

### Green Count House - Part 3

The 1884 Green County History said that the Green County House was a two-story hip-roofed building that contained 29 rooms. There was also a feed stable that was 32 by 100 feet that could accommodate 54 horses. At that time the property was valued at \$10,000.

Thomm continued to take good care of his hotel by putting in a new walk in front in August 1889. He also hired Will Fessenden to put on a new “jacket of paint” in September 1895.

An article in the January 1, 1891 issue of the Wood County Reporter shared that Olaf Oleson, a Swedish tailor, had been found dead in the Green County House at 10:00 a.m. on December 27. When the chambermaid entered his room to change the linens, he was found dead on the bed. “He had swallowed about one-half a bottle of rough on rats sometime during the night and from the general appearance of the room it was quite evident that he suffered considerably before death.” He had been on a spree since he returned from Sweden after going there to marry his fiancé and finding out that she had married a more handsome man.

According to the Darlington Democrat and Register on April 3, 1891, Fred Thomm had traveled to that area because he was interested in the cheese industry. He was riding around amongst the farmers there contracting to purchase milk for the coming season. At that time milk was selling from 70 to 80 cents per hundred.

Fred and Matilda Thomm, after owning and operating the hotel for more than 14 years, sold it to Charles M. Simons, a Norwegian immigrant from Friendship, Wisconsin, for \$8,000 on December 9, 1896. The Sentinel announced on December 16 that the Thomms would move to the vicinity of Kilbourn City (now Wisconsin Dells). The Mirror Gazette in Kilbourn City reported on December 26 that the Thomms had actually traded for the Simons’ “immense farm in Adams County” taking possession on January 1. The deed also stated that the hotel included “all household furniture and fixtures belonging to the hotel building and barn.”

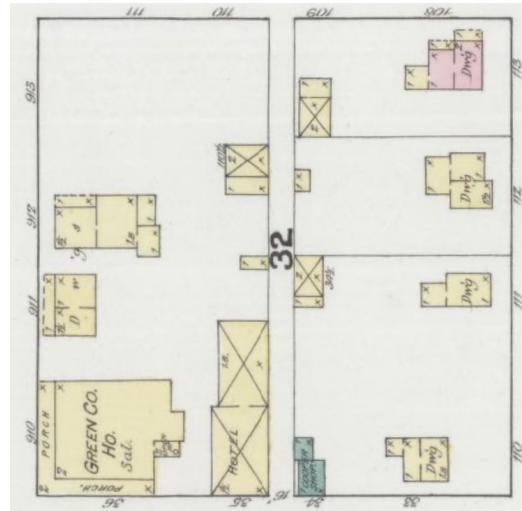
The Sentinel reported on January 13 that Simons was “making great changes in the interior of this favorite hotel.” It was shared the following week that Thomm’s liquor license was transferred to the new landlord. By the end of January Simons had transferred ownership of all of the property to Anna for \$1,700 and “other valuable consideration.”

It was announced in February 1897 that the name had been changed to the “Simon House.” Mr. Simons, “who knows how to keep a hotel, invites the patronage of the public, in the firm belief and desire to merit that patronage.” Rates were \$1.00 to \$1.50 a day with special rates by the week.

Charles Simons, 56, and Anna, 59, were living in the hotel in 1900 with their two sons, Stanley, 17, who worked as a hotel clerk, and Carl, 14, a student. Also living there was Susan Turner, 34, a kitchen girl, and her two daughters. Waitress Hilda Pickett, 16, and boarder Joseph Kaefer, a carpenter, and Mr. Simons’ widowed 86-year-old mother-in-law were also living there.

The Simons house was “closed by a legal process” and the mortgaged property was sold by Sheriff John W. Gardner on August 15, 1900. It was later stated in the October 31, 1900 Sentinel that “Mr. Simons could not make a living in the old hostelry.” Henry Ludlow purchased the property for \$4,500. It is unknown whether Ludlow had someone operate the hotel or whether it sat empty for the next several months.

Henry and Lida Ludlow sold the property on July 16, 1901 to Fred Steffen, of Albany, for \$4,500. It was stipulated that the Ludlows would pay the taxes for 1901. Steffen “will make some



This portion of the 1889 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows the Green County House and the other buildings that were located on the same block.

necessary repairs and then open the hotel to the public July 25. The rate will be \$1.00 per day.” Steffen offered a \$500 Chickering piano in good condition for sale for less than \$200 cash if taken at once in February 1905.

The 1905 census shows Fred, a 39-year-old Swiss immigrant, and his wife, Lena, 28, living in the hotel that he owned free of a mortgage. In addition, there were a laundress, a cook, two more female servants, and the hostler. His brother, Jacob, also lived there and worked as a bartender. There were also 10 male boarders at the time; half were born in Switzerland and half were born in Wisconsin. Two of the boarders listed their occupations as a barber, two were cheesemakers, two were cigar makers. One 65-year-old man had no occupation listed. The others were a painter, a landlord, and a blacksmith. Mr. Steffen had been in the country for a decade at this time.



This photo was taken of the Green County House sometime between 1901 and 1909 with owner Fred Steffen and others shown on and in front of the porch.

The Green County House stable was destroyed by fire on the morning of November 8, 1906 while the hotel had a narrow escape, thanks to the efficient work of the firemen. “The hotel building was the first one to be in danger, and at one time the flames got a good start along the edge of the west roof, which was about twenty feet from the barn. The hotel was filled with guests, who with the house employees set to work removing their belongings.”

The fire originated in the northeast corner of the barn and was first seen as it burst out through the roof. Members of the telephone company had a stall for working equipment downstairs in that corner of the barn. There was nothing upstairs except a few empty grain sacks. There was nobody in the barn at the time; the hostler, who was having breakfast in the hotel, had no idea how the fire started.

The horses and a few buggies were able to be removed. The other stock, including a number of hogs, were driven out. A large St. Bernard perished in the barn because it wasn't heard until it was too late. The barn was insured for \$800. There was no telephone service south of the break and all toll lines and country service south and west of the city was broken off.