

## Mabel House Hotel, Mabel (Fillmore County)

 MANY SMALL towns across Minnesota's late-nineteenth-century rural landscape credit their growth and even their survival to the arrival of the railroad. Dozens of new rural towns also sprang up along the rail routes. Mabel, nestled in Newburg Township in the southeastern corner of the state, is an example of a town that owes its existence to the Milwaukee Road's decision to reroute its track a few miles southeast of its original location in 1879.

Business owners in nearby Newburg and Riceford wasted little time relocating to Mabel, named for the daughter of a railroad official. One such entrepreneur was Thomas Thompson of Riceford, owner of the Hotel Thompson. In the fall of 1879, Thompson loaded his building on a flatbed wagon and journeyed six miles along rutted country roads to Mabel. He set his hotel down at 117 South Main Street, two blocks north of the depot. The hotel also served as a boarding facility, restaurant, and residence for the Thompson family.

Hotel Thompson was soon followed by three lumberyards, two blacksmith shops, and a wagon shop, grocery store, milliner shop, and bank. A south wing was added to the hotel in 1880. By the early 1900s, roads improved and the automobile became the favored mode of transportation between neighboring towns. Rail was still used for moving freight, but people traveled less frequently by train. By the mid-1900s, Thompson no longer owned the hotel.

At some point, Hotel Thompson was renamed the Mabel House Hotel



*Mabel House Hotel (originally the Hotel Thompson), circa 1900. (FILLMORE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY)*

to reflect its new location. Though ownership has changed hands several times, the hotel never shut down. In fact, the Mabel House Hotel declares itself to be Minnesota's "oldest continuously running hotel." Its shining moment was a week-long visit in 1923 by Charles Lindbergh during one of the aviator's barnstorming tours, during which he charged 50 cents for 15-minute airplane rides and did daredevil stunts. Lindbergh began a friendship at this time with Mabel

resident and aviation enthusiast Clifford Johnson; the two exchanged many letters until Lindbergh's death in 1974.

The Mabel House Hotel is a last remaining relic of Mabel's once-bustling Main Street. (The town's population in 2010 was 780.) Its exterior is less elaborate than in its boomtown heyday, but the upgraded guest rooms maintain the interior's original layout.

—Amy Jo Hahn

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