

History of the Hotel del Coronado 1887-1971

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Prior to this time, north and south islands were used for cattle grazing lands.

- 1884 - A Mr. E.S. Babcock (Railroad) from Evansville, Indiana, and Mr. H.L. Story (Piano Mfg.) from Chicago came west for their health. One of their pastimes was to row across the Bay and hunt rabbits on this brush-covered land. On one of these trips Mr. Babcock said, "What a place to build a hotel!" Mr. Babcock's dream was to build a hotel that people would come to long after he was gone...build a court with tropical trees, shrubs and flowers, lined with paths...balconies would look down into the court from every story...from the South a foyer would open to the Bay with verandas for rest and promenades. On the ocean corner a pavilion tower would stand, and a dining wing would project at an angle from the southwest corner of the court; this would almost be detached to give full view of the bay, ocean, and city.
- 1885 - Babcock and Story formed a syndicate and purchased the property -- approximately 4,000 acres -- for \$110,000. To raise money to build the hotel, they subdivided the property into lots and sold them at auction. Almost immediately workers were hired to clear the underbrush.
- 1886 - First ferry services began between San Diego and Coronado.
- 1887 - Construction on the hotel began in March. A brick kiln, planing mill, metal shop, and iron works were constructed (laundry site); also a barracks to house several hundred workers, including some 100 Chinese laborers.
A railroad was built along Orange Avenue. Water was piped under the bay from wells in the San Diego River.
- 1888 - In January, before completion, guests began to arrive. On February 19th, the doors were opened to the public. The hotel cost over one million dollars. There were ~~over~~ 399 bedrooms, each containing a wall safe, and a fireplace with cherry mantel in each sitting room. Only 73 rooms had a private bath. In 1897 steam heat replaced the fireplaces.
Wood used in construction: redwood, sugar pine, oak, and mahogany. The mahogany bar in the Casino Lounge was shipped around the Horn.
- 1890 - By this time the steam train was making numerous daily trips up and down the Strand.
- 1891 - President Benjamin Harrison stayed at the hotel, which was visited later by Presidents McKinley, Taft, Roosevelt, Johnson, and Nixon.
- 1900 - John D. Spreckels, sugar millionaire, bought the hotel. Babcock was named manager.
Tent City established -- a collection of gaily striped "tents" -- a vacation land south of the hotel with a dance hall, salt water plunge, bandstand, and a merry-go-round (now located at the entrance of the San Diego Zoo). Demolished 1939-41.
- 1904 - Legend has it that Thomas A. Edison pulled the switch to the first outdoor living lighted Christmas tree at the hotel -- first in the nation. This lighted tree is a tradition, having been lighted every Christmas except for World War II years.
- 1917 - North Island was bought by the U. S. Government from John D. Spreckels for \$5,000,000.
- 1920 - Edward, Prince of Wales (later King of England), now Duke of Windsor, visited the hotel. A banquet and a ball were held in his honor, given by the Mayor, City of San Diego.
- 1924 - Elevator installed at hotel.
- 1927 - Reception and dinner held in the Crown Room in honor of Charles A. Lindbergh.
- 1934 - Beach and Tennis Club opened. Pool built.
- 1938 - Golden Jubilee celebration, occasion being the 50th anniversary of the hotel. Residents and guests dressed in costumes of the 80's.
- 1941 - World War II years. Hotel occupied almost entirely by the military and their families.
- 1945 - Hotel acquired by Barney Goodman of Kansas City. Extensive modernization completed.
- 1960 - John Alessio, owner of the Agua Caliente Race Track, bought the hotel, spending over a million dollars restoring it.
- 1963 - Alessio interests sold to the Hotel del Coronado Company headed by Mr. Larry Lawrence.
- 1966 - Admiral R. H. Jackson's 100th Birthday Party, the Admiral being the oldest living Admiral in the United States Navy.
- 1969 - August 2 the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge was opened. Ferry service discontinued.
- 1970 - September 3 -- President Richard M. Nixon held a reception and State dinner at the hotel in honor of President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz of Mexico.
December 17 -- Hotel del Coronado officially designated a State of California Historical Landmark.
- 1971 - October 27-31 -- 25th Annual Conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation held at the Hotel del Coronado.

