

Park Hotel

By Tom Riley



It is believed that the Park Hotel was built by developers Benjamin Howell and Charles Noble in 1879. Howell & Noble owned most of the property between lower Arch Street and Main Street and were in the process of subdividing lots and selling them at that time. It is known that they owned the property across the street from the hotel and sold it for \$1 for the construction of the railroad station (now the Butler Museum). Of course, their hotel across from the railroad station proved to be an ideal location.

Frederick Casterlin obtained his experience in the hotel business by working for eight years at his father's hotel in Unionville, New York. He left there and came to Butler to run the Park Hotel in 1889. An advertisement in the August 15, 1891 issue of the *Pequannock Valley Argus* lists F.R. Casterlin as the proprietor. The ad goes on to say, "This well known establishment is conducted in a first class manner in every respect. Board by the meal, day or week. In connection with the hotel, a well equipped livery and exchange stable is maintained. Good rigs and reasonable prices."

Fred's fondness for horses was well known. Not only was he an experienced horse trader who kept a good supply of saddle and carriage horses in his stable, he was the owner of *Dick R.* and *Nick E.*, two valuable pacers with reputations for speed on the track.



In its heyday, Casterlin's hotel and stable were centers of activity. The hotel was considered the best accommodations in town and the two-storied brick stable was a large commercial operation. People were dependent on horse-drawn vehicles; hotel patrons and locals could hire everything from a farm wagon to a spring-wheeled buggy, to a three-seater surrey that could carry a large group or the entire family. In winter, sleighs were also available for hire. The second floor of the stable was serviced by a unique hoist that was operated by hand and could lift everything from sacks of horse feed to carriages.

On October 22, 1910, the stable suffered a terrible fire which gutted the building and burned off its roof. At the time of the fire, there were 25 horses in the stable; all except four were saved. The loss was estimated at \$10,000. Lost were a number of new wagons, two sleighs, tons of hay, straw, and grain, as well as numerous harnesses and other tack. Two Butler firemen suffered serious injuries when they fell off the burning roof. In time, the building was rebuilt, and is still with us today as part of the Peerless Precast Concrete plant.

\$10,000 FIRE AT BUTLER
Flames Wipe Out Barn of Fred Casterline—Firemen Hurt.

The large brick stable belonging to Fred Casterline, situated in the rear of Mr. Casterline's hotel in Butler, was entirely destroyed by fire last evening. The blaze, whose origin is unknown, broke out about a quarter of eleven. It immediately gained a headway and before help could arrive had gotten beyond control.

Twenty-five horses were in the stable when the fire started. Of these but four were saved. Nineteen horses belonged to Mr. Casterline. The four that were saved and the other two that were burned were boarders at the stable.

It is estimated that the loss will be \$10,000. The barn contained two carloads of new wagons, which were shipped to Mr. Casterline last week, a number of sleighs, a large stock of hay, straw and grain, besides the harnesses. A small insurance was carried on the building, but none on the stock.



F. R. CASTERLIN DIES OF ILLNESS
Prominent Resident Was Bank Director and Owner of the Park Hotel.

Butler lost one of its most prominent and oldest citizens with the passing of Frederick Rogers Casterlin, who died at his home shortly after 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon, following a long illness.

Mr. Casterlin, who was sixty-seven years old, had lived in Butler thirty-three years and during that time had had many varied interests.

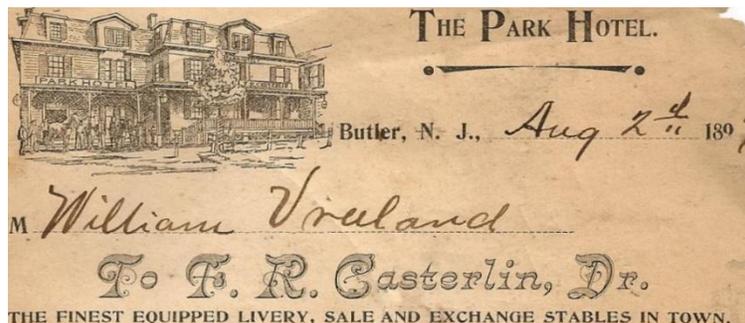
For a long time he had been proprietor of the Park Hotel and director of the First National bank, of Butler. He was also greatly interested in the water works at Butler and was one of the promoters of Glen Wild lake. Mr. Casterlin leaves one son, Richard Casterlin, and is survived also by a brother, E. Casterlin, of Orange county, New York. His wife has been dead about sixteen years. The funeral will take place tomorrow afternoon, the service being held at the hotel at 3 o'clock. Interment will be at Mount Rest cemetery, in Butler.

Fred Casterlin died in 1923 and Mrs. Nellie McCormick is listed as the proprietor of the hotel in 1929. When the hotel fell into disrepair over the years, many residents considered it an eyesore and a candidate for the wrecking ball. Mrs. McCormick retained control of the property until it

was acquired by the Borough of Butler for failure to pay \$33,000 in back taxes. The McCormick estate maintained the hotel's liquor license which, at the time, was valued at more than the hotel.



The Borough tried unsuccessfully a number of times to auction off the property. In the summer of 1976, Jeff Montemarano of Bloomingdale was the highest bidder and bought the building, without the liquor license, for \$24,500. The contractor originally planned to demolish it and build something new, but after closer inspection, he became impressed by the quality of the building's construction, and to the delight of many local history buffs, decided to save it.



By the summer of 1977, Montemarano was well on his way to converting the old hotel into eight 700 sq. ft. one-bedroom apartments and three stores or offices. During reconstruction, workers discovered 28-foot long beams in the ceiling and roof rafters that were still covered with bark. The lack of load bearing interior walls gave the builder a lot of flexibility in planning the arrangement of the renovations. Vintage diagonal sheathing added additional wall strength and, according to the project's architect, the cobblestone foundation looked "as good as the day it was made." Montemarano said he tried to retain as much of the building's original character as possible. In 2021 the structure was given a facelift with a new coat of stucco and paint.



The original hotel register is on display in the Butler Museum and a number of notable personalities are listed. If celebrities like Babe Ruth, Roy Rogers, and the inventor Thomas Edison could view the Park Hotel building today, they would find it even more accommodating than it was when they signed in so many years ago.