

CALIFORNIA
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2 History of Tent City *by Brittneydawn Cook*

16 Digital Concierge Service Interview *by Brittneydawn Cook*

18 The Producer's Pipeline Photo Album *by Gary F. Kurutz*

22 Tribute to Joe Nardone: Pony Express Historian *by Patricia Morris*

22 Tribute to Sibylle Zernitis *by Kathleen Correia*

FOUNDATION NOTES

23 Yosemite Farewell Book Review *by Gary F. Kurutz*

24 Recent Contributors

Front Cover: Hand-colored photograph, made in 1899 by the Detroit Photographic Company, displays the architectural beauty of the Hotel del Coronado created by James and Merritt Reid. Courtesy of the California State Library Collections.

Back Cover: P. 20: Workers are digging the trench for the Union Oil Company of California pipeline as they approach mountainous territory heading to the coast.

See article on pages 18-21.

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Tent City

A Canvas-Lined Paradise

by Brittneydawn Cook





Hotel Del Coronado's Early Years

In Southern California on the warm sandy shores of the Coronado peninsula off the coast of San Diego, awaits the Hotel del Coronado. The hotel, made famous by movies such as “Some Like it Hot” featuring Marilyn Monroe, was the place to be during the hot California summers of the 19th century. Even to this day it offers a restful retreat to those looking for a breath of salty air and an ocean breeze.

When built in 1888 the “The Del,” as some refer to it, hosted 399 rooms and stood as the second largest wooden structure in the United States (coming in second to the Tillamook Air Museum in Oregon). The Del was the brainchild of Hampton L. Story and Elisha Babcock Jr. who dreamt of creating a high-caliber resort that would be the “talk of the western world.” In 1885, the two retired businessmen purchased approximately 4000 acres of the San Diego peninsula south of North Island and began work on their seaside gem. By January 1887, Story and Babcock Jr. had teamed up with architect James Reid of Reid Brothers architectural firm and were beginning to break ground on the construction of what would become the Hotel del Coronado. The process of creating the dream resort cost over one million dollars and took 11 months and two thousand laborers working full time. However, by the end of construction the world was talking and looking towards the west.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the film “Some Like it Hot” the Hotel del Coronado is located in Florida and acts as the Seminole-Ritz Hotel but is acknowledged as the Hotel del Coronado of Coronado (San Diego), California in the film’s credits.



Photograph, made in 1890, of the Hotel del Coronado, taken by James William Reid shows off the conical and gable roof of the multi-story Victorian masterpiece. In the foreground the railroad tracks from the original Coronado Beach Railroad Company are visible. Courtesy of the California State Library.



The hotel was draped in grandeur which not only gave it the reputation of being the “unrivaled Queen of seaside resorts,” but also what kept visitors from all over the world coming back for over 130 years.

Completion of the Hotel del Coronado

Once completed, Story and Babcock hosted a party for over a thousand people in order to boast of the hotel’s architectural beauty and many technological innovations. The Del was equipped with many immaculate features and amenities such as indoor plumbing, electric lighting, oil-heated furnaces as well as a billiards room, bowling alley, private parlors, and exotic gardens. The hotel was draped in grandeur which not only gave it the reputation of being the “unrivaled Queen of seaside resorts,” but also what kept visitors from all over the world coming back for over 130 years.

However, the “Queen” came with a

price and when the Southern California real estate market collapsed in the 1890s, Story and Babcock Jr. were forced to sell the property, and it landed in the hands of John D. Spreckels. For years before the purchase, Spreckels provided small loans to Story and Babcock Jr. to assist in keeping the hotel afloat. When Spreckels purchased the property and took over the management there were huge considerations due to the state of the economy and the dilemma of affordability versus luxury. Whereas the opulence of the Hotel Del created a mecca for western vacations, not all travelers could pay the going rate for such accommodations, and Spreckels set out on a path to change that.

Reid Brothers Architecture

Canadian brothers, James W. Reid and Merritt J. Reid began the Reid Brothers architectural and engineering firm in Evansville, Indiana around 1880. The Reid brothers started their careers in architecture at the firm of Boyd and Brickley. They worked for Boyd and Brickley for a few years before purchasing the firm's contracts in 1879 to branch out on their own. Their early years were spent establishing a reputation for themselves with buildings such as the Willard Library, a gorgeous Victorian gothic, located in Evansville, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Most of the early Reid brothers' architectural work took place in and around Evansville or was commissioned for the Terre Haute Railroad. Earlier examples of their architecture are also listed on the NRHP, The McCoy Library and the Cloud State Bank Building, both located in McLeansboro, Illinois. In 1886, for reasons that can only be speculated on, James Reid headed out west with his younger brother Watson E. Reid. Some sources state the Reid Brothers architectural firm was invited by Hotel Del masterminds Hampton L. Story and Elisha Babcock Jr.. However, other sources indicate the two Reids headed to San Diego to start up an architectural firm on the southern California coast. Given the coinciding timelines of the Hotel del Coronado and the arrival of the Reid brothers in 1886, either speculation is possible. Once in California, the firm was an instant sensation, knocking it out of the park on the architectural design and integrity of The Del. In 1889, both James and Merritt were awarded the prestigious honor of becoming Fellows of the American Institute for Architects. That same year, Merritt Reid headed to San Francisco to open up another office, with James following not too far behind,



while the youngest Reid, Watson, stayed behind to manage the San Diego office. One of the Reids' San Francisco firm's first big jobs was for Portland's *The Oregonian* newspaper and it stood as the first steel-frame building on the West Coast, as well as the tallest on the Portland, Oregon skyline until 1911. Unfortunately, this timeless building with its landmark clock tower, came crashing down, demolished in 1950 after sitting vacant for more than a year.

The Reid Brothers would set more records as their careers continued. In 1895, John D. Spreckels and his father Claus Spreckels, commissioned the firm to build a home for their growing newspaper known as *The San Francisco Call*. This new home for *The San Francisco Call* couldn't be just any home, the Spreckels' wanted a glorious building, one that didn't just compete with the Chronicle Building on the San Francisco city skyline but one to create a shadow for it to live in. James & Merritt

went to work and by the end the building stood 315 feet tall, 15 stories of granite and white marble, all topped with the crown, an ornate baroque dome, and would become the offices for Reid & Reid architecture. It was the tallest building on the West Coast, and after being rattled and burned in the 1906 earthquake, still stands, slightly shorter after the 1938 remodel (298ft.), but ready to greet all passers-by with its mosaic tiled entryways. The Reid & Reid architecture firm embellished California with some of its most treasured buildings and lasted until 1932, when Merritt Reid passed away. James Reid immediately retired and focused on his hobbies, including music and art. During his time working in the architectural firm, he also devoted time as one of the founding members of the San Francisco Opera House. He died in September of 1943 in his apartment building in San Francisco, which he and his brother designed in 1929.