A Congenial Atmosphere:
Meredith Worley and the Aurora Inn, 1958-1975

compliments of the aurora inn
since 1833
aurora-on-cayuga, n.y.
noted for its congenial atmosphere and fine food

mr. & mrs. j. worley, mgrs. gifts - beverages - rooms
In 1958, the Aurora Inn (which had been owned by Wells College since 1943) opened its new dining room overlooking the lake.

The inaugural event was Mother’s Day. The Inn’s new managers were always listed as Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Worley, but it was Mrs. Worley who would make the Inn especially “noted for its congenial atmosphere and fine food.”
Meredith Vera Panton was born Dec. 16th, 1908, in Oak Hill, Kansas; she was the sixth child of schoolteachers Irving and Myrtle Panton.

Meredith’s great-grandparents Henry and Eliza (Webster) Panton came to America from England in 1847. Their son, Meredith’s grandfather, Matthew Henry Panton, was born in England in 1842. He had a farm and timber claim west of Oak Hill; he was a graduate of the University of Chicago, a teacher, and a poet.
When Meredith was very young, the family moved to Oak Hill so that the children could attend school there. After the youngest had graduated, Irving and Myrtle returned to the original Panton farm, and ran the Oak Hill house as a hotel and boarding house.

Since Meredith later listed a “family hotel” as part of her experience, it’s possible that this modest enterprise sparked her interest in hotel management. It was an interest that she followed at Kansas State University, later working for the Boss hotel chain.
In 1946, Meredith and her husband, John Howard Worley, moved to Cayuga County, where Howard had a dairy farm in Locke. He too had been a KSU student and had managed hotels in the Midwest for 20 years.
A 1963 article about the Aurora Inn described dining in the Worley years:

“American Home Style Cooking, with a variety of entrees, roasts, steaks and chops and delicious home baked breads and pastries, comes from the immaculate kitchen of Chef Alex Hertl....Six women, skilled in the Inn’s special preparation of food, assist Chef Hertl.”

The author went on to describe the meals in mouthwatering detail, including the ever-present sherbet cups, as well as the prices, astonishing to us today. The skilled cooks included Evelyn Berry, Mill Frye, Libby O’Herron, Lula Wood, and Reba Hitchcock, baker of the famous “mile-high pies.”
Patricia Bianconi saved her mother’s book of Inn recipes. Several of Meredith’s recipes are for no-knead breads, ideal for a busy kitchen. The above recipe calls for the dough to rest in the refrigerator. It is a richer variation of the 2016 Recipe of the Year just announced by King Arthur Flour.
Another review, this from 1971, takes you to the Sunday evening buffet of fond memory, a feast for $3.95.

LET'S GO OUT

Historic Aurora Inn . . . A Fine Place to Dine
In Aurora

By MARSHAL LARRABEE III

Henry Wells, founder of Wells College, must have eaten like a king.

You can eat regally also when you dine at the Aurora Inn, the original part of which first known as the Aurora House, was built by Mr. Wells' partner, Colonel E. B. Morgan, in 1833.

An addition, completed in 1858, houses a fine buffet every Sunday evening. Mrs. J. H. Worley is your hostess. After she's seated you at one of the tables, all with a delightful view of Cayuga Lake, your waitress brings the first course, a choice of soup, tomato juice, or luscious shrimp cocktail (imagine — and at no extra charge — the whole buffet costs only $3.95).

Then you help yourself to a fantastic array of palate tempting salads. I tried some of each and you can too — there was tossed salad with choice of dressing, tuna salad, potato salad, fruit jello with mayonnaise, and my favorite, a Waldorf style salad with marshmallows and fresh fruit.

Also on the buffet table are relishes, home-baked breads, and delicacies like deviled eggs, sardines, and smoked oysters. When it's time for the main course you return at your own pace and fill your plate with hot macaroni and cheese, scalloped clams, sweet potato, hot dog sections, fried chicken, baked beans, carrots, and sliced roast beef.

By dessert time it's good that you don't need to get up. Your waitress offers several flavors of ice cream — I had the toasted almond, but could have chosen peppermint stick, vanilla, or coffee.

Then, as the setting sun throws its stream of light upon the interior brickwork, one savors very good coffee and reflects perhaps on the kind of life Henry Wells lived.

Enjoy yourself!
Meredith and Howard Worley, who had two sons, Hugh and James, contributed in many ways to the area community: Howard (who died in 1985) through the Locke and Pomona Granges, in organizing the Cayuga County Farm Bureau, and with the Cayuga-Owasco Lakes Historical Society; Meredith (who died in 2002) through the United Ministry of Aurora, the Finger Lakes Association, the Locke Grange and the Order of the Eastern Star.

But especially, those of us privileged to enjoy the “friendly, gracious atmosphere of the Inn” and its “American food par excellence” recall above all the congenial hospitality of Meredith Worley.

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