

## The Story of the Waldorf -Astoria

by Neal Hospers [reprinted]

William Waldorf Astor launched the original Waldorf Astoria (Fifth Avenue at 34th Street) in March, 1893. The original Waldorf merged with the adjacent Astoria soon after completion. It closed in 1929 and was torn down and replaced by the Empire State Building. The new Waldorf-Astoria (Park Avenue at 50th Street) opened in 1931. It was New York City's first skyscraper hotel and the largest hotel in the world when it opened (1,410 rooms, including 200 suites). Every president since Herbert Hoover has stayed there. Hoover and Eisenhower had long-term suites there. Other celebrities with long-term stays included Frank Sinatra, Cole Porter, General Douglas MacArthur, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. The staff had to be very careful with at least two sets of their guests to be sure that their paths didn't cross: Dwight Eisenhower and General MacArthur, and, later, the General and President Truman.

Cole Porter immortalized the hostelry in song. Remember "You're the top"? "You're a Waldorf Salad. You're the top. You're a Berlin Ballad..." etc. And then there was Oscar and the Waldorf, the noted Maitre d' who started at the original Waldorf on grand opening night and worked over 50 years for the famous hotel until he died in 1950. The great hotel's many famous venues include Peacock Alley, the Starlight Roof, the Sert Room, and the famous Empire Room. Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians brought in the New Year celebrations at the hotel. One hotel employee is "keeper of the flags" because so many foreign VIPs stay at the hotel, and each is properly saluted by his country's flag flying at the entrance when he arrives.

Some of the more distinctive of the many matchcovers produced by the Waldorf-Astoria over the years (over 35 in my collection alone) include: a Diamond Safety First and three Diamond Qualities.

