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**PRESS RELEASE**

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AURORA INN**

Originally named Aurora House, the Aurora Inn was built in 1833 by Colonel E. B. Morgan, a native of Aurora, original investor in *The New York Times* and a lifelong friend of Henry Wells, founder of Wells College and the Wells Fargo and American Express companies. At the time, Aurora was a prosperous village and regular stop on the Erie Canal route, with a steady flow of travelers borne by stagecoach, canal boat and rail.

An article that appeared in the June 12, 1833 edition of the Auburn newspaper, *The Journal*, remarked on the “regularity, neatness and order everywhere exhibited - as well as the thousand little attentions which are paid to the comfort and convenience of travelers.” The writer also raved about the Inn’s “uninterrupted view of the water scenery of the most enchanting kind” and its “elegance scarcely surpassed by the most extensive houses of our large towns.”

In the early 1840s, William D. Eagles purchased the Inn and engaged his uncle John Eagles to manage it for him. Oil portraits of John Eagles, a former sea captain, and his wife now hang above the fireplaces in the bar and dining room. Portraits of William Eagles and his wife Nancy hang above the restored fireplaces in the parlor and reception area.

When a fire destroyed the main building at Wells College in 1888, many students lived at the Aurora Inn, which they renamed the Way-Side Inn, during the rebuilding process at the school. Fire struck again on February 18, 1919, destroying Aurora’s business district between the old post office and the Aurora Inn. When the south cornices of the Inn caught fire, Wells College President Kerr Duncan Macmillan climbed onto the roof and doused the fire with buckets of water handed to him by the village brigade. Today, charred beams remain under the roof as a reminder of the Inn’s narrow escape.

In 1943, the Zabriskie family deeded the Inn to Wells College. The Inn again served as a makeshift residence hall during the 1960s when enrollment at the college increased dramatically and space was tight in the dormitories. One student who lived at the Inn recalls that eight students lived in “four tiny rooms upstairs with one bathroom.”

Fond memories of the Inn abound among Wells College alumni. One recalls that the Inn became “our living room” when the enrollment boom had students living off-campus in Lauderdale House. Another remembers the famous East Coast blackout when the Inn was lit by candlelight. Still another talks of the Blizzard of ‘66, which dropped five feet of snow on Aurora and made it impossible for the students to get to campus so they took their meals at the Inn.

Despite a series of additions, renovations and new managers, the Inn struggled financially starting in the 1970s. A drain on the college’s resources, the Inn had to be closed several times during the last three decades, most recently in October 2000.

The Aurora Foundation, a partnership between Wells College and the Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation, began a complete renovation of the Inn in 2001 to restore its lost luster and make it appealing once again for lodging, dining and special events. The Inn reopened in time to host guests for Wells College graduation in May 2003.