

## St. Regis Fire Stirs Memories



This Frank Dean photo of the St. Regis Hotel circa 1906, was taken after the west wing was added.  
Lloyd Files Research Library Museum of Western Colorado photo.

By Kathy Jordan

A few weeks back when I heard the news about the fire that a fire was in progress at the St. Regis Hotel I felt a tightness in my stomach, concerned that one of the few historically significant structures left in the downtown area was going to be lost forever. But thanks to the fast work of the Grand Junction Fire Department the buildings was saved, only suffering damage to a small portion of the restaurant now located there, Naggy McGees.

The hotel was started in 1893 by William H. and Allie Neff and Anna Scott. It was completed and opened in 1895 as the Grand Hotel and Restaurant.

Harry Earl Barnett Sr. purchased the hotel in 1904 and in 1906 added the west wing increasing guest rooms to 28, some with connecting baths and some with just lavatories. This addition also enlarged the size of the dining room and renamed it The New Grand Hotel.

For years it was a leading hotel of western Colorado. The hotel had a massive bar and a ballroom for nightly dances. The lobby was Mission style architecture and was the gathering place for guests. Also on the main floor off the lobby was a ladies parlor and sample rooms used by traveling salesmen.

In 1908 with the completion of the third floor Burnett thought that the hotel needed a new name and held a contest offering a \$25 prize to the traveling salesman who came up with best name. St. Regis was it.

Burnett Sr. was a member of many of the service and social organizations in town and the hotel became the place for these groups to meet.

In 1920 Burnett Sr. sold one half interest in the St. Regis to his son Harry Earl Burnett Jr., retaining the other half interest for himself. Burnett Sr. died in August 1924.

Over the years the St. Regis had several well known visitors, one of which was Jack Dempsey. In an oral history interview done through the Mesa County Oral History Project Harry Lloyd Burnett said that his father, Harry E. Burnett Jr., and heavy weight boxing champion Dempsey were best friends and a frequent visitor at the hotel. Harry L. also said that his father was Dempsey's first manager.

In 1924 Rex Howell, owner of the new radio station KREX broadcast live music from the hotel featuring the Armand de Beque dance band.

Prohibition ended in 1933 and by 1936 the St. Regis opened the first cocktail lounge in town, the Oriental Room and Cocktail Lounge, according to a story in the Journal of the Western Slope.

During the 1940s St. Regis was a bustling place. Military pilots shuttling plane from one coast to another stayed there as did military personnel from Pando and the Tenth Mountain Division from Camp Hale near Leadville.

A resident of the St. Regis was William Moyer, best known for giving the city of Grand Junction the first public swimming pool. When Burnett Jr. ran into Mr. Moyer walking down the street with suitcase in hand and asked Mr. Moyer where he was off to Moyer replied that he had no place to live because he had no money so Burnett took him to the St. Regis where he lived until a short time before his death when he was moved to a nursing home. Mr. Moyer died in 1943.

The hotel remained a popular hotel for train travelers until the automobile became a more popular means of transportation and motels with all the modern conveniences sprang up in more convenient locations. The St. Regis got a new lease on life during the uranium boom of the 1950's when the bar business became the main money maker. The St. Regis was so popular that the sample rooms on the first floor were remodeled to make room for the crowds.

Burnett Jr. died in 1960 and the hotel was sold to A.W. O'Brien and Amos and Roland Raso in 1961. By the 1980s the bar business overshadowed the hotel business and the hotel was closed in 1985.

In 1986 the St. Regis dodge the wrecking ball and today this historic building has multiple uses, including condos, offices and a restaurant.