

Chicago’s Palmer Hotel rich with elegance, history and in debt at \$338 million

By Ed Breen

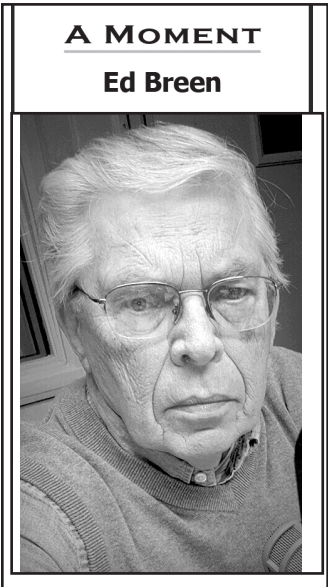
If you are a Midwesterner — and we all are, aren’t we? — Chicago is our Land of Oz, the place to which we went when we were very young and the place to which we like to return when we are very old because it draws us back to those days when we sought something more alive than what we had in Indiana or Minnesota or Iowa or Wisconsin.

“City of the Big Shoulders” Carl Sandburg told us it was. He had come there from Galesburg out on the Illinois prairie. Nelson Algren was there and Studs Terkel and Saul Bellow and so many others.

Eventually, if there was work and we made some dollars, we found ourselves a couple of blocks west of the Magnificent Mile, just off Michigan Avenue, maybe a mile from Lake Michigan. We were there at the corner of Monroe and State streets. Sinatra called it “State Street that Great Street,” when he sang of Chicago as “my kind of town.”

And on the southwest corner of that intersection, a grand place, the Palmer House Hotel, soaring 21 floors into the Chicago sky, dwarfed by the surrounding skyscrapers, but impressive, stately nonetheless.

Exactly what it looks like depends on your genera-



tion. The current iteration is the third on the corner since the first was built in 1871 by Potter Palmer as a wedding gift for his bride Bertha.

It opened during this very week in September 149 years ago and burned to the ground 13 days later when the Great Chicago Fire incinerated all but the Water Tower in downtown Chicago. Palmer, a man whose wealth was matched only by his will, rebuilt immediately and rebuilt it as one of the finest and fanciest hotels in the world of the late 19th century.

It was seven stories. Oversized rooms, luxurious decor and elegant meals served in the grandest style. The floor of its barbershop was tiled and silver dollars were embedded in a diamond pattern. Built of iron and brick, the



The Palmer Hotel, Chicago, Illinois.

Palmer, as it was known, was advertised as, “The World’s Only Fire Proof Hotel.”

Times and tastes change and Chicago became a world-class city. In 1925 the current version of the Palmer House was unveiled and for 95 years it prevailed as the definition of elegance. Rooms, amenities, appearances, everything. One-thousand-six-hundred-thirty-nine rooms.

It endured Prohibition and gangsters and the Depression and Capone and World War II and the Jazz Age and the Swing Era and Rock ‘n Roll. The Hippies and Yuppies and Mayor Richard J. Daley’s cops clashed out front in ’68. Why, back in 1879 one of the government hearings to sort out what happened to

George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn had been held right there in a room at State and Monroe streets. It endured all until the spring and summer of 2020 and the age of COVID.

It closed in March. The doors are locked. The debt is \$338 million. The tourists are gone and it will be a long time before the conventioners come back to the city.

Inside remains elegant, if a little dusty. The lobby, its chandeliers, its furnishings, its frescoed ceiling, its statuary, all there. Silent, motionless, unalive.

At the northeast corner and up a few steps from that great expanse of elegance are the double doors of the Empire Room, the finest dining room any of us Midwesterners had ever

walked into. Nothing like it even in Des Moines or Minneapolis or Omaha or Indianapolis or Kansas City, the big towns of our youth. The kind of place we brought our brides back then. I did. And I recall that on that first night of married life back in the winter of ’65, two dinners, two drinks and a concert by Tony Bennett cost a princely \$47.50. Some of us had cars in those days which hadn’t cost much more than that.

Celebrities dined there and celebrities performed there. Presidents had been in and out going back to Garfield. The shape of the Big Ten athletic conference was drawn at one of those tables 125 years ago.

Among those who signed the guest register were Garfield and Grover Cleve-

land and Ulysses S. Grant and William Jennings Bryan and Mark Twain. If you were somebody you had stayed at the Palmer House. If you weren’t, you were, by god, going to find a way to do that someday. Some of us did.

And the entertainers in the Empire Room! If only the sound could be squeezed from the walls and rung from the draperies.

Sinatra, of course. And Tony Bennett. And Judy Garland. Nat King Cole and Lena Horne. Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte, Bobbie Darin, Lou Rawls, Frankie Laine. Name a favorite and he, she or they were there, on that floor against the east wall of the Empire Room nestled inside the Palmer House.

Maybe it can be saved. Maybe not. Sure would be a shame to lose it. We just have to wait and see.

CORRECTION

James Dean Days, recently reported as being canceled, is still on.

The James Dean Run car show is scheduled for September 25-27, as normal.

Due to construction in Fairmount, the Downtown Festival and Parade have been cancelled for 2020.

Obituary

Kathryn “Kathy” J. Luzadder, 69

Kathryn “Kathy” J. Luzadder, 69, Marion, was surrounded by her loving family when she went home to be with Jesus at 11:27 am on Thursday, September 10, 2020. Born in Marion on Tuesday, May 15, 1951, Kathy was the daughter of Jasper “Bud” Henry and Althea Louise (Graham) Miller. On February 19, 1973, she married the love of her life, Tommy Neil Luzadder, and he survives.

Kathy graduated from Marion High School in 1969 and Sam Nabier Beauty School. She worked at VA Northern Indiana Health Care System in Marion, where she was a medical clerk for 13 years. She also worked at Lakeview Christian School for 17 years as the Food Service Director. Kathy always loved to dance and, therefore, opened up her own dance studio called Stars of the Future Dance Com-



pany. She was also a dance instructor at Playhouse Studio Dance, majoring in tap dance. She was a member of the Holy Women of the Marion Easter Pageant, Founder of Let My Light Shine, and President of Koinonia Red Hatter’s Group. Kathy loved playing Euchre and was instrumental in starting a Euchre club in her own home. The group became so large that it eventually moved to York House, where there

were at one time 40 players.

Kathy had a genuine heart for Veterans, and she was very dedicated and compassionate to them. Everyone always enjoyed coming to see her. Kathy also had a true servant’s heart. She did a lot of catering and enjoyed the fellowship it brought with her church at Sunnycrest Baptist, where she was a member. Her famous quote was: “If you see anything that needs done, do it yourself and don’t ask anyone else to do it.” The greatest of all things in life, though, was Kathy’s love for the Lord. She truly lived life to the fullest and believed that she had a “Win-Win”! She would either get well or be home with her Lord.

Loved ones to cherish her memory include her husband, Tommy Neil Luzadder of Marion; sons, Gary (Gladys) Luzadder of Bristol, TN, Mark (Julie)

Luzadder of Tampa, FL, and Brad (Angie) Luzadder of Marion; sister, Teal (Dennis) Royer of Fishers; grandsons, Garrett Luzadder, Riley Marshall, and Hunter Edward J. Luzadder; nephews, Chad Royer of Noblesville and Craig Royer of Fort Wayne; adoptive son, Tim (Tiffany) Gallant; adoptive grandson, Jonathan Gallant; and adoptive granddaughter, Katie Gallant.

Preceding her in death were her parents and her daughter, Pamela Luzadder.

At Kathy’s request, there will be no public visitation or funeral service.

Arrangements are entrusted to Integrity Funeral Care, 2901 S. Washington St., Marion, IN.

Memorial contributions may be directed to Let My Light Shine, PO Box 1413, Marion, IN 46952.

Memories may be shared online at www.ifccares.com.

Weekly Schedule

September 17-24

Thursday, September 17

9 am – 38 Exhibit, Indiana Wesleyan University, 4201 S. Washington St., Marion. Hosted by IWU’s 1920 Gallery in the Barnes Student Center, the gallery walls will be covered with art created by Marion resident Tashema Davis.

10 am – Quilters Hall of Fame Exhibit, Quilters Hall of Fame, 926 S. Washington Street, Marion. Jack Edson: Portraits and Patterns Exhibit. Many of Jack’s quilts are based on images and portraits from Art History but are carried through in the traditions of the art of quilting. Admission \$4, \$3 for seniors and students, and free for children under 6 years of age. Exhibit open Tuesday – Saturday. In order to protect everyone, we will be taking appointments to view the quilts so there will

not be multiple groups in the museum at once and we will be requiring masks. Between groups, we will sanitize all frequently touched surfaces. Call 765-664-9333 or email us at admin@quiltershalloffame.net to arrange your appointment.

4 pm – Wonderspace Week of Play, Matter Park, Marion. Join us at Matter Park to play in the Imagination Playground! Our big blue building blocks will be featured every day. Registration is required so that we can safely limit the event to 100 people per hour and properly clean the blocks. Tickets are free and just ensure that there will be enough space for you to join us. Wed -Fri come plan from 4pm-7pm. Saturday features kid races 9am-11am, geocache

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