



Actors Humphrey Bogart, Janis Paige, and Lauren Bacall sit with Barrington's Ernie Byfield in Booth One at the Ambassador East Hotel in Chicago. Janis Paige is one of the last known survivors of the Golden Age of Hollywood.

## Ernie Byfield

HOST TO THE STARS IN BARRINGTON AND CHICAGO

IN THE YEARS FROM 1938 TO 1950, when Ernest Byfield orchestrated the flamboyant ambience of his Pump Room at the Ambassador East Hotel, Chicago was not flyover country for the stars of stage and screen. It was the most important stopover in the public relations and promotion of their careers, and the ultimate stamp of approval was to be escorted by Ernie Byfield to Booth One, where he was the ever-gracious host.

Their cross-country travels from New York to San Francisco and Los Angeles were on the legendary trains of the time. The itinerary included the Twentieth Century Limited from New York, arriving at the Chicago La Salle Street Station at 9 a.m., limousine to the Ambassador East Hotel, time to freshen up in a suite, lunch at Booth One in the Pump Room, and then to the Dearborn Street Station to board the Santa Fe Railways Super Chief for their journey to the West Coast in their reserved Pullman car.

The Pump Room, named for the Pump Room

at England's historic spa town of Bath, became famous for spectacular culinary presentations frequently flambéed with great drama. Jack Benny reportedly joked that everything there was flambéed except the check.

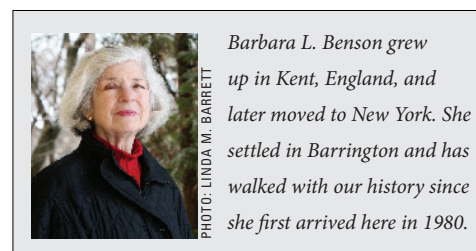
Byfield became lifelong friends with many of the stars, perhaps none more so than Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart. After their marriage on May 21, 1945 at Louis Bromfield's Malabar Farms in Ohio, their way back to Hollywood was through Chicago; reportedly repeating their vows in the Pump Room and beginning their honeymoon in an upstairs suite.

Ernie Byfield's death on February 10, 1950 was marked by front pages filled with tributes. His graveside service at Chicago's Rosehill Cemetery was led by Mayor Martin Kennelly and attended by many celebrities, foremost among them Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart.

After his death, another side of Ernie became better known and that was his generosity

to charitable causes. His lifelong friend George Jessel, hearing that Ernie had died of a heart attack remarked: "It couldn't have been a heart attack, he gave his heart to his friends many years ago".

Many of his famed friends were reportedly weekend guests at his Grassmere Farm country retreat in Barrington (at Routes 22 and 59) where surely superb cuisine and ample liquid refreshment were on the menu. And there was drama in the countryside, too. A fire siren, installed on the side of Grassmere Farm, sounded the signal when the evening fun was about to begin. ☺



Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since she first arrived here in 1980.