



Gas pumps on Front Street in early 1900s

*By Maurice "Christopher" Morley
As told to Ann Hauprich in April 2009*

Long before the Ballston Spa Central School District provided free transportation to students, families could hire the services of the Ballston-Amsterdam Bus Line, which according to an old village directory had an office at 8 Washington Street.

A rare photo of one of the buses is seen here on Front Street as it was about to round the corner onto Milton Avenue. The building with the white pillars at far right was The Eagle Hotel, which burned to the ground a few years after this picture was taken. A United States Post Office now occupies the site where stage coaches used to pick up and drop off guests in the 1800s.

Across the street from what is now the Post Office was a Texaco station that was then operated by J. B. White – who was listed in a 1916 directory as the President of the Ballston Spa Garage Company. White would later gain a reputation as a mover and shaker in local real estate circles and as a sulky owner who raced horses at the Saratoga County Fair. His also became a household name in Saratoga Springs.

It makes perfect sense that the gas pumps were near what is now O'Brien Pharmacy because before that the location was a turn-of-the-century automotive garage owned by George West III before it became Leahy's Drug Store in 1927 and then Lattimore's Drug Store in 1946. James O'Brien purchased the business from Miss Rachel Lattimore in 1960 and changed the name to O'Brien Pharmacy. The drug store remained in the family when Sean O'Brien acquired it from his father in 1995. It is a source of pride to the O'Brien family that they are now able to serve descendents of some of the historic drug store's original customers – that is when it was owned by Leahy during the Prohibition, Depression and World War Two years.

Gazing across the street, one sees what the village directory identified as Lillie's Department Store at 54-56 Milton Avenue to the left and Castle & McLennan Insurance at 48 Milton Avenue to the right. Lillie's was divided into sections with William H. Lillie operating a creamery and tea shop on one side and Mrs. William H. Lillie listed as the operator of the department store side of the family-owned business. Those names were found in a 1926 village directory. Harry Castle, meanwhile, is listed as the proprietor of Castle & McLennan. The only mention of a McLennan was that of Lela, widow of Donald McLennan. Castle & McLennan continues to serve insurance customers today from the same historic location.



George West III's bustling automotive business as it looked around the turn-of-the-century when the popular Eagle Hotel stood across the street. Among those who stopped by West's garage at the corner of Front Street and Milton Avenue was John "Jack" Johnson. Nicknamed the Galveston Giant, Johnson's 1910 match against James Jeffries was dubbed "the fight of the century." Historic photos courtesy of The Maurice "Christopher" Morley Collection. Inset 2008 portrait of Sean and James O'Brien by Antonio Bucca.

