

The Neil House Hotel

Before the days of Hiltons, Hyatts and Holiday Inns, there was but one major downtown hotel where visiting celebrities and conventioners slept in Columbus, Ohio – the Neil House. For almost 140 years the Neil House occupied prime real estate on High Street across from the Statehouse.

The Neil House started out in the 1820s as a tavern along Columbus’s busy main artery and stagecoach line. Over the years it grew into a 600-room hotel. Charles Dickens spent the night at the newly renovated Neil House in April 1842 on his way from Cincinnati to Cleveland. Dickens wrote favorably about the hotel referring to the “excellent apartments in a very large, unfinished hotel called the Neil House, which were richly fitted with the polished wood of the black walnut.” During his overnight stay, Dickens conducted his customary drawing room visits and hundreds of Columbusites came to meet and greet him.

Located so close to the Statehouse, it is not surprising that the Neil House was a meeting place for many politicians. At least fifteen presidents stayed in the hotel over the years, beginning with Andrew Jackson. William McKinley even resided at the hotel while he was Ohio’s governor. Eleanor Roosevelt occupied the presidential suite in 1934 when she was here to speak at an educational conference. The suite was furnished with almonds, chocolates and flowers, including her favorite yellow roses.

In 1928, Amelia Earhart was in town to help raise money for the Columbus Community Fund campaign. She too stayed at the Neil House and was the guest of honor at the Aero Club dinner held there. Other celebrity guests include singer Jenny Lind, journalist and politician Horace Greeley, U. S. army officer Winfield Scott, U. S. Supreme Court Judge Salmon P. Chase, and lawyer and statesman Daniel Webster.

By the late 1970s, Columbus was entering an era of downtown re-development. The Capitol Square project was getting underway, which included the Columbus City Center. The Ohio Center convention facility opened in 1980 along with a Hyatt Regency hotel. At that time, the Neil House was considered obsolete and was torn down to make room for the expanded Huntington Bank Building.

SOURCES:

Columbus Citizen Journal, August 22, 1958

Columbus Dispatch, September 18, 1938; April 6, 1934 and July 22, 1945

Columbus Vignettes, Vol. 01 by Bill Arter, 1966

Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, v.59, Jan 1950

Ohio State Journal, Nov. 20, 1928