

MADE TO MOVE YOU!

E. G. OTIS.
HOISTING APPARATUS.
Patented Jan. 15, 1861.

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

They appeared here in the largest hotels such as the Spring House, New American, Earlington and later the Berkeley-Waiontha in the late 1800s as a necessary addition for the comfort of the guests. The use of this strange, confined, 'box' that would move people and items from one level to another was a very unusual apparatus to the citizens of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The elevator was the latest in inventions of that period.

The earliest ones used here were run by hydraulics and steam. In 1884, the New American was in the process of installing a boiler of greater capacity to run their steam elevator. In 1887, one was added to the Spring House and it was noted the next year that the hydraulic elevator supplied the wants long felt by the guests, making the Spring House as comfortable as the best city hotels. In 1888, a baggage elevator was added to the New American for the convenience of guests. By 1904, the Berkeley-Waiontha had install a new Otis hydraulic, fireproof elevator of the latest pattern with safety doors.

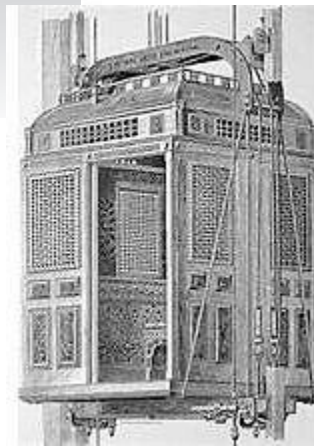
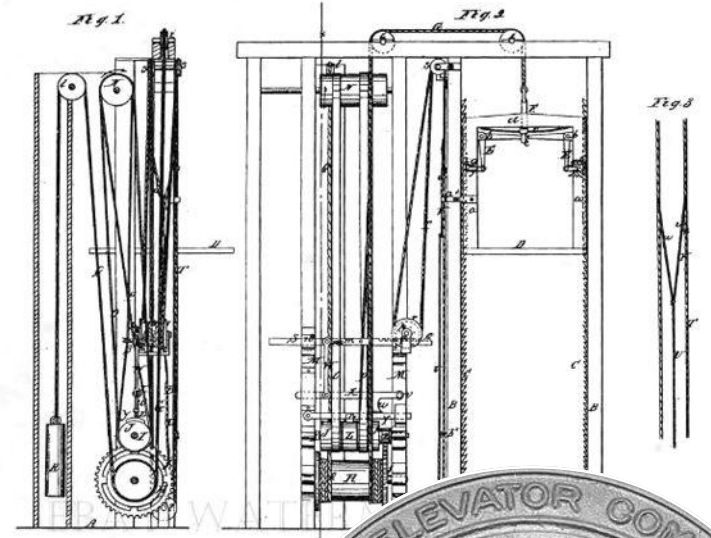
By 1909, new changes were coming to the former New American. It was now known as the Earlington and some reconstruction and decorating were being done. It was reported in the MERCURY that 'Changes are being made concerning the billiard and bowling rooms. They will be made into a bathhouse where sulphur and other baths will be given, enabling guests of the hotel to avail themselves of the health-giving waters without going out of the hotel. A new elevator leading to the bathing department will be installed. This will be built just to the rear of the office.'

The name Otis is a familiar one. Elisha Graves Otis was born in 1811 in Vermont. He was mechanically inclined and a self-proclaimed tinkerer. He first helped his brother Chandler by designing a hoist system to transport materials up two or three stories high in his factory. Hoist systems for moving heavy objects had existed since ancient times but were unsafe. This lack of safety encouraged Elisha to 'tinker' with the design.

He was the first in 1852 to develop the safety brake which would automatically halt a hoisting rope failure. This was demonstrated in 1853 at the New York World's Fair by P. T. Barnum of circus fame, who exhibited Elisha's invention, showing that even if the retaining rope on the elevator was cut, the safety brake would stop the descent safely. It was quite an elaborate show as Otis himself, rode up in the elevator - then slashed the retaining rope with a saber, only dropping about a foot before the elevator stopped and the frightened people were assured that 'all was well'.

From that point on, the elevator industry established credibility and Elisha founded what was first called the Union Elevator and General Machine Works in Yonkers, New York.

He didn't apply for a patent for his 'hoisting apparatus' until 1861 and it was in that year that the first Otis service agreement was offered to assure



purchasers that the entire responsibility for maintaining a steam powered elevator purchased from their company would be covered at a cost of \$780 a year.

When Elisha died of diphtheria in 1861, his sons Charles and Norton formed a partnership and continued the business. Fortunately, Elisha's sons had better business and management skills than their father. In 1898, the company and thirteen others merged to form the Otis Elevator Company.

By the 1870s, cabinet makers were employed to build the cabs of the passenger elevators which were becoming more popular. They were compared to sumptuous, carpeted apartments. However, they were commonly called 'birdcages' and many citizens were afraid to use them.

The popularity of passenger elevators and fame of the Otis Elevator Company increased worldwide as did the installation of their product in famous structures. From 1887 to 1907, for example, you could find Otis Elevators in such places as the Washington Monument, the Statue of Liberty, the U. S. Capital, the White House and the Eifel Tower.

Norton died at the age of sixty-three in 1905. He had been elected as a U.S. Congressman just twenty-three months earlier. Charles died at the age of ninety-two in 1927.

The next time you use an elevator, check to see if it is one of the famous Otis brand which has become synonymous with continued innovation. You will find them 'Everywhere people are on the move.'