

NEW HAVEN COLONY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Manuscripts

No. B22

Date processed: Mar. - Apr. 1979

- I. Title Hotels Collection, 1847-1979
- II. The papers of New Haven area hotels, mainly New Haven's Hotel Taft, plus other hotels deposited in the Library on _____, by _____
In _____ converted the deposit to a gift.
- III. Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 30
Approximate number of items: 29,848
- IV. Restrictions: None
- V. Literary rights of the unpublished writings of _____ in these papers, and in other collections of papers in the custody of the New Haven Colony Historical Society Library, have been dedicated to the New Haven Colony Historical Society.
- VI. Press release was issued on _____
- VII. Biographical note: See pages 2-5
- VIII. Analysis: See page 6

Biographical Note: Hotels in New Haven are almost as old as the town itself. The first such establishment mentioned by Dana* is a tavern owned by one William Andrews on Grove Street, which opened in 1645, only seven years after the founding of New Haven. The Wadsworth map of 1748 mentions four inns - Cook's on Chapel Street between Church and College Streets, Mix's on College Street between Elm and Grove Streets, Israel Munson's on College Street between Elm and Grove Streets, and the J. Peck Inn at Long Wharf by the harbor.

The tavern or inn in Colonial days was more than a lodging house for people passing through town or staying briefly. It usually had a dining room and bar which served the social needs of the local populace.

It is important to note that even though New Haven had a number of taverns and inns, none were like the large commercial hotels in existence today. The tavern was a small establishment, usually housed in what was formerly a large home, and operated solely by a live-in proprietor and his wife. There were a number of such establishments drawn on Amos Doolittle's 1824 map of New Haven. Some were clustered in the vicinity of the New Haven Green to serve visitors to Yale College, those having temporary business in town, or travelers by horse and carriage who wished to stop to rest before continuing on their journey. A second cluster was in the vicinity of the New Haven harbor which first served sailors and merchants who came to New Haven by ship, and later, because of its proximity to the railroad stations, served railroad travelers and workers.

The first hotel of considerable size built as such was the Tontine, which stood from 1824 to 1913 on the site of the present United States Court House and former post office on Church Street between Court and Chapel Streets. During its era the Tontine was known for its social events, its restaurant, and for notable people who were permanent residents.

The corner of College and Chapel Streets has a long hotel history. Between 1690 and 1750 Miles Tavern stood on this site. This gave way to Beer's Tavern from 1751 to 1850, at which George Washington stayed in 1775. The tavern was razed to make way for another noted nineteenth century New Haven hotel, the New Haven House, which opened in 1851. In 1908 its owner and operator, Seth H. Moseley died, and in 1912 it gave way to the Hotel Taft. The New Haven House, with some 100 rooms rivaled the Tontine in size and importance.

The Hotel Taft opened its doors on December 30, 1912 as an ultra-modern 450 room facility. It was built by a group of entrepreneurs which called itself the New Haven Hotel Company. The Taft was situated in an ideal location, except that it was some distance from the railroad station.

*Most of the information in this biographical note has been taken from vols.

It was adjacent to Yale University at the edge of the downtown business district, and overlooked the historic picturesque New Haven Green - two facts it never ceased to mention in its advertising. The hotel was a 12 story building. Its first two floors were occupied by a large lobby, stores, restaurants, and bars. The two upper stories contained a large ballroom, and the intermediate floors contained guest rooms or guest suites.

Many famous people stayed at the Taft, including Woodrow Wilson who visited there on September 12, 1912. It served as host to the many notables who visited Yale, and to Broadway casts who were staying in New Haven to perform at the adjacent Schubert Theatre.

On September 1, 1945 the New Haven Register reported that Louis E. Stoddard, Chairman of the Board of the Taft Realty Corporation, owners of the hotel, had sold his block of stock, which was the largest to Samuel Libis [sic], president of the Libis [sic] Hotel Corporation, 11 East 30th Street, New York City, and that Mr. Libis, who resided in Middletown, Connecticut already owned and operated New Haven's Hotel Duncan as well as 14 other out-of-town hotels. On September 2, 1945 the same newspaper reported that Craig LaVin had returned as manager of the Taft, replacing J.C. Voit, who had resigned. Mr. LaVin had served in that capacity from 1934 to February 1, 1937. Mr. Voit has served as manager in the interim. The same article also reported that Julius Curtis LaVin, his father, had managed the Taft from 1915 to 1917, and from 1927 until 1934.

Changes after the end of World War II and New Haven's redevelopment caused the Taft's eclipse. Automobile travel came into its own as never before, helped by a new system of interstate and defense highways, making possible the spread of population and business away from the central city into surrounding areas. Hotels sprang up to serve these newly developed areas adjacent to the new highways such as Connecticut's Wilbur Cross Parkway (opened 1950) and the Connecticut Turnpike (opened 1959). The automobile replaced train travel which formerly sent wayfarers into the hearts of cities and sealed the doom of downtown hotels such as the Taft which was in a more congested area and had inconvenient parking some distance away.

New Haven, under the leadership of Mayor Richard C. Lee in its attempt to counter suburban expansion and the decay of its downtown area, redeveloped much of downtown, and allowed the Sheraton hotel chain to build a new ultra modern hotel just one block from the Taft. This facility, the Sheraton - Park Plaza opened in 1970. There was not enough business for two first rate hotels in downtown New Haven, and people flocked to the newer facility. In

October, 1973 the management of the Taft closed it because it was "losing money at an unbelievable rate" (New Haven Register, March 3, 1974 p. 92-93) Earlier the Taft Annex, known as the Hotel Adams, a smaller adjacent hotel owned by the Taft had closed after the Culinary Institute of America stopped using it in June, 1970 to house its students when the Institute moved out of New Haven.

The Taft management was faced with the problem of what to do with these two large sound structures which were no longer profitable to operate. It proposed to the City of New Haven that the buildings be converted into apartment houses, but conflicts over city requirements that all new apartment houses provide parking facilities for their residents thwarted these plans for years. Finally in June, 1978 the New Haven Register announced that the New Haven Redevelopment Agency had been granted a \$4.6 million mortgage from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the conversion of the Taft into a 196 unit apartment house. The Redevelopment agency acquired the properties, and sold the Taft to the Starrett Housing Corporation of New York City for conversion. The future of the Hotel Adams, still owned by the Redevelopment Agency as of this writing has not been decided. *Demolished early 1980.*

In January of 1979 much of the furniture and fixtures of the Taft were sold at auction. The conversion of the Taft is set to begin in May, 1979, marking a new era for a well-known New Haven landmark.

The last half of the nineteenth century saw the opening of a number of small hotels on State Street between Elm Street and the harbor, some of which, such as Selden House, later the Hotel Jefferson, at 440 State Street continued in operation until the second half of the twentieth century.

In addition to the Taft, New Haven had at one time in this century four other sizable hotels - the Garde, the Strand, the Bishop, and the Duncan. Of these only the Duncan at 1151 Chapel Street is still in operation. This facility, built at a date after the Civil War not specified in the Dana Collection, was known as the Hotel Majestic until 1897. It is now basically a resident hotel.

The Garde, which about a decade ago gave way to a housing development, stood opposite the railroad station on Union Avenue. This hotel, second largest in

New Haven after the Taft, was renamed the Garde from the Pavilion in 1894, and was remodeled and enlarged in 1912. By the 1950's with the decline in railroad travel, it had degenerated into a large boarding house.

The corner of Court and Orange Streets, at which once stood the Hotel Strand has an interesting history. Prior to 1862 a forerunner, known as Assembly House stood there, at which many members of the Connecticut legislature stayed during New Haven sessions. Assembly House is mentioned on Doolittle's 1824 map. Tremont House, a more modern facility, was built on the site and opened in 1862. It was renamed the Hotel Davenport in 1900 and the Hotel Strand in 1939. The Strand has also become a resident hotel before it ceased operation.

The Hotel Bishop, razed to make way for the Yale Center for British Art, stood at the corner of Chapel and High Streets. The building was constructed by Yale D. Bishop, and opened in 1911. It was sold in 1950 after Mr. Bishop's death, and converted into apartments before being torn down not too many years ago.

A curiosity because of its location was the Elm Tree Inn opened about 1870, and torn down in 1910. The inn stood at the intersection of Whalley Avenue and Fountain Streets, far away from the center of the city.

New Haven at one time had a few resort hotels located around Lighthouse Point. Two of these were Grove House, in existence in 1860, and the Shoreham Hotel which burned on May 1, 1919.

Analysis

This collection comprises 48 boxes and 8 oversize ledgers, divided into five series. The items which do not pertain to the Hotel Taft (one folder and four oversize items) have been placed in Series I, the Taft items in series II - V as follows:

Series II: General office files, 1912-1973

Series III: Financial records, 1966-1971

Series IV: Employment cards, 1912-1973. These employment cards contain the names of an estimated 10,000 individuals and list employment history, dates of birth, national origin and religion. It is interesting to note that the prospective employee by signing the application, allowed the Taft to search his person, or possessions at the Taft, and that persons over 65 had "no insurance" marked on their cards

Series V: Reservations, 1967-68 and guest registration cards (alphabetically arranged) 1967-68, 1972, 1973.

C O N T E N T SSERIES I - Miscellaneous Hotels and the history of the Taft.

ITEM I - Naugatuck Hotel, Naugatuck, Connecticut. Register, 1900.
(register later made into scrapbook for newspaper clippings of historical interest to New Haven, and of national interest. 1 vol. (unpaged)

ITEMS II - IVA - Tontine Hotel, New Haven, registers - 1847-1848, 1848-1849, 1849-1851. 3 vol. (unpaged)
IV B- Stock Ledger, 1825-1907 1 vol.

See verso p.7 IV C- Ledgers 1824-1907 2 vols.
IV D Tontine Co. Minutes, 1824-1908 and transfers 1824-1896. 1 vol. Number of Items

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Number of Items</u>
1	AA	Tontine Hotel Ledger	1
	A	Hotel Commercial, 170 George Street, New Haven. A few odd documents from 1950, 1956, and 1958. Stationery, cancelled checks, permits, room key tab, business cards, etc.	30
	B - M	Hotel Taft History - 1912-1973	
	B	Auction, January 1979	5
	C	Brochures	3 + 2
	D	Fiske, Edson W. (controller), personal. (includes a few photos of the interior of the Taft)	5
	E	Floor plans (+ PHOTOGRAPH OF CONSTRUCTION, 1912 GIFT OF HAMDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 1992)	14
	F	Labor relations, employee lists	5
	G	Leases, rentals	4
	H	Menus, etc. 1962	11
	I	Robbery, December 16, 1963	11
	J	Stationery, forms, etc.	10
	K	Publicity, 1960-1962	7
	L	Vacations and staff lists, 1955-1961	7
	M	Miscellaneous	9
	N	LEASE for Barbershop, 1906 Tontine Hotel, menu, 1868, 1856, 1857	1
See verso	O	POSTCARDS Misc. New Haven hotels, clippings, & Brochure Gilbert Hotel, article empty hotel in New Haven	

SERIES II - Hotel Taft - General Office Files - 1912-1973

2	A-Z, AA-NN	Files, 1952-1972. Folders in alphabetical order.	470
3	A-R S	Correspondence, 1961-1969. Arranged chronologically. Publicity miscellany SOLICITATION/LETTER	303

Item VIII [Oversize] Register: Moseley's New Haven House Annex, Wm. H. Moseley,
Prop. Signatures dated 1960's [used for another purpose?]

Folder O cont. Card: Jefferson Hotel, 1918.

2001 (unclear) photo (unclear)

SERIES II - Hotel Taft - General Office Files (cont.)

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents of Box</u>	<u>Estimated No. of Items</u>
4	A-K	Contracts (labor, advertising, etc.) 1951-1964	380
5	A-B	Two court cases: Cathedral Estates-1954-59, Taft Realty Company vs. Schubert Theatre-1954-1956	230
6	A-M	Insurance claims (negligence, employee sickness) Insurance policies and claim forms	320

SERIES III - Hotel Taft - Financial Records, 1966-1971
Arranged chronologically.

7	A	Proof sheets from unpagged Accounts Receivable ledger - November 1, 1966 - October 11, 1967	1
	B-C	Accounts Receivable Slips - Nov. - Dec., 1966	290
8	A-B	Accounts Receivable Slips - Jan. - Feb., 1967	220
9	A-C	Accounts Receivable Slips - Mar. - May, 1967	460
10	A-C	Accounts Receivable Slips - June - Aug., 1967	260
11	A-F	Accounts Receivable Slips - Oct.-Nov., 1967, July, Oct.-Dec. 1970	270
12	A-I	Accounts Receivable Slips - Jan. - Sept., 1971	210
13-16		<u>Bills, 1966-1967.</u> Folders in alphabetical order by vendor. Bills within a folder arranged in reverse chronological order.	
13	A-Z, AA-CC	Vendors A-F	380
14	A-Z, AA-DD	Vendors G-N	490
15	A-N	Vendors O-Sealtest	550
16	A-N	Vendors Southern New England Telephone Company-Z	620
17	A-G	Payroll Books, 1962-1967	7 vol. (unpagged)
18	A-M	Payroll records, miscellaneous financial records	350
19	A-H	Corporation Tax Returns. Federal, State of Connecticut, 1948-1961	605

<u>Item V</u>		Ledger. Allowances - From Dec. 12, 1960 - Sept., 1961	10 p.
VI		Ledger. Earnings - Jan., 1956- Dec., 1957	8 p.
VII		Ledger. Petty Cash - From Dec. 12, 1960- Sept., 1961	10 p.
VII		Ledger. Trial Balance Book - Sept. 1, 1957- Aug. 31, 1958. Two folders in front with sheets of figures	1 vol. (unpagged)

SERIES IV Boxes 20-35. Hotel Taft Employment cards and applications. Arranged alphabetically by employee.

Box

20-22

Set I. 3 x 5 cards - 1912- 1973

Series IV (continued)

Box	Folders	Contents of Box	Estimated no. of items
20	A-C	Employees A-G	1,375
21	A-D	" H-R	1,868
22	A-B	" S-Z	625
23-29		<u>Set II: 6x9 cards, 1912-1946</u>	
23	A-D	Employees A-Col	855
24	A-D	" C-D	945
25	A-C	" E-H	990
26	A-C	" I-Mc, Martin	900
27	A-C	" N-P	855
28	A-C	" Q-S	975
29	A-B	" T-Z	630
30-35		<u>Set III. 6x9 cards, 1946-1973</u>	
30	A-I	Employees A-Con	900
31	A-H	" Cook-Gu	990
32	A-G	" H-L	865
33	A-D	" Hu-My, Mac and Mc	865
34	A-D	" Q-V	900
35	A	" W-Z	225
<u>SERIES V.</u> Boxes 36-48: Reservations and Guest bookkeeping cards			
36	A-H	Reservation requests, Mar.1967-Oct.1968 in chronological order by first date of stay requested in the reservations	850
37	A-K		
38-48		Bookkeeping cards with name and address of guests and itemized charges of each day of stay, 1967-73. Arranged alphabetically within year	7,675
38		Guests, 1967: A-L-	
39		Guests, 1967: M-Z	
40		Guests, 1968: A-B-Ch	
41		" " Ci-F	
42		" " G-J	
43		" " K-Ma	
44		" " Mc-Perl	
45		" " Perm-Sh	
46		" " So-Z	
47		Guests, 1970-72: A-Z	
48		Guests, 1973: A-Z	