



Amery Area Historical Society

*Historical Sites*



The Amery Hotel  
1886

# Amery Hotel Dedication

The story of the Amery Hotel begins in 1886, one year before the village (now city) of Amery was founded. Two business partners, George Francis Griffin and H.M. Webb, moved to what was then known as Big Dam, soon to become Amery. The two men built a small mercantile store on the banks of the Apple River in the fall of that year.

The previous year, George had married Minnie Rebecca Robbins, and their first child was born earlier in 1886. Griffin convinced his in-laws, William H. and Lucy Robbins, to join him at Big Dam and build a hotel. The hotel was completed that fall and named the Robbins House.

In 1887, the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad (Soo Line) reached the area and Amery was officially established and platted. . The village was named in honor of William Amery, a prominent Polk County resident who had served as County Treasurer and County Board Chairman.

With the arrival of the railroad, Griffin and Webb decided in the spring of 1887 to build a new store at the corner of what became Center Street and Keller Avenue. That same spring, the Robbins family moved their hotel building to Center Street, west of the general store, and built a substantial addition, retaining the Robbins House name. In 1889, Webb and Griffin built a two story brick building north of the original store, moved their mercantile operation, and demolished the corner building. Robbins then built another addition to the hotel, expanding the Robbins House to the corner.

When William H. Robbins died in the fall of 1892, his widow Lucy continued to operate the hotel. On February 15, 1899, the Robbins estate was finally settled, and Lucy Robbins sold the hotel the following day to Mr. Day Le Suer. On February 16, 1903, the hotel property was purchased by H.H. Hart for \$4,000. Although it was known as the Hart Hotel until the 1920's, the property was actually controlled by the Theo Hamm Company from 1912 until 1919. On September 2, 1919, the Hamm Brewing company sold the hotel for \$5,000 to P.C. Amundson, who at the time was President of the Farmers and Merchants State Bank in Amery.

Approximately six months later, on April 11, 1920, Amundson sold the property to the Amery Hotel Company for \$5,000. A year later, it was still called the Hart Hotel and was controlled by the Farmers and Merchants State Bank, according to "The Hotel Monthly" for March of 1921. The cost of a room at this time was \$2.00 per night.



Research for brochure by David Karpenske, Arlen Burke & Doug Drake





In 1924, Oscar Julius Friborg became proprietor of the hotel, which was now called the Amery Hotel. Formal title to the property passed from the Amery Hotel Company to his wife Catherine Friborg in March of 1925. In 1928, the Amery Free Press reported that Friborg had installed running water in the rooms and remodeled the interior of the hotel. He also tore down the "old and unsightly porch" and erected a "modern front."

Friborg continued to operate the Amery Hotel until his death on June 28, 1933. He was eulogized by the editor of the Amery Free Press as follows: "There isn't a man or woman who really knew Oscar Friborg who doubted his honesty and sincerity or who did not respect his value as a citizen. The writer is proud if he may have been numbered among his friends."

Friborg's widow Catherine owned and operated the Amery Hotel until her death ten years later. The property was then sold at auction at the front door of the Amery Post Office on December 17, 1943, for the sum of \$1533.34 plus mortgages of \$2,280.00, interest of \$25.65, and personal property tax of \$31.03. The new owners were James P. and Margaret Kelly.

Between 1946 and 1956, the property passed through several owners including E.J. and Mary Sullivan, Jack F. and Edith M. Brown, Alexander Cameron, Florence Budwoth and W.C. Briggs, and lastly J.O. and Myrle Bolin. In September of 1956, the Bolins sold the property to E. F. and Helen Walters. The Walters operated the Amery Hotel from 1956 until 1973.

On October 1, 1973, the Walters sold the Amery Hotel to Eugene M. and Margaret Grant, and Neal and Viva Dell Witt, for a total of \$67,500 including furnishings, fixtures and equipment. In 1977, Viva Dell Witt became the sole owner after her husband had died and the Grants quit claimed their portion of the property to her.

Viva Dell Witt operated the Hotel for several years, but as the 1980's arrived business went downhill and the hotel closed. On August 3, 1982, the building was condemned by the City of Amery, which declared the facilities to be unfit for human habitation. On June 16, 1983, the City went further and obtained a court order requiring that the business known as the Amery Hotel be repaired or removed by January 1, 1984.

In December of 1983, the City offered to purchase the Hotel property for \$5,000, plus \$16,000 in back taxes, if the sale could be completed by December 31.

Instead, the property was purchased on December 30 by former Amery resident Delore Michael, who paid all back taxes and current taxes, and also arranged for demolition of the structure. The site was reduced to rubble on Monday, January 16, 1984.

Today, the Amery Hotel site at the corner of Keller Avenue and Center Street is occupied by several Amery businesses.





The Amery Area Historical Society (AAHS)  
collects and preserves the heritage of the local area.



This historic site brochure is an activity of the  
Cathy Haug Memorial Project of the AAHS.



The AAHS welcomes your participation  
as donors and members.



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(lower level of the Amery Area Public Library)