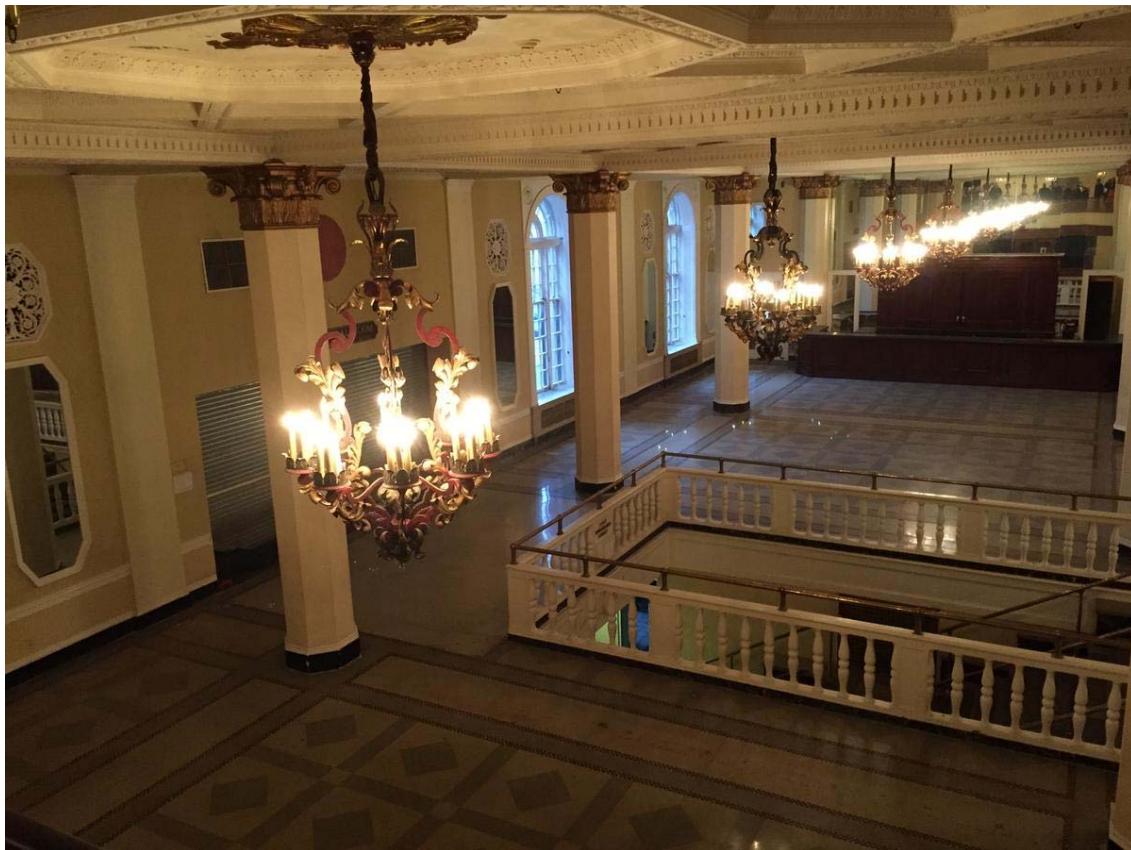


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The Hotel Syracuse Allows a Look into Its Past as It Preps for a Future

By [MARK BIALCZAK](#) · 22 HOURS AGO

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The main lobby of the Hotel Syracuse has always been grand

CREDIT MARK BIALCZAK

When my friend Theresa Constantine told me how she'd signed up as a tour guide for the Onondaga Historical Association's walk through the Hotel Syracuse set up for the last weekend of 2014 and asked if I'd like to tag along as her back-of-the-pack support, I jumped.

Especially when she checked with the folks in charge with allowing Central New Yorkers to check out the history of this big old place on Warren and East

Onondaga and got the OK for me to bring my iPhone 6 and curiosity for what the OHA was going to report to folks here on my weekly community blog for waer.org.

After all, if you live in Central New York, you know about the Hotel Syracuse, magnet for people news since it opened in 1924.



The Persian Terrace, where Ladies Luncheons aired on radio

CREDIT MARK BIALCZAK

I'm a relative Margie-Come-Lately on the historical timeline, but I clearly recall joining a roiling mass of bodies on the sidewalk outside the brown brick when presidential candidate Jimmy Carter visited downtown Syracuse in 1976 and said something to the effect of "this is not a brouhaha," sending me and my fellow reporters for the Morrisville Agricultural and Technical College Chimes newspaper scurrying to discover if that's what he said and just what he meant if it were. When I moved here in 1983, I discovered the Hotel Syracuse as the happy host of big lobby parties on St. Patrick's Day. My job at the big daily led me to concerts in the Persian Terrace and Imperial Terrace concerts during New York State Blues Festivals and otherwise, and within the walls I witnessed the greatness of blues king Bobby "Blue" Bland; the man who brought the band Wars and the Animals to the world, Eric Burdon; and the band's Rick Danko,

shortly before he passed away.

I ate burgers and drank brews at Coach Mac's, the street-level joint named for venerable Syracuse University football coach Dick MacPherson, who was said to also have living quarters somewhere on the premises. I laughed at jokes told by stand-up folks at Wise Guys and Viva la Debris in the space that used to be called The Library. I met a friend who covered politics for the Associated Press who came in from out of town on his beat to watch our Mets in a 2000 World Series game in the elegant lobby bar, and advised him it was not a good moment to approach a gubernatorial candidate he spied walking past.



Three tour-takers model hats in the Persian Terrace
CREDIT MARK BIALCZAK

I also heard the horror stories from the visiting Eastern Region NCAA basketball player who thought his room there was the worst lodging he'd ever seen, and seen the dust accumulate on the vacant window fronts and read the accounts of the failed attempts at purchase and restoration during subsequent fallow periods.

And now a Central New Yorker successful in this sort of thing, Ed Riley, has purchased the premises, named his recovery group Syracuse Community Hotel Restoration Company LLC, and raised hopes anew.



Dave Baker gives a magical history of The Library room, including songs
CREDIT MARK BIALCZAK

The OHA knows the back story better than any. They called the events on Dec. 27, 28 and Jan. 2 "Suite Story Ghostwalk." And the staggered groups of 25 or so, each of whom paid \$15 each to see the premises for these OHA fundraisers, were greeted by costumed characters who told tales of the glory days that whetted the appetite for what's to come.

No ghosts, really, but great stories in the balcony foyer overlooking the lobby about the expansive mural over the registration desk, and about how the hotel

was jacked up and moved from across the street and set into this spot without any of the guests having to check out or leave.

And the unsettling history of the Cavalier Room, where women were not allowed to drink or dine into the 1960s. Wow.



Hotel Syracuse history for sale
CREDIT MARK BIALCZAK

In the kitchen, one of the tour guests declared how the rolls served from the cooks to the banquet rooms were the best anywhere in Central New York.

In the Persian Terrace, a reenactment of the Ladies Luncheons that were part of the regular programming on Syracuse radio station WHEN included a hat fashion parade that allowed three tour-takers to model. In the space that used to be the Library and the comedy clubs, Syracuse entertainer Dave Baker anonymously donned the Magical Mystery Tour attire of the Beatles as he told

of how the space was used for Big Band era concerts that were aired by Syracuse radio station WSYR and available to stations worldwide. When the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra performed, the young male singer was a lad from Hoboken, N.J., by the name of Frank Sinatra. Baker sang snippets of songs, including John Lennon's "Imagine" after telling how Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono hosted a party in their Hotel Syracuse room after her exhibit there in 1971, and former Beatles mate Ringo Starr was one of the attendees.

Maids and young bellhops in a foyer told of how customers stuffed dirty laundry into the doorway spot called "the coffin."



The Cavalier Room, where women weren't allowed to dine or drink into the 1960's

At the end of the tour, the visitors were pointed to a room stocked with furniture salvaged from previous regimes by Asset Protection Associates Inc., with hotel security guard and sales director Frank Butler sitting post and

willing to sell them and set up appointments for future negotiations. His email address is assetproassoc@juno.com.

Dates for the future to remember: "Lodging Landmark, The Heritage of the Hotel Syracuse Exhibit" is open at the OH Museum through June 14, with free admission.

And during the tour, everybody said the renovations would be concluded and the Hotel Syracuse would be ready to roll again on March 16, 2016.

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