

# THE MONOPOLE LEGACY

The Monopole Tavern and Restaurant on Protection Alley, is the oldest continuing commercial establishment in downtown Plattsburgh, New York, keeping the same name at the same location, and offering the relative kind of quality of service for which it was originally established. It was opened in 1898 by Philip J. Blair and his wife, Lucy, who brought it to national fame as a purveyor of fine foods and beverages at a time when elegance of decor was expected, and excellence of service was implicit. This was a period of the luxury hotels of the North Country when the Champlain Hotel flourished on Bluff Point, when the Witherill Hotel and the Cumberland House on Margaret Street dominated downtown, and when the fabulous Fouquet House on Bridge Street furnished the finest in food and lodging. All these are gone, with the exception of the Cumberland, which retains no semblance of its one-time opulence.

The Blair's choice of location was apt. In 1897, Protection Alley - barely two blocks long - was a center for gathering, eating and drinking. Bentley S. Morrill operated a restaurant, Bernard St. Louis had a lunchroom, J.G. Burpee ran the Delmonico Hotel and Restaurant, and John Devlin was proprietor of the Central House. Most had disappeared before the onset of the twentieth century.

Yet, the Monopole has continued; it has grown and prospered through almost eight years of affluence and depression, through prohibition, through five wars and through changing times in the nation and their reflection in the city of Plattsburgh. Today, the Monopole is a half-million dollar enterprise operating an upstairs and a downstairs bar, a dining room and a wicker lounge. It has the latest in automatic beverage dispensing equipment, employs thirty-two people and donates \$1500 in scholarship money yearly to the Plattsburgh State College Fund.

Where once the business catered to wealthy tourists and professionals, today its major clientele is composed of university students. The Blue Plate Special of another era has given way to the businessman's lunch; the prize-winning pizza is now the specialty of the house.

The visitor who steps into the Monopole Bar, finds himself standing on a bridge spanning three generations. There is a subdued atmosphere of low lights and old stained mahogany, supplemented by photos, in antique frames, of grandparents before they were parents. There is the long, massive, waist high bar backed by the decorated wood-work of a long time past.

Depending on the time of day (for the tempo of the Monopole waxes and wanes with the passing hours) the visitor may move back into the past while sipping a beer in the company of pre-midday retirees imbibing their morning constitucionals and recounting other times and event which exist now only in their memories. At midday, he is likely to find himself in the midst of the attorneys, the shopkeepers, the insurance agents and the legislators talking of current events, or current transactions, over a businessman's lunch. Then, in the evening, he will be immersed in the future, when the establishment fills with the young: with the students from the State University and with the young airmen from the "Base, who congregate for the beer, the pizza, the company and the music.

At this point, the pilgrim-if he has not done so before-becomes aware of a strange paradox: the softly blending background music has changed to the unrestrained rhythms and overpowering tones of modern rock surging from the latest stereo equipment.

A dynamic mobile of change! In the ebb and flow of the years of nearly a century, downtown Plattsburgh has grown, changed, declined, faded. The Monopole remains. In the changing of the hours of the day, the Monopole atmosphere changes in adaptation to the time and the people. The flow of movement alters its direction - no the downstairs bar, the pool room, to the dining room, upstairs to the P.B. Finnan's Tavern; and it is still the Monopole, partly old, partly new, and yet, the same.

It has been suggested that Phil Blair derived the name of his business from the parisian Monopole on the Champs Elysee. The word is of French derivation having the dual significance of "monopoly" and "emporium", neither of which has any particu-

lar pertinence to the case in point. One would prefer to consider the exact lexical significance of the individual parts of the word; thus, "one pole", "the one polar point". The geographical position of the Monopole was central to the Plattsburgh business district and roughly between the major hotels.

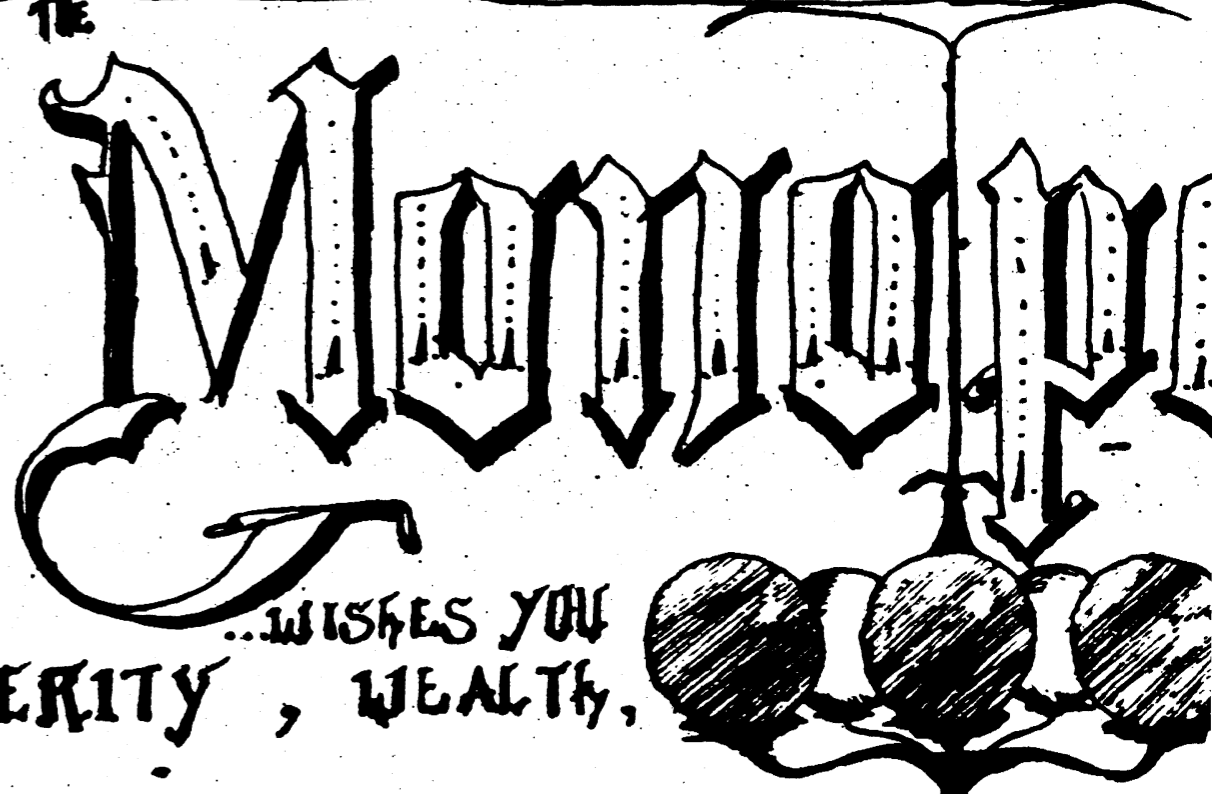
Clearly, Philip J. Blair could not have guessed, in 1898, that the name he chose for his business would be coined, in the late twentieth century by particle physicists. The coincidence to totally irrelevant. Yet, by overlapping the modern concept with the historical development of the Monopole, the one becomes strangely symbolic of the other. From the beginning, the restaurant has drawn and held people analogously as the physical particle draws and holds electrons. In both cases, power or force is thereby generated. Throughout its history, the business has been identified with the names of dynamic visionary individuals, who were forces in the community, who provided consistent, needed services, and who were characters that people gravitated to, remembered, and talked about.

Philip J. Blair was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on May 4, 1913. The only data available on him from this date until he appeared in Plattsburgh are that he was a fine athlete, that he was no mean a boxer and that he toured New England as an acrobat. This last lends some credence to the popular anecdote that, when he first opened the Monopole, he would do handsprings and cartwheels in the street to attract customers and then, would give a free drink to all who entered the establishment.

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