

—HOTEL ST. REGIS—

**WITH GRANDEUR GONE, HOTEL
NOW FACES CONDEMNATION**

EPT 11/26/76

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Fire! [photos]

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Comin' down

[photo]

EPHP 5/11/77

WITH GRANDEUR GONE, HOTEL NOW FACES CONDEMNATION

EPT 11/26/76

By Roxana Hegeman

President William Howard Taft may never have slept at the Hotel St. Regis, 323 N. Oregon, but employes boast he ate breakfast there during his visit with President Porfirio Diaz of Mexico.

The date was Oct. 16, 1909. The hotel, at 323 N. Oregon, was well on its way to becoming a historical landmark just four years after its formal opening Aug. 17, 1905.

It has housed Gen. John J. (Blackjack) Pershing and gunslinger Dallas Stoudenmire. It was a favorite of racing driver Barney Oldfield. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Vance Trimble is said to have written some of his dispatches in this hotel.

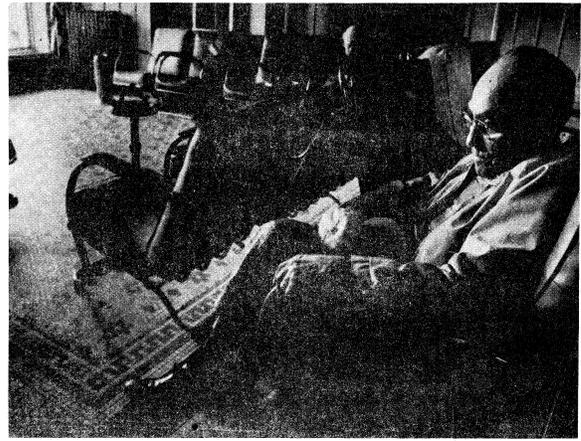
But today, the grandeur and elegance that made the hotel famous are also past history. And if a city condemnation hearing set for Dec. 9 goes badly, the hotel itself may become past history.

Already, the lace curtains and fancy tapestry are gone. Hotel St. Regis now mostly houses elderly poor. Manager Eleanor Tosch said it is the only hotel Jewish Welfare calls to house its poor clients. Not many places want old persons, she said.

Rates at the St. Regis no longer compare to that \$100-a-plate Taft breakfast. A person can stay overnight for \$7.50 or rent weekly for as little as \$21.

However, low rates attract not only the elderly. Capt. Gerald Pritchard, in charge of the police vice squad, said prostitutes, pimps and pushers "always try to pick the lowest prices in town" in a hotel.

He added that the Hotel St. Regis has been "very cooperative" in reporting suspected prostitutes and their promoters. About three months ago the department warned downtown hotels they would enforce a city statute under the nuisance law and the hotels could be fined \$1,000 a day for allowing the nuisance. The warning, he said, has cut the permanent hotel-resident prostitution 50 to 60 per cent.



HOME FROM THE SEA—Retired merchant marine sailor Homer Averich finds himself far from the sea these days, relaxing in the lobby of the St. Regis Hotel off San Jacinto Plaza. Averich, 84, says he has lived in the hotel "on and off" for the last 15 years.

—(Times Staff Photo by John Costello)

"We were something fancy at one time," the manager of the hotel said. "Now we are old. We know that."

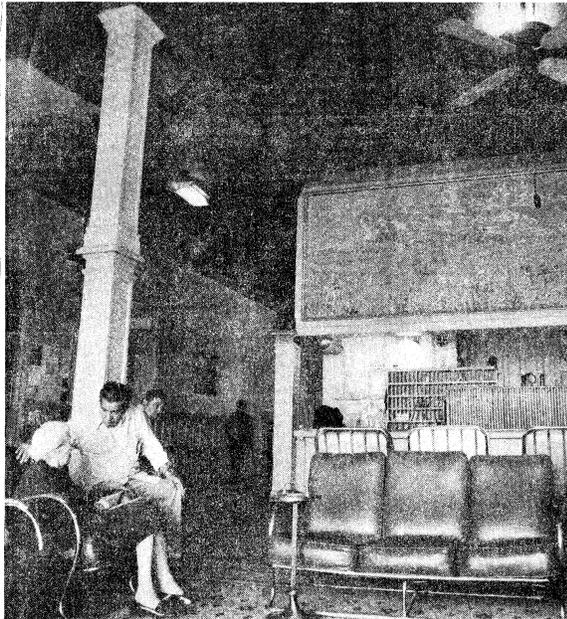
The City Council hearing will determine if the historic hotel is safe, she said. But she added, "We know its going to be torn down sooner or later."

"To put it back to its former glory would take a lot of money," Mrs. Tosch said.

"The Mills Building wants this as a parking space," Mrs. Tosch continued. "They don't need it. If they had it they might think they would be able to rent more offices."

The State National Bank Trust Department and Mrs. Frank are co-executors of the Harry Frank estate which owns the property.

Gene Roth, manager of trust real estate at the State National Bank Trust Department, said there had been "some discussion" with owners of the Mills Building regarding the property. They did not offer to buy, but the matter of value of the property was discussed, he said.



GRANDEUR GONE—When President William Howard Taft breakfasted at the Hotel St Regis with Mexican President Porfirio Diaz in 1909, he must have been impressed by the elegance of the hotel lobby, so unexpected in a rough-and-tumble border town. Taft wouldn't recognize the place today. A ceiling fan has replaced the gaudy chandelier, and elderly pensioners occupy rooms once reserved for cattle and mining magnates.

—(Times Staff Photo by John Costello)

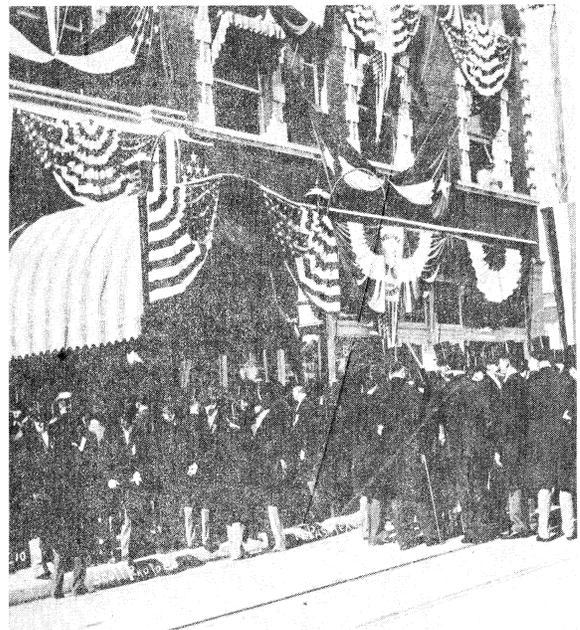
"I assume if they buy it, they would make a parking facility out of it," Roth added.

Hotel St. Regis also rents space in the building to S.S. Printing Service, St. Regis Barber Shop, El Paso Bridal Shop, Pan American Electric, St. Regis News Stand and the White Dove (a drug rehabilitation center run by several churches).

The 76-room hotel averages an occupancy rate of between 40 to 65 rooms year-round, the manager said.

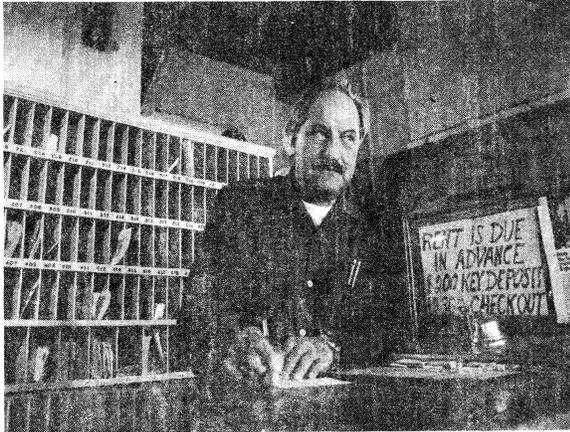
"I don't mean we have the poorest people in the world," Mrs. Tosch added, "But I hope when the time comes, they can find places to live."

When Hotel St. Regis opened in 1905, The El Paso Herald wrote of its open house: "The hotel was thronged with visitors. Hot and cold water in each room. Electric elevator. The kitchen is one of the marvels. The St. Regis is one of the finest hotels west of the Mississippi River.



A PRESIDENT'S VISIT—Silk-hatted diplomats and politicians crowd the sidewalk outside the St. Regis Oct. 16, 1909, when the President of Mexico and the President of the United States met for the first time. Today the street is seldom so crowded. The hotel itself may soon fall to the wrecking ball, to provide parking space for the nearby Mills Building.

* * *



MESSAGES AWAIT—*Lestor Winkler, desk attendant at the St. Regis for the past seven years, awaits a customer in the lobby. Behind him are the slots for mail and messages for those who room upstairs.*

—(Times Staff Photos)

**HOTEL CONDEMNED—
BUT IT'S HOME**
Aging Hotel Still Has Appeal
EPT 12/14/76
By Steve Peters

Curtis Taylor would rather jump into a fire net than move from the St. Regis Hotel.

“I don't know how efficient those damn nets are, but this building is not so high but what you could catch everybody in a net,” said Taylor, 73.

The four-story landmark across the street from San Jacinto Plaza was condemned last week by City Council. Fire inspectors testified the building does not meet safety codes and a representative of State National Bank that is its trustee said it would cost more than it is worth to bring the hotel into compliance.

Local historical organizations protested the move, but the city would not relent.

In 1909, President William Howard Taft breakfasted there with Mexican President

Porfirio Diaz. Gunslinger Dallas Soudenmire slept there and so did Gen. John J. Pershing. But those famous men all are dead and the old men who live there now are not presidents, do not have cavalry regiments or six-guns to protect them, and are to be forced out.

“I think the chance of fire is greater than it is in the Plaza or the Del Norte,” Taylor said.



“But I would say it isn't any greater than it is in the (Hotel) McCoy.”

JOSEPH RENAUD—*Back to California?*

Taylor has lived in the St. Regis for the last three years, and he lived there off and on before then. He is a retired civil engineer who lives on Social Security and he doesn't know where he'll go after Jan. 31, when the hotel's doors must close.

He drew on his cigar and said, "This is the sort of thing that old men—to be a male chauvinist about it—this is the kind of thing that old men need. Of course, I'm talking about the ones that are ambulatory," he said. "They hate like hell to give up their independence."



L.R. DOWNEY—*Only Historic Hotel Around*

The residents of the St. Regis—most of the permanent residents are men—say they like the place because it is convenient to stores, banks, cafes and the post office. They pay \$21 to \$26 per week, and for that price they buy a mixture of independence and security:

If one of them becomes ill, someone is bound to notice.

Afternoons, they sit in the lobby and look out the window at Oregon Street or the park a few steps away, smoking cigars or not smoking them, talking or reading or maybe just sitting. On warm days, sometimes they cross the street and sit in the sun.



HERMAN AVERICH—*El Paso Will Be Changed*

Clarence Miller, 76, has lived at the St. Regis for two and a half years. He retired from the Army in 1947 after serving with Pershing in France during World War I and wearing a uniform in the second big war. He moved to the St. Regis from his Montana Street apartment because he was tired of his own cooking.

"I enjoy living downtown," he said. "I don't have to cook for myself, and I'm always around someone."

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He hasn't decided where to move at the end of next month, that will be too great a problem. "I don't figure I'll have no trouble finding a place," he explained. But he does not believe the St. Regis is unsafe.

"I don't know, I wouldn't say that. I think it's just about as safe as a lot of the buildings I see around town," he said.

Joseph E. Renaud, 81, had the same sentiment. "Why don't they tear down some of the others that's not half as good as this?"

Renaud, a retired railroad worker, has lived at the St. Regis for about nine years. Before then, he lived in several downtown hotels: The old Campbell Hotel, demolished long ago; the Elks Hotel; the Hotel Gardner—others. But the Gardner is full and the others are either demolished or else not to his liking. "I might have to go back to California, who knows?" he said.

For F.A. Coughlin, the choice is easier. He thinks he might move to San Francisco. "I'm single," he notes. "There's nothing that holds me anyplace." Coughlin would not say how old he is but said he is a retired state department clerk and has lived in the St. Regis off and on since 1955.

Herman Averich, 83, is a retired Merchant Marine. He has lived in the hotel 15 years, he said. When he quit the sea, he retired in Brownsville, then moved to Laredo before finally settling down in El Paso.

To Averich, the St. Regis is El Paso. "You tear this down and El Paso will be changed," he said.

L.R. Downey, who has lived in the St. Regis for 18 of his 81 years, put it this way: "This is the only historic hotel around here."

* * *

AUSTIN—The State Review Board of the Texas Historical Commission has recommended El Paso's St. Regis Hotel for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, historical commission chairman Vernon Smylie has announced.

The board, a citizens' committee composed of experts in the field of architecture, history and the fine arts, met to consider the nomination last week.

The National Register is the nation's official inventory of properties worthy of preservation for their architectural, historic, archaeological, or cultural significance. The Texas Historical Commission is responsible for making Texas nominations to the register.

The city of El Paso recently condemned the hotel, which was built in 1904. It now provides low-cost housing for mostly elderly residents, and also houses a barbershop and news stand. But in its day it was known as one of the finer hotels in the U.S. As part of the first summit conference between leaders of Mexico and the U.S., Porfirio Diaz and William Howard Taft had talks in the hotel.

Present plans call for the hotel to be razed to provide additional parking for the adjacent Mills Building. Tenants have been given until early March to find new homes. In a hearing before the city council, owners said rehabilitation of the structure to meet city codes would be prohibitively expensive.

But if the St. Regis makes the National Register, the building would qualify for tax incentives to encourage its rehabilitation.

Under the Tax Reform Act of 1976, the owners could take accelerated depreciation on income taxes for the cost of remodeling to make the building commercially usable again.

If the St. Regis nomination to the National Register is accepted, the hotel would join three other El Paso sites already accepted: the Magoffin home, the Chamizal National Memorial, and Union Station.

National Register buildings also are eligible to receive federal matching grants for restoration.

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ST. REGIS HOTEL NOMINATED FOR REGISTER

Special to The Herald-Post
Feb 3, 1977

AUSTIN—The State Review Board, a citizens committee composed of experts in the fields of architecture, history and the fine arts, has recommended El Paso's St. Regis Hotel for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, announced Texas Historical Commission Chairman Vernon Smylie. The Board met Jan. 25.

The National Register is the nation's official inventory of properties worthy of preservation for their architectural, historical, archeological, or cultural significance on a local, state, or national level. Texas nominations to this Federal register are administered by the Texas Historical Commission, the state agency for historic preservation.

IF ACCEPTED to the National Register, the St. Regis will join other El Paso sites including the Magoffin House, the Chamizal

National Memorial, and Union Station which are eligible to receive Federal matching grants-in-aid aimed at encouraging restoration of historic properties.

Listing on the National Register also would make the 1904-5 Georgian Revival structure qualify for certain tax incentives for rehabilitation adopted under the Tax Reform Act of 1976.

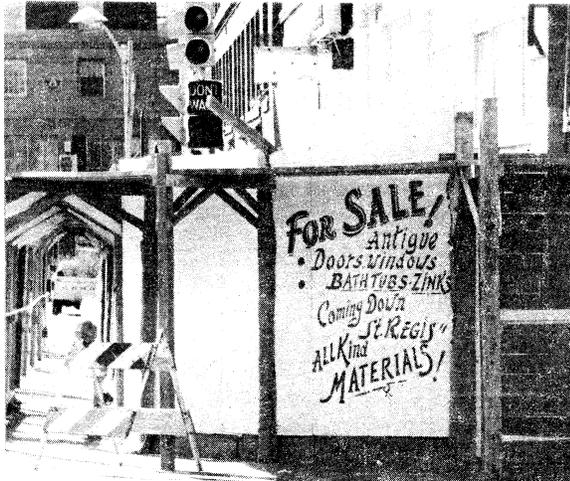
The Tax Act permits accelerated depreciation for the cost of rehabilitating certified historic structures that are used for commercial purposes. The act also allows charitable deductions for scenic easements, including facade easements for historic preservation purposes.

ANOTHER RECENT law, the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976, would give the St. Regis prime consideration for Federal office space. The Act directs the U.S. General Services Administration to acquire and use space in historically, architecturally, or culturally important buildings whenever such an option is "feasible and prudent compared with available alternatives."

The St. Regis, a four-story red brick building with excellent exterior detailing an original cast-iron storefront, was noted especially by the State Review Board for its importance in retaining the character of San Jacinto Plaza.

According to the report of a THC Visiting Restoration Specialist, the hotel also lends itself well to adaptive usage. The wooden Interior can be modified easily at nominal cost.

* * *



ZOUNDS THAT ZINK

Mar 22, 1977

The historic old St. Regis Hotel is being torn down and many of the down and according to this sign, offers lots of opportunities to buy antiques and Zinks—Sinks maybe? or maybe, zinc sinks. The famous old building was condemned by the city and ordered torn down and many of the old timbers, woodwork and fixtures will no doubt be bought by persons who will install them as nostalgia items in their own homes.

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BLAZE SWEEPS ST. REGIS HOTEL

EPHP 4/19/77

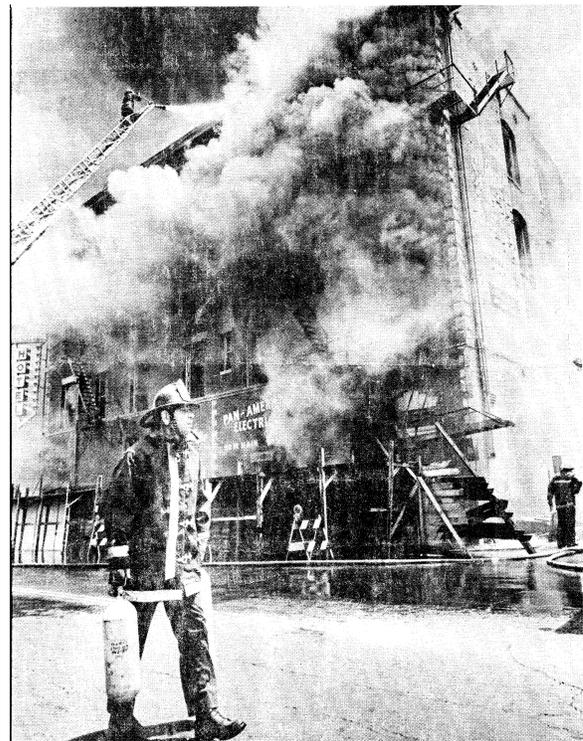
Trash In Basement Is Blamed Major Fire Sweeps Historic St. Regis Hotel

The historic old st. Regis Hotel, which faces San Jacinto Plaza, went up in flames today, filling the downtown area with smoke.

The major blaze is believed to have started in trash in the basement of the structure. It engulfed all four stories of the wooden framed, brick veneer building as firemen poured water through the windows from aerial ladders and snorkels.

The alarm came in shortly after 11 a.m. and firemen from the downtown central station were called to the scene. Firemen from other stations were quickly summoned when it was determined the blaze was of major proportions.

Firemen attempting to enter the basement were driven out by heavy clouds of smoke. Police held a large throng of onlookers back while flames leaped inside in a fiery dance.



Firefighter battles hotel blaze amid billowing smoke
Staff photo by David Kennedy

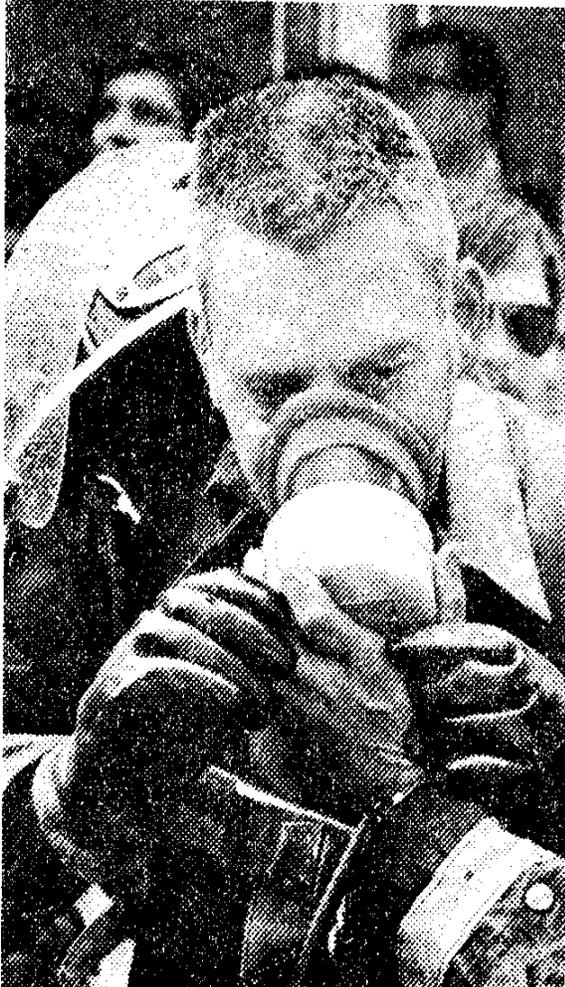
The fourth alarm was turned in at 1:55 a.m. Adjacent buildings were being soaked to keep the fire from spreading.

About noon the fire burst through the roof and shot tongues of flame 50 feet into the air. It scattered ash and sparks and debris over the surrounding downtown area.

The adjacent Mills Building was being hosed down by firemen in an attempt to pre-

vent its catching fire from the intense heat which scorched the walls and broke windows.

One elderly man, waiting for a bus in the Plaza, collapsed from smoke inhalation and was taken to a hospital. Several firemen were also treated on the scene for inhalation of smoke.



Chief G. M. Duryee

The once-plush old hotel has been in the process of being torn down, and windows and doorways left gaping openings to add to the force of the fire. Smoke billowed from them.

The St. Regis opened its doors on Aug. 17, 1905, and over the years has housed some distinguished visitors. These included Gen.

John J. (Blackjack) Pershing, early-day gunslinger Dallas Stoudenmire, and racing driver Barney Oldfield.

Employees said President William Howard Taft once breakfasted there when he came to El Paso for a meeting with President Porfirio Diaz of Mexico.

But like a once beautiful but aging lady, the St. Regis has long shown the signs of time. Its elegance had faded into shabby memory and the residents were mostly retired senior citizens who liked the reasonable room rates.

In December of last year the landmark was condemned by City Council. Fire inspectors testified the building did not meet safety codes and a representative of State National Bank, which is the trustee, said it would cost more than it was worth to bring the hotel into compliance.

The demolition began recently. "Spectacular, yes, but it could have been worse," was the way Fire Marshall Joe Wilson described today's fire at the St. Regis Hotel.

"This is an old hotel that we've been worried about for some time because of derelicts who spend the night there. I'm just thankful that we were able to go to the council and get it condemned."

"With all that woodwork and open stairwells," ye said, "if people had still been living there we could have had a situation just like what they had in Galveston where all those people were killed in an old hotel fire."

"As far as I know," Wilson said, "no one was hurt, but if this had happened at 2 or three in the morning with all those winos in there it could have been bad."

Mayor Don Henderson agreed with Wilson about the condemnation, saying “That was the first thing that came to my mind. I’m glad now we did it and I hope all the firemen will be alright.”

Robert Reid, a public relations executive, said it was one of, the most spectacular fires he ever witnesses. He feared it would spread to other downtown buildings.

“In fact, I called the Plaza Hotel and told them to get people out of the rooms,” he said. “It looked very much like it was going to engulf the Mills Building, which is just across the street from the Plaza.”

Firemen were concerned Mills building windows facing the street would become too hot and shatter showering some of the hundreds watching with glass.

A total of 16 fire department units were counted at the scene.

The fire was reported under control at about 12:30 p.m., but firemen were still hosing down the building to keep another fire breaking out.

* * *

Many Watch As Building Engulfed

By David McCumber

“I’ve been here 20 years, and I used to get my hair cut in that building every week.” The businessman looked at the St. Regis Hotel building as firemen pitted their equipment, their knowledge and their courage against the spreading flames within.

He was one of a huge crowd of people that gathered along Main and Oregon sidewalks,

in sudden smoky San Jacinto Plaza. Bunched in groups of five, eight, fifteen, mobile, shifting from spot to spot as the smoke billowed across them, they expressed varying reactions to the blaze.

It was almost a festival atmosphere, but not quite. Many were quiet, sobered by the magnitude of the thing. Even the vocal ones, the girls who giggled, yelped in mock dismay as the spray from a score of hoses struck them, were obviously awed by the oldest, most fearsome of calamities—fire.

“It’s sad,” one woman said. “Sure, they were tearing it down anyway, making another parking lot, they said. But it was always sort of a sad place for me. For years I’ve watched the old retired people sit there in the lobby, staring at nothing. And that’s sad.”

“Hey, man, it’s something to watch, something to do on your lunch hour,” said one irreverent young man. “It was an old thing, you know?”

But as it goes the way of all old things, the building leaves its own mourners.

“I’ll miss it,” said a woman. “I look at it all day from the shop where I work, and I never thought about it. But I’ll miss it.”

“It’s another part of the old town going,” another said.

It was going anyway. But the wrecker’s ball is not anywhere near so dramatic a reaper as are smoke and flame.

Mary Taylor, barmaid at the New Mint Bar across the street from the hotel, was a resident at the St. Regis for four years before it was condemned.

"I'm glad I'm out of there now," she said.

Miss Taylor, who said she moved out of the hotel, which has been an El Paso Landmark since it opened over 70 years ago, on the last day before it closed its doors.

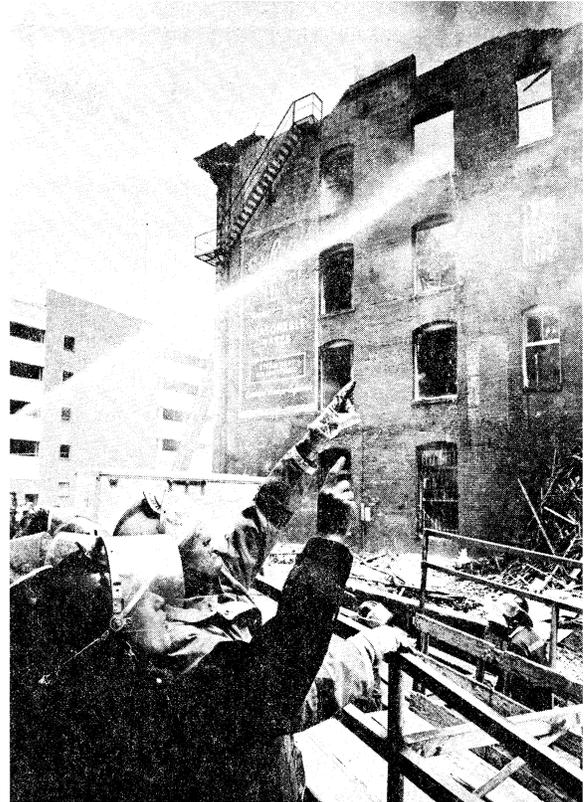
"There was so much woodwork and all those hardwood floors, but it was supposed to be steel construction. I never thought it would go up like that."

* * *

Fire!

EPHP 4/19/77

A major fire erupted at the St. Regis Hotel today, engulfing the city landmark in flames. These pictures were taken by staff photographers Bill Thompson and David Kennedy.



* * *

THE ST. REGIS FIRE

EPT 4/20/77

El Paso enjoys one of the lowest fire insurance rates in the state of Texas, and the reason was amply demonstrated yesterday by the performance of the City's firemen in tackling the four alarm blaze that swept the old St. Regis Hotel.

Thankfully, the old building had been evacuated prior to demolition, but the men of the Fire Department worked just as hard and fast to quell the fire as if a hundred lives had been at stake.

Choking in the dense smoke that rolled through the downtown area, firefighters brought the blaze under control in little more than an hour, and prevented its spread to adjoining buildings. Police, meanwhile, did an excellent job of holding back onlookers and redirecting traffic around the area of action.

It was superlative work, performed under hazardous conditions, and El Paso's Fire Department can take a bow for a job well done.

* * *

FRIENDS GATHER AS HOTEL DIES

EPT 4/20/77

By Bill Moore

Members of the family gathered at the New Mint Bar Tuesday. They came to watch an old friend die.

Across the street the St. Regis Hotel was wrapped in a death shroud of dense smoke. Water from the firemen's hoses could not save the old building from its fate.

Working behind the bar in the New Mint, Mary Taylor held back her tears as she re-

membered the St. Regis as a home before she was forced to move out when the building was condemned.

"I moved out on the last day it was open," Mary said while serving beers to the small crowd of friends gathered inside the New Mint. "I think most of us who lived there were really attached to the St. Regis. The people who lived and worked there were like a family."



NOZZLE POWER—Firemen aim their hoses from the windows of the fire-blistered Mills Building to contain a destructive fire that gutted the St. Regis Hotel just before noon Tuesday. One office in the Mills Building received minor damage.

—(Times Staff Photo by John Costello)

"The St. Regis used to have the best speak-easy in town," said Phil Taylor, Mary's husband, an off and on St. Regis customer since his army days in the early 1940s.

"It used to be a grand place back in those days," said Taylor. "The Green Frog Bar in the hotel was very popular. But that was

back when everyone used to come downtown to have a good time.”

Staring out the New Mint's green tinted windows at the swirling smoke, Taylor sipped his beer and said, "I have a lot of fond memories of that place.”

Ruley Provencio moved his St. Regis Barber Shop around the corner into the Mills Building when the hotel was condemned. Sitting with several of his friends at a table in the New Mint, he said he did not like to see the building go in a fire.

“I wasn’t happy when they condemned the building and began tearing it down. But I hate this. I hate the way it finally went.”

Provencio had been owner of the St. Regis Barber Shop for 27 years. The shop had been a landmark in the hotel for more than 60 years after Pancho Villa had his hair cut there.

Provencio said he had visited what was left of his old shop only last week.

“I went in to see how the demolition was coming along. There wasn't anything left in the shop but the wood frame. They had already taken off all the plaster board,” he said. “I knew it would not look the same. But I had to see it anyway.”

Louie Suarez had worked in the hotel as a bellboy eight years before the St. Regis was condemned. "This whole thing makes me very sad. When I look at Mary and think about the time she lived there and how close we all were, it makes me want to cry.”

M.D. Wilson was a clerk at the St. Regis when it was closed. “Everyone who worked and stayed there were friends. We had some-

thing together there. It is bad enough to see it go. But being burned out is really a blow.”

There were several other ex-residents and employes who had good things to say about the St. Regis. Not one liked the way it was treated by the city in being condemned and none liked the way it died on Tuesday.

About 2:30 p.m. the fire was out and the clearing smoke began to reveal the gutted remains. Provencio sat silently at his table staring out the window. Suarez walked over and put an arm around Provencio's shoulder to console his old friend.

The New Mint was anything but a jovial place Tuesday. It seemed fitting that “Faded Love” was playing on the jukebox.

* * *

**BLAZE SCUTTLES
OLD ST. REGIS HOTEL
EPT 4/20/77**

Fears that the gutted St. Regis Hotel would collapse forced firemen to barricade Oregon and Main streets Tuesday, after a spectacular four-alarm fire sent flames towering as high as the adjacent Mills Building.

Fire Chief M.L. Coleman said the fire started in the basement and spread rapidly through the vacant wood frame and brick structure.

Coleman said there was no reason to suspect arson, but he was keeping his investigators out of the building due to the danger of collapse.

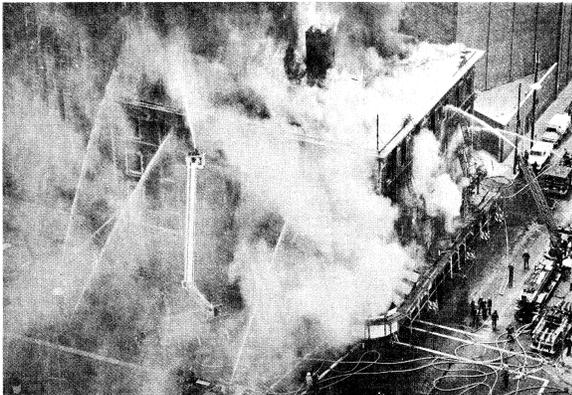
When the fire started, there was a welding crew inside the building with their tanks of

flammable gas, but Coleman said he did not know if the crew had anything to do with the fire.

Coleman said a stiff gust of wind could topple the four-story brick shell.

As the fire blazed out of control at about 11:30 Tuesday, it looked from a distance as if the entire downtown area around San Jacinto Plaza was in flames.

Sixteen fire units and 150 firemen from as far away as Fort Boulevard in Northeast El Paso were called to the blaze, including off-duty firemen called at home and department recruits. Large numbers of city police were called in to try to keep the thousands of lunch-hour onlookers at a safe distance.



HOLDING IN THE FIRE—*Firefighters and their equipment, shrouded in dense smoke, surround the flaming St. Regis Hotel just before noon Tuesday. Their efforts prevented spreading of the fire to nearby building.*

—Times Staff Photo by John Costello)

"That thing happened in a second," said bystander Darryl Meens. "Not a thing, then the next thing you know there were all the fire trucks."

The first alarm reportedly was turned in at about 11 a.m. by Ruben Urrutia, owner of Southside Wrecking. That firm was handling demolition of the once-grand hotel.

Minutes later, a host of firemen were engaged in the battle of their lives, trying to keep the flames from neighboring buildings.

"We were spread pretty thin by this fire," Coleman said. At first, there were no men available to send into the Mills Building, and heat and flames shattered all the north side windows of that structure. For a time it seemed as if that downtown landmark was doomed too.

On the 12th floor of the Mills Building, Bureau of Reclamation Director James Kirby and his employees were wetting down their offices with a small fire hose as flames and smoke danced just outside their windows.

"Tongues of fire and smoke broke the windows and burned the curtains up like that," Kirby recalled with a snap of his fingers.

That was enough to send Kirby and friends scurrying for safety down the 12 flights of stairs. They were afraid to use the elevators. One of the workers grabbed the office Stars and Stripes and carried the banner to safety.

Minutes later, firemen were taking positions at Mills Building windows aiming streams of water down onto the blaze, as other firemen atop snorkels sprayed through St. Regis windows.

"White smoke! White smoke! We've got it licked!" fire Capt. B.G. Atkinson shouted from his vantage point on the seventh floor. "All you can do, boys, is keep pouring water on it. Lots of water, fellas, lots of water."

The Mills building was safe. But flames, smoke, and water did take their toll, especially on the seventh floor.

The basements of both the Mills and the empty White House department store were

reported full of water. Runoff from the fire site produced a sizeable lake in front of the White House.

Only two people, including one firemen, required medical attention as a result of the blaze. An elderly man identified as Vincent Zenieski was overcome by smoke as he stood waiting for a bus. He was treated at Hotel Dieu and then transferred to Thomason Hospital for treatment of an ailment not related to the fire.

Fireman Roberto Lozano, 28, of 3014 Aurora was treated at Hotel Dieu for a knee injury. Many other firemen required treatment at the scene for minor smoke inhalation.

Even so, the fire fighters seemed to be taking it in stride. Fireman Norman Roberts admitted it was a “pretty good one.”

“As far as fires go, this is a big one,” said fireman A.E. Davila. “But even a garbage can can give you trouble.”

The St. Regis opened Aug. 17, 1905, and quickly established a reputation as one of the finest hotels in the West. It earned a niche in history in 1909, when it was the site of the first meeting between Porfirio Diaz, the president of Mexico, and U.S. President William Howard Taft. It was the first meeting ever between heads of state from the two countries.

The St. Regis building was being held in trust for the estate of Harry Frank, according to Gene Roth, manager of trust real estate for State National Bank.

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FIRE MOP-UP OPERATIONS CONTINUE

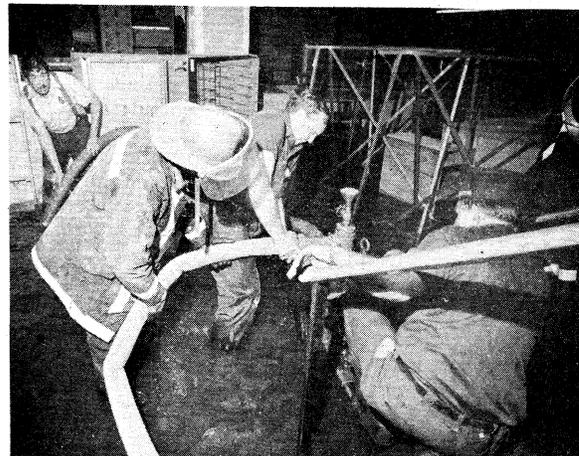
EPHP 4/20/77

By Joe Burchell

Mop-up operations continued through the night in the wake of a fire that destroyed the once proud St. Regis Hotel yesterday.

A burned-out shell facing San Jacinto Plaza is all that remains of the historic landmark that was once a stop-over for such notables as President William Howard Taft, Gen. John J. “Blackjack” Pershing, gunfighter Dallas Stoudenmire and racing driver Barney Oldfield.

Staff photos by David Kennedy



Firemen pump out 2 feet of water from basement of White House.

Fire units responded to the hotel in force again today when a fire that had been smoldering in the basement flared up.

Fire Chief Marion Coleman said that fire officials were aware of the smoldering condition, which was the result collapsing floors and ceilings piling up on top of one another, but each succeeding layer sealed the next from the firemen’s hoses, and structural damage to the building made it unsafe to go in and put them out.

But fire units had been monitoring the old hotel all night, and this time they were ready to curb the fire.

Coleman said the fire moved from the basement, where it started, up through the four-story building.

“All the windows and doors were off for the demolition,” he said, “and fanned by a 25mph wind that blew right through the building,” it quickly spread throughout the wooden interior.

RUBEN URRUTIA, head of a demolition crew that was working on the roof of the old hotel when the fire broke out said his men heard an explosion in the basement and saw smoke coming out. Urrutia said his men then evacuated the building and called for the fire department.

The cause of the explosion: has not yet been determined, but Urrutia said all gas and electric lines to the building were cut off two weeks ago.

According to Coleman, however, “there are so many gas lines in these old buildings it’s hard to be sure they’re all shut off.”

FIRE MARSHAL Joe Wilson said his office will investigate the blaze and take statements, but it may be some time before the exact cause is determined, if it can be determined at all.

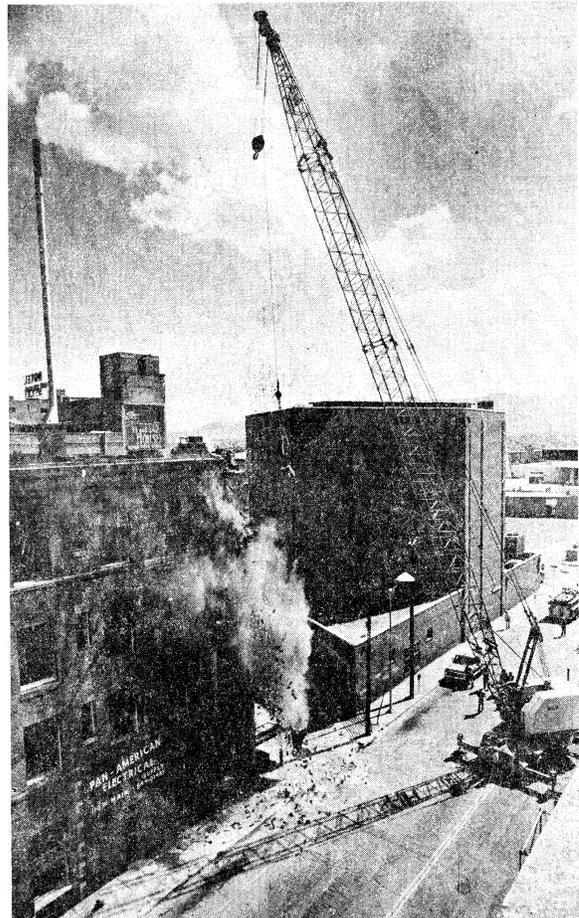
Actually the end was already in sight for the 73-year-old structure. Condemned by the city in December, demolition crews had already begun dismantling it to make way for a parking lot.

* * *

UTEP STUDENT HAS DATE IN COURT AFTER ARREST FOR PHOTOGRAPHING FIRE

EPT 4/21/77

A University of Texas at El Paso photography student faces an April 29 appearance in County Court-at-Law No.2 as a result of his arrest for taking pictures of the St. Regis Hotel burning Tuesday.



DOWN IT COMES—Dust and debris fall from the Main Street side of the St. Regis Hotel—a mere skeleton since its gutting by fire Tuesday—as Cordova Crane Service uses a 120-foot crane and a 2,000-pound wrecking ball to bring the historic structure down.

—(Times staff photo by Lance Murray)

Jose Villegas, 23, a sophomore at the University of Texas at El Paso, said he was charged with “obstructing highway or passageway” and booked into City-County jail

without being read his rights. He later bonded out of jail for \$60 for the Class B misdemeanor charge.

Villegas said he was taking pictures from near the Greyhound Bus Depot when he was approached by a police officer and told to move on.

He said he had already taken numerous photos, mostly of the firemen battling the blaze, and that the firemen had not seemed concerned with his presence.

“The firemen were kind enough to even turn around for me,” Villegas, a native El Pasoan, said.

A police officer told him that he would have to leave the area or go to jail. Villegas said he showed the officer his college identification card and told him he was trying to sell freelance photographs to *The Prospector*, UTEP’s student newspaper.

“He asked me again if I wanted to go to jail or leave the area, and I said that I would leave.”

Villegas said he was using the White House parking lot at that time.

He said he was moving away from the area when he was arrested by the same officer in front of Gunning-Casteel on Mills Street near Mesa.

“I was way out of the way,” he said, noting that there were hundreds of spectators all over the San Jacinto Plaza area watching the giant blaze.

He said he was apprehended, frisked, and was not read his rights. He then was placed in a patrol car and taken to jail. He said the

handcuffs were placed on his wrists so tightly that one of his hands turned blue.

* * *

Comin' down
EPHP 5/11/77

Demolition workers sort bricks from the rubble of the old St. Regis Hotel which was gutted by fire. Little remains of the once fine old hotel and soon there will only be a parking lot where it stood.

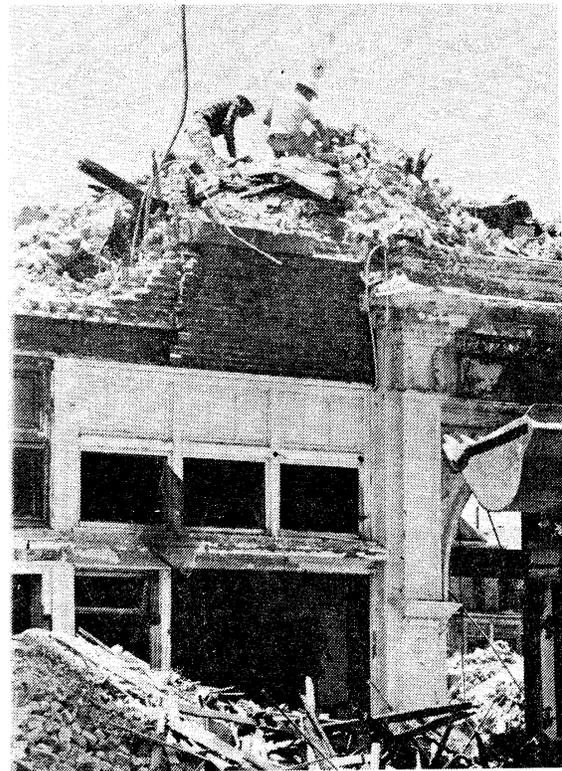


Photo by Bill Thompson

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