



CAMINO REAL HOTEL.

EL PASO, TEXAS

History of the Camino Real Hotel (formerly the Paso del Norte Hotel)

The hotel's builder, Zach T. White, was drawn to El Paso by its magical name "Pass of the North." After witnessing the 1892 burning of the Grand Central Hotel, which stood on the site of the present day Mills Building, White dreamed of building an elegant hotel that would be the center of social life and a gathering place for tourists.

He hired the local architectural firm of Trost and Trost and together they studied the structures in San Francisco, which withstood the Great Earthquake of 1906. They designed a brick, steel and terra cotta building with interior walls made of gypsum from nearby White Sands National Monument that was not only structurally sound but was also fireproof.

The hotel was built at a cost of \$1.5 million. White referred to it as his "dream hotel." The Hotel Paso del Norte, so named by White, opened Thanksgiving Day 1912 with a lavish ball. It was hailed as the "Showplace of the West."

The interior of the hotel was the most elegant in the area. No detail was spared in its construction. Cherrystone, golden scagliola, and black serpentine marble installed by Italian artisans graced the lobby, mezzanine and dining rooms. Twelve gold-leaf cages with live parakeets adorned the pillars in the main dining area. A Tiffany glass dome crowned the lobby. All woodwork was solid mahogany. The hotel supported its own bakery, ice-factory, butcher shop, laundry and a bar "stocked with every liquor you've ever heard of", said Mrs. Paul Harvey, daughter of Zach T. White.

The roof top ballroom and patio were the scene of many dinner dances and Sunday Tea dances. It was also a favored place to gather and watch the progress of the Mexican Revolution and Pancho Villa across the river.

The hotel became the headquarters for cattlemen and ranchers. The Paso del Norte claimed that more heads of cattle were bought or sold in its lobby than at any other single location in the world. The hotel remained in the White family until 1970, when TKG Investment Co. Ltd. bought the hotel from Mary and Katherine White, the daughters of Zach T. White. The new owners said they would refurbish and modernize the hotel, but every effort would be made to preserve the Western atmosphere.

Over the years, the hotel has undergone several remodelings. The last major construction on the hotel was in 1986 when the 17-story tower was added.