

Benson Hotel

By William F. Willingham

The Benson Hotel, built in Portland by pioneer lumberman Simon Benson in 1913, was constructed as an annex to the adjacent Oregon Hotel to the south. It was originally called the New Oregon Hotel. Soon after it opened, however, it separated from the Oregon Hotel and became known as the Benson. The older hotel was demolished in 1959 to make way for a new addition.

Conceived as a high-end hotel in downtown Portland, the Benson was designed by architect A.E. Doyle, who modeled it after the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. Doyle's design used the elements of the Baroque Revival Style in a grand manner, sheathing the twelve-story building in red brick and cream-colored, glazed terra cotta. The massive mansard roof is covered in copper and green terra cotta and pierced with pediment dormers.

The interior also displayed an opulent touch. The lobby featured rare Circassian walnut woodwork from Russia, Italian marble floors, and Austrian crystal chandeliers. The ceiling was punctuated with ornate plaster designs of acanthus, rosettes, egg-and-dart, and other classical motifs. Noted lighting designer Fred Baker created the lighting fixtures for the interior. The Benson Hotel was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

The \$1 million, 200-room hotel boasted the latest in modern conveniences, including private baths, automatic door switches, electric lights, and telephones in each room. The hotel has been well maintained over the years, receiving a thorough rehabilitation in 1991. The Benson Hotel has always sought to attract a high-end clientele, which included show business celebrities, business leaders, politicians, and many U.S. presidents.

Simon Benson (1852-1942) gradually accumulated a fortune in the timber business, shipping large quantities of lumber to southern California to supply a building boom in the early years of the twentieth century. He sold his holdings in 1910, invested in real estate, and built the hotel that bears his name.

Sources

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