



HOTEL  
ST. FRANCIS

## History of Hotel St. Francis

The old De Vargas Hotel's demise was almost as famous as its guest list and probably a lot more mysterious. On a cold winter evening in January 1922 the De Vargas burned completely to the ground leaving only the brick chimney to mark the location. Like "the city different" this fire was also mysterious. It was the biggest fire in Santa Fe in 300 years. There were no high winds to keep the blast alive and the 6-hour fire was across the street from the "then" fire department. So unpredictable was the hotel's destruction that guests were "checking into" their favorite rooms while the hotel burned. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but the beautiful wooden Victorian hotel was lost. The mysterious explosion heard by the owner, William Sargent, was rumored to be a copper still in the basement. One of the hotel's permanent guests frustrated with prohibitions was experimenting with peach brandy. It seems, according to the rumor, a peach clogged the copper pipe and the "booze blew up". The spectators called the fire "the darndest show ever."

With the insurance money William "Bill" Sargent (former Mayor of Santa Fe 1914-1918) rebuilt the beloved hotel in a new location on Don Gaspar Avenue. The new De Vargas Hotel joined a 2 story 1888 building on the north side with a new three story building on the south. The style was reminiscent of the early California Mission Revival with a hint of European elegance. This time however, Sargent built the hotel with brick. He had apparently had his fill of fires.

The new hotel opened its doors in 1924 as a first class hotel with a spacious lobby where men wore top hats and ladies wore full-length dresses. The bellhops escorted the guests to their rooms. That is, after they had shown their marriage license, and the house detective ensured that all guests stayed in their own rooms. The hotel boasted a wonderful dining room and a bar run by Ben Jaffa who kept the large blackboard where he posted information such as the election and World Series results. The hotel was "The Hotel" in the capital, so the bar served as the unofficial meeting room for the local politicians. According to a Santa Fean of the era, anyone wanting to meet almost any high-level politician in the 1930's and 40's could probably find him at the De Vargas Hotel Bar. At one time or another almost all of New Mexico's governors were seen at the bar at the De Vargas. After World War II the De Vargas Hotel seemed to lose its splendor.

In 1947 the hotel was sold to Pat Vigil and David Armijo. Celina Vigil who ran the hotel with her husband until his death said that politicians continued to stay at the hotel through the 1950's, but in the 1960's these politicians deserted the De Vargas opting for more modern establishments. Motels were gaining in popularity due to the convenience of allowing guests to park their cars near their rooms. In the 1950's the city of Santa Fe required hotels to have designated parking so to comply with the ruling, the Vigil family purchased and demolished the Methodist Church next door. Pat Vigil died in 1981. Until the restoration in 1984 the De Vargas hotel remained the working-man's hotel. It was described as "basic: a bed and a sink and a bathroom down the hall. There is maid service, but that's it. "Basic needs were met so the guests were warm, dry and safe."

Patricia and Goodwin Taylor, residents of Virginia purchased and remodeled the hotel and reopened it as the Hotel St. Francis in 1986. Mr. Taylor was an engineer and part time real estate investor. His interest in the property was due to his college relationship with a member of the Vigil family. Mr. Taylor secured an 80 year lease and commenced refurbishment and modernization of the hotel. George Pearl an influential architect with Stevens Mallory Pearl and Campbell was the architect for the project. The old DeVargas hotel had 98 guestrooms but to create private bathrooms that were lacking in the original hotel, the guestroom count was

reduced. A new restaurant and bar replaced the original barber and beauty shops. The interior was decorated primarily by Patricia Taylor in what is customarily known as Victorian style, often using furnishings acquired through estate and garage sales in her native Virginia. Under the initial oversight of Michael Cerletti, the hotel property manager, the property regained its prominence. The Taylor's continued to oversee the property from Virginia and their sons Kirk and Hunter took an active interest in the day-to-day oversight of the property. In 2008 the family decided to sell the hotel and directly contacted Heritage Hotels and Resorts due to the company's long time involvement in cultural hospitality projects.

Heritage Hotels and Resorts acquired the leasehold interest from the Taylor's in 2008 and fully renovated the hotel in 2009. Heritage Hotels opted to create a new experience for the hotel finding its inspiration from the patron saint of Santa Fe, St. Francis of Assisi. In 1610 when Don Pedro de Peralta founded the city of Santa Fe under the direction of the Viceroy of Spain, he gave it an official name – La Villa Real de la Santa Fe de San Francisco de Asis, or The Royal City of the Holy Faith of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis himself was a wealthy nobleman raised in privilege, who chose to give up this life to follow the teachings of Christ. In 1209 he founded the Franciscan Order. The Franciscan Order provided for a simple existence. Today, the St. Francis annual feast day falls on October 4<sup>th</sup> and it is on this day that the priests of the cathedral will take time to bless animals. For, in addition to his other deeds as a man of faith, St Francis is strongly associated as being the patron saint of animals. The Franciscan missionaries were significantly involved in the settlement of Santa Fe and New Mexico, bringing their religious, architectural, agriculture, artistic, culinary, and other traditions to the region.

The new Hotel St. Francis has undergone another major transformation. Spectacular changes allow guests to experience an even more historical and authentic cultural experiences. The hotel is designed in a style where peace and tranquility are the key design elements. Here, utter simplicity is an exacting art. The 81 guestrooms reflect this simple pared down beauty. Colors are the natural shades of wool from the churro sheep brought to New Mexico by early Spanish settlers. Guestrooms are furnished with hand-crafted furniture created by Santa Fe artisans. Many guestrooms now have the original hardwood floors exposed. At Tabla de Los Santos, the hotels beautiful three meal restaurant, guests enjoy food based upon local traditions and incorporating the freshest ingredients available from the local farmer's market. At Secreto, the hotel guest bar, guests experience the wine making traditions of the Franciscan missionaries. The seasonal patio and loggia provide a great vantage point to enjoy the exciting Santa Fe street scene.