

Historic Hotels!

XLII: Roanoke's *Hotel Roanoke*

The Hotel Roanoke came into being in the early 1880s, when the little town of Big Lick found itself at the crossroads of two big railroads. The new Norfolk & Western Hotel Roanoke opened in late 1892, and the townsfolk flocked to see the elegant Queen Anne structure and to gawk at the porcelain bathtubs and the sweeping staircase. The hotel served as the cultural center of the area and became known throughout the world for its elegant style, good service, and good food. The new N & W passenger trains stopped near the front door. Many dignitaries have visited over the years.

A major remodeling was done in 1891. In July, 1898, a major portion of the hotel was lost in a fire, but by October it was back in business. Additions and renovations continued through the years until the major rebuilding program in 1937-38, which ran over a million dollars. There was the appearance of the grand Tudor entrance that everyone remembers. By 1947, it was completely air-conditioned. In 1955, 56 guest rooms were added onto the north wing, along with some other changes.

In the 1980s, Norfolk & Western became Norfolk Southern Corporation and moved its headquarters to Norfolk, leaving a lot of empty offices in Roanoke. The hotel fell on hard times and needed major repairs,

so it was closed in 1989 and donated to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University for conferences and continuing education. In a deal with the city of Roanoke, the city added a conference center to the hotel which would be operated by the hotel. A private non-profit community organization, "Renew Roanoke Foundation," was formed to raise the \$40.6 million for a renovation project. Hotel Roanoke is now back in operation, as elegant as ever, serving its famous peanut soup and continuing more than a century of tradition.

The former Norfolk & Western high-rise buildings are in full swing as the Higher Education Center, where you can obtain a degree in almost anything. The former N & W passenger station is back to its original splendor and is the O. Winston Link Museum, filled with thousands of railroading photographs. *[thanks to John Rowe, VA, for this info]*

