

# From the First Omaha Family Hotel to the Latest, a Big Change

It's a far cry from the first family hotel in Omaha to the Blackstone—the latest one.

The first family hotel in this city was the St. Nicholas. They called it "family" because everybody, guests and all, slept in the same room in bad weather. In good weather the men folks all went outside and slept under the wagons or wrapped in their blankets, with nothing over them but the sky.

When that hotel, the St. Nicholas, was completed, all guests came in a wagon or on horseback. They couldn't take a train because there was no railroad closer than the Mississippi river. They couldn't take a trolley car because they had not been invented. They couldn't walk from the nearest town because there wasn't any nearest town; they were all far away.

The St. Nicholas could be picked up, bodily, house, chimney and all, and put over in one corner of the Blackstone's office. In fact, the St. Nicholas could be placed in the writing room at the Blackstone and there would be sufficient room left on all sides for a procession of those who used to live at the earlier hotel to pass round and round the ancient building.

The St. Nicholas stood at Twelfth and Jackson streets. It was Omaha's first hotel. It was built of cottonwood logs, cut on the site of the building and its one room was just sixteen by eighteen feet.

### A Difference in Frame.

All the building material used in the St. Nicholas would scarcely build a single room of the modern Blackstone. The Blackstone has \$27,000 worth of steel in its frame. The old St. Nicholas didn't have any frame at all. A few dollars' worth of nails was all the iron used in the frontier hotel. Iron was so scarce in Omaha in those days that the hinges on the door were made of wood instead of metal.

As a fact there was but one door in the first family hotel in Omaha. There were no partitions in the building and consequently, there was no use for but a single door. And that door was made of "punchoons"—slabs cut out of logs, not sawed. It was too far to a saw mill to get hold of sufficient planking out of which to make a door. So the builders of the St. Nicholas spent a day or two in cutting out thick punchoons for the door. Now the Blackstone has so many doors that the little old hotel at Twelfth and Jackson would be too small to hold them if they were taken from their polished brass and nickel hinges and nicely stacked up within the building.

### As To Windows.

There was a window in the St. Nicholas—and the Indians used to come 100 miles to see the wonder. They couldn't fathom the substance which could be seen through like spring water but which they could not stick their fingers into.

The Blackstone has more glass in just one basement window than the St. Nicholas had, all told.

It was about 1853 that the St. Nicholas was thrown open to the public. The building belonged to the Nebraska & Council Bluffs Ferry Co. and was operated by "Uncle" Billy Snowden.

They did some fast building in those days, despite the fact that Omaha was so far from the edge of civilization. The St. Nicholas was built and ready for the public within less than one week from the time its first sill was laid. The Blackstone has been build-



Neck in Blackstone Lobby. The Painting in the Picture is "The Head of Loch Katrine," by Charles Stuart.

St. Nicholas bedding was somewhat different. The "ticks" were filled with sweet-scented hay. If there were any sheets, that fact has been forgotten, now. The bedstead was homemade. It was in one corner of the room where it would not be in the way of the cook, the waiter, the diners or the dancers.

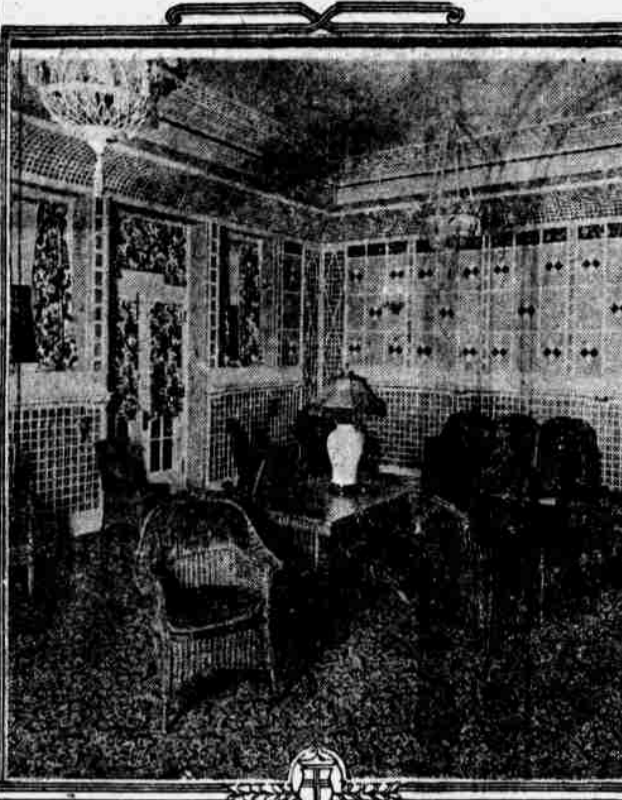
They sometimes had a dance at the St. Nicholas. It was not of the cabaret kind, either. Just plain dance. The music was made by an old fiddler. The dancing was done on the floor of the one room and the furniture must be moved back against the wall.

Now, when they go to have a dance in the Blackstone hotel, the proposition is an entirely different one. There are two or three dancing rooms and if the crowd of dancers is large enough they adjourn to the big banquet and dancing hall on the eighth floor. The orchestra balcony of this room is larger than the whole of St. Nicholas hotel.

When a guest of the St. Nicholas hotel wanted to wash his face, he got the tin washpan, filled it with water from the bucket and went to it. If he wanted a bath, he went down to the Missouri river and got it. If it was winter time, he didn't want a bath.

They do things differently at the modern Blackstone. Every apartment has an enamel lavatory with hot and cold water all the year. And the tiled bathtubs are things of beauty and convenience.

After dinner, at the St. Nicholas family hotel, the guests went outside, lighted their pipes and leaning back in home-made split-bottom chairs smoked until time to go to bed. The one little candle afforded by the hotel people did not even turn the night into twilight, much less into the brilliant sunshine of the flaming arc or the soft light of the indirect incandescent globes. There were no newspapers nor magazines similar to those furnished the guests of the Blackstone; there was no house library. Instead of the music of the house orchestra, there was the evening song of the coyote from the hills as the light faded



A Corner of One of the Blackstone Party Rooms on the Eighth Floor.

in the west and the stars came out.

After that, there was nothing to do but to retire. The guests had to go to bed in self-defense. There was nothing else to do. In those days, in Omaha, the night was made to sleep

in. Guests of the St. Nicholas family hotel could not run out to one of the clubs, go to the movies, go up to the music room, the lounging room, the billiard room, the roof garden, or the many other places provided by the

Blackstone for the entertainment and pleasure of its guests.

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## HOW THE DIFFERENT FLOORS WERE PLANNED FOR FAMILY USE

(Continued from Page Two.)

In Omaha—or the west. The roof has the arch effect. At the north end is a small nook of a roof garden; at the south end, the orchestral balcony. The small lounging room is only 19x22 feet, but the larger lounge is 47x22 feet. Each of them has an open fireplace and mantel.

At the south end is the party room 22x24 feet, where the ladies may hold their receptions.

There's a soda fountain up here—and a refectory, where light lunches, pastries and confections may be secured. A service kitchen is one of the equipments of the top floor.

And the basement; you must see the basement before you leave the building, where they make cold air, cold water, ice, etc. See the big refrigeration rooms with their milk, cream, fruits, meats, etc. See the linen rooms, the laundry, the paint shop, the carpenter shop, the storage rooms for the residents of the building, the fifteen rooms for the servants, the servants' dining room, kitchen and recreation rooms. See the big baking rooms, the pastry rooms, the great oven. There is a billiard room with three tables and a barber shop.

The heating plant is in an entirely separate building where none of the heat, smoke or dust can interfere with the pleasure and comfort of the residents of the hotel.

When Solomon said "There is nothing new under the sun," he had not seen the plans and specifications of the Blackstone. For the Blackstone is new. There is nothing like it.

ing just about eighteen months. But the Blackstone is somewhat more elaborate than was Omaha's "finest" and "only" in those days.

The St. Nicholas didn't have a kitchen stove. All the cooking in the establishment was done over the coals in the fireplace. That's the way they cooked the bear meat, the antelope, the venison, and the buffalo hump. They had two or three pots and kettles, a big coffee pot and a frying pan that was sometimes used as a wash basin if the little one-room hotel happened to be crowded. And it didn't take many guests to crowd it, either.

Imagine the chef at the Blackstone planning his dinner with nothing but the utensils of the St. Nicholas in which to prepare it.

The management of the Blackstone takes a pride in the equipment of its kitchens. Why, there's a single stove in the new hotel which would reach from end to end of the St. Nicholas and still there would be many feet sticking out the window. If the St. Nicholas cook had to prepare a meal for a dozen, there was grumbling and, sometimes, actual fighting. Anyway, it was an all-day's job. But imagine the Blackstone serving dinner to twelve people—when there is room in one banquet hall for 350. And that is only one of the five or six dining rooms in the building.

### No Menu Card.

It is impossible to secure a menu of the St. Nicholas. They didn't have things of that kind in Omaha in those days. You ate that which was placed before you. And usually you were hungry enough to eat it all, too. Of course you could have two or three pieces of venison, but you couldn't get a beefsteak for love or money. They didn't have such things in those days.

Baked potatoes—baked in the ashes—corn pone, black coffee sweetened with New Orleans sugar, and an abundance of wild meat. That was the usual menu of the St. Nicholas dining room. Just compare that with a menu from the Blackstone's dining room. But it would take an expert, the head chef of the Blackstone, for instance, to explain the difference. So don't try to compare them. Get the chef to explain to you.

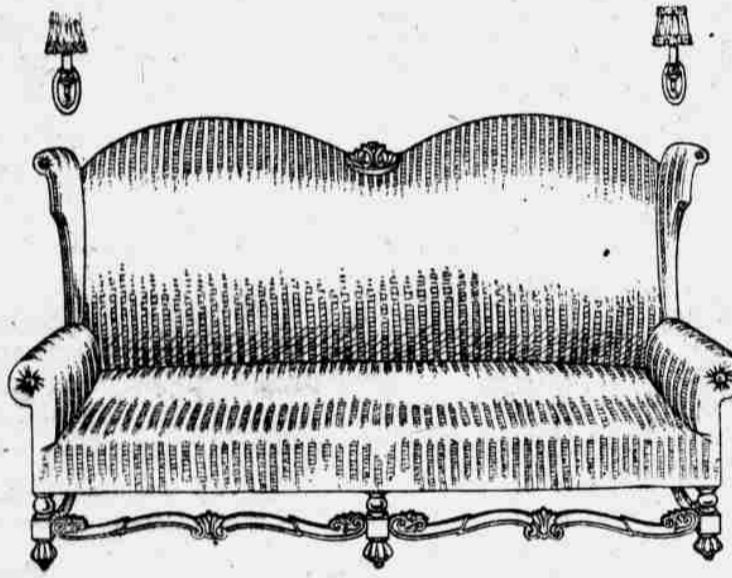
And the dishes. They had a set of tin plates and also a set of "iron stone" china at the St. Nicholas. There were some tin cups and some iron stone cups. The china was used on special occasions, but not often. It cost almost its weight in gold to freight china out to the new country. And there was too much danger of breaking a piece, even though the ware was a quarter of an inch in thickness.

What would be the result if the ghost of the old cook at the St. Nicholas should get into the modern Blackstone and place the ancient "china" on the tables in place of the elaborate table ware which is used in the modern first-class family hotel? There would probably be a riot.

And the beds. There were two in the one room of the St. Nicholas hotel. One fitted under the other and during the day time was pushed beneath it. They called it a "trundle" bed, because it could be trundled underneath the other one and gotten out of sight. It was the original disappearing bed of the trans-Missouri region.

### Hundreds of Beds.

The Blackstone has hundreds of beds, most of them of the disappearing kind, yet others are regular mahogany beds of the latest models. Blackstone mattresses, springs and bedding are of the very latest sanitary sort.



One of the Corridor Davenport in the New Blackstone.

**WITH** the opening of Omaha's newest hotel, the Blackstone, another name is added to the long list of public buildings that have been furnished and decorated throughout by the Orchard & Wilhelm Co.

In its splendid lobby, in its beautiful dining room, in its luxurious lounging rooms, in its corridors and its many perfectly appointed suites is seen the completeness of the work of the artists and the artisans comprising the corps of decorators that are a part of the Orchard & Wilhelm organization.

The task of furnishing a hostelry of the magnitude of the Blackstone is not merely one of selecting harmonious carpetings, hangings, furniture and wall coverings. It is of utmost importance that the expenditure be confined to a sum that will not jeopardize the possibility of profitable returns on the total investment. And more, the character of the furnishings must be such as to demand only a reasonable outlay for future replenishment.

Such are the problems in the furnishing and the decoration of buildings like the Blackstone, the Scottish Rite Cathedral, the University Club, the Fontenelle and many others.

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