

The following story by Ann Hauprich was published in a 2009 book titled *Ballston Spa: The Way We Were, The Way We Are, The Way We Hope To Be*. Inset (upper right) is a portion of a magazine article written several years earlier by Dick Buyer.

# Mayor recalls making of "The Way We Were"

It has oft been reported that a key reason Front Street in Ballston Spa was chosen as the backdrop for the filming of some memorable scenes from the now classic film "The Way We Were" is that the main drag still looked much the same in 1973 as it did during the Depression.

Normally that would not be taken as a compliment, but in this case, Mayor John Romano insists, it was something for which village fathers of the 1960s deserved a standing ovation.

"The Village of Ballston Spa was extremely fortunate that it had people around to fight the urge to give in to urban renewal," asserts Romano. "Where others were clamoring to tear down everything old that needed work, Mayor William Kelley fought to keep the historic treasures that we had in place.

While some notable gems were lost along the way, Romano notes "most of the downtown is intact today because of folks like the Kelleys. Indeed the Front Street along which "The Way We Were" co-stars Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand walked 35 years ago has changed little since.

The greatest change the cast and crew would notice if they made encore appearances today would be that The Medbery Inn – where Redford tied Streisand's shoelaces in a romantic moonlit scene – has been lavishly refurbished inside and out as per story on next two pages.

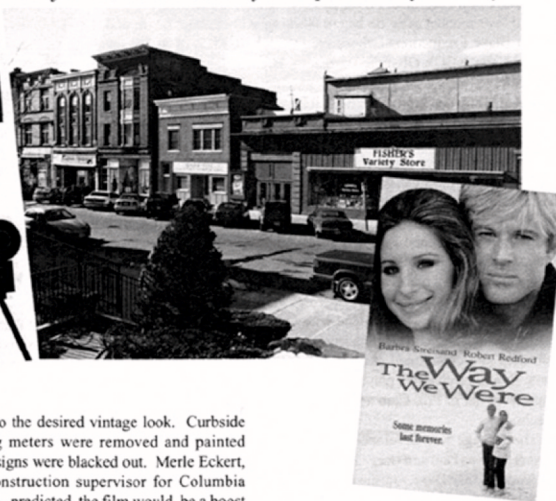
Porter's – where the character portrayed by Streisand waits on a table of Ivy League characters including a young Redford – has also been transformed from a soda fountain that catered to local teens to a professional office setting. But it's what the mayor observed while working behind-the-scenes as a night watchman that's worth the price of admission!

"The dressing trailers for Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand were parked in the back of The Medbery," explains Romano who hired someone to fill in for him in the evenings at the tavern while the parts of the movie were being shot along Front Street.

Rather than tending bar, Romano says he "got paid to meet to meet Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand." Although Streisand kept largely to herself, Romano says both Redford and another famous actor named Bradford Dillman had no qualms about mingling with the commoners.



For three days three decades ago, Ballston Spa leapt into film history when some brief-- but memorable -- scenes between Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand were shot along Front Street . . . what follows is the conclusion of a two-part series by Dick Buyer.



It was 1972 when Front Street was selected as a location for filming some scenes for "The Way We Were." Based on a novel by Arthur Lawrence, the movie version called for a setting reminiscent of a 1937 street. The rest, as they say, is Hollywood history!

Thousands thronged along Front Street on a Tuesday and Wednesday night in late September straining for a glimpse of the young stars. Eight policemen executed crowd control which extended from 8 p.m. until shortly before dawn. Although it rained, some spectators with binoculars ignored the downpour. They perched on rooftops, stood on street corners, crowded the Post Office steps or viewed the activities from upstairs apartment windows.

One newspaper reported that two or three hours of "takes" were required for a 20-second final product. Another article described the construction work required to restore Front

Street to the desired vintage look. Curbside parking meters were removed and painted traffic signs were blacked out. Merle Eckert, film construction supervisor for Columbia Studios, predicted the film would be a boost to the local economy because 200 executives and technicians -- including members of local unions -- were hired for the production.

When filming in the village concluded on the third day, it took crew workers only a few hours to remove store facades and remove other reminders of Streisand's flashback scenes. While the movie was being produced, shopkeepers conducted business as usual. However the Front Street restaurant used for one scene had been closed on Thursday so the interior arrangement would not be disturbed.

A final newspaper account of the film production noted that some local citizens experienced momentary fame by being hired as extras decked out in "the style of the times."

When the studio professional stand-in was unavailable for Robert Redford, for example, Harry Escher, then a young Funston Lumber employee, substituted for him.

Although Escher maintained that he looked nothing like Redford, he said he enjoyed helping when the scene in the restaurant was shot. During the shooting at Union College, the director reportedly recommended the Ballston Spa man for a film to be shot in Colorado.

Three decades later, villagers can still boast that a part of their past has been enshrined forever in film's celluloid record.

“During downtime on the set, we would congregate in a garage owned by The Medbery and bounce a ball in a cup to pass the time. I remember Robert Redford and Bradford Dillman watching the games. They struck me as being just a couple of regular guys.” Romano adds that Redford was always gracious, taking time to talk to everyone who approached him – as did Dillman.

“I don’t think anyone ever could have imagined it at the time, but that movie was destined to give our village recognition long into the future,” muses Romano, adding there’s another movie that should be on every Ballston Spa lover’s Must See List.

Interestingly, the other movie titled “Nobody’s Fool” starred the legendary Paul Newman who later co-starred with Redford in such film classics as “The Sting” and “Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid.”

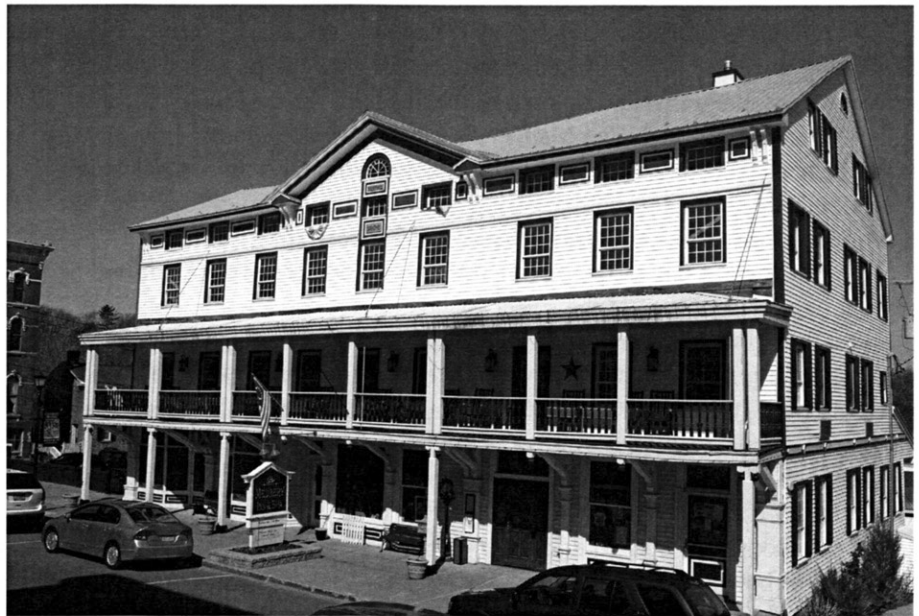
Though “Nobody’s Fool” was not filmed in Ballston Spa, Romano says the movie was based on a novel that was set in this community.

If you rent it, you’ll quickly notice some striking similarities. For example, there’s a White Horse Restaurant that strongly resembles The White House Restaurant on Milton Avenue.

Come to think of it, says the mayor, a scene from “Ironweed” (a film co-starring Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson based on the book by Pulitzer Prize winning author William Kennedy of Averill Park) is rumored to have been shot in a storage room above the mayor’s own office at the corner of Front and Bath Streets.

To which one can only add the Post Script: QUIET ON THE SET!

-- Ann Hauprich



## Medbery Inn & Spa restored to its former splendor by the Taiseys

Story by Joanna Farra  
Photo by Antonio Bucca

To step inside The Medbery Inn & Spa is to be transported back in time to an era when elegant spas attracted visitors to Ball’s Town, the original name of this pretty village on the Kayaderosseras Creek.

Named in honor of the Rev. Eliphalet Ball, the settlement soon became the place for “taking the waters,” as spa-going used to be called. Indeed, mineral springs were discovered in Ball’s Town long before neighboring Saratoga Springs gained recognition for the therapeutic and other health benefits of its spring waters.

Like many of the great inns and hotels built at the site of a mineral spring, The Medbery was located at the site of Park Springs, one of a group of four excellent-quality mineral springs known as the Sans Souci Springs.

Situated today just behind The Medbery, the spring was named by Nicholas Low, who in 1803 established what became the world famous Sans Souci Hotel. Low chose the expression *sans souci*, “without cares,” to exemplify his vision for a spa similar to its famous namesake hotel and spa in Potsdam, Germany. The learned businessman and entrepreneur had knowledge of the great spas of Europe and set out “to create a place where one goes to maintain or restore his/her health.”