

THE DURANT

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As Flint blossomed as an automotive boomtown in the early Twentieth Century, civic leaders desperately wanted a new hotel. It was reported

that the current hotels of the day were turning guests away due to the sold out occupancy rate. In December of 1916 the Citizens Hotel Company, lead by Fred Aldrich, long time associate of Dallas Dort and William Durant, was organized by 40 stockholders, which included C.S. Mott and Arthur G. Bishop, for the purpose of building a new hotel on Second Ave . The name of the new hotel was unveiled at a civic dinner in honor of Wm. C. Durant, then President of General Motors. He immediately pledged \$300,000 toward the project.

The hotel was supposed to have been rushed to completion within a year for a cost of \$650,000. Instead it took three years and cost \$2.5 million. World War I was one of the biggest reasons for the delay. A disagreement over who would run the hotel also delayed the opening. An agreement was finally signed with the United Hotels Company.

The 264 room hotel opened on December 14, 1920 with Governor Albert E. Sleeper being the first registered guest followed by the distributors of the Dort Motor Car Company where Fred Aldrich was an officer of the company.



A Grand Opening was held on News Years Eve complete with dedication speeches and dancing. Over 500 of Flint's finest were included in the affair. The hotel was a hit and was consistently filled to capacity with businessmen, social gatherings, and meetings for the local auto manufacturing plants. Business was so good that an addition was added to the rear of the building which included more rooms and a new ball room and service area. An eight room suite on the sixth floor was named the Durant Suite in honor of Billy Durant. This space later became home of the Flint City Club.

The first floor of the hotel offered a complete shopping district in itself. It was complete with a jewelry store, florist shop, fur shop, hat store, men's store, lingerie shop, shoe store, appliance store and a branch of the Genesee County Savings Bank.



Two popular areas of the hotel were the Purple Cow Restaurant located on the Saginaw Street side of the hotel that featured murals of a purple cow telling a story of the people who ate at the restaurant. The Wheel Room was a very art deco lounge where the glass tables were made to look like steering wheels from a car, and the back bar was emblazoned with the Chevrolet logo.



Entertainers coming to perform at the nearby IMA Auditorium and visiting politicians would stay at the Durant. Entertainers Frank Sinatra, Glenn Miller, and Doris Day are among the many that stayed at the hotel. The hotel became a center piece in the UAW Sit-down strike in 1936-1937 when Governor Frank Murphy came to Flint and used the Durant as his headquarters to negotiate the end of the violence in Flint.



The Durant began experiencing problems in 1939 when guest numbers slowed even though the hotel had been completely refurbished a few years earlier. Economic times were tough and the hotel mortgage was foreclosed on and put up for auction. Metropolitan Life Insurance purchased the hotel in 1940. A year later the hotel was in default again.



A new management contract was signed with the Albert Pick Hotels Corporation in Chicago. In June of 1942, the Pick Hotel Corporation took full ownership of the hotel, renaming it the Pick Durant Hotel. The next twenty years would be good for the hotel as it was heavily used by the local General Motors plants for meetings.

The ball room was heavily damaged by fire in 1960, a week before a major Buick Sales Convention was to be held. Contractors were able to completely refurbish the room complete with new floors, ceilings, and light fixtures in time for the convention. By 1968 there were several proposals to sell the hotel. Speculation was ended in 1969 when the Pick Corporation announced new remodeling plans. Rooms were made larger to create hospitality rooms and large twin bed rooms. Each room was given controls for heat and air conditioning.



Every room received a color television. A driveway entrance was added to the rear of the building with a direct connection to the lobby. The Royal Scot Grill served lunch and dinner on the first floor, the Candlelight room, the original ballroom, became a private banquet and meeting room.

The hotel closed in 1973. Numerous developers since then contemplated redevelopment but were never successful in their attempts. The Genesee County Landbank acquired the building in 2005.

Photos & history courtesy of Kettering University Archives