

Historic Hotels!

XXVII: Detroit's Book-Cadillac Hotel

When E.M. Statler opened his new hotel at the foot of Washington Blvd. in 1915, the Book brothers (J.B., Herbert and Frank) were no doubt both pleased and jealous. They had a vision for Washington Blvd. that it would become the "5th Avenue of the West." The Books planned to accomplish this feat with the construction of a series of new buildings along the thoroughfare filled with fine offices and shops. The crown jewel would be a grand hotel to compete with the Statler. In 1917, the Books purchased the old Cadillac Hotel at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Washington Blvd. However, the First World War made materials for new construction hard to obtain. Thus, they had their architect, Alvin E. Harley, renovate the old Cadillac for \$60,000. It was a temporary fix. By 1923, the old hotel was gone and work had begun on the Book-Cadillac.

For the new project the Books hired their favorite architect Louis Kamper, who gave the lower five floors of the exterior a facing of stone. The ground floor which was given over entirely to shops had ornate metal storefronts. Above these were tall arched windows set between massive pilasters. The upper floors created a 'shaft' of simple brick occasionally relieved by a band of stone. Above a ornate cornice rose three copper terraces, giving the hotel a unique profile. No matter which angle you saw it from, the Book-Cadillac was a dramatic addition to the city's skyline. The interiors were equally impressive. The hotel featured five floors of grand public rooms and shops. Among the amenities were large lounges, three dining rooms, a coffee shop, three unique and functional ballrooms, and a tea room. They were the most richly decorated interiors found in any Detroit hotel.

All told, the Book-Cadillac was a massive construction project which required 2 years of planning. At 33 floors, it was both the tallest building in Detroit and the tallest hotel in the world. This no doubt being the reason that the top floor had a radio station, WCX. The hotel had a total of 1136 guest rooms. The total cost of construction exceeded \$14,000,000. By 1931, though, the hotel was forced into receivership and ultimately changed hands twice in only twenty years. successful. In 1951 the hotel was purchased by the Sheraton Corporation for \$6 million. In 1975 the hotel was sold to experienced hotel operator Herbert Weissberg and then underwent another renovation and became the Radisson-Cadillac. The Book-Cadillac joined the list of abandoned buildings...but who knows..?

