

Historic Hotels!

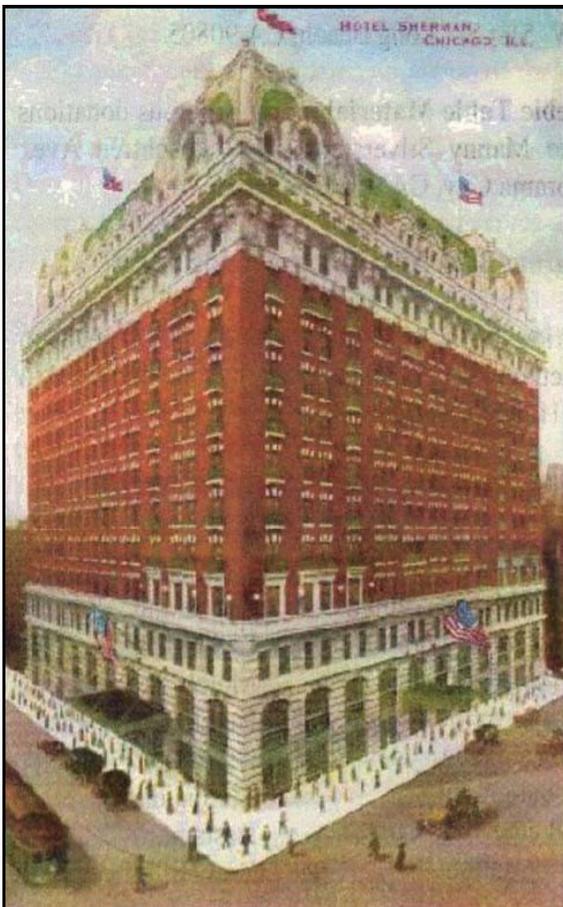
III: Chicago's *Hotel Sherman*

The Hotel Sherman was one of the city's premier hotels and a leading night-life venue during much of the early twentieth century. The hotel's origins, however, date back to 1837. In that year, Francis C. Sherman, a three-time mayor of Chicago and father of the legendary Civil War general, opened the City Hotel on the north side of Randolph Street between Clark and LaSalle. The hotel, renamed the Sherman House in 1844, measured a mere 18 by 84 feet.

The venerable Sherman House endured many changes over the years, not the least of which was the great fire of 1871, when the hotel burned to the ground alongside the rest of downtown. Quickly rebuilt, the new structure was larger and more elaborately decorated than its predecessor. By the turn of the century, however, the Sherman House began to lose its luster and popularity. Gradually, it gained the reputation as the "deadest hotel" in town.

Not until the hotel was acquired by entrepreneur Joseph Beifeld was its decline reversed. Beifeld, a Jewish Hungarian immigrant, dramatically improved the hotel's image with the help of first-class customer service and top-flight entertainment in the evenings. By 1904, the new and improved Hotel Sherman and its famed restaurant, the College Inn, were the talk of the town, frequented by celebrities and members of high society.

Hotel Sherman, c. 1915



Buoyed by the turnaround, Beifeld invested several million dollars in new construction at the hotel. In 1911, the main hotel structure was rebuilt, followed by an additional \$7 million, twenty-three-story expansion in 1925. By the end of the 1920s, the Hotel Sherman contained 1600 guest rooms, a banquet hall seating 2500, and stunning new marble lobby. Local newspapers reported that the new facilities made the Sherman the largest hotel west of New York City.

The Hotel Sherman remained one of Chicago's premier night spots through the 1910s and 1920s. The Hotel Sherman has since been demolished. Its site is now occupied by the Thompson Center, formerly known as the State of Illinois Center.

