

# STRATER HOTEL

## HISTORIC DOWNTOWN DURANGO

### Celebrating 125 Years!

It's hard to believe that the Strater Hotel is celebrating its 125th birthday this year. With so many years having passed, how could one ever recount all that has taken place during those years as well as the impact this very special historic hotel has had on so many people and most importantly, southwest Colorado? Well the answer is... it's simply not possible. However, we would like to share with you some of what has taken place—below is an excerpt about the Strater Hotel from our website. For those of you who would like to learn more consider our history book, “The Strater Hotel Story; Durango’s Premier Landmark—The Jewel of the Rockies” by Philip A. Aleo, available at the hotel front desk. Meanwhile we hope you enjoy reading about this very special place: the Strater Hotel.

#### 1887 - 1895

At a time when Durango’s future still hung in the balance, a question was asked: would it become a mining camp or a metropolis? A Cleveland pharmacist named Henry Strater had the vision and the faith that Durango would prosper, and with its prosperity, it would need a grand hotel. Construction was quite a challenge, but with the help of his brothers Fred and Frank, his Father Antone, and a lot of enthusiasm, Henry’s dream was realized. The Strater Hotel opened after an expenditure of \$70,000 and placement of 376,000 native red bricks and hand-carved sandstone cornices and sills.

As it evolved, the Strater Hotel proved to be a popular retreat for townsfolk who would close their own homes dur-

ing the cold winter months and move into the hotel. Each room boasted its own wood-burning stove and comfortable furniture, with some rooms equipped with pianos and washstands. The washstands served double duty, as the cabinet also housed the “facility,” which was emptied each morning by the maids. The hotel also featured a strategically designed three-story privy.

Henry Strater, who placed his pharmacy in the prominent corner of the hotel, had no intention of running the property, and leased it to Proprietor, H. L. Rice. Under Rice’s management, the Strater Hotel soon became known as the place of social gathering. Women would convene in the winter to play euchre, while Rice entertained their children. Mr. Rice loved children and was known for having a warm heart, although he had the demeanor of a stern man.

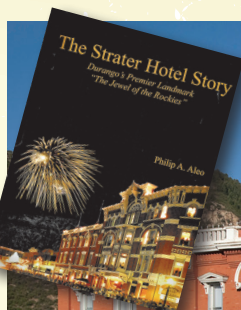
Being young and inexperienced in business, Strater unfortunately discovered that he had neglected to exclude his pharmacy location in the lease to Rice. Rice extracted an extremely large rent, which infuriated the young pharmacist and prompted him in 1893 to build the competing Columbian Hotel directly to the south, with the intent of putting Rice out of business. Both hotels competed toe to toe until 1895 when the silver panic put both out of business.

#### 1896 - 1926

Following the financial devastation of the silver panic, the Bank of Cleveland repossessed the Strater and sold it to Ms. Hattie Mashburn and Charles E. Stilwell. Both had the savvy and grit to make things work in the toughest of times. Stilwell took the hotel through the turn of the century and developed a more refined appeal by offering such things as opera and fine dinners.

#### 1926 - 1982

During the Roaring Twenties, Durango’s



economy chugged along. James A. Jarvis had introduced the movie industry, oil and gas had been discovered, and coal still fired the Durango Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. In 1926, a group of Durango businessmen led by banker Earl A. Barker, Senior formed an organization to buy the now aging hotel, and the group focused on refreshing the image of the 39-year-old property.

Although the townsfolk no longer retreated to the Strater in wintertime, several celebrities have made the Strater their home away from home. For example, western author Louis L’Amour always asked for the room directly above the Diamond Belle Saloon, Room 222. He said that the honky-tonk music helped set the mood for his novels of the Old West including the Sackett novels. L’Amour and his family would spend most of the summer enjoying the hotel. Today, room 222 is known as the Louis L’Amour room.

Over the years, the Strater has enjoyed ongoing renovations. Jentra and Earl Barker Junior began the renovation project with special attention to such details as (continued on pg. 2)

### From the Owner

125 years! That is a long time to run a business. We’ve all seen the little foil stickers but to make the number a little more meaningful, try to think about all of the lives that this hotel’s 125 years have touched. To do so, a few numbers will help. These many years represent 45,625 days.

During this time we have:

- Prepared over 10 million meals in our restaurants
- Pampered over 4.7 million hotel guests
- Poured over 12 million drinks, cocktails, and sarsaparillas
- Scheduled over 4.2 million work shifts
- Employed over 25,000 employees
- Entertained over 800,000 theatre guests
- Provided over 134,000 hours of live entertainment
- Paid over \$340 million in payroll (adjusted to today’s dollars)

This list is quite a task and represents the work of a lot of dedicated employees and managers who have cared deeply about our role in this community and our heritage in history. Beyond the numbers though, we all feel that our role is about each individual customer and their desires for a fun and memorable experience as a

critical part of their individual lives. This is a very important thing to entrust to us because it may represent the first day in the lives of a newly married couple, a 10 year-olds birthday party, the presentation of a presidential candidate, the signing of a Trans-Atlantic Treaty, or simply a romantic night out.

As we read thru the guestroom diaries, it is easy to see the magic that the Spirit of this hotel and staff imparts to its guests. They also feel a part of something very special. Some would call that spirit a ghost, but we know that it is really the essence of the fun and warmth of each of those experiences that linger here. It is the Strater Spirit that is 125 years old and promises to pass on the friendship and warmth that we are all meant to experience. This is why we are naming each of our 93 guest rooms after Durango pioneering families and institutions. They are inspiring people who have helped to create the unique environment that is Durango.

We are proud to serve this need and we thank you for allowing us the opportunity to fulfill our function for 125 years.

**Roderick E. Barker**  
President & CEO  
Strater Hotel

CREATING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES FROM OUR CORNER OF THE WORLD SINCE 1887



# The Strater Hotel Rooms Dedication Project

What better way to celebrate the 125th birthday of the Strater Hotel and to commemorate its history than the permanent dedication of a room at the Strater to one of our revered citizens or institutions! Rod Barker, in 2011, announced the Rooms Dedication Project and opened up the nomination process. The goal was to identify those individuals, families, and institutions that truly made a contribution to the Strater Hotel, local community, or even our country (so long as there was a local connection).

The first seven dedications and rooms were selected; gold plaques were mounted on the room doors and dossiers were written detailing the nominee's story. The official unveiling of the first seven rooms was at the Strater Hotel Annual Open House event this past April, 2012. A display including photographs and the dossiers were staged outside of each dedicated room. Family members were present for the official unveiling and it was quite a memorable day for all.

## THE 2012 STRATER HOTEL DEDICATED ROOMS

### Louis and Kathy L'Amour: Room 222

Louis (1908-1988) is undoubtedly the most noted western novelist of all times and room 222, the Louis and Kathy L'Amour Room, is the most visited room at the Strater hotel. Designated a Literary Landmark™ by ALTAFF.

### The Kroeger Family: Room 211

Six generations of the Kroeger family have left their mark on our community. Their impact began with the Farmers Supply in 1921 and the family legacy continued with Kroegers Hardware, the Southwest Water Conservation District, Fort Lewis College, First National Bank, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, and Durango City Council.

### Joseph A Walker: Room 423

Joseph Walker was a U.S. Secret Service Agent who came to Durango in 1907 to investigate over 70 cases of illegal home-

stead operations. He was shot and killed making him the first U.S. agent to have died by gunfire in the line of duty. Three significant laws came about after his death making a significant contribution to our country.

### Olga Schaaf Little: Room 307

Olga was destined to become one of Durango's most notable pioneers, as she was the first female mule-skinner, guide, and outfitter. She carried provisions to the miners, and would take travelers on horseback outings into the nearby La Plata Mountains and was responsible for saving the lives of some 20 miners in 1912.

### Charles Schumacher: Room 332

The handiwork of Charles Schumacher can be seen throughout the Strater, The Office Spiritorium, and the Mahogany Grille. Charlie, master woodworker and wallpaper artist is responsible for most of the magnificent work and has been involved in Strater projects since the 1970's.

### The Strater Family: Room 230

The Strater family built the Strater Brothers Paints and Oils Store, the Strater Hotel, the Strater Thorpe Drug Company, and the Columbian Hotel. It is only fitting that there is a room dedicated in their honor at the Strater Hotel!

### The First National Bank of Durango: Room 320

The First National Bank of Durango opened in 1880 and continues serving the community today. The First National Bank worked extensively while enduring hard times but always believed in the community and is responsible for the success of many of its businesses and individuals.

There are dossiers for each of the dedicated rooms on our website, Strater.com. If you know of an individual, family, or institution that you would like to nominate for a special room dedication, you may download a nomination form or request one at the Strater Hotel front desk.



**1887** Henry Strater constructs the Strater Hotel.

**1889** Hotel is spared in the Durango Fire.

**1893** After a falling out with Strater manager H.L. Rice, Henry builds the Columbian Hotel to compete, the same year as the Silver Panic.

**1894** Henry Strater loses both hotels.

**1900** Fire starts on fourth floor of Strater—Strater is saved.

**1902** The Columbian and Strater hotels are joined under the management of Mr. Stillwell.

**1926** Earl Barker Senior and local businessmen purchase the hotel.

**1953** Earl Barker Senior becomes sole owner of hotel.

**1954** Earl Barker Junior and Robert Blomstrom join Earl Barker Senior as managers.

# Celebrating 125 Years

(Continued from pg. 1)

bathrooms, air conditioning, heating, closets, television, and telephones. Creating the Victorian charm in the décor began on a trip to a hotel convention in Atlanta, Georgia, where they found an authentic Victorian walnut bed in an antique store. Earl and Jentra thought it would be interesting to furnish several of the larger hotel rooms with authentic period furniture. They cashed in their airline tickets and drove back in a U-Haul truck, stopping at antique stores along the way. Today, the Strater hotel is home to the largest collection of American Victorian walnut furniture in the world.

To Be Continued...

There is much more to learn about how the Strater Hotel came to be and will continue to be--and we look forward to the many more memories that will be made in the years to come.

# A Place in History

The historic Strater Hotel is more than an icon of downtown Durango, it is an anchor for our community. The distinctive exterior appears in so many images of Durango from early historic photographs to today's digital images; it could be said that the Strater Hotel is Durango. It serves as a living symbol of the community's commitment to treasuring our past. The distinctive exterior, built of native brick, speaks to the community's commitment to historic preservation. It is rare indeed to have an iconic building still serving in the role for which it was built.

Not only is the Strater a historic building, but it has been and continues to be a site for history. From Will Rogers to Louis L'Amour, the Strater has hosted more than its share of notable visitors. Events at the Strater, such as the Trans-Atlantic Telephone Cable (TAT 6) negotiations have given Durango a spot on the world's stage.

The Strater is not only important to the community from an architectural and historic standpoint, but psychologically as well. From its first days, the hotel not only welcomed visitors, but locals as well. Early Durango residents took refuge from winter weather by closing up their homes and spending the winter months enjoying the warmth and hospitality of the Strater Hotel. It is reassuring indeed to know that come what may, this elegant Victorian masterpiece continues to stand proudly on Main Avenue, just as it has for more than a century.

### Carolyn Bowra

Director, Animas Museum

La Plata County Historical Society





# The Barker Family

## 86 Years

Out of the 125 years that the historic Strater Hotel has stood, 86 of them have been under the ownership of the Barker Family. It all began in 1926 when Earl Barker Senior bought the Strater with several other business investors. By 1953, Earl Senior owned full stock of the hotel and his son Earl Barker Junior and son-in-law Robert Blomstrom were brought on as managers. In 1968 Earl Junior became owner and President. Robert had moved on to teaching, but his family still played a role in the hotel with his sons holding managing positions.

Through the ownership of Earl Junior and his wife, Jentra Barker, the father and mother of present owner Rod Barker, the Strater saw many renovations and progressive changes. It was Jentra whom upon buying a Victorian walnut bed began what would become the largest American Antique Victorian Walnut collection in the

world. Robert and Earl Junior are responsible for the popular Diamond Belle Saloon, even though at first they completed their vision without the permission of Earl Senior who was away on vacation.

With every generation came new additions and renovations. Rod, who took over in 1983 is responsible for more recent renovations such as the Mahogany Grille, The Office Spiritorium, and the Pullman Room. He is also credited for the inclusion of the elegant Victorian Bradbury and Bradbury wallpaper in every room and in the elegant public spaces. Along with his wife Laurie, President, CEO, and owner Rod continue to provide events and functions at the Strater such as the Strater Hotel Annual Open House that includes the Durango community within the Strater's history.

Earl Barker Senior's motto was; "If we take care of the Strater, it will take care of us." For 86 years the Barker Family has done just that. And for 125 years the Strater has taken care of Durango and its visitors, and will continue to for many years to come.



1957- The Diamond Belle Saloon is established.

1962- The Diamond Circle Theatre (now the Henry Strater Theatre) performs its first melodrama.

1963- Jentra Barker buys a Victorian bed—the start of the largest Victorian furniture collection.

1981- Durango's Centennial Celebration—Centennial Banquet Room commemorated.

1983- Rod Barker becomes the hotel manager.

1987- Hotel celebrates its 100th Anniversary.

2000- The Office Spiritorium opens for business.

2004- The Opera House becomes the Mahogany Grille.

2012 Strater Hotel celebrates 125 years!





## Thank You from the General Manager

As I write this letter, I have to wonder, how does one adequately say thank you to all the individuals and organizations that have helped to make the Strater Hotel what it is today? There are so many that have contributed over the past 125 years to the success and longevity of the Strater that it seems nearly impossible to express our gratitude to its fullest to everyone and everything. There are so many that have played their part from Hattie Mashburn to Louis L'Amour, La Plata County to the city of Durango, countless guests and to many more. Or even before any of our visitors, there is Henry Strater himself who had the grand vision to establish the most magnificent hotel southwest Colorado had ever seen.

Then there is the Barker family itself. Without their commitment to and love of Durango and of the Strater Hotel, the Strater simply may not exist today. The family has worked tirelessly through the years to make the Strater a viable and desirable place for our community and tourists. It's simply impossible to determine the number of hours of thought and work that the Barker family has put into this hotel from renovations, expansions, converting to green energy solutions, community contributions, employing staff of all ages, and so much more.

However, on behalf of Rod Barker and all of the Strater Hotel staff, I would like to say thank you to our locals. They (you) have and continue to believe in and enjoy the hotel—we truly treasure this immeasurable support you give by frequenting our restaurants, enjoying our musical and theatrical entertainment, and spreading the positive word about what the Strater Hotel has to offer for all. These are gifts we cannot ever thank you enough for, except to say we will continue to do our very best to take care of you and your guests.

In short, all of us are very excited, honored, and grateful to be able to celebrate the 125th birthday of the historic Strater Hotel, and we look forward to many more years of Creating Memorable Experiences From Our Corner of the World with you.

Many Thanks,

**Michelle Thom**  
General Manager  
Strater Hotel



## Staying Green

Just as to stand the test of time one must change with the times, to be a part of the community, one must also play a part in that community. After 125 years the Strater Hotel continues to play its part by staying green and environmentally friendly. Currently, the Hotel recycles glass, cardboard, and paper, but recycling is just one piece of the hotel's environmental friendliness.

In 2010 the Strater Hotel began following Energy Star procedures, and became the first Historic Hotels of America member, to achieve such a rating. To qualify, the Strater had to score in the top 25 percent of EPA's National Energy Performance Rating System. Upgrades include using low wattage fluorescent bulbs, recycling the heat from the air-conditioner to heat the water, installing LED lights on the roof, using dimmer and timer lighting programs, using water cooled refrigerators and ice machines, and using heated windows in the Mahogany Grille to conserve heat and gas usage. The Strater continues to lessen its footprint by replacing the windows to double insulated models and installing energy efficient the toilets and shower heads.

This summer, the Strater began an initiative known as the Global Soap Project to recycle discarded soap in the rooms. There are 4.7 million hotel rooms in the United States, and 2.6 million bars of soap are discarded from these rooms every day. Strater Hotel housekeepers collect the soap in bags made out of our recycled restaurant table-linen. Once enough soap is collected it is then shipped to the Global Soap Project headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia where the soap is then re-processed, recycled, and sent to countries with limited access to soap. The Strater Hotel is proud to be a partner in the Global Soap Project as it keeps the soap out of landfills and helps save lives.



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