

230 N. Interocean Ave. — A local hotel with many names and a unique fireplace

Written by Chris Lee

Has it really been here that long? Is it possible for a building to still be standing that was here when Holyoke got its start? Well, that's a good question.

According to "Those Were the Days" centennial book, the hotel has been standing at 230 N. Interocean Ave. since the incorporation of Holyoke in 1888.

However, in a document owned by Carolyn Wirges who owns the current Burge Hotel with her husband Phil, it states Jason G. and Maria Sawyer built the original Sawyer House in Feb. 1888. This building stood just to the north of the present Burge Hotel and right near the railroad depot.

In 1890, G.F. Blakley purchased the house and renamed it the American Hotel.

In 1900 the property was purchased by Lucy P. Sears and was renamed the Sears Hotel. Around this same time, an addition was added to the south which is the current northeast part of today's building. A sign was painted on the siding deeming the building the Sears Hotel Annex. Another addition was added to the rear of the building around 1912.

In 1918, Sears sold the hotel to her son Charles R. Sears. He went on to form the Sears Hotel Company with other investors. More additions were added and in Dec. 1920 it was known as the Sears Hotel.

From "Those Were the Days," "Aug. 30 1887, a long side track was laid on the proposed town site last week by the road for the purpose of getting material in place for their buildings. We learn that the railroad will put up a large hotel in Holyoke."

The "large hotel" mentioned in the centennial book refers to the Burge Hotel.

Fireplace is well known

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One of the key features of the hotel is the fireplace located on the north wall in the northeast room.

According to the same centennial book, in 1929 the fireplace was dedicated to the “Knights of the Grip” and a bronze plaque in the center of the structure bears the names of almost 200 people who donated the unusual stones, treasured keepsakes and historical objects which make up the structure.

The Knights of the Grip was an organization of traveling salesmen with the term “grip” coming from the handle on their briefcases.

The objects used to make the fireplace came from 31 of the 50 states, five countries and date back to many different periods throughout history.

Objects include a tooth of an extinct mastodon, various specimens of petrified wood and a number of seashells which were picked up in Colorado.

Also included in the make up of the fireplace is a chain cannon ball from the Civil War, a German helmet from WWI, specimens of rich gold-bearing ore, a stone from the grave of Calamity Jane, arrowheads, crystals, lava, agate from South Africa, black obsidian from Brazil and a coral display from the Philippines.

A slab of Vermont marble weighing approximately 300 pounds forms the mantel.

The fireplace stands as a memorial to Mr. and Mrs. P.F. Burge who spent two years collecting the objects which were fitted together by a master mason. It stands as a source of pleasure and pride, not only to its owners, but to the entire community and to the scores of traveling persons to whom the Burge is a “home away from home.”

Past owners of the building according to the centennial book include Mr. and Mrs. L.S. Berry,

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Mrs. Theodosia Ambrose, Mr. and Mrs. L.G. Machamer and Mr. and Mrs. Harold P. Harding. In 1976, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Baker purchased the hotel and in 1997 the Wirges bought the hotel and continue to own it today.

Building features unique style

Architecturally, the Burge Hotel is the Mission Revival style, popular towards the early 20th century. The Mission Revival style is also known as California Mission or Mission. It was a part of the Art and Crafts movement in the early 1900s. The character is generated from the Spanish Franciscan mission churches of the southwestern United States.

In 1995, the hotel was named into the Colorado Register of Historical Places.

The Wirges gave a face lift to the building when they remodeled the front portion in 2004. Peters and Son Construction from Ogallala Neb. helped with the renovation. New windows and stucco were part of the process.

Carolyn said there were many different layers of the building and they took it clear down to the boards of the walls.

Currently the Wirges are in the middle of remodeling two suites upstairs. They hope to have them finished by fall.

The majority of visitors are that of any hotel. Salesmen, people passing through town, harvesters and hunters are frequent visitors of the hotel.

Wirges said for about eight weeks during the fall months she and her husband run the hotel as a bed and breakfast when hunters come to town.

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Every year the same guided hunting operation books rooms for hunters to stay in while in the area hunting.

“They like all the food and the rooms,” Wirges said.

There are eight rooms and four apartments for a total of 12 rooms.

A building as old as the Burge Hotel surely is haunted or plays host to ghosts. Not according to Carolyn. She said she hasn't heard of any legends or stories from the past. She did mention people recall running down the halls when they were little kids. She also found a photo in one of the cabinets of a man sitting on a couch who appears to have two heads.

“There aren't any ghosts,” Wirges said. “People have asked.”