

'Literally in Midst of History'

By HILLARY CHURA
The Associated Press

BRETTON WOODS — Fifty years ago, New Hampshire's mountains welcomed World War II dignitaries from around the world for a conference designed to restore order at the end of the war.

About 730 delegates from 44 countries gathered in July 1944 at one of America's plushiest hotels and ate food not seen on average U.S. dinner tables for years.

The Mount Washington Hotel — with 350 rooms, windows and mirrors bigger than small cars, a 900-foot wraparound veranda, stained-glass widows and closets larger than many college dormitory rooms — housed some of America's richest families as well as notables from abroad in the summer.

The red-roofed hotel was selected so delegates would not be distracted by urban glitz and would finish their work quickly. New Hampshire was chosen partly because the Democratic administration wanted Republican support for the Bretton Woods plan, and a key GOP Senator — Charles Tobey of New Hampshire — wanted the conference in his state, U.S. delegation member Edward Bernstein said in a recent interview from Washington.

Delegates arrived and left the hotel from a train a quarter of a mile from the five-story hotel.

Security was tight, with the Army providing protection, checking badges and felling trees across roads, leaving only one road to the hotel.

Hotel employees were used to famous guests, but they eagerly anticipated these arrivals — and the pilferable butter and Coca-Cola brought in to feed them.

"With a kitchen like that, I guess it would be pretty difficult to stop it," said Stuart Shaines,



AP Photo

EDWARD BERNSTEIN
... Executive secretary

then a Boy Scout who ran errands for delegates.

The hotel was renovated for the conference. The heated indoor swimming pool remained, but the billiards room and bowling alley were transformed into meeting rooms. More telegraph and telephone lines were installed.

The 1,000-capacity ballroom also was transformed into a meeting room, where 15 New Hampshire Boy Scouts carried messages among delegates from America, Britain, Russia, China, Iceland, India and other countries.

"You should've been there," said Shaines, a Portsmouth businessman. "The world was focused on Bretton Woods. We were literally in the midst of history."

Documents were signed in what is now known as the Gold Room. Tables and chairs remain as they did that July, cordoned off as a tribute to the momentous gathering.