

The Checkley House

By Frank Hodgdon



For more than seventy years, the entrance to the Scarborough River was dominated by the Checkley House Hotel, which soared impressively above the narrow channel at the very tip of Prouts Neck. Established by a young Ira C. Foss in 1873 following the demise of Captain Thomas Libby in 1871, the hotel flourished from its very beginning. Captain Libby had closely held most of Prouts Neck and his passing marked a boom in real estate as his three children liquidated their inheritance. The Boston and Maine Railroad opened its double-track line in 1873, opening

the great Scarborough seaside resorts to people from as far afield as Pennsylvania and Chicago to the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Quebec. The innovative Ira C. Foss continued to expand the establishment for the remainder of his life (he died in 1919) and brought many improvements to the area along with his business. He built a water system which benefited not only the Checkley, but everyone else as well along the road from the Southgate (now known as Black Point inn) to Checkley Point. He bought electrical generators to provide lights and power for his pumps and elevator in the days before electricity was widely available. He operated a busy fleet of horse-drawn jitneys which met every train at Scarborough Beach Station and ferried new arrivals to "the Neck." He continued to add on to the hotel itself every year until it boasted upwards of 100 guest rooms. In the early days, rooms went for an astonishing \$3 per week. The Checkley continued operations after Ira C. Foss passed away under the capable management of his widow, Mary. World War II finally brought the curtain down on this remarkable enterprise. Five years of blackouts and forced evacuation of coastal areas saw the great wooden structure fall into disrepair and it was razed in 1944.