

# Thunderbird Inn



Bethel, Maine

## **The Thunderbird**

### **July 1958**

Bethel Theater closed and Max Zallen, the owner who built it in 1940, announced his plans for converting the into a two story motel.

### **Sept 1958**

The home of Max Zallen was moved to the rear of the Bethel Theater building.

### **1959**

June 1959 The Robertson house on the corner of Main and Elm Streets was razed to give space for the Thunderbird Motel parking lot.

New motels opened in Bethel – the Thunderbird Motor Inn of Max Zallen on Main Street and the Red Rooster built and operated by Roland Glines in Mayville.

### **1967**

January 12 Citizen – THE BETHEL INN AND THUNDERBIRD MOTEL ACQUIRED BY GOULD ACADEMY INTERESTS

The purchase of the Thunderbird was motivated largely because of increased pressures on Gould to provide additional dormitory space for delegates to the sessions of the National Training Laboratories during the summer months. As Gould expands, the property may also be useful for dormitory purposes.

Announcement made by Sidney W. Davidson, President of the Board of Trustees of Gould.

(Before the Gould acquisition of the Thunderbird, the editor, John K. Brown, noted that in Bethel's tax records the owner of record of the Thunderbird property was the National Theater Supply Co., Tarrytown, NY.)

### **Life at the T-Bird**

Instead of Remember the Alamo, this is a story of Remember the Thunderbird.

Charlie Newell called with a quite story of his and Cathy's experience living at the T-Bird. He said that Gould bought the motel on Main Street in 1966. When he and Cathy arrived on campus in 1967 they enjoyed an apartment made of two former motel rooms including a kitchen they fashioned out of one of the bathrooms and opened a doorway

between the two the two rooms. Four other faculty members had apartments with them at the same time.

Cathy then emailed me some more details, such as: Hey, WE remodeled the “kitchen” - put a piece of plywood over the bathtub, and some sort of shelf over the toilet. Used a mini refrigerator, a toaster oven and an electric fry pan! Actually have some pictures of it! Cooked some good stuff there. Also there was no screening along the balcony and I was walking down Main Street after dark and realized that drawing the blinds was essential!

Sam and B Bigelow lived across Elm Street where the Donovans do now and were the “dorm parents” for the faculty in the T-bird; some were young and some not so young. But we did have a great time! Our neighbor, George Renwick, a Latin teacher, hosted a Tupperware Party for men on the faculty to advance Mary Hurd’s career as a salesperson! Charlie went to the party -it was terrifically successful needless to say and I remember listening in on the revelry thru the heating ducts.

Nick and Nancy Litchfield were dorm parents in the T-Bird before the Ouwingas and it was the location of a baby shower in 1973 prior to Martha’s arrival – the men enjoyed a shower up the street at (Don and Ruth) Feeney’s (now Victoria).

The Zallen house was used for the clerk of the works during construction of the Davidson Dormitory in 1970-71, I think. When we lived in the T-bird in 1967-68 it was unoccupied and a real wreck. It did not get really renovated until it was moved down Elm Street. (It is the home of Lorenzo and Jan Baker.) We and the other faculty used to store luggage, skis, etc. in there as the mini-apartments did not have real closets, just little motel-type hanging racks.

Tineke Ouwinga told me that she and Marvin were the “innkeepers” for the last year 1976-1977, after which Gould sold the motel. It was a dorm for 15 junior and senior boys. In addition there was an apartment set aside for a Japanese who lived there as student helpers for Japanese students attending Gould.

During the year before Davidson Hall was completed, The Elms at the Bethel Inn was used as overflow boarding student housing for girls. (In December 1966, Guy Butler sold the Bethel Inn back to the Bingham Trustees who formed a subsidiary corporation called The Bethel Holding Company to run the Inn.)

Sidney Davidson’s announcement about acquiring both the Thunderbird and the Bethel Inn in January 1967 read, “The purchase of the Thunderbird was motivated largely because of increased pressures on Gould to provide additional dormitory space for delegates to the sessions of the National Training Laboratories during the summer months.

As Gould expands, the property may also be useful for dormitory purposes.” It was also used to house summer school students about that time.

Tineke Ouwinga also emailed this about their experiences at the T-Bird:

Upstairs was also a room with bath for guests of the Academy. When we moved in Gould added two more rooms to our apartment by breaking down a wall, so we had 4 bedrooms with bath (quite a luxury). The part that was used to house the students, upstairs and downstairs, faced Elm Street. The Thunderbird building is still there, it's the part of the Bethel House that is perpendicular to Main St. After Gould sold the place the wing which is parallel to Main St. was added.

Underneath the motel floors, when we lived there, the basement floor sloped down, a relic of its movie theater days. The T-Bird was also called the Zallen House.

In 1958 when the old Bethel Theater was being converted to the Thunderbird Inn, the Zallen house which had stood some distance away from the end of the theater was moved to the very end of the theater building so that it looked like part of the motel.



Photo by Don Brown, November 18, 1959. Bethel Historical Society collection.

After Gould had either sold or at least had ceased using the T-Bird, the parking lot was used for Christmas Tree lighting celebrations circa 1979.

