

# THE BROWN PALACE IN DENVER



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of  
PLUSH, POWER AND PRESIDENTS

By Caroline Bancroft

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Lucius Beebe Says

"Few hotels in the American record better deserve full-dress biographical treatment than the radiant Brown Palace, and few have ever been greater repositories of local folklore, history and romance.

"Caroline Bancroft was specially outshopped in heaven to be the biographer of this remarkable hotel."

Mr. Beebe knows whereof he speaks. His varied accomplishments have brought him fame in colonnaded halls, city avenues and mountain by-paths.



Jerome Zerbe, 1937

Drama critic, railroad historian, author, and more recently, editor of *The Territorial Enterprise* of Virginia City, Nevada, he makes an annual pilgrimage to the opening night of the Central City Summer Festival, and stays at the Brown.

In his autobiography, "Snoot If You Must," he recalls:

"The Sunday afternoon in mid-July in Denver that Evelyn Walsh McLean took it into her head to give a dinner party of fantastic proportions the same evening at the Brown Palace Hotel, and how, six hours later, we sat down to a full-dress turnout, with two name bands, enormous ice elephants full of fresh caviar, quadruple bottles of Bollinger '26, roast Mexican quail and the *creme de la creme d'Isigny* of Denver society. Only the Brown Palace and only Evie McLean could contrive such magnificence."

... It was on that occasion that the accompanying candid photograph was taken; left to right, Lucius Beebe, Evalyn Walsh McLean, the Hope diamond, and Caroline Bancroft.

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## THE BROWN PALACE IN DENVER

No hotel in America has more prestige, nor has seen more drama.

From the day of its opening in August, 1892, the H. C. Brown Palace (as it was known then) took its place beside the great hotels of the nation, the Palace in San Francisco and the old Waldorf in New York. But more than that, the Brown moved into a sweep of colorful history second to none.

Colorado was a rip-snorting silver state in those days. Lucky strikes in Aspen, Leadville and Creede were sending millionaires into the mile-high capital city of Denver to meet investors, to entertain, and to seek residence. Naturally everybody, who was anybody, stayed at the Brown.

The formal opening of the hotel was held on August 12 when a banquet of three hundred "sir knights" of the Grand Order of Knights Templar took place as the finale of a week-long national convale. Visitors streamed into Denver, and their special trains jammed the railroad facilities at the Union Station. The overwhelming crowd pleaded for hotel space. Although the Brown Palace was not entirely completed, the new managers, lessees, and part owners, William H. Bush and N. Maxcy Tabor, flung open the doors.

Four hundred cots and two hundred beds were set up in the larger rooms while wall paperers and painters continued to work feverishly on the three lower floors. Any inconvenience to the guests was entirely compensated for by the farewell dinner.

"The Grandest Affair of Its Kind in Denver History," ran the headline printed in the *Denver Times* the next day. The account described "the brilliant gathering" in detail.

"The fine banquet hall on the eighth floor was beautifully decorated with choice exotics," it said. One hundred colored waiters served a seven-course dinner on Limoges and Haviland china and poured a different vintage wine with each course. The toastmaster proposed such toasts as "The President," "The Grand Encampment," "Richard Coeur de Lion," "Woman" and "Colorado" to which the most gifted speakers of a nation responded. An orchestra played throughout the evening and accompanied the assemblage when they sang the "Anvil Chorus" and "Auld Lang Syne." During the singing the men kept time by clinking their spoons against the Val St. Lambert cut-glassware. The cost of the dinner was \$10 per person, considered exorbitant then.

"Such a housewarming is rarely accorded any building, public or private," Bill Bush remarked the next day, his face alight with satisfaction. And well might Bill Bush be pleased, for the Brown Palace was his creation.

It was named for Henry C. Brown, the owner of the triangular cow pasture, on which the building had been erected, and half owner of the building. Brown was a carpenter who came to Denver in 1860 to practice his trade. He was an older in the community, aged a year and a half, for it was composed mostly of very young men and he was forty years old. East of the town he homesteaded tracts of prairie land which later became very valuable and made him rich. He put up \$1,600,000 for the hotel. But the planning, promotion and final details were those of Bill Bush who, with Maxcy Tabor, had invested \$400,000 in the furnishings. This sum brought the total cost of the four-hundred-room hotel to two million dollars.

Versatile Bill Bush was a unique character in Colorado history. Over twenty years before, in 1871, he had been hired by Henry M. Teller, Colorado's long-time senator, to open and manage the Teller House in Central City. There the thirty-year-old newcomer took his place as one of the gold camp's leading citizens. There he entertained the great of the nation, including the preparation of two banquets, in 1873 and 1875, for President Ulysses S. Grant.

When the Leadville excitement broke, he followed the call of silver to the new bonanza town. He built, and for several months in 1879, operated the Clarendon Hotel on Harrison Avenue. The hotel was next door to the house of the over-night millionaire, Horace A. W. Tabor. Bush and Tabor became intimates as well as business partners. Together they built the Tabor Opera House in Leadville, furnished the Windsor Hotel in Denver and erected the Tabor Grand Opera House in Denver. Tabor supplied the money, and Bush, the brains; and when complete, Bush managed all three ventures.

Bush opened the Windsor in June, 1880, and hired Maxcy Tabor, the Silver King's twenty-two-year-old son, to come down from Leadville and act as cashier. About the same time in Leadville Bush introduced the Silver King to a divorcee from Central City, "Baby" Doe. She became Horace Tabor's mistress, and in 1883, his wife. Her first act after the wedding was to precipitate a violent quarrel and lawsuit between the two men. In a few years the son took up the friendship that the father left off.



### BATHS

*The elegance of the new hotel was exemplified by its new-fashioned appointments, even to the large sponges for use of guests who wanted a fine brisk scrubbing to top off their bath.*

Bush had obtained a controlling interest in the Windsor, meanwhile. After the split he continued to manage the hotel and to employ Maxcy. Despite a scandalous legal attack made by Bush in retaliation to his father's suit and an acrimonious break between Bush and his mother, Augusta Tabor, Maxcy's loyalty to his friend never wavered. The sixteen years' difference in their ages made no difference either. They moved together as perfectly as a matched team of horses.

By the middle 1880's they realized that Denver was growing away from the Larimer Street locale of the Windsor. Bush persuaded Henry C.



### FEMME FATALE

*Two murders were committed for love of Isabel Springer, the society vamp of the day. The tragedy occurred in the old bar (pictured on the opposite page) on the night of May 24, 1911. Here you could buy a straight shot of bourbon for 15c or two for 25c. The head bar man for many years after 1899 was W. S. Thompson, a famous raconteur of racy happenings of the smart set and their underworld friends and secrets.*

### LOBBY

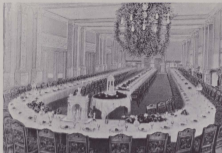
*For the immense fireplace, two solid columns of onyx supported a 14-foot high mantel. The columns are the largest ever cut and weigh 3000 pounds each. The outlines stand there now.*



Brown to utilize his vacant lot for a fine hotel and to engage Frank E. Edbrooke as architect. Bush had first known Edbrooke when he came from Chicago to assist his brother in designing the Tabor Grand Opera House. When the hotel plans were finished in 1887, the building was begun.

Five years were needed to complete the structure; the finishing touches being added from the top down. Bush and Maxcy Tabor each had elaborate private suites on the eighth floor. They were at opposite ends of the Tremont Street side, across the rotunda from the ballroom and the Ladies' Ordinary (a dining room for women only).





### EXOTICS

*For the opening banquet special decorations relating to the order of Knights Templar were used; August 12, 1892 was the date.*

Maxcy Tabor enjoyed society functions. He decided to have a gala ball as a local opening of the hotel when every detail was ready. This was not until January 23, 1893. The elite of Denver society arrived and were whisked to the eighth floor. Here they found the grand salon and the ladies' parlors "embowered in flowers and ferns," according to the *Denver Republican*. The gowns of all the smart set were described to give the event full coverage.

Mrs. Tabor received in "white, striped satin trimmed in Point Duchesse lace with knots of fragrant violets." She carried a large cluster of violets. At a select dinner which preceded the ball, the guests were given favors of a white, leather-bound, illustrated booklet. In it, the wonders and splendors of the new hotel were described in flowery Victorian language, obviously written by literary Bill Bush. (Maxcy Tabor's own copy may now be seen in the Western History Collection of the Denver Public Library.)

One of the wonders of the Brown was a reading library for guests, a unique feature among hotels. This was Bill Bush's idea. He had first instituted such a library when he and Horace Tabor furnished the Windsor. Later in 1890, when Bush took the management of the Metropole Hotel (across Broadway from the Brown), his books had to go to storage. But now they were more elegantly housed than ever.

The booklet described many other elaborate features of the new H. C. Brown Palace. The hotel's water supply came from two 700-foot-deep wells. (They are still operating.) Fresh vegetables and dairy products were supplied from Bush's 480-acre Windsor Farm. On the second floor was a grand salon for guests to receive callers, done in delicate shades of cream and gold with Louis XVI furniture. On the main floor was a bowling alley and billiard rooms and, of course, a bar where no women were allowed. It was directly to the right of a Broadway Street entrance in the present location of the Palace Arms.

The onyx used throughout the public rooms was imported from Coahuila, Mexico, and was considered the quintessence of beauty in stone.

### FOR "T.R."

*A patriotic motif was used in 1905 to decorate. Five hundred attended but five thousand applied. Count the stars on the flag.*



(Many connoisseurs agree today.) The onyx lined the lobby and public rooms, and its polished pearlyness may be seen to good advantage on all sides but most particularly in the striking Onyx Room.

The hotel ran into its first big financial drama at the turn of the century. One of its residents was the millionaire, Henry C. Brown. In 1893 the Silver Panic catapulted many Colorado fortunes to zero, and this depression caught Brown in its wake. He mortgaged the hotel for \$650,000 with the thought that the drop in silver was temporary and that his investments would soon recover. During the rest of the decade his affairs became more involved, and he put a second mortgage on the hotel to pay debts.

In October, 1898, he lost his staunch ally, Bill Bush. This unusual man died at the age of fifty-seven, following an operation for appendicitis, and Maxcy Tabor assumed sole management of the hotel. Meanwhile Brown grew more and more in arrears with his bills. Maxcy (who had inherited his mother's regard for the dollar) planned to eject any delinquents, or any occupants of whom he disapproved. The first to feel his ire was James Bush, brother of Bill, who sued the hotel for \$10,000 after his ejection and got a judgment of \$750. The man who gave his name to the hotel was to be next. Maxcy planned to co-operate with the U. S. Mortgage Co. in a threat to foreclose on Brown and re-finance the whole set-up.

Brown appealed to the new "Midas of the Rockies," W. S. Stratton, who had made millions in Colorado's sensational new gold camp, Cripple Creek. Stratton was a strange, wild character but notoriously generous. In March, 1900, he assumed Brown's two mortgages for \$800,000 on the hotel and paid up the interest and hotel arrears. Maxcy was unable to eject Brown, and for many years thereafter matters were strained between lessee and owners of the hotel.

After Stratton's and Brown's deaths the hotel was sold on July 6, 1912, to settle their estates and to clear the building's involved finances. The hotel changed hands again in November, 1922, when Horace W. Bennett and



### COLORFUL CHARACTERS LIVED AT THE BROWN

*Pictured here are just a few of the Colorado headline-getters who have lived in the hotel, shown as they looked at the time. Evelyn Walsh McLean with the Hope Diamond in her hair; Augusta Tabor, first wife of the Silver King; the "Unsinkable" Mrs. J. J. Brown, and Colonel William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill" to most, who is buried near Denver.*



### UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS STAYED THERE

*President Dwight Eisenhower is shown luncheoning with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Vice President Richard P. Nixon as they plotted campaign strategy for the 1952 presidential election. President Herbert Hoover is coming out of the 17th Street door in 1954 and President Theodore Roosevelt is arriving at the Union Depot for his 1905 stay.*





### DECORUM

*Overstuffed furniture, derby hats, motoring caps and a big elk on the mantel of the fireplace set the tone of a dignified lobby in the early 1900's. Serenity was stylish then.*

associates bought it for \$1,250,000. In February, 1931, Bennett sold out to Charles Boettcher and his son, Claude K. Boettcher. Ever since that time the Boettcher interests have retained control.

During these years many dramatic episodes and colorful bits of history were enacted within its portals. In 1901 Parson Tom Uzzell (who had known the Guggenheim family in early Leadville) gave a Thanksgiving banquet, financed by wealthy Simon Guggenheim, for fifteen hundred indigent children. It was a touching sight to see the ragged children eating like wide-eyed gnomes against a background designed for opulence.

On May 9, 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt arrived at the Union Station. A parade was held up Seventeenth Street and around the business district to the Brown Palace. Roosevelt stayed in the presidential suite on the eighth floor and was entertained at a banquet. He set a precedent for many other presidents. Not all have stayed at the Brown while in office but nearly every president has been entertained in some capacity.

President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson spent the night of September 25, 1919, when he was on a speaking tour to advocate adoption of the League of Nations. As he left, a presidential salute was fired from the roof top.

President and Mrs. Warren G. Harding arrived June 23, 1923, when a banquet was planned. But that morning on a tour of the mountains,



### WHOOPS

*A band of Sioux advertised Cheyenne Frontier Days with a war dance, July '50. In the old days such goings-on would never have been permitted the Indian scalp-takers.*

Sumner Curtis, a Washington correspondent, was killed in an automobile accident in Bear Creek canyon. Harding insisted the banquet be cancelled, and the presidential party went into seclusion at the hotel.

Queen Marie of Roumania arrived in Denver, November 11, 1926, and stayed in her private car. She attended a dinner at the Brown given by the Mile High, a dinner club whose membership is limited to civic and social leaders. On that occasion a special private entrance under a canopy was built to the elevator and carpets rolled all the way to the street. No *hoi polloi* were permitted close to Her Royal Highness.

Nobility has not been limited to guests. Two titles have been listed on the hotel's payroll. Count Koenigsmarcke, a dashing horseman whose funds gave out, was the hotel's bookkeeper for more than a year in 1897. The next year his rich father called him home to Germany. Baron Gottfried von Kronenberger was the headwaiter in the Palace Arms in the late 1940's. He had been an aviator in World War I and eventually moved to California.

The list of the great and near-great, who have walked through the lobby, dined or stayed, would make a fat WHO'S WHO. John C. Barry, Irish headporter, who came to work at the Brown at the turn of the century and remained some forty years, used to regale guests with his reminiscences of celebrities. His favorites were William Jennings Bryan and Harry



### DEMOCRATIC

*The presidential suite was all done in Queen Anne style for "F.D.R." when he stayed at the Brown Palace several different times.*

Lauder; the first because he was like a friendly cowboy campaigning for the presidency, and the second because of his jokes and inviting people into his room.

Mary Garden sang a concert one night and returned to the Brown to sleep, only to discover that a \$14,000 diamond brooch was missing. The police were phoned, and an all-night search ensued, but no trace of the pin could be found. The next noon John was putting a departing traveler into a waiting cab when he glanced down at the curb. There was the brooch, right where it had been for hours! Mary Garden got her brooch back, and John got \$100.

Others of John's reminiscences concerned the three Barrymores—John, Lionel and Ethel—Lillian Russell, Mme. Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Amelita Galli-Curci, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Charlie Chaplin was nice to kids around the hotel, buying them candy and gum. Colonel William F. Cody planned national itineraries of his Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in the lobby. Madcap, dancing Evalyn Walsh lived there with her mother in the spring and autumn of the years, 1906-08, when they were opening and closing their summer place, "Wolhurst." The "Unsinkable" Mrs. Brown swept through the corridors, swinging her swagger stick, after her heroism during the sinking of the Titanic in April, 1912. And then there was Lizzie, the pet house cat.

In February, 1909, Lizzie was frisking around the hall on the ninth floor. No one knows what happened to unbalance her, but she fell the whole depth of the rotunda. Crowds from all over the world witnessed her plummeting down. Women shrieked, and a bellboy rushed to pick up the limp body from the lobby floor. Lizzie was only stunned. A few hours later she was frisking around again, and purring as she received the plaudits of celebrities and a write-up in the *Denver Times*.

The most sensational drama the hotel has witnessed came to a bloody

### REPUBLICAN

*Only George Washington's portrait remained when the suite was panelled in knotty pine for "Ike's" 1952 visit and campaign.*



climax, May 24, 1911. Mrs. John W. Springer, the wife of a rich banker and rancher, had a Capitol Hill home, a country estate and a suite on the sixth floor of the Brown so that she might indulge in some extra gaieties. She had been Mrs. Isabel Patterson of St. Louis, a beautiful divorcee with a racy reputation before her marriage to John Springer. In Denver she had two lovers, Sylvester von Phul, a wine salesman, and Harold Frank Henwood, a mining promoter. Both men lived at the Brown and were jealous of each other's standing with the glamorous "Sassy."

The May night of the tragedy the Springers were the guests of Henwood in his box at the Orpheum for the weekly vaudeville show. Von Phul went to the Broadway Theatre to see the "Follies," starring Fanny Brice, Bert Williams and "75 Anna Held Girls." After the show Henwood saw the Springers to their sixth-floor suite and then went down to the bar for a nightcap. Some twenty other men were drinking and chatting there.

Suddenly Von Phul entered with a friend. Seeing Henwood, he strode over to the promoter, called Henwood a dirty name, stuck his finger in Henwood's glass as an insult, and then knocked him down. From a lying position on the floor Henwood pulled a revolver and emptied it. Three bullets caught Von Phul as he fled, one hit a Colorado Springs attorney, and two entered the knee of a sampling works owner from Victor. Von Phul and the man from Victor died later in the hospital.

The ensuing trial of Henwood was a weeks-long society scandal. Juicy tidbits from Sassy's love letters to the two men and near-pornographic accounts of various rendezvous kept the press in a dither. Henwood was given a life sentence and died in the penitentiary at Canon City in 1929. The Springers were divorced. The old bar eventually became a dining room and the entrance from Broadway was closed.

An amusing episode of Prohibition days involved Room 929. The Spanish-American War Veterans held a convention in September, 1929, and





### MURDERER

Ronald Smith, a veteran, drank all afternoon on September 30, 1946. At the cocktail hour he went berserk and shot down a young medical student. He wounded a college president and an advertising man. It took three men to overpower him. He is in the penitentiary.

an enterprising bootlegger opened a secret stand in that room. The jovial vets were too loquacious, and the federal agents moved in. After the raid they put an enormous padlock on the door. For a year and a half ninth-floor guests were fascinated by the sight. Eventually in June 1931, the hotel established its innocence in the affair and the padlock was removed.

Another amusing episode was the "Battle of the Bees" which occurred on July 20, 1938, and was written up by the press associations. Thousands of bees arrived in plague-like droves to give the employees of the swanky hotel a "honey" of a battle. The bees wanted to use the hostelry for their own private beehive. They swarmed over the Eighteenth Street corner of the building as high as the seventh floor. Their combined buzzing sounded like a squadron of airplanes, and the guests, who were trying to rest, got a bee-utiful nap.

The employees rushed out and wielded mops, brooms and hoses while hundreds of people gathered to watch the strange sight. The battle went on for four hours. Traffic jammed, the employees got stung, and the bees remained victorious. Finally a professional bee "wooper" was sent for. Mrs. Sara Jackson climbed out a second floor window and, although stung badly, captured three queens. The males dutifully followed into the boxes, and the battle was over.

### \$100,000

Dan Thornton, later governor of Colorado, sold two prize bulls for the new top price of \$50,000 each, January 16, 1945. Three days later Regent and a son were put on exhibit in corrals built in the lobby. There they remained for the duration of the 1945 Stock Show.



Larger battles also took place on the hotel's premises, particularly political and financial battles. The Republican Party of Colorado has frequently had its headquarters in the Brown and successful stratagems of many kinds have been plotted in its "smoke-filled rooms" (in the words of a favorite cliché). It has always symbolized a setting of power in the Rocky Mountain region.

The Democrats as well as the Republicans have employed the setting as a springboard to vault to victory. President Franklin Roosevelt held two political receptions there, September 15, 1932, and again October 21, 1936. Both times the subsequent elections gave him the presidency. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Miss Margaret Truman have received informally at the Brown on a number of occasions when they were able to add the feminine touch to the Democratic cause of their families.

The Brown reached its highest national political eminence when Dwight Eisenhower chose the hotel as his campaign headquarters. The success of his 1952 bid to be the thirty-fourth president of the United States and his preference for Denver as a vacation spot have brought a new nickname to the Brown Palace of "Summer White House."

Then in September, 1954, the hotel came into a world-wide spotlight. On Saturday, the eleventh, two highly-guarded planes flew into the Lowry Air Field with the most precious human cargo of our government. Aboard

## GALA BALL

*The dressiest society parties are held in the hotel. These are the annual Xmas Debutante Ball dancers in the lobby.*



were Vice President Richard Nixon, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, Secretary of the Treasury George M. Humphrey, Foreign Operations Administrator Harold Stassen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Allen Dulles, Director of the Atomic Energy Commission Lewis Strauss, Director of the Bureau of the Budget Rowland Hughes, Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr., and FBI-Chief J. Edgar Hoover. They had come for a critical all-Sunday conference with President Eisenhower.

For security reasons most of the party stayed at Lowry Field but the overflow were put up at the Brown. Yet not one of these illustrious names, quartered at the air base or in the hotel, but already knew the Brown Palace and had stayed there sometime or another. The Brown Palace has ruled as king in its field with a scepter of prestige, attracting all other kings-of-their-fields to its doors. The quality of its service and the uniqueness of its architecture and appointments have always bested contenders for its throne. The great have sought the great, and eschewed the merely new.

The Brown Palace is truly a palace. Guests are charmed with its atmosphere of history and romance where the most modern comfort has been installed without blighting its distinguished air. Visitors sit in the lobby, consciously and sub-consciously savoring this prestige, a prestige of other days—past days—when the plush and power of former royalty and presidents will be matched by others for decades to come. The Brown Palace was and is always regal, befitting Denver's ruling hostelry.



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