The Elmheart Hotel was built about the same time as the Manitou Beach Trolley line was constructed, circa 1890. George Weidman Sr. and his brother-in-law, Michael O'Loughlin ran a saloon on State Street in the city and decided to invest in property on Lake Ontario. They purchased the Elmheart Hotel in 1903, running it from May to October (the usual Trolley season). The families lived on Lyell Ave. "Mike" O'Loughlin was one of Mary Weidman's younger brothers. The 1915 census does not list George Weidman senior, but does list George F., age 22, as a partner in the hotel business, along with his Uncle Mike. Prohibition was in full swing by the early 1920s, but the hotel prospered in spite of the ban on alcohol beverages. Mike O'Loughlin never married and always lived with his sister and family. The combined families maintained the home at 529 Lyell Ave. through at least the early 1940s.

The onset of the depression in 1929-30 brought changes to the lake side hotel business. Automobile travel and better roads spelled the demise of the Manitou Beach trolley in 1925. Mary Weidman, who was George’s mother, passed away in the late 1920s leaving George and his uncle as proprietors of the hotel. The dancing craze, which became an almost worldwide craze, had begun about 1910. It would retain its popular appeal well into the 1940s. George, who had taken over the day to day operation of the hotel from his uncle, (Mike was then in his early sixties), felt it was time to build a new dance hall. An earlier hall had been on the property. A new and larger dance pavilion was built in 1932. The rather old fashioned 1890’s hotel facade was shorn of its quaint gingerbread trim; a second floor porch and tower came down and the porches were fully screened in. The grounds were improved; an addition of a water slide into the lake, changing rooms for bathers and an enlarged refreshment stand added to the attractions. The Reis Brother’s Carousel was moved near the beach and continued to be an attraction, as it had been since the early 1900s.

The huge attraction was the dance pavilion. Dances were held weekly on Friday and Saturday and at other special times. The hall also catered to special parties and dances. Admission was fifty cents each in 1932 and dropped even lower as the depression continued into the 1930s. The nearby Odenbach Hotel, with its large, lake front restaurant also provided dancing. The competition apparently didn’t hurt either of them greatly. George seemed to have a good ear and was savvy about attracting name bands to his “off the beaten track” location. Among the numerous name bands of the ‘30s and early ‘40s that played at the Manitou Dance Pavilion were: Les Brown, Benny Goodman, Henry Busse, Ina Rae Hutton, Jack Teagarden and Chick Webb (Ella Fitzgerald was the vocalist). One of the biggest draws was the Jimmy Lunceford Band, a very innovative Black Orchestra. According to Mr. Weidman’s own recollection years later, “Jimmy Lunceford’s group played at Manitou six times!”

Curtailment of driving and the draft during World War II saw the gradual end of dance halls and the Big Band Era. After the war a much diminished schedule of dances was resumed but eventually George closed the dance hall, except for an occasional party or dance. It was used for winter boat storage by 1970.

George lived on in the hotel with his sister, Edna for a long time after their Uncle Mike had passed on. He kept the bar room open on weekends and then only to people he knew or liked. George passed on in 1986. His sister inherited the closed hotel. Eventually it was sold and not long after a fire destroyed it. The same ending happened to the Dance hall a couple of years after that.

Not one of the hotels along Greece's north Lake Ontario shore survived. There isn't much to see where the dance hall and hotel once stood. A sagging chain link fence, some cement pilings in the lake that helped anchor the wooden pier into the lake and scrub bushes make for a melancholy scene. The waves along the shore might echo Lunceford's band “jivin' through” some of their tunes: Runnin' a Temperature, Slumming on Park Avenue or Frisco Fog! ....but the memory of those are now off shore!

See photos on page 7....

Photos, data supplied by Alan Mueller, Historian's Office. If you have any information on our photos, call Alan at 663-1706.
All of the photos are from a large group recently donated to the GHS from the widow of Randy Price, who was a close friend of George Weidman in later years.