

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SOCIETY NEWS

The program at the regular meeting at Micke Memorial Building, November 28, at 8:00 p.m., will be the History of the San Joaquin River Delta and Its Development with Sherwood Beckman as speaker.

HISTORICAL FACTS

Mrs. Elaine West Brandstad very kindly consented to give us the following excerpts from the interesting talk she gave at our meeting last September. Mrs. Brandstad, a native of Stockton, is descended from the pioneer West family who were connected with the early growth of the city and the later building of the hotel.

HISTORY OF THE HOTEL STOCKTON

Sometimes one small incident will trigger a huge project. Such was the case in the construction of the Hotel Stockton. Lee A. Phillips, who was in the process of developing some of the rich farm land surrounding the city, invited 50 Southern California capitalists to visit the area with the thought he could interest them in investing in the area. Much to his chagrin there were no adequate hotel facilities for the guests and they were obliged to be quartered on the train which brought them north.

Through Mr. Phillips efforts a group of young men, active and successful in their businesses, who had the respect of the community, formed the Stockton Investment Company on February 26, 1903. They incorporated with capital stock of \$240,000 to be sold at \$24 a share. An office was opened with an operating budget of \$400 and stock was offered for sale. At the first meeting of the investment company \$15,000 was subscribed and there were such names on the certificates as West, Thompson, Colvin, Hurdle, Ryland, Frankenheimer, Guernsey, Simpson and Peters.

It was agreed that no site would be selected until the money was pledged. It was a trying and disheartening struggle in the infancy of the plans but by perseverance and faith at last \$274,000 was subscribed by 275 persons and the company bonded itself for \$200,000. Architects were hired, the land known as Weber's Hole was selected for the site and construction began in 1907. The site, 100 x 300 feet had long been an eyesore in the center of the town, and its use had been confined to circuses, tent shows, traveling evangelists and a huge mud hole in the rainy season.

Those involved decided the building should be worthy of Stockton's importance as a commercial city of the future and selected a Spanish Mission style of architecture. This was the first reinforced concrete building in the area. It was to be a substantial structure, well appointed, with the most modern conveniences of the time and should appeal mainly to the men as there was little hotel usage by the women in those days.

A description of the original construction stated there would be 200 guest rooms with 143 connecting baths, a spacious lobby with a baronial fireplace, cool inviting

roof garden, large ballroom, mezzanine lofts, a massive and imposing dining room off the lobby and a men's grill. The latter to have comfortable chairs, fireplace, huntsman's fixtures, beamed ceiling, English tavern atmosphere and telephones at each table. Rates would be \$1.00 per day without bath, \$2.00 for sample rooms with bed and bath for the many traveling drummers of the day.

The magnitude of the construction job, the floods of 1907 and 1909 caused many delays but the opening date was finally set for early in 1910. However, it was not until May 26, 1910 that the new hostelry was opened for business officially. Prior to completion the State Association of Supervisors Convention was scheduled for Stockton and a number of rooms were hurriedly furnished, the kitchens stocked, a skeleton staff brought in and the supervisors were housed and fed.

The lot and building cost \$500,000 and \$75,000 was spent on furnishings. The music gallery was located so that it could serve both dining areas. The roof garden was enclosed with glass and its flower and vine covered trellises and tinkling fountain was ready for lunches, teas and evening discourse and amusement. The furnishings were considered elegant for the time and the best of china, crystal and silver were purchased. There was a spacious kitchen and a fully stocked wine cellar.

Don H. Porter, the first leasee, brought a French chef and the maitre 'd from the East along with their assistants. Wine steward, waiters in full regalia, bus boys and chambermaids in white garb and bell boys in red uniforms completed the staff. It was quoted that all were highly skilled in their separate categories.

The formal banquet for the stockholders on May 25 was attended by 200 persons. The reception was held in the spacious lobby, the banquet lasted 3 hours and was followed by speeches. Prof. Andrew Blossom's orchestra played from the mezzanine, Frank Thornton Smith was vocalist and R. B. Oullahan was the toastmaster. To quote in part from Mr. Oullahan----" The occasion marked the opening of Stockton's growth and progress. The past has been shrouded in inactivity. Stockton no longer is a cow pasture by the sloughs. The city is like Rip Van Winkle arising from a long sleep. Merchants and business and professional men must pull together instead of each one thinking only of himself." He urged the lighting of the court house and Hunter Square, paving of the downtown streets, installation of street lighting and predicted that the 30,000 population of the area would increase to 100,000 in ten years.

The sumptuousness of the banquet has never been exceeded. The printed menu read as follows: Radishes, celery, olives and salted almonds. Green turtle soup, cheese sticks and sherry. Filet of sole, tiny potato balls and sauterne. Mignon of beef, peas, cabernet, chicken and burgundy. Squab and Julienne potatoes, salad Diplomat. Clysmic with bisquits, cigars, cigarettes, bon bons, petit fours, cheese, crackers, coffee and cognac.

In 1910 the lease was taken over by Mr. A. I. Wagner, who was operating a number of smaller hotels in the city. He was assisted by his wife, the charming Annie Edwards Wagner, and the couple soon became noted as superior hosts and the hotel for its excellent cuisine.

1910 saw the appearance of such notables as Sarah Bernhardt, Maude Adams, Lillian Russell, Billie Burke, John Drew, David Warfield, and DeWolfe Hopper appearing at the Yosemite Theatre. Performances were always followed by a supper for the star and cast and local theatre goers. All mingled during the supper period and the informal conversation that followed.

Hiram Johnson, campaigning for the governorship, headquartered at the hotel that year and Carrie Nation, hearing that Stockton was rife with saloons and houses of prostitution, made one of her famous appearances here. Though she did not wield the hatchet she carried she did sell miniature ones to finance her campaign against the demon rum.

Under the management of the Wagners, the Hotel Stockton became the locale for teas, luncheons, dinner clubs, and musicals as well as regular trade that came for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Service organizations made the hotel their headquarters and the graduating class of Stockton High School in 1910 held its reception and banquet on the premises. Grace Gage West opened her dancing school in the ballroom and piano teachers held the recitals here. After the death of her husband in 1921, Mrs. Wagner and her son-in-law, Frank Guernsey, continued the operation of the hotel until 1935. It continued to be the center for social functions, community, fraternal and convention affairs. Later Jack Beatty of Modesto took over the management and from the period 1950-61 he was followed by George Ernest. Competition of motels and other hotels, parking problems and high rising costs of maintenance forced the closing of the hostelry from its original purpose. In 1961 it became the interim Court House during construction of the new edifice and subsequently was taken over by the Welfare Department which occupies all but the ground floor and a few offices in the annex. The future of the building is unknown but it is rumored that the Welfare Department expects to expand on the present site and that eventually, should they have their own quarters, the space will be needed for additional County offices.