

# City Beat

*There are eight million stories in my albums. This is one of them...*

Lewellyn "Louis" Davenport came to Spokane Falls, Washington Territory, in the spring of 1889 at the age of 20. He had been a clerk in San Francisco and came up to Spokane to work the summer in his uncle's "Pride of Spokane Restaurant." The summer of 1889 was fateful for Spokane and for Louis Davenport. In August, a fire turned 32 square blocks of civilization to ashes. Young Davenport recognized his opportunity and leased a brick building on the North-east corner of Sprague Avenue and Post Street the next year. Business was so good, Davenport expanded into an adjoining building within a decade. He hired up-and-coming architect, Kirtland Cutter, to make the two buildings appear as one in 1904. This remodel added the finest ballroom in the West on the second floor, the Hall of the Doges.

The Davenport Hotel was neither Louis Davenport's idea nor was it built with his money, as it was leading businessmen who desired a large public house in which to board and entertain their guests. Their searches for the best men of architecture and hospitality ended with their first choices, Cutter and Davenport. Leveraging Davenport's already strong name, the Davenport Hotel Company was formed in 1912 and preparation of the site began that year. The hotel tower went up in eight months of 1913 using horse carts, steam jacks and hand tools. Not a single worker was seriously injured or killed—a rarity for the time. Cutter and Davenport shopped the world for ideas and furnishings for their new hotel. Cutter designed spaces inspired by the great architects of France, England and Spain. Davenport filled them with fine art and songbirds and prepared to seat his guests at tables dressed in the finest Irish linens from Liddell (whose linens sailed on the Titanic) and set with 15,000 pieces of silver (the largest private commission ever created by Reed and Barton). Ever since opening day, the hotel has promoted itself as "one of America's exceptional hotels."

Mr. Davenport sold his hotel in 1945, and died in his suite at the hotel in 1951; his wife Verus in 1967. Each successive owner through the second half of the 20th century took more than they gave to the property. The Davenport Hotel was closed in 1985 and demolition was considered, but the nightmare of airborne asbestos saved it from implosion. Dismantling and salvage was determined to be too expensive so the hotel remained closed for 15 years.

In March 2000, local entrepreneurs Walt & Karen Worthy purchased the entire city block for \$6.5 million, then spent the next two years of their lives—and \$38 million of their own money—to make The Davenport Hotel grand again. The hotel's public spaces and ballrooms were restored to what they would have looked like when they were new - it is real gold leaf around the fireplace. The hotel's guest floors were taken back to bare concrete and built anew with fresh wiring, plumbing, drywall, furniture and fixtures. The Hall of the Doges, Spokane's oldest and finest ballroom, was removed from the oldest part of the structure and re-installed in the new East addition. The removal was accomplished by lifting the ballroom out intact, making it the only flying ballroom in the world. The Davenport Hotel was re-established in September 2002 with the ringing of a ship's bell eight times signaling a change of the watch.

