a place to stay. It was estimated that she took in a dozen children to raise along with her own children.

The entire family worked very hard at the hotel, as there were always rooms to prepare and clean, laundry to be done, and all the meals to prepare and serve. Julius was the resident handyman and kept a neat workshop.



The Western Hotel and the Dreyfuss family and friends, July 4, 1895



Gladys Dreyfuss and her mother, Mary

The hotel featured a front porch that extended across the building between the first and second stories. A large lantern hung high above the main entrance. The hotel's business cards stated, "First class accommodation for farmers," and "Summer boarders a specialty."

On the east side of the hotel, near the front, was a garden room enclosed with latticework. Julius's daughter Gladys referred to this as the "knoedelen (canoodling) room" where a young man might steal a kiss from his lady love. The hotel's topmost floor featured a ballroom with a stage at one end.

The hotel had 18 bedrooms. Those in the rear of the building were one step down from those in the front. Heating was provided by eight coal stoves that were kept at full blast during the winter months. Each bedroom's accommodations included a chamber pot under the bed, and a bowl and pitcher of water on the washstand.



Gladys Dreyfuss holding her sister, Harriet

Water was heated downstairs and carried to the bedrooms.

The source of water for all 18 bedrooms, as well as for all of the hotel's other needs, was a hand pump on the property. In winter, one of the chores was to bring in pails of water before they froze at night. At times, ice and snow were melted for water.

Although the hotel initially lacked indoor toilet facilities, it had a large double outhouse, with one side for men, and the other for women. There were no toilet paper rolls at that time, so old Sears-Roebuck catalogs were supplied for the purpose. For night trips to the outhouse, a Dietz Cold Blast lantern was provided to light the way.

As new inventions improved everyday life, the Hotel Dreyfuss was quick to adopt them. The first public telephone in Hales Corners was installed in the hotel, and Julius made the inaugural call himself to the *Milwaukee Sentinel*.

Haute Cuisine in Hales Corners

After farmers no longer used the hotel as a halfway house, promotional emphasis shifted to the fine dining available there. Its reputation began to grow. The hotel's business cards highlighted "meals first class." Wealthy families from Milwaukee and even Chicago



The double outhouse

enjoyed coming for the bountiful dinners. According to the family, two young women once walked from Milwaukee to Hales Corners just to eat at the Hotel Dreyfuss, a distance of about 15 miles. Another time, a distinguished Englishman came to see the hotel he had heard mentioned by British friends as the best place to dine between Chicago and Milwaukee.

The cooking for those dinners was done by Julius's wife, Mary, with help from all the women in the family. Every meal was cooked to order. The women canned, pickled, preserved, baked biscuits and breads, dressed chickens, and served the meals.

Fried chicken was a specialty of the hotel. Although it was called "Creole Chicken," it was just regular young chicken fried in a big cast iron skillet in plenty of butter. French and German dishes were also important features on the menu.

The hotel also had a bar and served wines with dinner. Imported German wines, champagne, and beer were popular. Early photos show "Pabst Beer" advertised above the hotel's front door. Unlike some other establishments, the Hotel Dreyfuss did not require ladies to enter the bar through a separate entrance.



Ella Diener holding Harriet Dreyfuss, with "Sam," and Julius Dreyfuss

Julius Dreyfuss and the Community

Julius took an active interest in civic life. In 1912, he campaigned against the widening of Forest Home Avenue through Hales Corners, advocating that 30 feet was wide enough. He served as a justice of the peace and as the Village's postmaster. The Post Office was just one room inside the hotel, sometimes managed by Julius's sister, Louise.

Julius was a conservationist with a keen interest in preserving the natural beauty of the lakes near Hales Corners. He appeared



Julius Dreyfuss, 1920s

before the state legislature and championed litigation in the state Supreme Court to prevent the draining of Big Muskego Lake and Vernon Marsh. Mayor David Rose of Milwaukee led the opposing forces. For 25 years, Julius fought that battle before finally achieving victory.

Like his father, Julius had an interest in horses. One of them, Sam, appears in the photo above.

The Later Years

Julius passed away in 1929 at the age of 71. For many years, he kept a roll of money in his pocket and, whenever he found someone in need, he generously pulled off bills without any thought of repayment. Consequently, he left a very small estate but was remembered with a great deal of gratitude by many neighbors and friends.

Mary Dreyfuss lived on at the old hotel following her husband's death, and after it closed to paying guests. Her children knew it as "Grandma's House," a marvelous place to go. There were so many rooms to play in, not the least being the ballroom. With the

stage at one end and dressing rooms on both sides, it was a great place to put on impromptu plays. The local school used it for dramatics each year.

Mary suffered from diabetes in her later years, which sadly resulted in the amputation of her legs. Her daughter, Gladys Dinneen, then a young widow, moved into the hotel with her two children to care for her. Mary spent her remaining days propped up in bed, holding court for her family and many friends who came to call. She assured that her house was always a happy place with no room for complaint or melancholy. Mary passed away in 1947 and is buried next to her husband in Forest Home Cemetery.

The Hotel Dreyfuss was razed in 1953 as Hales Corners experienced a steady increase in post-World War II residential and commercial development. Fortunately, many photos, hotel registers, documents, postcards, and letters still exist to preserve the history of the Dreyfuss family, and of the famous hotel that bore their name.



Mary Dreyfuss at home, 1942

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