

Across the Board

Fond Memories of Old Hotel

By Clyde E. Leib, Managing Editor
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It is difficult to pass the hollow ruin of the Stacy-Trent Hotel these days without getting nostalgic about the place. The hotel, now being torn down to make way for a modern office building, was once Trenton's proudest badge of importance. Here politicians rubbed elbows at the bar, newspaper men haunted its corridors in search of stories, nervous best-men toasted countless hundreds of blushing brides, and thousands of hapless service club members slumbered through weekly luncheons of pot roast and green peas.

Doubtless everyone in Trenton has some fond memories of the Stacy-Trent or associates some momentous event in his life with that crumbling pile of stones on W. State St.

In the current issue of Trenton Magazine, Chamber of Commerce President Herbert Stites laments the passing of the hotel in proper chamberly fashion – it was a fashionable and convenient gathering place for the city's merchant princes and professional dons, and now Trenton has no place downtown where the Rotarians and Kiwanians can convene in their high purpose. Stites, of course, is entirely right regretting the passing of the hotel for this reason – Trenton should have a first-class hostelry with sufficient capacity to cater to its civic endeavors.

But my memories of the old hotel are, I confess, somewhat more visceral (or barbaric, if you will) than Stites', perhaps because my first encounter with the Stacy-Trent was on something less than the high plane of community betterment.

That encounter was in the summer of 1948. I was new to Trenton, a fledgling reporter, and not disinclined toward the baser pleasures. As it happened, this newspaper in those days was staffed mostly by refugees from big city papers. They were a hard-drinking, fun loving crew in the best traditions of Ben Hecht and H. L. Mencken, and every day the newsroom would be filled with epic tales of the prior

night's debaucher.

But, getting back to the Stacy-Trent...One day a magician who billed himself as the "Great Silkini" came to town (he was playing the old RKO Capitol). Silkini's "schtick" was a coffin that he took from town to town; he claimed that he slept in it. The city editor at the time assigned a reporter and a photographer to do a story on the entertainer, and Silkini was so delighted by the publicity that he invited the local press to a party in his suite at the hotel. Doubtless Silkini came to regret that impetuous burst of generosity, because that night the staff of this newspaper descended on him like a swarm of locusts. The party raged on past dawn, but finally the liquor ran out, the host "retired" and the revelers drifted off.



That afternoon, as various members of the staff stumbled into the newsroom, ready to do battle with the day's events (as best they could, considering their condition), it became apparent that the city editor was among the missing. Someone called his

home – no answer. Now, aware that without the pilot the ship might founder, the staff became uneasy. Where was the city editor? Now we began to grope through our foggy memories of the night before in hopes someone would recall what happened to him.

Then it occurred to us that he might still be in Silkini's suite. I was deputized to return to the hotel and rouse him from his slumber – if, indeed he was in sweet repose. But when I got to Silkini's rooms there was no editor to be seen, only Silkini's coffin parked in a corner. With some trepidation I opened the coffin and there, contentedly sleeping away the night's revelry, he was. I did the only decent thing and closed the lid on him.

I never saw him again. For some reason or other he simply never returned to his job.

There are other touching memories of the Stacy-Trent as well (the occasional fistfights at political soirees, those deadly limp club sandwiches, the interminable, boring banquets), but nothing reaches the magnitude of that first one. And somewhere there is a wandering wrath of a newspaper editor who probably the same way about his last one.



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